
Part I

Imaginative Form and
Literary Context

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Eliot and Narrative

Monika Fludernik

With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799. (*Adam Bede* 5; ch. 1)

Though George Eliot's novelistic oeuvre is generally credited with the authoritative tone and rational tidiness of the omniscient narrator tradition so prominent in the realist prose of the nineteenth-century English novel, this cliché only partially succeeds in characterizing her narrative discourse. True, we feel we are in competent hands when we immerse ourselves in the fictional worlds of Eliot; yet the impression of authority arises less from a consistent world view that is being propounded than from our connivance at Eliot's ironies. As in satire, the superiority displayed by the narrator's delineation of characters' foibles, their self-deceptions and propensity to slide from ideal conduct, communicates itself to the ideal reader, who comes to share that ironic aloofness from the lapsarian world and savors the exposure of the protagonists' shortcomings. Since the authorial discourse (to use Stanzel's terminology) is clearly a knowing one, the reader comes to feel that the narration provides a normative viewpoint on the fictional world, in which the sarcasm of satiric analysis is humanely tempered by charitable impulses to explain and excuse the characters' blunders. The reader is thus led to appreciate the discriminating and sympathetic intelligence of the narrator.

The opening of *Adam Bede* cited above illustrates this intertwining of irony and sympathetic appeal. In this passage the blend of dissonance and consonance (Cohn) arises from a conjunction of two textual strategies that narrative theorists usually believe to be incompatible—(a) metafiction, with a hint at metalepsis, the transgression of ontological boundaries; and (b) the establishment of aesthetic illusion (Wolf) by means of the reader's immersion (Ryan) in the fictional world. In the ironic opening paragraph of *Adam Bede*, the narrator implicitly compares himself with an Egyptian sorcerer, thus seemingly undermining the respectability and credibility of fictional realism. At the same time, s/he works toward immersion by magically projecting the reader into the fictional world, where s/he can “see” what is happening in the carpenter's shop: “It is clear *at a glance* that the next workman is Adam's brother”; “He [Seth] has thrown off his paper cap, and *you see* that his hair is not thick and straight, like Adam's, but thin and wavy, *allowing you to discern* the exact contour . . .” (6; ch. 1; my emphasis).¹ The passage therefore prepares the ground for a metaphorical metalepsis that the narrator's “drop of ink” is able to achieve by means of direct address (“you, reader”) and deictic positioning: the shift into the present tense and the references to vision require a transgressive location of the reader within the fictional world.

Eliot displays this technique a second time to even more striking effect in Chapter 5 when we are introduced to Mr. Irwine and the narrator takes the role of our chaperone: “Let me take you into the dining-room, and show you the Rev. Adolphus Irwine, Rector of Broxton. . . . We will enter very softly, and stand still in the open doorway, without awaking the glossy-brown setter who is stretched across the hearth . . .” (54; ch. 5). The narrative positions us behind Mr. Irwine so that “at present we can only see that he has a broad flat back and an abundance of powdered hair” and have to wait until “[h]e will perhaps turn round by-and-by” (55; ch. 5). The narrator even attributes thoughts to the projected reader figure: “You suspect at once”; “which tells you that he is not a young man” (54, 55; ch. 5). All of this is not very radical as metalepsis goes; Charlotte Brontë in *Shirley* has the narrator stand behind the chairs of the three curates and look over their shoulders; her narrator asks the narratee to “[s]tep into this neat garden-house,” proposes that “You and I will join the party,” and suggests that the time while the curates are at their meal can be used for a little chat: “and while they eat we will talk aside” (6; ch. 1). What is noteworthy in both passages is the conjoining of this strategy of address plus metaleptic metaphor—putting the reader on the scene, so to speak—with an enhancement of sympathetic affect. Reader address and the employment of metalepsis are traditionally believed to produce a breaking of aesthetic illusion; here, in fact, they serve the opposite function of deepening the reader's involvement in the fiction rather than disrupting immersion.² The magic trick played by Eliot's narrator persona is of course that of reviving the past by deploying her pen; the presumably heathen visions of the projected Egyptian sorcerer are replaced by the decidedly Christian theater in which Eliot stages her drama of moral failings, tragedy, remorse, and religious atonement and reconciliation. The final realist proof that no malevolent magician has beguiled us with his mischievous tricks comes in another instance of explicit metalepsis in

chapter 17, in which the story pauses a little for the narrator to propound her charitable aesthetics of ugliness and social commitment to the lower classes, noting in an aside that “I gathered [this] from Adam Bede, to whom I talked of these matters in his old age” (*Adam Bede* 179; ch. 17).³ Despite the ostensible breaking of illusion, the strategy succeeds in authenticating the reality of the fictional world, transforming the invented events of the novel into the supposed factuality of the narrator’s personal past. The logical contradiction this entails fails to bother the reader, whose willing suspension of disbelief has made such strides that it reinterprets this logical irritation as a corroboration of the credibility of the narrator persona.

I have taken a route through generalization to foreground the inherent ambivalence of Eliot’s writing. In what follows I would like to proceed more systematically by listing prominent features of Eliot’s narratorial discourse, mostly focusing on *Adam Bede*. I will first elaborate on the narrator persona’s strategies of communication, analysis, and evaluation with an emphasis on metaphor and simile. I will then focus on perspective and focalization. A final section will be devoted to Eliot’s irony, particularly in conjunction with metaphor and the use of reflectorization.

Eliot’s narrator figures have of course been the object of much literary criticism. A question that has greatly interested narratologists is the presumptive gender of Eliot’s narrator personae. As Barbara Hardy (*Particularities* 128–40), Suzanne Graver (278–86), Ansgar Nünning (*Grundzüge* 125–290) and myself (“Subversive Irony”), among others, have pointed out, Eliot’s gendering of the narrator figure varies from text to text. Thus, in *Adam Bede*, the narrator takes a consistently male role by means of statements that refer to a man’s perspective: “. . . *one* can put up with annoyances in the house, but to have the stable made a scene of vexation and disgust, is a point beyond what *human flesh and blood* can be expected to endure long together . . .” (126; ch. 12; my emphasis). *One* or *humankind* are male, as is the narratee addressed at the end of chapter 50: “That is a simple scene, reader. But it is almost certain that you, too, have been in love—perhaps, even, more than once, though you may not choose to say so to *all your lady friends*” (493; ch. 50; my emphasis).

From *The Mill on the Floss* onwards Eliot starts to vacillate between male and female gendering of the narrator figure in gnomic statements and addresses to a gendered narratee with whom the narrator persona claims communality. Thus, in the following passage from *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator first identifies with the female experience of bonnets and then takes a typically male perspective:

English sunshine is dubious; bonnets are never quite secure; and if you sit down on the grass, it may lead to catarrhs. But the rain is to be depended on. You gallop through it in a mackintosh, and presently find yourself in the seat you like best – a little above or a little below the one on which your goddess sits . . . (359–60; bk. 6, ch. 7)

More often, Eliot’s narrator persona is androgynous or of neutral gender, as in this comment from *Romola*: “But our deeds are like children that are born to us; they live and act apart from our own will” (219; ch. 16). Although the passage applies to Tito’s

situation, the insight characterizes a general human conundrum, one that one could also find corroborated in *Adam Bede*.

A second important feature of Eliot's narrator figures is their active philosophizing and moralizing, most commonly in gnomic utterances⁴ of considerable length and breadth. Let us consider an example:

He [Seth] was but three-and-twenty, and had only just learned what it is to love – to love with *that* adoration which a young man gives to a woman whom he feels to be greater and better than himself. Love of this sort is hardly distinguishable from religious feeling. . . . *Our* caresses, *our* tender words, *our* still rapture under the influence of autumn sunsets . . . all bring with them an unfathomable ocean of love and beauty; *our* love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object, and loses itself in the sense of divine mystery. And this blessed gift of venerating love has been given to too many humble craftsmen since the world began, for us to feel any surprise that it should have existed in the soul of a Methodist carpenter half a century ago . . . (*Adam Bede* 37; ch. 3; my emphasis)

Gnomic utterances in Eliot typically start out from a concrete situation or problem in the fictional world—here Seth's unrequited love for Dinah—and return to the particular issue after the narrator's flight of sermonizing. Moreover, such passages frequently deploy the plural pronouns *we* and *our*, establishing with the text-internal narratee but also with the text-external audience a commonality of experience and attitude and thereby soliciting their consent with the expressed views. In the above passage it is love of a deep and venerable kind as a generic human experience that is being described. The point is to allow for an acknowledgment that depth of amatory sentiment is not a privilege of the upper classes but, as a universal human phenomenon, occurs also among "humble craftsmen." The thrust of these observations therefore anticipates the argument of chapter 17, Eliot's plea for the lovability of people "not altogether handsome" (177), and her appeal to her audience to cherish the beauty residing "in the secret of deep human sympathy" (178)—passages in which the narrator moves beyond mere gnomic truths to explicit moral statements in his own voice: "Let us cultivate . . . let us love . . . Paint us an angel . . . but do not impose. . . ."; "It is so needful that we should remember . . ." (all 178), on to statements in the first person: "It is more needful that I should have a fibre of sympathy with that vulgar citizen who weighs out my sugar . . . than with the handsomest rascal in red scarf and green feathers" (179).

Gnomic utterances often presuppose that the characteristic they are about to outline is already well known to the narratee; they are reminding us of a well-known fact rather than pointing out any ingenious insight that the narrator has happened upon. This is frequently made explicit by the anaphoric demonstrative *that*. In the passage cited above, Seth's love for Dinah partakes of "*that* adoration which a young man gives to a woman whom he feels to be greater and better than himself" (37; ch. 3; my emphasis). The *that* underlines our familiarity with the emotion; it calls up our

recognition of it, and thereby endorses its appropriateness as a reference for Seth's situation. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's way of attiring herself calls up a similar *that*-construction: "Miss Brooke had *that* kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress" (*Middlemarch* 29; ch. 1; my emphasis).

At times the narrator addresses the reader figure as an arbiter of the point under discussion or even lectures the narratee, as in chapter 17, where the largely gnomic philosophizing develops into a veritable harangue:

But, my good friend, what will you do then with your fellow-parishioner who opposes your husband in the vestry? . . . with your neighbour, Mrs Green, who was really kind to you in your last illness, but has said several ill-natured things about you since your convalescence? – nay, with your excellent husband himself, who has other irritating habits besides that of not wiping his shoes? These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people – amongst whom your life is passed – that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people, . . . the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice. (*Adam Bede* 176; ch. 17)

The admonition is directed at a reader figure of flesh and blood, one that knows real people like Mrs. Green and chafes under her husband's untidiness. (Note, incidentally, that the narratee is here decidedly female.) Such reader addresses can be used merely to focus on the representation, as when we read "I beseech you to imagine Mr Irwine . . . in his ample white surplice that became him so well" (*Adam Bede* 197; ch. 18). Here the effect is that of alerting the audience to the picture of peacefulness and benevolence ("the benignant yet keen countenance" and "generous soul") of an Anglican service on Sunday. This is of course an ideological strategy. At other points the narrator engages in a dialogue with the hypostatized narratee:

Are you inclined to ask whether this can be the same Arthur who, two months ago, had that freshness of feeling, that delicate honour which shrinks from wounding even a sentiment, and does not contemplate any more positive offence as possible for it? . . . The same, I assure you; only under different conditions. Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds; and until we know what has been or will be the peculiar combination of outward with inward facts, which constitutes a man's critical actions, it will be better not to think ourselves wise about his character. (*Adam Bede* 313; ch. 29)

The passage first involves the narratee in an argument about Arthur, then propounds a gnomic truth ("Our deeds determine us") and by continuing to use the first-person plural pronoun aligns our judgments and our capability of lapsing into wrong with

Arthur's predicament, thus drawing us into a sympathetic and condoning attitude towards Arthur's self-delusions. German literary criticism has coined the handy term *Sympathie lenkung* for this technique, literally "directing (the reader's) sympathy (to a character)," to talk about narrative strategies that convey positive or negative attitudes or impressions of a character. Eliot's narratorial discourse clearly moves beyond abstract moralizing and evaluation to deliberate empathetic manipulation and "shaping"⁵ of her audience.

There is a comparable moment in *Adam Bede* when Hetty is, for once, seen compassionately. Again, we do not learn what she thinks or feels but confront her as the enigma of suffering hidden behind the screen of touristic pastoralism. The narratee is put into the role of a traveler unaware of the seamy underside of the natural beauties displayed for his gaze. The immersive function of the narratorial communion with the narratee is here fitted with a nasty barb of irony hidden in the fluff of theatrical display:

What a glad world this looks like, as one drives or rides along the valleys and over the hills! I have often thought so when, in foreign countries, . . . I have come on something by the roadside which has reminded me that I am not in Loamshire: an image of a great agony – the agony of the Cross . . . and surely, if there came a traveller to this world who knew nothing of the story of man's life upon it, this image of agony would seem to him strangely out of place in the midst of this joyous nature. He would not know that hidden behind the apple-blossoms, or among the golden corn, or under the shrouding boughs of the wood, there might be a human heart beating heavily with anguish: perhaps a young blooming girl, not knowing where to turn for refuge from swift-advancing shame . . . (*Adam Bede* 363–64; ch. 35)

The spectacle of bloom and happiness conceals a dark, sad secret. Such secrets often remain hidden to the cursory reader disinclined to delve below the surface or look behind the trees and apple blossoms. The narratee imaginatively adopts the role of a traveler and is exhorted to be aware of latent meanings.

Let me move on to another prominent feature of Eliot's prose, that of her use of metaphor. I would like to distinguish between explicit and implicit metaphor or simile. An explicit metaphor or simile openly declares its metaphoric nature; in the case of a simile by means of a comparative (*like, as*, etc.), in the case of metaphor by the semantic rupture within a sentence from the literal meaning of the surrounding context. Explicit metaphor and simile are phenomena located at the syntactic micro-level of the sentence. Let us look at two examples:

But it is not ignoble to feel that the fuller life which a sad experience has brought us is worth our own personal share of pain: surely it is not possible to feel otherwise, *any more than it would be possible for a man with cataract to regret the painful process by which his dim blurred sight of men as trees walking had been exchanged for clear outline and effulgent day.* (*Adam Bede* 530; ch. 54; my emphasis)

In this explicit narratorial simile Adam's growing maturity is explained as based on the sorrow he experienced through Hetty's tragedy; his reward of a richer life comes at a cost which is compared to the regaining of sight; the result, however painful the process, overwhelms all memory of previous suffering. In the second example, this time of explicit metaphor, the narrator even adds a metanarrative comment on metaphor:

Poor Mr Casaubon had imagined that his long studious bachelorhood had stored up for him *a compound interest of enjoyment*, and that *large drafts of his affections* would not fail to be honoured; for we all of us, grave or light, *get our thoughts entangled in metaphors*, and act fatally on the strength of them. (*Middlemarch* 111; ch. 10; my emphases)

Here the narrator uses economic metaphors to portray Casaubon's increasing desire for emotional gratification. Casaubon has hoarded up his feelings and invested them in the expectation of deferred marital bliss, a speculation that turns out to be erroneous since the treasure has dried up rather than blossoming into fruit (interest). The narrator's comment on our propensity to act on metaphor is, however, odd since the economic parallel was introduced by the narrator herself and most likely was not a conscious motive in Casaubon's thoughts; Casaubon clearly failed to exercise his emotions in the expectation that they would be available in increased force when at last needed; but did he really conceive of this "hoarding" as a financial transaction, a speculation? It seems more likely that the narrator ironically exposes Casaubon's mode of thinking as *comparable* to the bank model of compound interest, where the money always increases and does not become devalued. The irony consists in the fact that Casaubon's expectations ignore the quality of emotion, that he is unaware that affection is like a spring that may dry up the older one gets.⁶ What the narrator really implies is that we often have incorrect notions and that the reason for our misconceptions lies in imposing a structure on reality that is not appropriate to it—a gap in adequation that can be grasped by means of metaphor. Metaphor imposes a frame on a situation that reconfigures the situation from a new perspective; if the metaphor works well, it will allow us to operate more successfully by supplying us with new concepts and outlooks. If it falls flat, as in Casaubon's case, it falsely makes us act on notions that will be disappointed; it deludes us with hopes and lures us to our ruin.

Explicit metaphorizing is one of the prerogatives of Eliot's narrators; unlike Flaubert, Eliot rarely attributes her metaphors to the characters. When Hetty's dread of discovery is figured in a striking simile that anticipates her impending confrontation with the law, the imagery that evokes Hetty's mental condition belongs to the narrator's ironic discourse:

Hetty looked out from her secret misery towards the possibility of their ["her aunt and uncle"] ever knowing what had happened, *as the sick and weary prisoner might think of the possible pillory*. (*Adam Bede* 336; ch. 31; my emphasis)

The explicit comparison is part of the narrator's rhetoric: suffering is terrible, but it palls before the dread of shameful exposure. Hetty is not the source of this simile.

Let me now turn to *implicit* similes and metaphors. A good example of such implicitness is the gnomic dictum that "people who love downy peaches are apt not to think of the stone, and sometimes jar their teeth terribly against it" (*Adam Bede* 153; ch. 15). This comes at the end of Hetty's depiction as "puss" and a "dear young, round, soft, flexible thing" (152; ch. 15) and Adam's thinking about Hetty "very much in this way" (153; ch. 15). The gnomic statement creates an analogy to the discussed inclination of men to take pretty women as harmless fools and innocent child-like creatures who need to be protected and are apt to be "lovely and loving" (153; ch. 15)—note the alliteration. The analogy of the peach which costs you your tooth applies to the argument that women who look like fruit are apt to be bitten into to the detriment of the male consumer. This analogy is an implicit metaphor. The ostensible message ("Things are not what they seem," "Appearance is not reality") through the verb "love" and the adjective "downy," which echoes women's softness and Hetty's earlier description of having the "beauty . . . of kittens, or very small downy ducks" (83; ch. 7), establishes a primary analogy ("One has to be careful of women's real character just as one has to be careful of stones in peaches") that could be interpreted as metaphorical: women are peaches, and they have stones. Or, analogously: "Hetty is a peach with a stone (for her heart?)." This implicit metaphorical conceptualizing of Hetty is half-corroborated by the opening of the following paragraph: "Arthur Donnithorne, too, had the same sort of notion about Hetty. . . . He felt sure she was a dear, affectionate, good little thing" (153; ch. 15).

The strategy of implicit imagery recurs in Mr. Irwine's cautioning of Arthur:

You needn't look quite so much at Hetty Sorrel then. *When I've made up my mind that I can't afford to buy a tempting dog, I take no notice of him, because if he took a strong fancy to me, and looked longingly at me, the struggle between arithmetic and inclination might become unpleasantly severe.* (102; ch. 9; my emphasis)

Mr. Irwine is proposing a parable with the moral "Do not get involved where your feelings might get the better of your rational calculations or duties," and this parable is taken from the realm of dog buying. However, implicitly, the analogy suggests that Hetty is the dog, and the cautioning tale in fact anticipates precisely what will happen, though the consequences are much more serious than overdrawing one's account for the acquisition of a puppy. In fact, the whole simile makes much more sense for horse-buying (where the cost might indeed become prohibitive). The dog imagery is extremely appropriate to Adam's view of Hetty as his future wife and to Arthur's patronizing attitude towards Hetty; it captures the men's attitudes towards women: they are fawning spaniels who need to be pampered and they deserve love for the adoration they expend on their masters (husbands); the canine image moreover underlines the domesticity of the vignette in a manner that a horse in the stable could not have done.

From the indirection of such examples of metaphor I would like to turn to another strategy of indirection which is prominent in *Adam Bede*. In the opening chapter of the novel we have Adam stride home to the admiring glance of “an elderly horseman” (12; ch. 1) who is impressed by Bede’s stalwart carriage and vigorous walk. In chapter 2, the anonymous horseman pulls up at the Donnithorne Arms, and the “traveller” (17; ch. 2) then proceeds on his journey; it is through his eyes that we view the landscape (“the traveller might exchange a bleak treeless region . . . for one where his road wound under the shelter of woods . . . and where at every turn he came upon some fine old country-seat” [17–18; ch. 2]). Not only what the rider sees but what he might have seen is outlined in detail (“He might have seen other beauties in the landscape if he had turned a little in his saddle and looked eastward” [18–19; ch. 2]). But the main focus of the chapter is his witnessing of the Methodist preaching and thereby the introduction of Dinah Morris to the reader. “The stranger” (22; ch. 2) has extremely favorable impressions of Dinah, thus directing our sympathies towards her and, by his double noting of Adam and Dinah, implying that they are the two main protagonists, whose union will indeed close the novel. The strategy of providing an external viewpoint does not end here.⁷ We have noted how Hetty is always presented in terms of how she affects other people watching her: Arthur looking at her in the dairy (83–86; ch. 7), Adam seeing her gather the red currants (219–20; ch. 20), Adam watching for her affections before and after he gives her Arthur’s letter (318–23; ch. 30) and when he proposes to her (358–60; ch. 34).

Hetty is rendered almost consistently in external focalization, though often through the internal focalization of other characters’ thoughts about her. She is first talked about by Dinah (“that poor wandering lamb, Hetty Sorrel” [34; ch. 3]), then by Lisbeth (“that bit of a wench, as is o’ no more use nor the gillyflower on the wall” [45; ch. 4]) before she is noted by the narrator for her vanity (73; ch. 6). Next she is viewed by Aunt Poyser, whose “keen glance” is nevertheless misled in judging Hetty (74; ch. 6). Hetty is described in detail for three pages in chapter 7, all for the benefit of the reader, whose imaginary viewing of her is underlined at every turn (83–85; ch. 7). This series of perspectives continues with the impression that Hetty makes during her trip to Arthur at Windsor, and later at the trial we also get various depictions of her from the witnesses’ statements. The problematic positioning of Hetty as the focalized object of other people’s vision is therefore a persistent feature of the novel and suggests that she is the object of desire in Lacanian terms as well as, more literally, for the men in the fictional world. Hetty poses an enigma—she seems easily readable through her beauty (the peach), but hides her innermost self by this dazzling and deceptive exterior.

There are of course minor exceptions to this external presentation of Hetty. I will cite one below when I note the novel’s extensive use of free indirect discourse. Since we have a very outspoken narrator persona who keeps commenting on the customs and attitudes of the protagonists, psychonarration—the narrator’s representation of characters’ consciousness—is a recurring strategy that allows for an ironic view of the characters’ minds. In fact, as we shall see, the most empathetic passages frequently turn out to be barbed with implicit criticism or judgment.

Arthur had felt a twinge of conscience during Mr Poyser's speech, but it was too feeble to nullify the pleasure he felt in being praised. [psychonarration] *Did he not deserve what was said of him, on the whole? If there was something in his conduct that Poyser wouldn't have liked if he had known it, why, no man's conduct will bear too close an inspection; and Poyser was not likely to know it; and after all, what had he done? Gone a little too far perhaps in flirtation, but another man in his place would have acted much worse; and no harm would come – no harm should come . . .* [free indirect discourse] (*Adam Bede* 264; ch. 24; my emphasis)

Here Arthur's self-deluding musings are rendered in free indirect discourse; we as readers do not yet know that he has slept with Hetty, except from the hint at dire consequences. The passage definitely provides an ironic view of Arthur's mind. By contrast, when Adam panics that he might have killed Arthur, we have a clearly consonant, empathetic representation:

But why did not Arthur rise? He was perfectly motionless, and the time seemed long to Adam . . . Good God! had the blow been too much for him? [free indirect discourse] Adam shuddered at the thought of his own strength, as with the oncoming of this dread [psychonarration] he knelt down by Arthur's side and lifted his head from among the fern. [narrative] There was no sign of life: the eyes and teeth were set. [Adam's impression] The horror that rushed over Adam completely mastered him, and forced upon him its own belief. He could feel nothing but that death was in Arthur's face, and that he was helpless before it. [psychonarration] (*Adam Bede* 301; ch. 28; ellipsis in original)

Here Adam's fear is totally justified and the reader is sympathetically involved with Adam, whom he or she does not want to see as a murderer. The passage moreover illustrates Eliot's typical technique of blending psychonarration and free indirect discourse.

One of the few passages that give us Hetty's thoughts comes in chapter 31, when she decides she will marry Adam:

Why should she not marry Adam? She did not care what she did, so that it made some change in her life. [free indirect discourse] She felt confident that he would still want to marry her, and any further thought about Adam's happiness in the matter had never yet visited her. [psychonarration] (*Adam Bede* 339; ch. 31)

This rendering of Hetty's mind is consonant to the extent that we get an insight into Hetty's feelings and surmises that are clearly expressive of her wish to improve her situation. Though her reasons for marriage are wrong, the reader does not yet know that she is pregnant and cheating on Adam; the end of the previous paragraph in fact had a gnomic utterance by the narrator which rather suggested she is merely naïve in wanting to marry without loving her husband: "she was ready for one of those compulsive, motiveless actions by which wretched men and women leap from a temporary sorrow into a life-long misery" (339; ch. 31). Since the narrator here deceives us into thinking Hetty is merely unhappy because she no longer has Arthur to dream about,

the irony of her views about marriage is much muted. Eliot's narrative therefore continues to blend irony and sympathy in its preference for external viewpoints and selective representations of consciousness.

In this essay there is no space to elaborate on George Eliot's irony, clearly one of the hallmarks of her prose. What I would like to conclude with is a different narrative strategy that I have discussed in connection with *The Mill on the Floss* and *Romola* (Fludernik, "Subversive Irony"; *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* 182–84), reflectorization.

Reflectorization⁸ consists in the miming of a particular story-internal viewpoint by the narrator who adopts the arguments, style, and vocabulary of a person (or, possibly, group of persons) inside the fictional world. This mimicry is mostly ironic: the narrator in the role of the character whose viewpoint he or she has been echoing is unreliable to the extent that we as readers know that these opinions and views are definitely not in line with the overall belief system of the narrator or the text as a whole. Although unreliability is generally considered to be a feature of first-person (homodiegetic) narrative, the posturing of the narrator as in agreement with a character's worldview when we know that this particular standpoint is being criticized seems to allow for the label, particularly since the Boothian disparity between the beliefs of the character and those of the text in its entirety (the "implied author") can be argued to underlie the reader's recognition that there is ironic undermining of the views outlined by the narrator in her/his mimicry. Let us look at an example from *Adam Bede*. The character whose viewpoint is echoed is Arthur Donnithorne:

he was but twenty-one, you remember; and we don't inquire too closely into character in the case of a handsome generous fellow, who will have property enough to support numerous peccadilloes – who, if he should unfortunately break a man's legs in his rash driving, will be able to pension him handsomely; or if he should happen to spoil a woman's existence for her, will make it up to her with expensive *bon-bons*, packed up and directed by his own hand. It would be ridiculous to be prying and analytic in such cases, as if one were inquiring into the character of a confidential clerk. We use round, general, gentlemanly epithets about a young man of birth and fortune; and ladies, with that fine intuition which is the distinguishing attribute of their sex, see at once that he is 'nice.' The chances are that he will go through life without scandalising any one; a sea-worthy vessel that no one would refuse to insure. (*Adam Bede* 125–26; ch. 12)

The narrator in this passage continues his speculations about Arthur by adopting an attitude about the possible peccadilloes of young gentlemen that emphasizes their harmless and forgivable nature. As the examples indicate, however, these pastimes are far from innocent. The adventures of the "nice" young man are in fact irresponsible aggressions towards his social inferiors, resulting for instance in a broken limb and the man's permanent disability. The "young man of birth and fortune" can afford to pay his way out of his blunders by giving the invalid a pension (which will not enable him to make his life meaningful) and by solacing the grief of the ruined woman with luxurious presents that seem to indicate his esteem for her ("packed up and directed

by his own hand”) when in fact they debase her as the recipient of superficial concern. This mode of behavior is “ridiculous,” yet the narrator uses this lexeme to scoff at those scrutinizing the young man of property’s behavior from a too narrow, petty, lower-class perspective (the comparison to the “confidential clerk”). The rest of the paragraph continues in this exculpatory vein, anticipating Arthur’s foundering on the rocks of disastrous circumstance, a vessel with a “flaw” in its construction (126). The term *flaw* again plays down the seriousness of the situation, but the consequences of this faulty workmanship in the sinking of the ship (“casualties” including the loss of load and lives of the crew) are tragic indeed. The narrator in this passage takes the role of a person with common-sense attitudes towards young scions of the upper classes. By means of such ironic impersonation he thoroughly discredits the ideology of the gentry, denouncing it from the perspective of the waste caused in humbler lives through the irresponsible and thoughtless sowing of wild oats.

Reflectorization in Eliot is a strategy that serves to enhance the ironies purveyed by the narrator. The technique of reflectorization is often flanked by the delineation of what Alan Palmer has termed “intermental thought,” evident for example in the collective thought represented by the “Middlemarch Mind.” (See Palmer, “Intermental Thought”; “Large Intermental Units”; *Social Minds* 65–104). Intermentality concerns thoughts and opinions that are shared between people. Most passages of intermental thought are ironic since the village or town are usually mistaken in their views, prejudiced, or otherwise untrustworthy in their outlook. For instance, in *Silas Marner*, the envious and supercilious Miss Gunns are presented as sharing uncharitable views of Miss Nancy Lammeter, views that the narrator is quick to contradict, thus putting down the Gunns’ cavillings:

The Miss Gunns smiled stiffly, and thought what a pity it was that these rich country people, who could afford to buy such good clothes (really Miss Nancy’s lace and silk were very costly), should be brought up in utter ignorance and vulgarity. She actually said “mate” for “meat,” “appen” for “perhaps,” and “oss” for “horse,” which, to young ladies living in good Lytherly society, who habitually said “orse,” even in domestic privacy, . . . was necessarily shocking. . . . There is hardly a servant-maid in these days who is not better informed than Miss Nancy; yet she had the essential attributes of a lady – high veracity, delicate honour in her dealings, deference to others, and refined personal habits . . . (*Silas Marner* 92–93; ch. 11)

The passage ridicules the snobbism of small-town society and its focus on pronunciation rather than moral character. Another good set of examples of collective thought can be drawn from *Felix Holt* and the depiction of the riot, where diverse groups within the mob are contrasted in their viewpoints.

Let me conclude. When we try to characterize Eliot’s narrative, its preponderant features are the presence of a foregrounded, opinionated narrator persona; the high incidence of narratee address and involvement, especially in Eliot’s early fiction; a frequent use of explicit and implicit metaphor and simile; a consistent tendency

towards irony, reinforced by ironic free indirect discourse, reflectorization, and passages of collective thought; and an inclination to moralize, judge, and philosophize on the human condition, yet in reference to very specific circumstances in the fictional world. Eliot's narrative corresponds to a social reality familiar to its readers, as the prominence of gnomic commentary and the focal use of text-internal observation of characters by others demonstrate. It is precisely this alignment of the represented world with the readers' moral and practical outlook that makes for George Eliot's realism. It is not a realism of descriptive detail *à la* Ian Watt, but a realism of ethical concern and pragmatic life experience. It encompasses, like the holy spirit in Gerard Manley Hopkins's "God's Grandeur," the whole world of great and small, ugly and beautiful, envious and noble, of the egotistic and bilious as well as the modest and passionately spiritual: "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings" (Hopkins 1030).

NOTES

- 1 Compare also Nünning, *Gründzüge* 161.
- 2 See Nünning, "Mimesis" and Fludernik, *Introduction* 61 on this counter-intuitive effect of metanarrative, and even metafictional, techniques in realist prose.
- 3 Compare Nünning's remarks on this in *Grundzüge* 166.
- 4 The term *gnomic* refers to universally valid dicta.
- 5 There is no English equivalent of *Sympathie-lenkung*. (But see Tyson 195–97 on "shaping" our empathy towards Gatsby.)
- 6 See Hardy (*Novels* 218–20) on the water metaphor in *Middlemarch*.
- 7 See Shaw (222–25) for further examples of the traveler motif.
- 8 The term comes from Stanzel (168–84), where it translates the German *Personalisierung*, and echoes what Stanzel calls reflector-mode narrative (*personale Erzählsituation*) in which internal focalization predominates.

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