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The summit of Victorian realism the theory and practice of George Eliot.

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THE SUMMIT OF VICTORIAN REALISM:
THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF
GEORGE ELIOT

by

Anne Cecelia Matthewman

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at The University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada 1985
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ABSTRACT

THE SUMMIT OF VICTORIAN REALISM: 
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Realism, the representation of reality, has been part of artistic philosophy and technique for generations. Similarly, a recognition of the link between literature and the fine arts has long been realized. Indeed, it was affirmed in the early Horation doctrine of ut pictura poesis est. At no other time was this link and the simultaneous avowal of realism in the arts more prominent than in the nineteenth century, particularly in Victorian England.

Victorian painters, novelists, and critics understood realism to be a simple and natural treatment of ordinary people, occurrences and things. In the arts, this treatment was often a merely descriptive or objective one, and resulted in paintings and novels which are representative eighteenth-century period pieces. However, the treatment of man and society in some of the novels was a more dramatic or subjective one. In their characterization of the motives of mankind, they achieved universality.

The novels of George Eliot belong to both categories.
They are objective studies of English life yet they also provide an inner exploration of life. This exploration results in an understanding of mankind, giving the novels a universal aspect lacking in the painting and other novels of the period.

In this paper, an overview of the history of realism, including some modern appraisals, is considered. Emphasis is placed on the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries which both influenced Eliot's ideas and work. The author's knowledge of art and philosophy is examined in order to arrive at an appreciation of her theory of realism and of its purpose in the fine arts and literature.

Examining four of Eliot's novels, Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, Felix Holt, and Middlemarch, one can trace the development of her use of realism. Its objective element is readily apparent and is always handled accurately and with great finesse. The subjective element, which gives these novels their enduring quality, is handled with equal finesse. Through a precise synthesis of her knowledge of philosophy, art, and humanity, Eliot explores the evolutionary nature of life and the interaction of man and his society. Her perception results in realistic studies of life far surpassing those of her contemporaries in both the fine arts and literature.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people provided support and encouragement while this work was in progress and I am grateful to all of them. Special thanks must be given to Dr Colin Atkinson, my faculty advisor and to Drs. E. Ducharme and K. McCrone, my second and third readers. Thanks are also due to my family, most particularly to my sister Gillian who typed and retyped endlessly. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the English Department secretary, Mrs. Bev Stahlbrand, and of the Interlibrary Loan staff at the Chatham Public Library.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Realism, the study of what is natural and actual, can involve both objective interpretations of life and subjective examination of the same. It is basically discussion of man and society, of what one understands to be his world. What man understands is reality.

Although it was not until the mid-nineteenth century in France that the term itself came into being, the theory and practices of realism are centuries old. Initially, these were philosophical in nature and had their beginnings in the work of Plato and Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle were concerned with realism in the arts generally, but it was not until much later that specific theories of realism were applied to the fine arts and literature, linking together art and society. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European artists, specifically those of the Dutch and Flemish peoples dedicated themselves to painting life as it was known and experienced by the common man. This cult of the ordinary, a reaction against stylized and romanticized art forms reasserted itself in the nineteenth century and reached a glorious fruition in English Victorian fine art and literature.

In the study of life, the fine arts and literature
have long been recognised as sister arts and have shared various philosophies and critics. Indeed, in his book, _The Commonwealth of Art_, Sachs delineates the union of all art forms in their spirit and meaning as the "expression of man". Although their individual methods vary, the arts are all components of the same body. Each draws inspiration and support from the others and in any given time period strong resemblances between the various arts will be obvious. As a result, the critical literature has often pointed out the interdependence of literature, particularly the novel, and painting. Their characteristics have often been described using the same terms. Seventeenth century German and English literature and art have been described by Austin Warren and Morris Croll as baroque, parallels have been drawn to the repetition in Gothic art and literature, and studies such as those of Mario Praz have linked Biedermeier principles in art and literature. In _The Art of Fiction_ Henry James asserts the connection of realistic or representative qualities in the novel and in painting: "The only reason for the existence of the novel is that it does attempt to represent life...the same attempt that we can see on the canvas of the painter..." Correlations have also been made between the arts in the twentieth century. Impressionism in painting, the use of "masses of light and shade" has been compared to impressionism in the novel
where the masses of response and emotion the characters reveal within the scene are most important. And, the abstract nature of expressionist painting finds parallels in the abstract themes portrayed in the symbol and allegory of some novelists.4

However, the most pertinent and essential expression of the affinity between painting and literature is found in the Horatian doctrine (1st century BC), ut pictura poesis est: "As with the painter's work so with the poet's",5 or, "The art of the poet is akin to that of the painter."6 This principle is echoed in the three guidelines set forth in 1979 by Hugh Witemayer for recognizing literary pictorialism or the connections between literature and the visual arts:

1. Literature may recall an identifiable work of art;
2. it may recall a tradition of graphic or plastic representation;
3. or, it may recall an established convention of pictorialist rhetoric such as the character portrait.7

Keeping in mind the Horatian principle, it is logical to substitute the term painting for that of literature in the first guideline and to say that literary traditions and conventions may be obvious in painting.

Recognition of this strong correspondence between painting and literature was basic to the theories of realism in Victorian England. Realism, to the Victorians,
meant an examination of real things and situations as understood by down-to-earth middle-class people. In general, the Victorians had no liking for abstraction, did not understand the myriad workings of the subconscious mind, and only wanted to see and understand things as they were. In consequence, Victorian realism strove for sincerity, simplicity, truth in experience, and moral edification. It was unadulterated by falsism, which is the untrue portrayal of life, and the unattainable. In form, it was both objective and subjective.

Painter and novelist alike strove to represent man as he lived and worked, and each borrowed techniques such as the use of detail from the other. Critics of the period, especially John Ruskin and George Henry Lewes, applauded this trend and the artists who most faithfully followed it. Thus, notable painters of the school were dedicated to art which no longer borrowed its themes from classical mythology and religious stories but addressed contemporary society. Novelists of the period worked in the same manner.

One of the most prominent novelists among those concerned with realism and its relation to the principles of art was George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans, 1819-1880). She developed her own theory of realism as a result of an intensive and extensive study of the arts, literature, and philosophy. Her theories of the novel and of art are extensions generally of nineteenth-century realism and her
own theory of realism.

In the objective sense, Eliot's work paralleled that of the nineteenth-century visual artists. Yet, she achieved far more than they ever did. The visual artists attained only a surface study of readily perceived objects and situations. Using her vast knowledge and opinion to comment on the objective pictures she produced, Eliot provided an inner, or subjective, view of life as well. Her novels bring the reader to an appreciation of life and man's reaction to it. Such psychological realism leads to a true understanding of the human condition. This results in her work having a universal quality which is lacking in the painting of the same period.

In order to fully understand Eliot's theories and approaches to realism it is necessary to gain an understanding of realism generally and of Victorian realism specifically. Then, study of her knowledge of art, her general philosophical ideas, her interpretation of realism, and her theories of the novel can be appreciated and applied to her own work.
Notes to Chapter I

1. Curt Sachs, *The Commonwealth of Art-Style in the Fine Arts, Music and the Dance* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1946), p.17. The majority of Sachs' comparisons are made between painting and music but he certainly acknowledges literature as one part of the whole body and one "expression of man". He also includes the other fine arts & dance in his study. See also Oscar Wilde, "The English Renaissance of Art," in *Oscar Wilde, Essays and Lectures*, 5th ed. (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1920), p.155, "...the secret of life is in art."


8. Represented in this study by *Scenes of Clerical Life,* (1858; three novellas), *Adam Bede,* (1859), *Felix Holt,* *the Radical* (1866), and *Middlemarch* (1871-72).
CHAPTER II
A History of Realism
to the Victorian Period

Today, general definitions of realism stress the undistorted representation of real objects and an opposition to idealism. In literature and art, realism is recognised as an attempt to "present an accurate imitation of life as it is" rather than life as man would prefer it to be. This attempt embodies the artist's didactic purpose of teaching his reader or viewer to accept life as it is, to "cope in a positive way with the business of living", and to strive only for what is possible within the bounds of his life. Realism "is concerned with the thinness rather than the whiteness of things." Consequently, the artist or writer concerns himself with the immediate, objective world, observing each minute detail of everyday life in a sense which in some cases is almost photographic yet always subjective. The subjects detailed are average and commonplace and the experiences universal. The romantic, heroic, and beautiful ideal is largely avoided in order to portray the average progression of childhood, adolescence, love, marriage, parenthood and death which is varied only occasionally by unusual good fortune or utter disaster. The focus is on man's growth

7
and interaction with his environment as his life plods on unrelentlessly.

Conceptions of realism have not always been based so firmly on the ordinary. Early theories propounded a kinship between the real and the ideal. As part of the medieval philosophy of nominalism, realism was "concerned with the reality of ideal essences or universals" and not until the eighteenth century philosophy of Schiller did realism involve only the imitation of true nature. ⁵ This imitation of true nature is obviously not concerned with transcendence or the intangibles of religious faith but, "the often disillusioning search for transcendence, like the testing of faith against weighty obstacles of the real world, these certainly have their appropriate place in realistic literature." ⁶ Surely this is an assertion of elements of the ideal in realism. It is not a mistaken quest to strive for the ideal in everyday life since idealism exists in a "vision of realities in their highest and most affecting forms, not in the vision of something removed from or opposed to realities." ⁷

The Aristotellean theory of realism incorporates this idea of searching for ideal forms of reality. Through mimesis, an imitation of life, which conforms to the "law of probability or necessity" ⁸ Aristotle felt art could instruct man in the right way to live. This is in opposition to Platonic theory which "supposes art has a
detrimental effect on human behaviour. Plato did though recognize the imitative function of art in an imperfect form. Later philosophical approaches to realism include Descartes' idea of the reality of the external world and Kant's and Hegel's studies of the imitation of truth.

Modern critical discussion of the aspects of realism, of its purposes, and of the problems associated with it fills volumes. A comprehensive study of it is not possible in the space allowed here. However, the work of certain critics stands out and should be acknowledged for its contributions to the understanding of the elements and techniques of realism as used in both art and literature.

Writing first in 1949, Becker describes the techniques and qualities of realism most succinctly. His work stands as a valuable overview in the understanding of realism and he also offers a number of outstanding definitions and opinions of realism culled from previous literature. These include C. D. Warner's statement (1883) that realism is "a wholly unidealized view of human society" ⁹, B.O. Flower's pessimistic assessments (1903) that it is "photographic in its reflection of life as it exists, and often gloomy in character and depressing..." ¹⁰, and most importantly the idea that realism is that which is believable;"... he is not a realist whose readers doubt that what he is depicting is consistent with their knowledge of the world they live in." ¹¹ Becker sees the beginnings of the modern realist
movement in the novels of Flaubert and in the social activist reaction to romanticism. He goes on to explain what he understands as the three aspects or phases of realism. 12

The first of these is realism of method which is concerned with objective facts and norms. Its techniques include localisms in speech and manner, early "slice-of-life" approaches, and an attempt by the writer to remain dispassionate. Realism of subject matter is the second aspect and it may deal in a more psychological manner with interior man, sexual man, and social relationships. It is more subjective, brooks no idealism, and is more comprehensive in its search for truth:

The true realist in his explorations offends both the idealist who refuses to admit that things are so, and the decorous man of the world of eighteenth century stamp, who knows they are so but considers it necessary at all costs to keep the unseemly concealed. 13

The third approach is philosophical realism, the description which Becker gives to statements of the condition of mankind. One such statement is naturalism, "a philosophic position taken by some realists, showing man caught in a net from which there can be no escape." 14 He uses Zola's statements of the effects of heredity and environment as an illustration of naturalism. Becker is then a critic who does not divide naturalism from the realistic stream. Later, in the introduction to Documents
of modern literary realism, Becker reasserts these principles and regrets that realism in the twentieth century is often seen as 'naive and inadequate.'

Writing again in 1980, he stresses the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century and the parallel growth of realism in which the individual man is seen as most important.

Booth's theories of realism are similar to Becker's. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* he mentions four approaches to realism. There is a realism of subject matter or "social reality" in which technique or form is not dictated, metaphysical truth which reveals the human condition, the "transcriptions of sensations", and realism of character. Booth also notes that a conflict can arise between authorial intrusion and reality, and the question remains whether it enhances or destroys realism. Less, or certainly at least moderation, would seem better in this instance where further authorial prejudice, indirect or otherwise, would be added to the already subjective view and would certainly run the risk of obscuring reality.

The social aspect of literary realism is dealt with in great detail by Ames. He feels the true realistic novel avoids the conventions of romance, and shows man to be a social animal seeking to learn about himself and to express his lifestyle and values. According to him, the novelist voices the experience of the group; "while they are dumb he
cries out when he feels the pinch, the rub between traditions, institutions, and human needs." Realizing the ideal in the real,

he shows what the signs of promise are and holds up a vision of the things that may be hoped for. He shows where society is breaking down and how it is being reconstructed. 19

Ames's concerns with social realism are carried to far greater extremes in the Marxist theory of realism expounded by George Lukacs. His ideas are far less useful than the practical straightforward elements of realism delineated above. He views realism as the historical development of laws which govern human relationships. If properly presented, this realism serves an educative function in revealing all the humanly and socially essential determinants... present on their highest level of development, ... unfolding the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes, rendering concrete the peaks and limits of man and epochs. 20

This may not seem so bad on the surface nor does his assertion that "every action, thought, and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community." 21 However, it soon becomes apparent that Lukacs is denying the life of the individual, (an important element of true realism), and is seeking to direct mankind as a political unit in which the good of the whole is the good of each individual. He praises the work
of Russian novelists including Tolstoy, Bielinski, Sholokhov, Chernyshevski and Dobrolyubov, saying that they are not fully understood by the western world and are therefore distorted or suppressed. But, he forfeits any sympathy he may have engendered in democratic, western individualists by stating that:

The great lesson to be learnt from the Russian development is precisely the extent to which a great realist literature can fructifyingly educate the people and transform public opinion.\(^{22}\)

Other critics discuss the educative nature of realism but do not place its emphasis on the transformation of public opinion. Realism allows the reader to "perceive and comprehend the world or reality more sharply"\(^ {23}\) and the didactic element of the realist novel strives to depict the truth in nature and life.\(^ {24}\) Moral seriousness is "the essential basis of realism"\(^ {25}\) and the foundation of the "serious novel" on a strict social code serving as a criticism of life\(^ {26}\) has strong didactic traits. However, none of these theories purports to change the course of history or public opinion.

Several other purposes of realism are described in the literature. Grant, who like Becker sees no division between realism and naturalism,\(^ {27}\) notes the early tendency of realism to discourage use of the imagination and its later and more complex tendency to interpret
reality. He makes the obvious and common sensical statement that art and life are separate yet can be brought together in realism. It is easily seen through consideration of the theories discussed above that realism revolves around the portrayal of life as it occurs at all levels and around man as a social being. The separate streams of art and life are brought together, with or without the omniscient narrator, in order to educate man about life.

Another important purpose of realism lies in its method which defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literatures. Realism is the process of examining the ordinary and it must avoid ambition, passion, heroism, and extremes of good and evil. Levine lists the most important elements of realism as supremacy of character over plot, use of detail to attain verisimilitude, ordinariness of hero, and, unlike Booth, he stresses the desirability of an omniscient narrator who gives a running commentary on the lives and times of a novel. Levine does make a most questionable statement when he says that realism in a self-conscious manner tries to be uninteresting. The whole point of realism is to show man what is valuable and interesting in everyday life so that it can be more fully appreciated.

As in any convention, there are problems with the use
of realism. Some have already been mentioned. Others include the fact that too much detail can obscure its purposes. Also, too much detail can be very tedious. Tension can exist between reality and what the subconscious mind wants to express. Problems in linguistic interpretation may also arise as words may have different connotations for different writers and readers. Also, the significance of an event or certain action may vary in importance according to its interpreter.

These several interpretations of realism mirror its development throughout its past history and into the twentieth century. In certain periods of history, realism has been particularly predominant in visual art and literature. In studying these periods, strict attention must be paid to the work of the seventeenth-century painters who considered the same middle-class situations and values as the visual and literary artists of the nineteenth century would later do, and to the work of the these nineteenth-century artists themselves.

It was in the Dutch and Flemish painting of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries that the imitative nature of realism and its intense concern with everyday life first appeared to flourish in a large way. These men were "painters of manners" who dealt with the "specific and familiar." They avoided the traditional approach to biblical, mythical and historical art in order to treat
subjects and themes which were recognizable to members of their own society. Their imitations of nature, while simple, were detailed and true-to-life, and were in reaction to the formal mannerism and contrived stylization of their forbears. Slive bluntly refers to these artists as "human kodaks". This description sounds somewhat derogatory on first consideration yet it explains exactly the purpose of these realist painters. That was, "to tell a story by means of objects, clues, costumes, facial expressions..." One of the representative artists of the Golden Age of genre painting (seventeenth century) who told stories of contemporary secular life is Gerard Terboch (1617-1681) whose "Knife-grinder's family" (c. 1653) reveals life in one of its poorer and less attractive forms. The knife-grinder is hard at work yet his yard is strewn with garbage and his wife appears to be searching for lice in his daughter's hair. Life appears more serene, though no less realistic, in the work of Jan Vermeer (1632-1675). His "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window" (1659) depicts the trappings of a middle-class room and the typical dress of its occupant. Middle-class themes were also dealt with by Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667), Gerrit Dou (1613-1675), Dirk Hals (1591-1656), Isaak van Ostade (1621-1649), Adrien van Ostade (1610-1685); and Frans Hals (1580-1666). This bourgeois or middle-class element of Dutch and Flemish art is depicted again and again in
literary and artistic realism from that time to the present. Aspects of peasant life are also important to this genre and in the seventeenth century they were well portrayed by several of the artists mentioned above as well as by Peter de Hoogh (1629-1684), Peter Breughel (c. 1525-1569), Adrian Brouwer (1605-1638), and Nicholas Maes (1634-1693).

These painters drew inspirations from similar schools in Italy (eg. Caravaggio, Carracci), France (eg. La Tour, Le Nain, Tournier), and Spain (eg. Ribalta, Ribera, Villezquez) which were also working in reaction to a more stylized presentation. In a like manner, the Dutch and Flemish schools would later inspire Victorian artists and novelists, particularly George Eliot.

It is interesting to note that at the same time that middle-class realism was predominant in Dutch painting, Dutch books of manners were being printed by Vondel, Hooft, and Huygens. Paintings of proverbs were popular during this time as well. Such trends were later reflected in Victorian England as the fortunes of the English middle-class were rising. There seems then to be a definite connection between the popularity of realism, self-improvement, and the prosperity of the middle-class or bourgeoisie.

The next great period of realism occurred in the nineteenth century. At this time, the parallels
between literature and art were much stronger. Nineteenth-century realism was centred in France and England and drew inspiration from the Dutch and Flemish painters discussed above, and in some instances from the Nazarenes, a German school of the 1790s based in Rome and concerned with honest painting.

Realism in the visual arts in France centred around the painter Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), a professed realist who himself revealed only what he saw in his treatment of peasants, labourers, and the middle-class. He declared that all artists should also reveal only what they saw and not what they imagined. In 1855 his work was refused by the Paris Exhibition and he established his own "Pavillon du Realisme" in which he hung his pictures. Courbet was joined by the members of the Barbizon School (eg. Corot, Millet, Troyon) who "devoted their brushes to landscapes and peasant life - without sentimentalism, without passion or drama, ... without idealization." These artists opposed the idealism of the classicists and romantics and were deeply interested in expressing contemporary themes. Indeed, they saw themselves as part of this detailed expression:

Reality was now the world in all its natural and social complexity, a dynamic synthesis of nature and history, by means of which the artist is formed and becoming a living expression of his own time, displays his creative activity.
This represents definite growth from the seventeenth-century desire to merely depict everyday life. Now, the artist is creating life in art and vice versa.

Champfleury (Jules Husson) was a French critic who recognized and supported the concerns of Courbet and the Barbizon school. He was in fact, "considered the Courbet of literature" and in the late 1850s founded the critical journal, Le Realisme. This was the first use of "realism" as a literary term. French art critics had used the term in a philosophical manner in 1835 identifying it with human truth as opposed to the political idealism of neo-classical painting. However, with the debut of Le Realisme the movement concerned with expressing social problems and middle-class values in nineteenth-century art and literature was given both a name and credibility.

The presentation of these social problems and values was of prime importance to French novelists of the period since one aspect of their belief was that a novel's "realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it." This presentation varied from the trompe l'oeil photographic reproduction of the 1840s, to domestic realism, and to the naturalism of Emile Zola. Prominent novelists in the French realist school included Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola and Proust. Like the English novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these men sought the truth in
individual, contemporary lives.

In the literary and visual arts traditions of nineteenth-century England, realism was predominant. Essentially, Victorian realism in both traditions focused on the ordinary life of ordinary people who were daily confronting change in all aspects of their life. Most important to remember is that it was, as it was in seventeenth-century Holland, the age of the middle-class whose idea of progress and prosperity was based on order and reason; moderation was sought in all things. The middle-class approach to life was fundamentally realistic. Domestically, life centred first around the family at home and then in a larger sense around the rapidly expanding family of the British empire. Each was dependent for its welfare on the other. The moral values of the hard-working family supported the prosperous growth of the nation, providing a firm base for intellectual and commercial success. In turn, the middle-class family flourished on this base.

The culmination of this familial interaction was the Great Exhibition of 1851 which was seen as the "herald of a new age, with the middle-class industrialist... firmly in the saddle, an age which reached its height in the middle-class apogee...

50 The Exhibition revealed the tastes, conventions, scientific advances of, and the international influences on an increasingly metropolitan
lifestyle. Its success indicated the great desire for progress in Victorian society, a progress firmly rooted in the tangible things of life.

Yet, as in any period of prosperity, there were those who suffered. The population was rising, and the plight of the urban poor was painful despite the work of many philanthropic and humanitarian groups. Regardless of the tendency to urban life, England was still largely dependent on its rural agricultural base, a fact of which politicians were keenly aware. These politicians also had to contend with a growing trade union movement as the industrial centres became more politically active. Social and political reforms became inevitable as all classes of society were thrust together.

It was logical that the debates over these issues and the emphasis on the tangible things of life would be reflected in the art and literature of the period. A more educated public with more leisure time, the increasing availability of cheaper books and magazines, and the expansion of lending libraries made this particularly so. Likewise, this more affluent and cultured middle-class was exposed to the visual arts and it became fashionable to acquire art for the home. Because the middle-class wanted to see itself portrayed, the Victorian painter and novelist thrived in this receptive atmosphere. Their influence on nineteenth-century society was overwhelming and they used
it to the greatest advantage. Despite this influence, differences in visual and literary productions of life exist. The painter merely illustrates values and aspects of life which the viewer must interpret for himself. The novelist is able to go beyond this point to an in-depth discussion and analysis of such scenes. Yet, he may fall behind the painter in his "ability to project the sensory qualities of person, place and event." Such differences and the following important similarities determine that a comprehensive study of Victorian society and realism is best achieved through consideration of both art forms.

Through their work, the visual artists and novelists allowed their contemporaries to study seriously the problems and potentialities of their society and to appreciate the experiences of everyday life rather than to yearn for a more romantically perceived past. To do so, they began to employ the principles and methods of realism. In theory and in practice, distinctions between the two art forms became rather blurred. Speaking of the Victorian genre painters, Wood emphasizes their "desire to narrate" and states that "by combining literary and social themes, they pushed painting over its natural frontiers into the realm of literature." The novelist, at the same time, was making books into pictures by rendering detailed "word-pictures". Critics frequently, and with
good reason, refer to the portraits and scenes which their novelists produced as if they were visual works of art.

Like the Dutch genre painters, Victorian painters and novelists were concerned with immediate society and the individuals within it. Domestic life and the work ethic gained new importance as mythological, romantic, historical, and classical interests receded. The overwhelming desire for sincerity in imitating life involved both subject matter and method. In terms which can certainly be applied to Victorian realism, Williams points out that "the art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent 'way of life',... in consequence, aesthetic, moral and social judgments are closely interrelated."53 In Victorian scenes of daily life, most particularly in the novel, cogent statements were being made on aesthetic, moral and social grounds.

Two champions of Victorian realism, both eager critics of painting and literature, were John Ruskin and George Henry Lewes. Ruskin's criticism (eg. Modern Painters) was largely concerned with a sympathetic and technically true approach to nature. He felt the sincere artist should be entirely receptive to the whole of nature, transferring his vision of it to page or canvas. The great moral significance of such works of art lies in their physical and spiritual universal appeal. This universal appeal is
achieved through adhering to the facts of physical life and the actualities of human experience. Art, then, both visual and literary, avoiding conventionalism and sentiment, should teach man to be sensitive to the world surrounding him.

Ruskin's opinions were echoed by Lewes. Realism is that which is natural and Lewes stated that "in fact the natural means truth of a kind."\textsuperscript{54} Everything then should be judged on its own merits. Lewes was always conscious of the all-important fact that art being a representation only of reality is subjective because it must necessarily be limited by the nature of its medium; the canvas of the painter, the marble of the sculptor, the chords of the musicians, and the language of the writer...\textsuperscript{55}

This representation of reality is opposed only to "falsism", a misrepresentation of life, and not to idealism which injects emotion into life and aspires to the divine or highest truths possible in humanity. It would have been the opinion of both Ruskin and Lewes that "the canvas (or page) that lacked 'truth to nature' could betoken only the artist's spiritual inadequacy or his technical incompetence."\textsuperscript{56}

It was the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood\textsuperscript{57} who reflected most clearly such ideals of truth and beauty. Their aims, as set forth by William Michael Rossetti, were to
1. express genuine ideas;
2. closely study nature to express them;
3. sympathize with the serious, direct and heartfelt in previous art [i.e. pre-Raphael] excluding convention and rote; and
4. produce good pictures.\textsuperscript{58}

Their subjects, painted with medieval simplicity and specific detail, were taken from nature and daily life and demonstrated "the superiority of realism — freshly observed nature transferred to canvas — to timid emulation."\textsuperscript{59}

Pre-Raphaelite nature was certainly "freshly observed". The members of the group often worked out-of-doors, searching for perfect colours and true scenes. As the group evolved it retained its technique of simplicity but developed a more spiritual, aesthetic interest in beauty and the imagination, in some cases moving away from a portrayal of the mundane.

An example of one of the better known Pre-Raphaelite paintings 'in which intense attention is paid to natural detail is Sir John Everett Millais' 'Ophelia' (1852; appended). Ophelia (see \textit{Hamlet}, Act IV, scene viii) is pictured floating down the stream (the model actually posed in a bathtub), and every leaf, petal, and branch on the bank is clearly rendered as Millais saw it. The painting has great natural appeal and sensitivity.

An even more important contribution than that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who began later to concentrate
on spiritual interpretations, to Victorian realism was that of the genre painters. Their work, modelled largely on the age of Dutch genre painting and on the French realists, was centred on all the nuances of the average life both in the country and city. Strict attention was paid to detail in historical and social settings, domestic objects, moral concerns, work, and community life in general. Wood states, tongue-in-cheek, that "Victorian painters were nothing if not thorough." Certainly even a casual glance at many of the paintings of this period reveals a wealth of detail directed at the objects of everyday life. Each painting is in fact a history lesson.

A casual glance will also indicate the busy-ness and action of Victorian life; "The world of their pictures is a world in which you expect things to happen. The pictures seem to refer to what has gone before or what will come after." Examine for example William Powell Frith's (1819-1909) painting "Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)" (1854; appended). It is an action-packed series of episodes with infinite attention paid to detail. It reveals the dress and pastimes of Victorian folk at their leisure and if "read" carefully simultaneously tells several stories. The vibrancy of Victorian life emanates from its surface. Similar hustle and bustle is achieved in his "Derby Day" (1858; appended) which was based on a photograph of Derby Day 1857, ( appended). Such panoramic
works can only be produced after detailed study of men and social settings. An acute perception of human nature is also necessary. However, without the narrative voice of the novelist, this human nature cannot be examined.

Frith's work, the epitome of Victorian visual realism, is described as "a visual equivalent of a long Victorian novel's composite achievement." Both emerge as a shaped and achieved image of nineteenth-century English society..." 62 Similar comprehensive style is seen in Ford Madox Brown's (1812-1893) "Work" (1852/65). This painting illustrates the several occupations of the artisan class with the more leisured folk looking on. Again, as intended by the artist, the painting provides a history lesson.

Proof that such narrative paintings were immensely popular is indicated by the content of the 1863 Royal Academy exhibition in which "the greatest number of pictures [were] of domestic scenes, in or out of doors, often with an anecdotal interest." 63 Narrative pictures were also prized for their moral teachings and their meanings were perfectly clear to the upright middle-class Victorian. The perils of profligacy are only too obvious in Robert Braithwaite Martineau's (1826-1869) "The Last Day in the Old Home", and Augustus Leopold Egg's (1816-1863) series "Past and Present" (1858; No. 3 appended) succinctly points out the fate of the unfaithful wife.
Social realism both in painting and the novel was not always well-received because it revealed aspects of life which some members of society preferred to forget.

The plight of the less fortunate can also be seen in the social realism of Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), Frank Holl (1845-1888), Luke Fildes (1844-1927), and Herbert von Herkomer (1849-1914). J.J.J. Tissot (1836-1902) and Sir William Quiller Orchardson (1832-1910) generally treated more upper-class subjects than did their contemporaries. Nevertheless, such paintings as Tissot's "Boarding the Yacht" (1873) and Orchardson's "Mariage de Covenance" (1883) are true-to-life scenes of a more affluent lifestyle.

All the concerns dealt with in a sensory manner by realist painters were analyzed in depth by the novelists. These novelists included among others, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Meredith, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë and to some degree, Charles Dickens. Again, their concerns were with the patterns of everyday life, social situations, and moral dilemmas. Novels were long and complicated in order that the intricate fabric of life could be woven. Dealing with these realistic subjects in a realistic manner was the trademark of many Victorian novelists.

Realism in the Victorian novel did not occur overnight. It was a part of the evolving English novel
tradition and had its origins in the medieval and eighteenth century movements of finding truth in experience rather than making experience conform to pre-set notions of truth. The novelist began to accept reality as "an undivided whole" of which he was one of the parts and human life was seen as "unified and coherent."66 This organic view of life which had its basis in the novels of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen became a fundamental tenet of Victorian realism. In their novels, Scott and Austen described the forces which were at work in human society, related stories of individual and social experiences in a designated social and geographical context, and indicated clearly their dislike of fantasy.67 Other important early novelists who strove for truthful social, political, and geographical detail included Daniel Defoe, Aphra Behn, Tobias Smollett, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. The contemporary paintings of William Hogarth have been likened to the novels of Fielding and Smollett and they anticipate nineteenth-century novels in their detailed depiction of city life. The particular elements in Hogarth's work which are singled out are his satire and moral concerns.68 As noted, the strain of moral edification was a dominant aspect of Victorian painting and novels.

Another influence on Victorian novelists was that of the Romantic poets who also viewed life as an organic whole. Of primary importance was the Wordsworthian notion
that the beauty of the common pastoral life could be portrayed by describing humble folk in simple language and with an artistic use of dialect. The love and appreciation of nature would inevitably lead to the love and appreciation of mankind. Here one can see definite parallels to Ruskinian art criticism. Victorian novelists, particularly George Eliot, attempted to portray the pastoral life in an objective manner, rejecting the idealized pre-lapsarian view of the world.

Earlier and contemporary continental novelists and painters also contributed to the growth of realism in the Victorian novel. Lessons were learnt from the Dutch genre painters, and the nineteenth-century French realist painters. Novelists such as Balzac and Tolstoy were greatly admired. Balzac particularly taught the Victorians to study character and motive and to recognize that life was not always pleasant; in fact, it was sometimes quite unpleasant. Happy endings were not common place and should not be made up to please the reader.69

All these aspects grew into fruition in the Victorian realist novel which was concerned with man's reaction to the forces of his environment. It delineated strict social and geographical divisions, and was concerned with the natural rather than the supernatural world. Its method relied on a "study of the nature of reality and its effects on human nature."70 The novelists strove for a "full and
balanced presentation of character and situation.\textsuperscript{71}

This presentation was always comprehensive. In order to
further root the presentation in a realistic mode, the
chronological sequence was followed with the greatest of
care.\textsuperscript{72}

In her discussion of Victorian realism, Berle says
that "a sane realism neither ignores nor magnifies the
sordid elements in even the most perfectly regulated
civilization."\textsuperscript{73} Likewise, the novelist of the period,
remembering the words of Balzac, neither ignored nor
magnified any of the aspects of society. Through the use
of direct statement, an important technical method of
realism, they effected "a frontal assault on the
truth."\textsuperscript{74} There was no sentimentalization, only a
likeness to life — a verisimilitude.

In this likeness to life, the purpose of the novelist
was to make the "reader, writer and fictional characters
share a continuous world. The novelist's technique was to
cause the reader to "take its [novel's] represented world
as continuous in all ways with his own... [and] regard a
novel's characters as living beings."\textsuperscript{75} This was done by
using current scientific, political, legal, religious,
cultural, and social themes and controversies which the
educated and aware Victorian would recognise as pertinent.
In this regard, Houghton notes that the Victorians "looked
to literature for authority"\textsuperscript{76} in religious and moral
questions. In addition, recognizable place settings were employed and many of the characters were modelled on actual Victorian men and women.

Everything considered, the sensitivity of the Victorian painter and novelist to his times was tremendous. Recognizing the desire for edification he demonstrated what life was really like and showed how an idealistic search for higher truths was possible. This is indeed the essence of Victorian realism. In return, the Victorian patron of the visual and literary arts could learn to appreciate nature, study society and gain an understanding of its successes and failures, and seek ideas for moral improvements. He did so with gusto. It was a relationship in which both parties benefited.

The novels the Victorians read with great enthusiasm included those of George Eliot. Eliot was widely educated and acutely sensitive to the intricacies of Victorian life. Recognising the search for moral principles, she filled her novels with the dilemmas of daily life. They serve as excellent examples of the purposes and techniques of Victorian realism.
Notes to Chapter II


   In its strict sense, realism is the representation of real objects, such as actually exist, as opposed to idealism which may be defined as the construction of the perfect type of these same things...

   or, Ralph Mayer, A Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Co., 1969):

   The depiction of human figures, real objects, or scenes as they appear in nature without stylization... also used to mean representational or objective painting as distinguished from abstract painting.


5. J.P. Stern, On Realism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p.38. See also Damien Grant, Realism (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1970), pp.3-4. In his discussion of the history of realism he says that idealism "was used to describe the scholastic doctrine that universals (justice, goodness, etc.) have a real existence, independent of the particular objects in which they are found."

6. Ibid., p.47.


12. Ibid., pp.185-94.

13. Ibid., p.192.


18. Ibid., p.42.


27. Grant, Realism, p.32.

28. Ibid., p.29.

29. Ibid., p.69.


31. Ibid., pp.146-66.

32. Ibid., p.16.


34. Levine, Realistic Imagination, p.32.

35. Other works consulted in this study of realism but not directly used include:


Amelia B. Edwards, "The art of the novelist,"
Contemporary Review, 66 (1894), pp.225-242:

Frye views realism as the third of three organizations of myth and archetypal symbols in literature. In realism there is an emphasis on content and representation rather than form and structure. The other organizations of myth are the undisplaced myth (apocalyptic and demonic) and the romantic myth. (pp.139-140).


W.D. Howells, My Literary Passions - Criticism & Fiction (New York: Klaus Reprint Co., 1968: reprint of 1891 publication). Howells is another supporter of the omniscient narrator convention in realism and says that the author is "bound to express or to indicate [life's] meaning at the risk of overmoralizing." (p.200).

Karl Kroeber, Styles in Fictional Structure - The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971). Kroeber's study includes a contrast of the novel (representative in his view of reality) and romance. Romance he says is filled with action rather than character study and is full of colourful astonishing events lacking "realistic plausibility". The novel, with comprehensive detail deals with people in the business of life and, the reader sees "these people in their real complexity of temperment and motive." (pp.12-13).


Edith Wharton, The Writing of Fiction (New York:
Charles Scribners Sons, 1925). Wharton's approach to realism is that of "slice-of-life", and she says a realistic novel represents "exact photographic reproduction of a situation or an episode, with all its sounds, smells, aspects realistically rendered,..." (p.10)


38. Ibid., p. 481.


41. Sachs, Commonwealth of Art, p.142.


43. It should be mentioned at this point that the literature of Russia and the Scandinavian countries also indicated a move towards realism at the same time.


48. Further credibility was given to this movement by Hippolyte Taine in his Histoire de la literature anglaise. This work emphasizes scientific positivism and the uses of literature as historical documentation. For further details see Levin, Gate of Horn, pp. 10-15.


55. Ibid., p.87.


57. The original group, formed in 1847, included William Holman Hunt, (1827-1910), John Everett Millais (1829-1896), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Thomas Woolner (1825-1892), James Collison (1825-1881), William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919), and Frederic George Stephens (1828-1907). The group was formed in reaction to the traditionalism of the Royal Academy. Others associated at various times with the PRB included Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), Arthur Hughes (1830-1915), William Dyce (1806-1864), and Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833-1898).


64. Further discussion of the works of all the painters mentioned above can be found in William Gaunt, The Restless Century - Painting in Britain 1800-1900 (London: Phaedon Press, 1972); Maas, Victorian Painters; Graham Reynolds, Victorian Painting (New York: MacMillan 1966); and Wood, Victorian Panorama. Several lesser known Victorian realists are also discussed in these books.

65. Sensationalism was also a force in some Victorian novels and in opposition to the focus on character in realism it focused on plot and scene. Examples of sensationalism appear in the work of Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade. See W.C. Phillips, Dickens, Reade and Collins, Sensation Novelists - A Story in the Conditions & Theories of Novel Writing in Victorian England (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962; reprint of a 1919 publication).


67. Ibid., pp. 10-11.


CHAPTER III

George Eliot's Knowledge and Theories of Art and Realism

George Eliot was premier among Victorian novelists with her portraits drawn from average humanity and her scenes of daily life painted as she viewed them, in a realistic and straight-forward manner. These "portraits" and "scenes" were not merely reproduced for the reader's simple amusement or the author's financial need. Rather, they evolved from her theories of the purpose of literature and art, and the relationship of religious, philosophical and moral ideas, and realism. Eliot's firm belief in realism as a literary and artistic theme and technique was tightly interwoven with all her other intellectual beliefs. All these were exemplified in her criticism, and in her theory of the novel and her practice. Eliot's vast knowledge of visual art and contemporary thought had a great influence on her work. So, in discussing her theory of realism, which progressed from a simpler domestic approach in her earliest work, i.e. Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede, to a deeper psychological analysis in her chef d'oeuvre, Middlemarch, one also considers as a matter of course her religious, philosophical, and moral ideas, her knowledge and criticism of visual art, and her novel
theory. More frequently than not, they are indivisible. As a result, the theory of realism revealed in Eliot's novels goes far beyond the realistic studies of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the genre painters. All her knowledge was distilled in her work. Her narrative voice expanded and developed themes dealt with in a surface manner in the visual arts and integrated philosophical ideas never addressed in the latter.

From the time her novels were published to the present day, critics have commented on and interpreted Eliot's theories of realism. They have approached these theories both in general and in terms of the specific novels. The critical literature has always recognised her interest in common experience and her skill in word-painting and historical description. Henry James states that her "sympathies are with common people" and that "she is unmistakably a painter of bourgeois life." Virginia Woolf praises her ability to paint portraits of her characters and says,

> It is impossible to estimate the merit of the Poyzers, the Dodsons, the Gilfils, the Bartons and the rest with all their surroundings and dependencies because they have put on flesh and blood and we move among them ...

This is a clear affirmation of Eliot's humanism. More recently, Garrett has affirmed and extended these ideas in saying that
In George Eliot the actual predominates, the profuse detail, creating an elaborate verbal picture, works toward an effect not only of 'piquant picturesqueness' but of the solidity and multiplicity of an actual physical presence, rooted in history.³

Garrett is acknowledging the symbols and dramatic presentation within the description of the actual and her ability to surpass the realism of the visual arts which the earlier critics failed to recognize. Likewise, Bonaparte describes the novels as "an attempt at objectivity that remains ultimately within the limits of subjectivity."⁴ Even if this interpretation may seem to degrade Eliot's realism somewhat, it does recognize its dual nature of objectivity and subjectivity. Leavis also recognizes the subjective, psychological element which he says is closely allied with Eliot's interest in human nature.⁵

In addition to her interest in human nature, critics have praised her historical and regional descriptions and her ability to integrate them into the fictional life of her characters. In her novels she presents an accurate picture of rural society, class structure, political, religious, and scientific reform, and the almost xenophobic aspect of tightly-knit provincial communities. Although localised in the novels, these descriptions "recreate through the imagination what is likely to have occurred" on a larger scale "based on her factual knowledge and feeling for the period."⁶ The reader feels he knows a great deal
about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England after reading the novels.

Eliot achieves this accuracy through interspersing dialogue and narration with actual historical fact, through the description of rural traditions and customs, and through the exposition of family life. Naumann mentions particularly her use of folk festivals, rustic humour, tavern scenes, and religious and political gatherings in this regard. One can see that these devices, which describe the interaction of man and society, serve to delineate Eliot's thoughts on humanism, positivism and determinism. Her subjects are forced to grow within the family, the community, and the natural environment. They all operate as part of a larger whole.

Her approaches to the growth of Evangelicalism in society in "Janet's Repentence", Adam Bede, Felix Holt, and Middlemarch, for example, give the novels true historical perspective as do her discussions of the fight for medical reform and political change in Middlemarch society. If called upon to describe Eliot's theory of realism and its use in her novels, one would do well to relate the view that they are "scientific case studies of specific social, political, economic, historical, psychological, and religious phenomena."

It was from both personal experience and contemporary art criticism that she developed her own theories of the
supremacy of realism in art and ultimately in the novel. In retrospect, her exposure to and knowledge of art was incredible. She visited art studios and galleries in London and abroad, and studied all she saw with a fervent interest.

Her knowledge of painting and art theory has been dealt with in great detail by Witemayer in *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*. Important aspects of his work are covered in the following discussion. Eliot disliked the puzzling symbolism of the modern German painters but enjoyed modern French realists. She had some exposure to the Nazarenes and thought their history painting rather unintelligible. It had "too much mind and not enough nature." Simply stated, it was not realistic. Closer to home, she was exposed to the natural studies of the Pre-Raphaelites and the nineteenth century genre style which she admired for its narrative quality, problem scenes and moral themes. Eliot was receptive to all she encountered in painting, selecting with great precision those attributes she felt pertinent to her own work.

The works of art which she knew and loved included those most important in the context of the history of Victorian realism: the Dutch and Flemish genre painters whose work she saw in Europe. These included Vermeer, Metsu, Terboch, Teniers, Holbein, Maes, Durer, and Steen. She was especially impressed by Dōu's "The Spinner's
Grace". Much of her exposure to these genre painters was occurring as she was writing Adam Bede and, in this novel she admits her debt to them as she praises the beauty and goodness inherent in everyday life:

It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions, ... therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things - men who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them.10

Similar justification is found in "Amos Barton":

Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tone.11

Several scenes in these and her other novels reflect her love of the Dutch bourgeois conversation piece, "a mixture of genre and portrait in which a group of friends or relatives is depicted in an intimate and informal setting."12

In the tradition of classical portraiture she admired particularly the paintings of Rembrandt and Raphael. The
latter's "Sistine Madonna" stirred her deeply with its mixture of ideal and human properties. Her praise of Rubens is the ultimate praise of the realistic form: "His are such real, breathing men and women - men and women moved by passions, not miming and grimacing and posing in mere apery of passion." Portraits, she felt, should reveal character both on the canvas and on the page. A visual or verbal description of the outer person should lead to an appreciation of the inner person. The physical descriptions of the characters in novels can be likened to portraits and she uses them to reveal character traits.

The portrait of Adam in the first chapter of Adam Bede is drawn to indicate his rugged good health, strength, and intelligence (Adam Bede, p. 18). That of Esther Lyon in Chapter V and VI of Felix Holt indicates her air of superiority, yet also her ladylike appeal and basic goodness. Casaubon's portrait in Chapter 2 of Middlemarch reveals his pedantic nature and overall weakness (Middlemarch, p. 12).

Truth in physical setting was as important to Eliot as genuine personal portraits were and, she drew heavily from the traditions of the English landscape painters. She was intrigued by unsentimental topographical detail which created a sense of place and a background foil for characters and events. One gets the sense she felt she could enter into some of the scenes she saw painted, and
today, the reader feels an ability to enter directly into her fictional towns, farm-houses and other pastoral settings, and country estates without getting lost. Like Hardy and Trollope, she created fictional "real places".

In addition to her knowledge of particular styles and periods of art, Eliot had many personal acquaintances in the art world. These included members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, some of the Victorian genre painters, the Nazarene painter Wilhelm von Schadow, and art historians and critics Gustave Fredrich Waagar and Francois d'Albert Durade. In fact, in 1849-1850 she lived at the Geneva home of the latter. Their correspondence, to which she attached great importance, continued throughout his lifetime. As well, over the years she read Coindot's Histoire de la peinture en Italie, Kugler's Handbook of Italian Painters, Lessing's studies of German art, works of Adolf Stahr and Johannes Overbeck, Vasari's Lives of the Painters, Pater's Studies in the History of the Renaissance, and most importantly, much of Ruskin's work including Modern Painters, Stones of Venice, Lectures on Architecture and Painting, and Political Economy of Art. Of her reading, Ruskin's work probably had the greatest impact on her own thought:

Ruskin, more than anyone else, taught George Eliot to value art as the servant of a greater reality... For Ruskin and George Eliot, the faithful study of nature is not an end in itself
but a means of attaining a selfless perception of truth and beauty.\textsuperscript{14}

As a result of her study of Ruskin and the other critics mentioned above, Eliot recognized five essential functions of true art which she adapted to her own novel writing; these were greatness of conception, truthfulness of execution, perfection of expression, superb colour and form, and, stimulus to meditation.\textsuperscript{15} Each of these five functions were to become evident in her novels as aspects of realism but the middle three were the most important. Above all, she sought truth, perfection and accuracy in her work. It is interesting to note how closely these functions of art parallel the aims of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They also echo the Wordsworthian aspects discussed earlier. The artist's, poet's or novelist's faithful study of nature should lead to a realistic perception and interpretation.

Eliot stresses this point herself when she states her aim to avoid arbitrariness and

to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective, the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath. (Adam Bede, p. 174)

The same idea is repeated in Middlemarch

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 the little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering of a concentric arrangement...¹⁶

With these words Eliot points out the necessary subjectivity of realism. One can see that Eliot believed art and literature were two different forms of the same language. Much of this belief was based on the Horatian doctrine of ut pictura poesis est. She felt her novels should imitate the specificity of painting and she averred that skillful use of language would create visual imagery. This "pictorialism" was achieved by word-painting and dramatic presentation. Objective realism was the result of word-painting and subjective realism was the result of dramatic presentation. Eliot's use of subjective realism took her one movement beyond many of her contemporaries, both painters and novelists, who were not concerned with or able to portray the dramatic reality of a situation as well as the objective reality.¹⁷ It has also been suggested that her use of subjective reality carries the doctrine of ut pictura poesis est one step further into revealing the internal aspects of human experience since very few paintings achieve true dramatic presentation.¹⁸ This is
indeed the essential difference between Eliot's realism and that of the painters. In discussing this aspect of Eliot's work, Witemayer says that "the novel may not only evoke a portrait in the mind's eye of the reader; it may also animate that portrait and go inside the frame." He merely repeats what Eliot herself has stated in *Middlemarch*:

> And what is a portrait of a woman? Your painting and Plastik are poor stuff after all. They perturb and dull conceptions instead of raising them. Language is a finer medium. ...Language gives a fuller image... After all, the true seeing is within;
>
> ..."(*Middlemarch*, p. 142)

Her love of art and her quest for truth in word-painting and dramatic presentation were clearly set forth in an article which she wrote for the *Westminster Review*: "art is the nearest thing to life; it is the mode of amplifying experience... Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life."

In this article, "The Natural History of German Life" she clearly stated her aim to show people as they really were, and to evoke a sympathetic understanding of the common man. She felt she had truly achieved this when the reader could accept her characters as they were and cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience" for them. (*Adam Bede*, p. 75)

There are aspects of idealism in Eliot's realism and it has been pointed out that she "habitually idealized her
characters by associating them with sacred and heroic history painting and with classical sculpture. The most obvious association is that of Dorothea and the reclining "Ariadne" in which the former is given a divine serenity. (Middlemarch, p. 140). Despite modern conceptions of realism and idealism, there is no contradiction in saying that Eliot's realism contained aspects of idealism. Both Eliot and her intellectual soulmate Lewes maintained that falsism (artifice), not idealism, was at odds with realism (art). (See discussion of Lewes in Chapter II). Idealism was to them a striving for the divine in real life. They seemed to make it clear that the artist, through his characters, could strive for this ideal and still portray the more mundane aspects of daily life. This idea would appear to coincide with the subjective/dramatic aspect of Eliot's "pictorialism" through which the reader appreciates the inner action of characters who strive for something beyond objective reality. However, this search for the ideal can become self-defeating if the character ignores the more practical aspects of reality, primarily his duty to mankind. This blindness becomes a kind of self-destroying egoism leading only to frustration and failure. Several of Eliot's characters including Hetty (Adam Bede), Casaubon (Middlemarch), and Bulstrode (Middlemarch) are destroyed by their egoism. In Felix Holt, Esther and Felix are able to
conquer their egotistical leanings and realize a new fulness in life.

In addition to her thoughts on idealism and realism, Eliot considered a number of philosophical, religious, and moral theories which became part of her own theory of realism. These included humanism, positivism, and determinism.

The basis of Eliot's knowledge of humanism, a philosophy which supported her belief that one should view the experiences of others with sympathy, came from her readings of Auguste Comte, J.S. Mill, G.H. Lewes, Herbert Spencer, and most importantly Ludwig Feuerbach. In 1854 she translated Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* into English.

Feuerbach and other Humanists viewed Christianity as legend and their "religion of humanity" was based on the belief that Christian love must exist in "flesh and blood", thus eliminating any faith in the supernatural. Certainly Eliot believed in the power of flesh and blood. Ethical values and morals are learned through human progress, and do not come from God. This progress nurtures human goodness and sympathy leading to moral order and an acceptance of the limitations of human life. Feuerbach believed that part of the human progress was a search for happiness within these limitations. As man learns to accept his duties to society, the human condition becomes
"the basis of a new assertion of purpose and dignity in human life." This is similar to Eliot's own views on the value of idealism where divinity abides in humanity:

It originates in a clear and compassionate perception of human suffering, which then quickens the natural emotions of pity and love, ... a forgetfulness of self in the recognition of our common humanity. 26

The Positivists held similar beliefs to the Humanists and felt that observable phenomena and positive facts determined the progress of human life. There are two facets of positivism, and in characterization, Eliot used both. Empirical positivism, linked to objective reality, is concerned with actual experience as the test of truth, with consciousness of evolution, and with knowledge of the external world. Metaphysical positivism, linked to subjective reality, works on the principles of ontology and teleology, accepts ideas not originating in experience, accepts that reality can transcend experience, and finds knowledge through introspection. While discussing Eliot's novels, Paris compares the egoists, those concerned with self rather than with humanity, to metaphysical positivists. 27 Their fault lies in not carrying out their duty in terms of actual experience. The empirical positivists, on the other hand, work with the forces of nature and human progress to carry out their duty to humanity. 28 Again, one can perceive strains of Eliot's
idealism in her beliefs.

The empirical positivists accept the deterministic philosophy that nothing happens by chance. In recognising this and working within the limitations of society man serves to determine the evolution of the environment as it determines his own evolution (cause and effect). Eliot subscribed to this secular determinism by which man was still responsible for his own actions within the pre-determined limitations of life.29

It can be seen that Eliot assimilated vast amounts of knowledge with strongly held philosophical beliefs to produce her own theory of realism. She imbued her novels with various aspects of this realism, ranging from simple domestic and historical realism in word-pictures to subjective dramatic presentation and indepth psychological examination of her characters who personified her humanistic, positivistic, and deterministic beliefs.

Her technique for presenting this varied realism was based strongly on the use of straightforward descriptions and extensive narration. She linked her characters to places and ways of life in which they were forced to learn how to function.30 Such a technique utilizes the Bildungsroman archetype of learning to cope with life. For example, Jones suggests that her novel Adam Bede is an example of Bildungsroman in which the protagonist, Adam Bede, undergoes changes in the course of the action because
he is forced to operate within the limitations. As a result he ceases being an egoist and, in accepting his duty and the strictures which bind him, finds personal happiness. One might say that there are elements of *Bildungsroman* in *Middlemarch* as well. Dorothea, for example, is forced to give up her egoism and adapt to *Middlemarch* society. Felix and Esther do the same in *Felix Holt*.

In speaking of the technical aspects of Eliot's work, Witemayer demonstrates her use of the word-painting and dramatic presentation:

The characteristic George Eliot chapter begins with the description, setting a scene in static, visual, often pictorial terms. Then it modulates into drama activating the tableau with dialogue and movement, or penetrating it with psychological commentary. The picture frame becomes a proscenium arch, and the viewer is drawn into the scene, moving from a distanced and relatively objective perception toward participation and sympathetic identification.

One can perceive this quite clearly in both her earlier and later work. Consider for example Chapter III of "Amos Barton" in which Amos and Milly visit the Countess Czerłański at Camp Villa or the oft-quoted Chapter 28 of *Middlemarch* which describes the Casaubons' return from Rome to Lowick Manor:

she saw the long avenue of limes lifting their trunks from the white earth, and spreading white branches
against the dun and motionless sky.
The distant flat shrunk in uniform
whiteness and low-hanging uniformity of
cloud. (Middlemarch, p. 201)

The narrative technique most important in the novels
is the voice of the narrator as it is used to elicit the
reader's sympathy and to provide the psychological
commentary. Through the analytic insights of the
omniscient narrator, the reader can
move to the other side of the mirror
and enter into the role of the
personage who tells the story...[he
moves] within the community. [He
identifies himself] with a human awareness which
is everywhere at all times within the world of
the novel.33

A related aspect of the narrative technique is that of
style indirect libre through which the characters assist in
the narration of the author's ideas. The reader becomes
acclimated to the characters' points-of-view and the
reasons for their actions. Eliot frequently uses this
style. The description of Fred Vincy in Chapter 23 of
Middlemarch is an excellent example.34 The reader hears
Fred's side of the story—"Fred felt sure that he should
have a run of luck... (p. 168) — while at the same time,
the author retains control of the narrative—"there was no
reason why he should not have increased other people's
liabilities to any extent, but for the fact that men...
believe that the universal order of things would
necessarily be agreeable to an agreeable young gentleman."
(p. 169).

These techniques and a deeper analysis of Eliot's theory of realism as set forth in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *Felix Holt*, and *Middlemarch* are discussed in the following chapter. They demonstrate her knowledge of and interpretation of Victorian life. The novels provide an objective view of the society and a subjective analysis of its members and their actions.
Notes to Chapter III


9. Witemayer, George Eliot and the Visual Arts, p. 81. Witemayer's work is essential reading in the study of Eliot's realism. I have relied heavily on it in this work.


15. Ibid., p. 24.


21. Witemayer, George Eliot and the Visual Arts, p. 73. This is an instance of a departure from her adherence to the principles of Dutch realism which avoided classical, mythical and biblical subjects.

22. Edward T. Hurley, "Piero di Cosimo: An Alternate Analogy for George Eliot's Realism," Victorian Newsletter, 31 (Spring 1967), pp. 54-56, apparently feels there is no contradiction as he refers to her "idealistic realism". He contrasts the idealism and insight of the artist Piero di Cosimo in Romola to the Dutch Realists' "close observations of the commonplace actual" and concludes that Eliot fuses both streams in her novels, particularly Romola.


CHAPTER IV
George Eliot's Use of Realism

The four works under consideration provide different examples of the author's belief in and techniques of realism. Yet, connecting threads run through them. Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, Felix Holt, and Middlemarch all provide a view of community life as a unified whole whilst describing both individual and wider social experience and interaction. They are directed to the broad average of humanity in an open-minded yet morally-structured manner. From the beginning, nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers encounter the world in which Mary Ann Evans grew up and from which ideas which form the basis of George Eliot's novels were developed. At the same time they recognize their own contemporaries and the patterns of life in which they are constantly involved.

Although the novels, like the work of the Victorian genre painters can be viewed as period pieces, with all the action taking place in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, they do provide a much deeper commentary on the human experience. Eliot's vision of society and character in these novels is by no means limited. By penetrating the human psyche and societal patterns in a manner which the
painter is unable to achieve, she forces the reader to recognize human traits and interactions which transcend time and location. As a rule, the painter is unable to achieve such penetration because he lacks the interior narrative voice of the novelist.

All the novels discussed are accurate studies of English life. Considered chronologically, they illustrate the development of her technique of realism and, each novel also indicates the thematic and structural elements of realism. In their respective story-lines, Eliot's theory of realism is explained and put into practice. Scenes of Clerical Life begins the pattern, describing humble, unheroic lives, exactly as the author views them, in an honest attempt to evoke the reader's sympathy and draw his attention to the basic goodness in human life. The Scenes can be regarded as a manifesto of humanism.

In Adam Bede, the scenic aspect continues and the plea for sympathy is reiterated. Additionally, in this novel the author begins to examine, by means of dramatic presentation, motives for the characters' actions and reactions. The necessity for "empirical positivism" rather than "blind egoism" is underlined and the humanistic aspect of the Scenes is seen to operate in a deterministic world.

The focus in Felix Holt is somewhat different as Eliot attempts to portray the political side of life. She seems to be less at ease with this aspect of her story, but she
succeeds again in detailing the process of social life and further enlarges the dramatic element of realism begun earlier. She discusses at length her characters' minds and motives in order to make their interaction with their society believable. In the objective sense, she presents an accurate picture of the different classes of English society and their respective lifestyles.

*Middlemarch* is the culminating triumph. It is a broad canvas, crammed with detail, experience, and information. Yet it is also a psychological discussion of the forces which determine life and of man's reaction to these forces. It is truly the quintessence of Eliot's theory of realism.

All the novels demonstrate Eliot's theories of realism, providing her with a forum to discuss art and literature, to demonstrate the power of human love, and to comment on humanity in general. The novels can thus apply to man in all ages and societies. She borrows theory and technique from the realistic pictorial arts but far surpasses their surface realism and set time-frames by entering the scene as the omniscient narrator and discussing it from within. It is this view from within, combined with her acute social perception, which results in the novels being great works of art which are universal.

The three *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton*, *Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story*,
and "Janet's Repentence", are essentially vignettes of three clergy and their respective parishes, Shepperton and Milby. It is widely acknowledged that Eliot describes actual people and places recalled from childhood in these stories. Having studied Eliot's early life, "there can be no doubt that 'Janet's Repentence' is a chapter of Nuneaton life, and a portrait gallery of Nuneaton worthies." In these stories, Eliot is concerned with the importance of religious life in the community as a whole, and she describes her clerical subjects, who are average folk, with sympathy and humour.

This sympathy and humour is illustrated in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story", which is the human interest tale of a sad, lonely old man who happens to be an Anglican minister. His sorrow could be that of any widower. Although he performs his clerical duties rather perfunctorily, and has demonstrated a love for the hunt and gin and water, he radiates kindness, affection and tolerance, and is greatly loved by his parishioners. Eliot's religion of humanity takes precedence over any established religion in this story. She, as the reader must also do, sees more benefit in human receptiveness than in strict religious doctrine, whether High Anglican or Evangelical.

In "Amos Barton" and "Janet's Repentence", both set a little later in time when religious matters, particularly
the growth of Evangelicalism and High and Low Church
controversies, greatly affected English life, religious
concerns dominate the communities of Shepperton and Milby.
One comes to appreciate the impact theological debate can
have on society. Consider for instance the effect of the,
charismatic movement or the ordination of women on the more
traditional Roman Catholic and Anglican churches today.
Such debate is equally vitriolic, and as Evangelicalism
divided the population of Milby with much of its society
reacting violently to this "new religion" and a small
portion embracing it, the former issues divide the modern
church. Then and now, any new doctrine makes its mark on
the community.

The people of Shepperton and Milby are obsessed both
with fundamental issues of faith and with the more simple
concerns of clergy manners and forms of divine service.
Each community member strives to make his feelings on
religious matters known. Amos Barton is the subject of
many a Shepperton discussion and his use of hymns sparks
controversy between the advocates of psalms and the
advocates of these "new-fangled" hymns. This debate which
arose publicly in England is related fictionally by Eliot:

"they began to sing the wedding psalm
for a new-married couple, as pretty
psalm an' as pretty a tune as any's in
the prayer-book. It's been sung for
every new-married couple since I was a
boy. And what can be better?..."But
Mr. Barton is all for th' hymns, and a
sort of music as I can't join in at all." ("Amos Barton", p. 6)

One of Barton's shortcomings, the fault of many a High Churchman, is his inability to preach at a level his listeners can appreciate. Thus he alienates them, creating in their minds horrific pictures of an unrelenting God when in fact he believes strongly in God's mercy and forgiveness.

Such a destructive view of religion is painted also in "Janet's Repentence". Dempster and his cohorts incite violence over differences in religious belief. He himself is a portrait of unregenerate human wickedness. Without a doubt, such inhumanity and intolerance are continuing blots on mankind's record. Eliot uses this social prejudice though to illustrate the moral strain in man and the possibility of repentence and forgiveness. The moral influence and the human love of the much beleaguered Rev. Tryan shine forth. As a result, Janet is changed both by his influence and through her own moral struggle. As she struggles so does the community as a whole. Again, the need for love and tolerance is the moral lesson of this story.

These events may appear overdrawn and, critics have emphasized the melodramatic nature of the stories. Certainly it cannot be denied but, it must be remembered that melodrama was an accepted Victorian literary (and pictorial) convention of which Eliot was aware. Moreover,
the use of melodrama does not preclude realism and there is strong agreement that the stories are founded upon the principles of realism and are true-to-life. The subject matter discussed above is adequate support of this argument.

In terms of subject matter, one of Eliot's contemporary critics wrote that "the fictitious element is securely based upon a broad ground work of actual truth, truth as well in detail as in general." More importantly, remembering Eliot's wish to portray the common and sometimes unattractive lot of man, he stresses the "honest adherence to truth of representation in the sombre as well as the brighter portions of life." In these stories, the reader encounters sickness, cruelty, misguided love and affection, strong religious faith, and generally pleasing descriptions of bountiful country-life. Several examples spring to mind including Caterina's blind love for Captain Wybrow ("Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story"), the sickness and death of Milly Barton ("Amos Barton"), the persecution of Tyran by the anti-evangelists ("Janet's Repentence"), the affection of Patty Barton for her father ("Amos Barton"), Janet's conversion ("Janet's Repentence"), and the kindliness of Mr. Gilfil to his parishioners ("Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story").

Technically, these scenes reveal the methods of realism as accepted by Eliot. The characters and themes are universal and everything is stated directly. Important
in this regard is the use of the narrative form to explain historical social life and to provide the author's commentary on the characters involved.

Characterization is important, and in the true-to-life folk described there is a "careful delineation of personality, with all its attributes, habits, and external appearance" throughout the narrative. Note the revealing portraiture of Caterina Sarti in the opening paragraph of Chapter II of "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" or of Janet Dempster in Chapter IV of "Janet's Repentence". True physical settings are equally important, and the towns and homes of all involved are clearly rendered. Shepperton church is distinct in the mind's eye and the dismal home of Dempster's contrasts with the sunny cheerfulness of the Jeromes' garden. Likewise, everyday objects are described in the context in which they are normally used.

Everyday objects and situations appear in scenes of domesticity which clearly indicate the peaceful Flemish influence:

...the large bow-window of Mrs. Jerome's parlour was open; and that lady herself was seated within its ample semicircle, having a table before her on which her best tea-tray, her best china, and best urn-rug had already been standing in readiness for half an hour. ... She was a buxom lady of sixty, in an elaborate lace cap fastened by a frill under her chin, a dark, well-curled front concealing her forehead, ... her favorite geraniums in the bow-window were looking as
healthy as she could desire; ... (*Janet's Repentence* Scenes of Clerical Life, p. 231)

and

She is softly pacing up and down by the red firelight, holding in her arms little Walter, the year-old baby, who looks over her shoulder with large wide-open eyes, while the patient mother pats his back with her soft hand. (*Amos Barton*, Scenes of Clerical Life, p. 13.)

The world of the Scenes is a world regulated and bound by the unrelentless progression of time. The characters are ever vulnerable to time and must function within its limitations. Mrs. Jerome's afternoon tea is an unviolated ritual even amidst community turmoil (*Janet's Repentence*) and Mr. Gilfil continues to carry out his clerical duties despite the death of his wife (*Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story*). Yet the world in which they operate is constantly changing. The reader learns from this progression that man is ever evolving and despite tradition nothing is ever the same as it was.

In an even more involved manner, the clock also ticks on in *Adam Bede* in a world bound by natural and moral laws. This is the pastoral, rural life in its most obvious realistic sense; a life in which man and nature depend daily on one another. Unlike disjointed visual representations of pastoral life, this novel flows cohesively from one scene to the next. The pattern can
never be disturbed. The Hall Farm must continue to function despite Hetty's misfortunes and Adam must continue to work despite his distress. Such a pattern continues today.

Throughout the novel, the inevitable progress of the seasons is obvious: "It was beyond the middle of August... The reaping of the wheat had begun..." (p. 281). A few chapters later, the narrator reveals that "it was no longer light enough to go to bed without a candle, even in Mrs. Poyser's early household..." (p. 317). Soon, it is "the time between the beginning of November and the beginning of February" (p. 345). For all this time, "the sun shines and the rain falls on the just and the unjust." It has been argued that there is stasis in this pastoral world and that nothing changes, but this is true on the surface only. The world of Adam Bede, like that of the Scenes, and its inhabitants, whilst bound by the tradition and the cycles of nature, continually evolves. The just and the unjust alike must face life and learn its lessons. There is a very Wordsworthian aspect to Eliot's style which in its open-mindedness accepts all of nature in man, even his fallen nature... seeing in the life of communal man the analogy to growth and death in nature's seasonal generations.

The Wordsworthian element is further augmented as Eliot acts as a natural historian, detailing the life of
rural folk. Much of this is "remembrance of childhood past" as she sets down on paper that which she had seen and heard as a child. Indeed, many of the characters are based on actual acquaintances or family members, or on people she knew of from others. She infuses their stories with spirit and a dramatic (subjective) presentation through her imagination and moral interpretation of events.

In much greater detail than in Scenes of Clerical Life, the realistic pastoral sense is also supported by her use of rustic dialect and often satirical humour, particularly as it appears in the descriptions of the Poyser family and their lifestyle. Mrs. Poyser has been characterized as "the articulation of a way of life" and "a close examination of her daily household routine and her interaction with family and community tells the reader much about domestic farm life in the eighteenth century. Her speech is the common tongue of unsophisticated folk as is that of Lisbeth and Seth Bede. It is these simple straight-forward characters who convey life in an objective and sometimes brutally blunt sense. There is nothing unreal about their world.

Mrs. Poyser, Bartle Massey and Reverend Irwine are "empirical positivists" with humanistic tendencies. Although sometimes brusque, all are kind souls who have accepted the reality of their life and approach it with "a balance of head and heart." None of these characters
attempts, idealistically, to achieve the impossible. Reverend Irwine especially is motivated by the needs of his flock. His approach is one of human caring rather than divinely-inspired "fire and brimstone". He is somewhat like Rev. Gilfil of "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story". This demonstration of Eliot's philosophical beliefs embodies the moral purpose of her novels. One must learn to commune with the "brotherhood of man" and strive to live in a realistic manner, giving and taking within society as is necessary. Neither head nor heart alone should lead one as they do in the case of Hetty and Arthur. Most importantly, one must not become blinded to duty by idealism.

Adam is an idealist who suffers from an "imbalance of head and heart". In Adam, Eliot "dramatizes man's physical and moral-emotional condition. This dramatic presentation, through which the reader follows Adam's struggle and growth, "suggests the way it [life] should be so that it can become better." Adam must learn forgiveness and sympathy and Eliot reveals subjectively this learning process to the reader:

Deep unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. The
yearning memories, the bitter regret, the agonized sympathy, the struggling appeals to the Invisable Right - all
the intense emotions which had filled the days and nights of the past week, and were compressing themselves again like an eager crowd into the hours of this single morning, made Adam look.
back on all the previous years as if they had been a dim sleepy existence, and he had only now awakened to full consciousness. It seemed to him as if he had always before thought it a light thing that men should suffer, as if all that he had himself endured and called sorrow before was only a moment's stroke that had never left a bruise. Doubtless a great anguish may do work of years, and we may come out from the baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity. (Adam Bede, p. 405).

Adam is then able to forgive Hetty, face the verdict, and reach his arms out to her in compassion. (p. 414)

The character of Hetty reveals a different type of idealist yet her position is bluntly realistic. She relies too heavily on imagination and acts the dreamer as she preens in front of her mirror picturing herself in the company of Arthur Donnithorne. As a result, she cannot attend to the mundane chores of life. Despite her own frivolity and less than realistic approach to life, Hetty's situation reveals life's problematic nature. Her immaturity, rash actions, and insensitivity clash with the more balanced life. Therefore like the fallen woman of all times she must suffer and be punished. Only too late does she appreciate the folly of selfishness and the cruel forces of nature.

The Wordsworthian quality of Adam Bede and the necessary growth of the "imbalanced" idealistic person are not the only notable aspects of Eliot's realism in this novel. Again, but in a more sophisticated manner than in
the *Scenes*, she draws strongly on the narrative form and direct statement. As the omniscient narrator, she has no scruples about injecting her theories of realism, for example in the famous Chapter 17, and also her interpretations of the action and character into the story line. As noted, it is in this way that her work surpasses the mere objectivity of the visual artist.

In this novel, as in the *Scenes*, her interpretation and description of the characters is carried out largely by portraiture. The portrait of Dinah Morris in Chapter 2 of the novel is an excellent example, revealing as it does, Dinah's pacific nature and deep faith:

> She held no book in her ungloved hands, but let them hang down lightly crossed before her, as she stood and turned her grey eyes on the people. There was no keenness in the eyes; they seemed rather to be shedding love than making observations; they had the liquid look which tells that the mind is full of what it has to give out... in this sober light the delicate colouring of her face seemed to gather a calm vividness, like flowers at evening. It was a small oval face, of a uniform transparent whiteness, with an egglike line of cheek and chin, a full but firm mouth, a delicate nostril, and a low perpendicular brow... *(Adam Bede, p. 33)*

Contemporary religious issues are an important component of the story. In *Adam Bede* the concern is with the Methodism and its growth, particularly in the expanding industrial sectors of English society. Eliot is thus able to use this theme to contrast the pastoral (country) life
to the more hectic industrial (city) life. Another contemporary concern which she addresses is the education of the lower classes. Not without opposition, Bartle Massey attempts to teach the willing and unwilling the rudiments of reading and writing. He represents the struggle of all men to become better educated for their own good.

A similar struggle is addressed in Felix Holt which embodies Eliot's first attempt to deal with English political and legal life. Generally, this novel has not been as well received as the others and admittedly it is rather dry, but its message is clear. In it she retains her quest for realism and humanity, imbuing her characters with genuine properties and problems. Likewise, her treatment of growing political unrest and class struggle is true-to-life. It is important to note that she diligently studied the news reports, history, and legal documents of the early 1800s to achieve this veracity.12

Immediately she sets the scene by transporting the reader into a world which like the present one has both pleasant and unpleasant aspects. It is a world of peaceful, halcyon progress,

As the morning silvered the meadows, with their long lines of bushy willows marking the watercourses, or burnished the golden corn-ricks clustered near the long roofs of some midland homestead.13
And, as

here and there a cottage with bright
transparent windows showing pots full
of blooming balsams or geraniums, and
little gardens in front all double
daises or dark wallflowers; at the
well, clean and comely women carrying
yoked buckets, and towards the free
school small Britons dawdling
on,... (Felix Holt, p. 5)

Yet,

...the land would begin to be blackened
with coal-pits, the rattle of hand-
looms to be heard... Here were powerful
men, walking queerly with knees bent
outward from squatting in the
mine... Everywhere the cottages and
small children were dirty, for their
languid mothers gave their strength to
the loom,... (Felix Holt, pp. 5-6)

These excerpts, again revealing the Flemish influence,
indicate a reliance on substantive natural imagery; nothing
is sensational. Everyday situations and work are of prime
importance, and poverty and distress are not ignored.
Going beyond the mere pictorial aspect, Eliot introduces
the theme of political unrest:

In those days there were pocket
boroughs, a Birmingham unrepresented in
Parliament and compelled to make strong
representations out of it, unrepealed
corn-laws, three-and-sixpenny letters,
a brawny and many-breeding pauperism,
and other departed evils; (Felix Holt,
p. 1).

The reader soon recognizes the inevitability of
natural and social progress, and the organic interplay of
all elements of society. In the deterministic manner of
the novel, Eliot demonstrates that the individual, represented most importantly in this case by Esther and Felix, must react within the limits of his environment whilst retaining his individuality. Much more clearly than in her earlier work, it becomes obvious that the "past, present and future are inextricable." Nothing occurs which does not have some significance. Certainly this is the situation with Harold Transome and his mother. The latter, who represents Eliot's first intensive examination of a mature, older woman, cannot undo her choices of the past and must endure their outcome:

Today she was more conscious than usual of the bitterness which was always in her mind in Jermyn's presence, but which was carefully suppressed, - suppressed because she could not endure that the degradation she inwardly felt should ever become her own, should ever be reflected in any word or look of his. For years there had been a deep silence about the past between them, - on her side, because she remembered; ...("Felix Holt", p. 168)

Inevitably she becomes an embittered cold woman, constantly in a state of unease:

"I am not at rest!" Mrs. Transome said, with slow distinctness, moving from the mirror to the window, where the blind was not drawn down, and she could see the chill white landscape and the far-off unheeding stars...

"Denner," she said in a low tone, "if I could choose at this moment, I would choose that Harold should never have been born."("Felix Holt", Bk. II, p. 168)
However, she can no longer choose. This is a most tragic aspect of realism. Harold's future too is determined for him by Jermyn's actions and by the ramifications of legal inheritance over which he has no control.

At its most basic level, *Felix Holt* is an objective study of Reform-era England. The author details the political and economic conditions of the time, particularly the bribery and corruption of the electoral process which lead to the Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867. The utter chaos of election day is described by Eliot in all its horror:

There was only evidence that the majority of the crowd were excited with drink, and that their action could hardly be calculated on more than those oxen and pigs congregated amidst hootings and pushings. The confused deafening shouts, the incidental fighting, the knocking over, pulling and scuffling, seemed to increase every moment. Such of the constables as were mixed with the crowd were quite helpless; and if an official staff was seen above the heads, it moved about fitfully, showing as little sign of guiding hand as the summit of a buoy on the waves. (*Felix Holt*, Bk. II, p.2)

In the same manner she introduces the reader to all the intricacies of the English legal system and illustrates the tenacious hold it has on people's lives. The novel also serves as an excellent description of the many social classes. Life from the manor to the dingiest pit cottage is portrayed with all its active participants and
hangers-on. She demonstrates a sympathy for the working man and, the quality of writing shows George Eliot to have been quite unusually open to the viewpoint, idiom and whole culture of the underdog.\textsuperscript{15} To generate sympathy for the common man had been her purpose since she began to write.

On a more subjective level, Eliot penetrates this surface view of life to study the moral progress of some of the principal characters. As in Adam Bede, these characters, Esther and Felix, are idealists who must learn and change. They however, function in a larger environment than Adam does and in their strong-willed idealism, frequently clash with each other and society in general. Although they must act within the limitations of society, unlike the Tránsomes they are not inextricably bound by past, present and future. Although the influence of the past is pervasive in Esther's situation, she is able to transcend it "and dispose of the estate according to the needs of the present situation."\textsuperscript{16}

Both Esther and Felix are anomalies in Treby life having been transplanted from different situations; they must adapt their ways to a new life. This is a gradual evolutionary process. Felix's success in this process is debated by some who feel he is not represented as powerful enough to make a change. He is seen as too superior with an easy way out given to him.\textsuperscript{17} Felix does not make a dramatic impact on society but, through his experiences
trying to educate the miners and village boys and trying to
fight political corruption, and through his misfortunes as
a result of the election day riot, he changes himself. He
becomes attuned to the realities of life and realizes that
he will have to change his methods in order to help
others. Society will be changed by humanity and not by
politics. Through this realization he is gradually
brought from a position outside society to a definite place
and function inside society.18

Esther's initial position is also uncertain. Clearly
she does not fit into her father's dissenting world, she is
not of Felix's ilk, and although she has pretentions, is
not an aristocrat. Her fault lies in vanity and
contemptuousness which she slowly learns to overcome
through her growing love for Felix and her experiences with
the Transomes. She learns that no life is lived without
renunciation of some sort and that choices must be made.
In the process she acquires a genuine sympathy for the less
fortunate and an understanding of Felix's mission. In the
scheme of things her final decision to renounce the estate
may seem to occur rather quickly,

But life is measured by the rapidity of
change, the succession of influences
that modify the being; and Esther had
undergone something little short of an
inward revolution. (Felix Holt, Bk II,
pp. 221-222)

During their simultaneous learning processes, Esther
and Felix meet and their experiences become intertwined. Their marriage, the triumph of social and individual growth over legal and political concerns is a coming together of the past, present and future as it "reaches back to the past through inheritance and forward to the future through imagery of family connections that extend to all the social classes." 19

Considering the technical terms of realism, Eliot continues the methods she employed in her earlier work. She draws revealing portraits of the principle characters and paints scenes of domestic life. Her portrait of Jermyn reveals his unctuousness and treacherous nature (Felix Holt, P. 50). "Following her description of the elder Transomes and Harry on the lawn:

She was standing on the broad gravel in the afternoon; the long shadows lay on the grass; the light seemed the more glorious because of the reddened and golden trees. The gardeners were busy at their pleasant work; the newly turned soil gave out an agreeable fragrance; and little Harry was playing with Nimrod round old Mr. Transome, who sat placidly on a low garden-chair. (Felix Holt, p. 166)

she says, "The scene would have made a charming picture of English domestic life." Another charming and much more poignant scene is painted of Esther and her father:

Esther had risen, and had glided on to the wooden stool on a level with her father's chair, where he was accustomed to lay books. She wanted to speak, but the floodgates could not be opened for
words alone. She threw her arms round
the old man's neck, and sobbed out with
a passionate cry,...

They sat so, encompassed in silence,
while Esther relieved her full heart.
When she raised her head, she sat quite
still for a minute or two looking
fixedly before her, and keeping one
little hand in the minister's. (Felix
Holt, pp. 367-368)

Of course, Eliot as narrator is able to enter into
these scenes and, unlike the painter, reveal what is
happening in the minds of the participants. In setting the
scene and commenting on it, the analytic approach adds to
the subjective realism of the study.

The most complex example of Eliot's realism is her
psychological and domestic tour de force, Middlemarch. It
is a large scale social study operating on several levels
with complex narrative lines and a multiplicity of moral
problems. In its representation of a cross-section of
English society, it serves as "the epitome of English
realism." Its greatness lies in the fact the author
pulls all these threads together, weaving an eminently
believable scene, an analysis of life, applicable then and
now. No nineteenth century pictorial artist achieved such
a feat. The novel demonstrates a "sheer informedness about
society" and an accurate portrayal of how "different
classes live and (if they have to) earn their
livelihood." Again, it is important to note that, as
she did in preparation for Felix Holt, the author read
widely on all historical aspects of the period she planned to write about.

Eliot's contemporary critics recognized both the objective and subjective aspects of Middlemarch's realism. On the objective level, Henry James compares the novel to a picture which is "vast, swarming, deep-coloured, crowded with episodes, with vivid images." This comment calls to mind the crowded paintings of William Powell Frith. However, Eliot goes beyond Frith's photo-realism to provide a detailed examination of the inner workings of the society. Simcox, noting the charm in this 'study of provincial life', affirms that its real importance lies in "all the subtle factors which make up the characters of a definite state of society." She appreciates the dramatic presentation and inner development of the characters. This important factor is recognized also by Dicey who describes Middlemarch as

a history of the development, and generally of the tragic development of characters which are sometimes noble, sometimes base, and generally neither very noble nor very base, amidst the commonplace circumstances of a country town.

The commonplace circumstances of this country town are essential to the action and, in a deterministic manner, they provide the medium in which each character acts and develops.

The novel is then a consideration of human nature and
in this consideration particular attention is paid to the "process of change". On a simple level, it is the story of a fictional society experiencing actual historical change in the form of the rush for the Reform Bill, the question of Catholic emancipation, the growth of Evangelicalism, the awareness of the need for public health reform, the clash of new and old theories of medical practice, and technical developments such as the railway. The detailing of these historical changes gives the novel a "dynamism in time" as do the frequent references to the seasons, the days of the week, and the time of day: "It happened to be on a Saturday evening..." (343); "Mr. and Mrs. Casaubon... arrived at Lowick Manor in the middle of January..." (p. 201); and, "Mr. Bulstrode was still seated in his manager's room at the Bank, about three o'clock of the same day..." (p. 507).

Time also works in a more subtle manner in the novel. It determines, simultaneously with the environment, the progress of the idealists (egalists). Eliot employs dramatic presentation and psychological analysis to reveal the effects of time and environment on the idealists. Both serve to emphasize the "Victorian sense of duty" which, for example, Dorothea and Lydgate have not accepted at the outset. However, they gradually learn to accept their duty as decreed by the environment. Lydgate's struggle is especially painful, and tragic in the recording of "the
steps by which genius and energy sink at last, overpowered by the force of circumstances, and of circumstances of the pettiest nature. Eliot subjectively records these steps and with examining insight portrays Lydgate's struggle:

He was feeling bitter disappointment, as if he had opened a door out of a suffocating place and had found it walled up;... When he looked up and pushed his hair aside, his dark eyes had a miserable blank non-expectance of sympathy in them;...

.................................
...he wanted to smash and grind some object in which he could at least produce an impression,... (Middlemarch, p. 480, 483)

Lydgate eventually succumbs to the suffocating place and walled up doors, and dies an early, unhappy death.

On the other hand, like Adam, Felix, and Esther, Dorothea, who seems at the outset to be less in the real world than Lydgate, gives up her idealistic quest yet lives a happy life. She learns to accept her environment and work with circumstance. Lydgate allowed himself to be trapped by circumstances, primarily by burying himself in a provincial town which was unlikely to accept medical reform and by marrying Rosamund Vincy. Because of this he can never truly accept his duty. He becomes the pawn of a deterministic world.

As in Lydgate's case, Dorothea's path to realization is equally painful:

Like one who has lost his way and is weary, she sat and saw as in one
glance all the paths of her young hope
which she should never find again. And
just as clearly in the miserable light
she saw her own and her husband's
solitude—how they walked apart so
that she was obliged to survey him.
...(Middlemarch, p. 312)

but she is able to adapt more easily, and in the end,
although she has given up her lofty ideals, "the effect of
her being on those around her was incalculably
diffuse..."(Middlemarch, p. 613). Dorothea becomes a
humanist, an active member of the brotherhood of man who
realizes the necessity of a realistic outlook.

Lesser, but still important psychological studies, are
pursued in the treatments of Bulstrode and of Fred Vincy.
Like Mrs. Transome, in Felix Holt, Bulstrode is forced
through great pain and suffering to accept an
incontrovertible action of the past and live up to the
present consequences. Although the reader's sympathy may
be stirred for Bulstrode and Mrs. Transome, their sin
remains. Fred Vincy's struggle is primarily one of
acquiring maturity. He is a young man of the world who
must relinquish folly and untenable youthful dreams in
order to become a viable member of society.

In Middlemarch one finds again the same technical
devices of realism employed in the previously discussed
works. Much of the context is based on reminiscences of the
author's own early provincial life. The people in
Middlemarch are average folk with average concerns. The
reader accepts, very easily, the action of the novel. This is largely because the omniscient narrator tells him exactly what is happening in a straightforward manner, either in revealing the dialogue or in adding frequent philosophical and analytical asides. There is really no doubt as to what is going on.

The novel contains many charming domestic, "Dutch realist" scenes described in vivid word-pictures:

He found the family group, dogs and cats included, under the great apple-tree in the orchard. ... Christy himself, a square-browed, broad-shouldered masculine edition of his mother, ... was lying on the ground now by his mother's chair, with his straw-hat laid flat over his eyes, while Jim on the other side was reading aloud... Letty herself, showing as to her mouth and pinafore some slight signs that she had been assisting at the gathering of the cherries which stood in a coral-heap on the tea-table, was now seated on the grass, listening open-eyed to the reading. (Middlemarch, p. 416-417)

Likewise, the novel contains many painterly landscapes and descriptive portraits. All these aspects of George Eliot's realism and those discussed previously are combined to produce a true-to-life "study of provincial life".
Notes to Chapter IV


2. Consider for example the description of Milly Barton's death scene ("Amos Barton", p. 62) and that of Caterina's attempted revenge on Captain Wybrow in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" (pp. 152-153).

3. Harvey, The Art of George Eliot refers to these stories as sources of local history p. 131. Deegan, "George Eliot's Novels," refers to the use of her historical imagination through which past history is related in private rather than public terms, p. 75. As a point of interest, compare the more recent historical novels of Jean Plaidy or Taylor Caldwell in which the action is centered on the lives of historic public figures who actually existed.


12. This reading included a number of Parliamentary Reports, Blackstone's Laws, the Annual Register of 1832, J.S. Mill's Principles of Political Economy, and S. Bamford's Passages from the Life of a Radical. Fred C. Thomson, "The Genesis of Felix Holt," PMLA, 74 (1959), p. 579 notes that these titles "show George Eliot orienting herself in the major political backgrounds of her story."


    Felix never has to pay the moral price for his actions that George Eliot believed was the cost of social reform, and her reluctance to let him do so eviscerates his radicalism and his effectiveness as a hero.


19. Ibid., p. 185.

Problem of the English Historical Novel in the Nineteenth Century," in Buckley, Worlds of Victorian Fiction, p. 257 who says of the novel, it is "a cross section of history as it really occurs, an infinitely complex interaction of local and general, personal and public, petty and generous, foolish and insightful actions all stirred and stirring the larger currents elsewhere. To know the history of Middlemarch in its fullest significance is to know the history of England or of civilization."


CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Visual art and the novel are two of several art forms which tell the story of life and interpret it in various ways. In this interpretation the technique of realism has always been popular. Its growth, beginning with the early philosophies of Aristotle, Plato, and later Horace, rising again with the seventeenth-century Flemish painters, and then culminating in the nineteenth-century work of the visual and literary artists of France and England has inextricably linked together life, visual art, and the novel.

One of the strongest links in this chain is that of nineteenth-century Victorian realism. The writings of critics such as Ruskin and Lewes, the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the genre painters, and the novels of Eliot, Trollope, Thackeray and others all provide good examples of the Victorian reliance on truth, simplicity, and middle-class values. Their work, whether a solely objective consideration of the readily-perceived tangibles of life, or a subjective examination of the not always apparent workings of inner man represents the characteristics and desires of real people in real situations, and leads to an understanding of aspects of
Victorian life.

Scenes such as those discussed in the previous chapter serve to illustrate the similarities of the visual arts and the novel form in the realistic tradition. Pictures can tell stories of life and stories can create life-like pictures in the mind's eye. As has been noted, there are also differences between the two art forms. These are most obvious when comparing the greater depth of interpretation offered by the narrative form of the multi-scene novel to the surface interpretation of the single-scene painting. Regardless of these differences, both the painter and the novelist must remain true in both subject and technique if a faithful and realistic study of life is to be achieved. Characters, scenes, and events must be believable, the style used must be straightforward, and most importantly, truth must be never be made to conform to a story. The reverse must always be the case.

Eliot's work particularly, being both objective and subjective, leads to such an understanding. Her contemporaries and critics of the twentieth century have pointed out the way in which her novels reveal the structure of Victorian life, the beliefs of the Victorians, and the tenor of the times. But, even though she is firmly rooted in her own time her work transcends the Victorian period through its consideration of human nature and issues of vital concern to all men. This universal spirit gains
life from Eliot's appreciation, understanding, and deep interest in humanity, and through her own wide knowledge and experience.

Discussion of the four novels, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *Felix Holt*, and *Middlemarch*, reveals the manner in which Eliot was able to synthesize all she understood of the philosophy of realism, and of art and literature and their relation to the life of the ordinary person. Expanding on the realistic techniques of the visual artist and injecting her own philosophical beliefs, she produced "real-life" stories with genuine characters and situations. These stories do not glide over the surface of life but delve deeply into man's motivations and feelings. The examination of these motivations and feelings increases in power as Eliot's realism grows from the earlier domestic approach in her first novels to the more psychological analysis in the later novels.

The novels indicate the importance of an honest and humanitarian outlook, the importance of living within reason, and the importance of understanding the inevitable evolutionary progress of life, time, and natural growth. Such work places her at the summit of both visual and literary Victorian realism.
APPENDIX I

"OPHELIA"

by John Everett Millais
APPENDIX II

"LIFE AT THE SEASIDE (RAMSGATE SANDS)"

by William Powell Frith
APPENDIX III

"THE DERBY DAY"

by William Powell Frith
APPENDIX IV

PHOTOGRAPH OF DERBY DAY 1857
by Robert Howlett

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APPENDIX V

"PAST AND PRESENT", No. 3

by Leopold Augustus Egg
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