George Eliot, George Henry Lewes and the Mechanisms of Literary Influence

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In Lieu of an Introduction

Virginia Woolf has a resonant, often-quoted sentence in her famous essay on George Eliot from 20 November 1919, asserting that *Middlemarch*, for all of its flaws, was "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people."[1] In a less frequently quoted passage grappling with the previously mentioned flaws, the most important British high-modernist author writes:

> It is partly that her hold upon dialogue, when it is not dialect, is slack; and partly that she seems to shrink with an elderly dread of fatigue from the effort of emotional concentration. She allows her heroines to talk too much. She has little verbal felicity. She lacks the unerring taste which chooses one sentence and compresses the heart of the scene within that. "Whom are you doing to dance with?" asked Mr Knightley, at the Weston's ball. "With you, if you will ask me," said Emma; and she has said enough. Mrs Casaubon would have talked for an hour and we should have looked out of the window.[2]

[1] V. Woolf, "George Eliot," in: *The Common Reader*, New York 1925, p. 168.
[2] Ibid., p. 170.

The imperfections deliberately overlooked by scholars and admirers of George Eliot who quote Woolf's words of praise represent, for the future author of *The Waves*, the widening abyss between the Victorian writer's sensitivity and the compactness prized by Woolf. The fact that Jane Austen, a writer from the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is presented as a counter-example, rules out the possibility that this judgment was precipitated by the aesthetic breakthrough that accompanied the modernist revaluation of the past. The passage quoted above shows Woolf to hold that there are writers who have withstood the test of time better than Eliot. The ability to synthesize, to enclose meanings in short, compact phrases, is, she reveals, about the furthest thing from the method of literary approximation of reality Eliot developed. This does not mean that the weariness which may be experienced by readers of Mrs. Causabon's ponderings is necessarily an undesirable state. Perhaps Eliot's England has little in common with the country inhabited by Woolf a few decades later, but its anachronism does not diminish its homely feeling:

> The flood of memory and humour which she pours so spontaneously into one figure, one scene after another, until the whole fabric of ancient rural England is revived, has so much in common with a natural process that it leaves us with little consciousness that there is anything to criticize. We accept; we feel the delicious warmth and release of spirit which the great creative writers alone procure for us. As one comes back to the books after years of absence they pour out, even against our expectation, the same store of energy and heat, so that we want more than anything to idle in the warmth as in the sun beating down from the red orchard wall. If there is an element of unthinking abandonment in thus submitting to the humours of Midland farmers and their wives, that, too, is right in the circumstances.[3]

The feeling of being at home in the represented worlds offered by Eliot bears witness, in this receptive testimonial from an author whose treatment of Eliot's technique is far from uncritical, to the effectiveness of the strategies the novelist deploys. Woolf managed to describe their effects:

> But [Eliot] gathers in her large grasp a great bunch of the main elements of human nature and groups them loosely together with a tolerant and wholesome understanding which, as one finds upon rereading, has not only kept her figures fresh and free, but has given them an unexpected hold upon our laughter and tears.[4]

The power possessed by the heroines of Eliot's prose aligns with the will of the novelist, whose mind may, as Woolf claimed, have worked at a more diffuse rhythm than required for writing comedies, but undoubtedly was capable of mastering things that were strange or distant, and therefore of endowing such things, for each of her readers, with a feeling of nearness and belonging.

The questions that arise from Woolf's study relate to the formula for literary engagement of the reader's attention, which before 1919 had largely ceased to be thought of in terms of

[3] Ibid., pp. 166-167.
[4] Ibid., p. 167

creative practice, the paradigm in use being the "progress of the intellect," to use the title of a book by R.W. Mackay that was reviewed by Mary Evans in 1851. Nevertheless, the reception-oriented position taken by Woolf should not discourage but encourage us to seek connections between modernist attempts at writerly self-definition and the recipes for success worked out by Victorian authors.[5] Woolf's enchantment in spite of the technical shortcomings she perceived in *Middlemarch* confirm its effectiveness and enable us to look somewhat more warmly at the sometimes Utopian premises of literary communication agreed upon by such authors as Eliot and George Henry Lewes, the unfulfilled writer and scholar specializing in both biology and psychology as well as Evans's partner of many years. In the mid-19th century, belief in the narrative of progress was still strong enough that considerable credence was placed in hopes for the development of more effective formulae for impacting society through literature, moving in tandem with changes observed in the social sciences. Eliot wrote the following in the review mentioned above:

> It is Mr. Mackay's faith that divine revelation is not contained exclusively or pre-eminently in the facts and inspirations of any one age or nation, but is co-extensive with the history of human development [...]. The master-key to this revelation, is the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world – of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organization, our ethics and our religion.[6]

The world was a mechanical process, governed by stable laws, whose principles could and must, according to the Positivistic thought in which Eliot was raised, be discovered. Those principles relating to the mechanisms of communication, inscribed in the program for the progress of knowledge in the nineteenth century, were no exception; Herbert Spencer, a friend of Lewes and Eliot and one of the most important minds of the Positivist school in Europe, wrote about the interdependency of knowledge and fulfilment in an artistic profession.[7] Working with one of Lewes's books and some passages written by Eliot, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the importance of the myth discussed here for the development of a poetics of the nineteenth century novel. And the reasons why a departure from that poetics was an absolute necessity for Woolf's "grown-up" literature of the twentieth century.

[5] Woolf herself comments weightily on this in her essay "Modern Fiction," writing: "With their simple tools and primitive materials, it might be said, Fielding did well and Jane Austen even better, but compare their opportunities with ours! Their masterpieces certainly have a strange air of simplicity. And yet the analogy between literature and the process, to choose an example, of making motor cars scarcely holds good beyond the first glance. It is doubtful whether in the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learnt anything about making literature. We do not come to write better; all that we can be said to do is to keep moving, now a little in this direction, now in that, but with a circular tendency should the whole course of the track be viewed from a sufficiently lofty pinnacle." Though Eliot is not mentioned here, this passage, written in 1919, clarifies Woolf's complex relationship, as a reader, to the literary tradition, allowing her some openness to alternative formulas of representation. Woolf, *Common Reader*, p. 146.

[6] G. Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. R. Ashton, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992, p. 21.

[7] See H. Spencer, *O wychowaniu umysłowym, moralnym i fizycznym*, przeł. M. Siemieradzki, 2nd ed., Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff 1880, p. 63ff.

Part One, or How to Succeed in Literature: George Henry Lewes's Intermediate Handbook

In his two-part course entitled *The Principles of Success in Literature*, first published in the *Fortnight Review* in 1865, Lewes presented a view typical for the era of progress:

> Literature is at once the cause and the effect of social progress. It deepens our natural sensibilities and strengthens by exercise our intellectual capacities. It stores up the accumulated experience of the race, connecting Past and Present into a conscious unity; and with this store it feeds successive generations, to be fed in turn by them. As its importance emerges into more general recognition, it necessarily draws after it a larger crowd of servitors, filling noble minds with a noble ambition.[8]

This diagnosis, pronouncing literature an essential component of the civilizing process, was at the same time becoming a programmatic postulate of the rising literary generation in Poland. For Lewes and most of his contemporaries, the view seemed to be a truism; its importance in considerations of the mechanisms of literature's impact reveals the certitude of the causative power of literature and, at the same time, of the author, who should take responsibility for ensuring that he uses his power with integrity. After being published in the *Fortnight Review*, Lewes's essay was reprinted toward the end of the century as an academic textbook, a kind of instructional guide, but also a morally elevating text, a readable lecture not only on the principles of writing composition, but also an analysis of the mechanisms of social accomplishment and market success. At the foundations of this pragmatism lay, we should underscore, a desire to serve the ideal of great art and the differentiation of writers whose honest ambition was deserving of support from those whose actions were motivated merely by the desire for applause and the acquisition of financial profit. The success which toward which Lewes's pen guides readers is distinctly utilitarian, and the "guide" shows itself to be rooted in the Positivist world view:

I propose to treat of the Principles of Success in Literature, in the belief that if a clear recognition of the principles which underlie *all* successful writing could once be gained, it would be no inconsiderable help to many a young and thoughtful mind.[9]

The horizon of the period's epistemological optimism is very much in evidence in this passage. As Lewes writes, "[t]here is help to be gained from a clear understanding of the conditions of success" and that is linked to "encouragement to be gained from a reliance on the ultimate victory of true principles." It is awfully easy in our day to treat such enthusiasm patronizingly and catalogue it as a symptom of Positivist naïveté, an expression of hopes whose shattering was not easily predictable from the perspective of that time. Woolf's point of view further enabled her to recognize that the movement away from a rhetoric of the novel that developed in the course of struggle for transparent principles not only of writing but of social organization had not happened overnight, and the transformation of European letters at that accompanied the anti-Postivist turn at the turn of the century was not monolithic in nature.

[8] G. H. Lewes, *The Principles of Success In Literature*, ed. D. Arms, Berkeley: University of California 1901, p. 8.

[9] Ibid., p. 11.

Within paradigms of modernism which have previously been elaborated and have shaped my thought, this process, though subject to some delay, moved forward in the only direction it could, accenting the relativity of all systems and shifting the complexity of the world into new narrative formulae. But the story of progress and great hopes associated with it, rendered obsolete by the experience of Woolf's generation, allows us more fully to grasp the logic of George Eliot's artistic project. Eliot's intellectual development, as Jerome Thale wrote, represents a typology of the progress of thought in the nineteenth century: from evangelical piety through the loss of faith to attempts to redeem the hope for some kind of semasiological order in the world, the creation of which was to be aided, despite her own internal skepticism, by her novels. As Thale notes, Eliot sought to find a rational foundation for human existence while remaining skeptical toward proposed rational solutions.[10]

Part Two (fundamental). Tea with Cream

The author of *The Voyage Out* underscored the amazing nature of the rapprochement made possible by Eliot's prose between her readers and the simple farmers whose mental world was wholly foreign to them. What happens is that Evans lacks the spirit of satire and therefore does not speak patronizingly of her characters; on the contrary, "she makes us share their lives [...] in a spirit of sympathy." This ability springs from Eliot's biographical drama, the fate that placed her on the margins of society, forcing her to adopt a specific perspective on the world, and in some sense limiting her horizons. In her most famous essay on women writers, Woolf recalled that crucial splinter of the confinement of women's experience to the private sphere:

> ... we must accept the fact that all those good novels, Villette, Emma, Wuthering Heights, Middlemarch, were written by women without more experience of life than could enter the house of a respectable clergyman; [...] One of them, it is true, George Eliot, escaped after much tribulation, but only to a secluded villa in St John's Wood. And there she settled down in the shadow of the world's disapproval. "I wish it to be understood," she wrote, "that I should never invite anyone to come and see me who did not ask for the invitation"; for was she not living in sin with a married man and might not the sight of her damage the chastity of Mrs Smith or whoever it might be that chanced to call? [...] Had Tolstoi lived at the Priory in seclusion with a married lady "cut off from what is called the world," however edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely, I thought, have written *War and Peace*.[11]

The profound nature of the writerly breathing space for which Woolf is struggling in the early twentieth century allows us to consider a detail in the text of Eliot's novelistic debut, *Scenes from Clerical Life*. I will quote at some length from the first story in the book, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton":

> Mr. and Mrs. Hackit, from the neighbouring farm, are Mrs. Patten's guests this evening; so is Mr. Pilgrim, the doctor from the nearest market-town, who, though occasionally affecting aristocratic airs, and giving late dinners with enigmatic side-dishes and poisonous port, is never so comfortab-

[10] J. Thale, *The Novels of George Eliot*, New York: Columbia University Press 1959, p. 5.
[11] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, New York: Harcourt, 1921, p .71.

> le as when he is relaxing his professional legs in one of those excellent farmhouses where the mice are sleek and the mistress sickly. And he is at this moment in clover.
>
> For the flickering of Mrs. Patten's bright fire is reflected in her bright copper tea-kettle, the home--made muffins glisten with an inviting succulence, and Mrs. Patten's niece, a single lady of fifty, who has refused the most ineligible offers out of devotion to her aged aunt, is pouring the rich cream into the fragrant tea with a discreet liberality.
>
> Reader! did you ever taste such a cup of tea as Miss Gibbs is this moment handing to Mr. Pilgrim? Do you know the dulcet strength, the animating blandness of tea sufficiently blended with real farmhouse cream? No—most likely you are a miserable town-bred reader, who think of cream as a thinnish white fluid, delivered in infinitesimal pennyworths down area steps; or perhaps, from a presentiment of calves' brains, you refrain from any lacteal addition, and rasp your tongue with unmitigated bohea. You have a vague idea of a milch cow as probably a white-plaster animal standing in a butterman's window, and you know nothing of the sweet history of genuine cream, such as Miss Gibbs's: how it was this morning in the udders of the large sleek beasts, as they stood lowing a patient entreaty under the milking-shed; how it fell with a pleasant rhythm into Betty's pail, sending a delicious incense into the cool air; how it was carried into that temple of moist cleanliness, the dairy, where it quietly separated itself from the meaner elements of milk, and lay in mellowed whiteness, ready for the skimming-dish which transferred it to Miss Gibbs's glass cream--jug. If I am right in my conjecture, you are unacquainted with the highest possibilities of tea; and Mr. Pilgrim, who is holding that cup in his hands, has an idea beyond you.[12]

This passage, which deserves to be called a risky one, since it may have the effect of leading the reader to break off reading in order to brew a delicious hot drink in the kitchen and possibly not return, is at the same time an important demonstration of a point of great relevance for Woolf. It brings into relief the authoritative status, which in spite of scandal and seclusion, Evans had achieved for herself. When "The Sad Fortunes" were published anonymously in *Blackwood Magazine*, Evans remained anonymous, and the success she would enjoy shortly after the publication of *Scenes* in book form and, even more so, of *Adam Bede* is in fact independent of her life and relationship choices. Eliot's authority thus consists of the authority of her narrators, whose stories conquered the literary public of the time.

For in her first published story and in the relatively inconsequential passage quoted above, Eliot had rhetorically constructed the space in which she would happily remain for years. The powers of the experience of idyllic provincial life cannot be taken here as strictly ironic; the distance built between the arcadia of village routine and urban tumult displays the readiness typical in Victorian prose to uphold the Romantic myth of the eccentric provincial space that represents an escape from the dangers of the greater world. Thick cream, as a feature of novelistic composition, allows us to observe her method of building understanding between narrator and reader, accenting such elements of the represented world and (looking at the work as a totality) the scenes constructed around them as spaces of initiation into shared secrets, key points of reference.

[12]G. Eliot, *Scenes from Clerical Life*, New York: Kirill Press, 2015, p. 4.

Knowing how ambitious Eliot's plan was for the panorama of small-town morals and manners which the *Scenes from Clerical Life* comprise to unfold from the perspective of one parish and cover the stories taking place in the fictional town over half a century, we must heed the skill with which she concentrates on details, which represents not only what Woolf perhaps would like to perceive it as – a demonstration of the limited horizon of experiences allotted to women – but above all an attempt to indicate points of reference within the space known to herself and her readers which provide easier orientation and understanding of their shared values but also their insurmountable differences. As Michael York Mason reminds us, Eliot, in her review of Wilhelm Riehl's *Die Bürgerliche Geslellschaft* and *Land und Leute*, pointed to those formulas of realism which best explain her chosen method:

> If a man of sufficient moral and intellectual breadth, whose observations would not be vitiated by a foregone conclusion, or by a professional point of view, would devote himself to studying the natural history of our social classes, especially of the small shopkeepers, artisans, and peasantry-the degree in which they are influenced by local conditions ... and if, after all this study, he would give us the result of his observations in a book well-nourished with specific fact, his work would be a valuable aid to the social and political reformer.[13]

The engagement of literature in the sphere of practical activity and its "politicization," in what Eliot finds to be a positive sense, is connected to the desire to construct a model of the process in which the artist, an adroit observer and analyst, synthesizes her material in order to reveal how simple laws observed in life have complex consequences for society and history.[14] Eliot's literary strategy, inscribed within an organicist conception of all kinds of community, depicts the laws of history through their unfolding in *Scenes from Clerical Life* in between the homely realm of the past and the perspective of a contemporary observer – to generate aesthetic sensations, but also for their practical resonance. The "Sad Fortunes" deals not only with the pleasures of drinking tea. It also deals with the reform of the Church of England and resultant divisions in the community; it tells of the hard lot and indigence that are tied to public service, and it tells of love... All of these currents can, however, be traced to the gesture, explicit in the passage quoted above, of showing to an alien, "urban" reader how far he is from the myth that he undoubtedly cherishes of the Romantic (in his view) return to the source, such as is celebrated, for example, in the magical act of pouring cream. Showing the distance, paradoxically, is in this instance intended to lead to closer relations between the text's sender (whether the author, understood in nineteenth century fashion, or the narrator as formulated in contemporary literary studies) and receiver. This sketching of temptation and the seductive gesture inscribed in it, supposed to bring the reader's imagination into a world of sensory reconciliation, constitutes the foundation of a relationship based on specific (even if imagined), familiar experience. The reader thus seduced will then listen more easily and more avidly to rumours about the Rev. Benton; feeling at home in Milby, he will more eagerly follow the series of sad fortunes that the narrator relates. This is due, in part, to the function defined by Herbert Spencer's aesthetic principle, as expressed in his essay "Use and Beauty," first published in 1852:

[13]Quoted in: M. Y. Mason, "*Middlemarch* and Science. Problems of Life and Mind, w: George Eliot. Critical Assesments," ed. S. Hutchinson, vol. III, *Critical Essays on Individual Works*, Mounfield: Helm Information 1996, p. 353.

[14]Ibid., p. 356.

> It is by virtue of their contrast with our present modes of life, that past modes of life look interesting and romantic. Just as a picnic, which is a temporary return to an aboriginal condition, derives, from its unfamiliarity, a certain poetry which it would not have were it habitual; so, everything ancient gains, from its relative novelty to us, an element of interest.[15]

We must assume that this view of the matter had an influence on the young author's fiction debut, her reformist aspirations incorporated in the experiences of the clerics, assimilated over time, reveal the ingeniousness of Eliot's attempt to propagate the attitudes that mattered to her: tolerance, pity and sympathy. She wrote about these in a letter to William Blackwood,[16] refusing to make any of the changes to her depictions of characters and descriptions of their activities which he, as editor of the magazine, had suggested to her. This integrity with regard to her own imagination, embodying in the plot her unbreakable convictions that arose out of personal experiences, ties in with the view of literature described by Lewes in his book on success in literature.

Imagination, sincerity and beauty – these are the three pillars named by Eliot's partner as the key elements in his analysis of the path to success. The first of these factors in achieving success is connected with the revaluation which was reached in the eighteenth century, and which continued to be thought through very intensively in the following one, when the question of the productive imagination as the source of creative power was becoming a pivotal area of aesthetic discussions.[17] It is no doubt intriguing to find the relations between these aesthetic values set forth in Lewes's program in some ways analogously:

> Personal experience is the basis of all real Literature. The writer must have thought the thoughts, seen the objects (with bodily or mental vision), and felt the feelings; otherwise he can have no power over us. Importance does not depend on rarity so much as on authenticity.[18]

Sincerity may, together with e.g. historicity, be pronounced one method of restraining the imagination, and such a criterion indubitably facilitates the author's communication with the reader – mainly because it establishes agreement between them on what kind of text is the medium of the truths conveyed.

The power of vision, which I sought to illustrate with the example of the cream, is underpinned in Lewes's system by sincerity: "In all sincere speech there is power," writes the author of *The Principles of Success in Literature*, "not necessarily great power, but as much as the speaker is capable of"[19]. This conviction establishes the frame from within which the remaining two elements of success possess the potential to enhance the power of the message. "But

[15]H. Spencer, *Essays: Scientific, Political, & Speculative*, vol. II, London: Williams and Norgate, 1891, republished at the website: Online Library of Liberty. http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/spencer-essays-scientific-political-and-speculative-vol-2 [accessed 12.01.2017.]

[16]See D. Lodge, Introduction to *Scenes from Clerical Life*, in: *George Eliot. Critical Assessments*, p. 23.

[17]See L. C. Lima, "The Control of the Imagination and the Novel," in: *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography and Culture*, ed. F. Moretti, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006, p. 44.

[18]G. H. Lewes, op. cit., p. 35.

[19]Ibid., p. 112.

if Sincerity is not necessarily a guarantee of power, it is a necessary condition of power, and no genius or prophet can exist without it."[20]

Finally there is the principle of beauty, which, as Lewes declared, is but another name for style. Style, after all, is art, and like all other arts, is not directly communicated but also like them is "subordinated to laws founded on psychological conditions."[21] This heavy thread in Lewes's thought, like his detailed considerations of the rules of composition and the shaping of individual style, is mirrored in both the critical and the fiction works of Eliot. The novelist's concentration on form, and particularly the change that the narration undergoes in successive works, permit us to state that the broadening of her knowledge in the area that Lewes referred to as psychological foundations was transposed onto her efforts at literary creation through constantly changing mechanisms of understanding between author and reader. And that leads us to the next passage I would like to present, which comes from the work discussed by Woolf, *Middlemarch*. It occurs at the beginning of Chapter XV, in which the newly arrived Dr. Lydgate is presented to the reader:

> A great historian, as he insisted on calling himself, who had the happiness to be dead a hundred and twenty years ago, and so to take his place among the colossi whose huge legs our living pettiness is observed to walk under, glories in his copious remarks and digressions as the least imitable part of his work, and especially in those initial chapters to the successive books of his history, where he seems to bring his armchair to the proscenium and chat with us in all the lusty ease of his fine English. But Fielding lived when the days were longer (for time, like money, is measured by our needs), when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings. We belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager, as if delivered from a campstool in a parrot-house. I at least have so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.[22]

Eliot's narrator does not avoid the conventions of the realistic novel, writing "At present I have to make the new settler Lydgate better known to anyone interested in him than he could possibly be even to those who had seen the most of him since his arrival in Middlemarch." The narrator can say more, because she knows more. The way that the narrator justifies her competencies, however, does not fit into the framework of the standard capabilities of the Victorian "storyteller":

> For surely all must admit that a man may be puffed and belauded, envied, ridiculed, counted upon as a tool and fallen in love with, or at least selected as a future husband, and yet remain virtually unknown — known merely as a cluster of signs for his neighbors' false suppositions.[23]

[20]Ibid., p, 114.
[21]Ibid., p. 138.
[22]G. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994, p. 117.
[23]Ibid., p. 117.

This is one of those passages wherein the experience of life is subordinated to the opportunities provided by fiction. Realistic poetics declaratively allow us to see more here, to make a more profound assessment. The human being as we know her in the real world is revealed to be merely an "aggregate of signs"; the novel, which itself represents such an aggregate, can, as a consciously organized space, permit us to better understand Dr. Lydgate, a man, whose ambitious plans for service to society are destined eventually to melt like a jellyfish (the comparison is Eliot's), subordinated to the determination and plans of Rosamond Vincy, his future wife.

The competencies demonstrated by Eliot's narrator in the two passages quoted above display her eagerness to build a communicative community based on regions of experience that are easily grasped because they are literary – such is the role played by the earlier-mentioned Fielding. The writer's analytical skills distinctly show her familiarity with science and psychological perspicacity as well. Eliot nonetheless does not break with the serviceable criterion of common sense, and common experience ("For surely all must admit…") is the final gauge of laws proclaimed *ex cathedra*. This is one of the passages that could be chosen to exemplify the fluid transition between how Evans presented (and perhaps also perceived) herself and the competencies of her narrators. At the same time, it was passages like this that allowed a boundary to be drawn which would finally lead literary criticism and professional studies of literature toward the development of their twentieth century categories of description of creative processes.

In Edward Dowden's 1877 essay on Eliot, referred to in all of the seminal English-language scholarship on the rhetorical strategies of nineteenth-century fiction (from Kathleen Tillotson, through Wayne C. Booth up to Wolfgang Iser), we find the use, remarkable and unusual for that early period, of the category of the "implied author"; for my purposes, however, what is more interesting than the most frequently cited passage from that work is the critic's approach to the effect that Eliot's "second self" elicits:

> It stands at some distance from the primary self, and differs considerably from its fellow. It presents its person to us with fewer reserves; it is independent of local and temporary motives of speech or of silence; it knows no man after the flesh; it is more than an individual; it utters secrets, but secrets which all men of all ages are to catch; while behind it, lurks well pleased the veritable historical self secure from impertinent observation and criticism. With this second self of George Eliot it is, not with the actual historical person, that we have to do. And when, having closed her books, we gaze outward with the mind's eye, the spectacle we see is that most impressive spectacle of a great nature, which has suffered and has now attained, which was perplexed and has now grasped the clue—standing before us not without tokens on lip and brow of the strife and the suffering, but resolute, and henceforth possessed of something which makes self-mastery possible. The strife is not ended, the pain may still be resurgent; but we perceive on which side victory must lie.
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> This personal accent in the writings of George Eliot does not interfere with their dramatic truthfulness; it adds to **the power with which they grasp the heart and conscience of the reader**.[24]

[24]E. Dowden, *Studies in Literature*, London: Forgotten Books 2013, pp. 240-241. Emphasis added – M.J.

The sense of power possessed by the writer is, in the axiological space designated by Eliot and Lewes, fundamentally limited. The point is not, as Evans's partner shows in his book on success in literature, to calculate the worth of a work from the number of copies sold, but rather to obtain recognition from outstanding minds who are also kindred spirits to the writer. It is the prestige of recognition, as Lewes writes, that is Literature's true reward, the measure of the strength the author commands. The word "power" connotes strength as well as authority; depending on the context, it can express the potential of writing which, rooted in a specific system of values, leads to the transformation of those chosen few who have truly smelled the aroma of cream rising from the doctor's teacup in Milby.

Conclusion

On 1 January 1873, noting in her diary that the eighth and final volume of *Middlemarch* had been released in December of the previous year, Eliot declared that none of her earlier books had been received with greater enthusiasm: "I have received many deeply affecting assurances of its influence for good on individual minds."[25] This influence and the joy of reading such testimonials represented, for both Eliot and – according to Eliot herself – for Lewes (who, we might add chose only appreciative reviews for his partner to read) the greatest possible satisfaction. Eliot writes about the pleasure of having her amour-propre flattered, but also about the meaning that such development of her spiritual existence held in her struggle with the encroaching signs of old age.[26]

Michael Davies, commenting at the end of his pioneering work *George Eliot and Nineteenth-century Psychology*, pointed to Eliot's high level of awareness of the causative role of literature and simultaneously its ability to create a world outside the space of scientific diagnoses. Davies remarked upon this in the context of Eliot's deliberations on form in art, found among her private papers and therefore constituting a special kind of commentary, of particular importance for this scholar of her work. Davies writes:

> Eliot's thoughts here are interesting as a meditation on the power of the mind, a power which can be mediated and harnessed in the deliberate artifice of literary production. As ever, she is aware of the ongoing processes of "grouping and association" which constitute the mind, a choice of phrase which bears witness to the influence of the associationist tradition of psychology on her representations of mental life and on many of the scientific models of mind with which she engaged.[27]

The dependency of her selected forms on Lewes's psychological analyses here transcends the domain of private relations, revealing the principle that rules the formation of the consensus fundamental to the realist novel, written about by Elisabeth Deeds Ermarth, the development of a strategy of representation that could reveal the mechanisms that authorize one form of

[25]G. Eliot, *The Journals of George Eliot*, red. M. Harris, J. Johnson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 142-143.

[26]Ibid., p. 143.

[27]M. Davies, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 190-191.

representation and not another.[28] In this context, the distinct voice of the narrator in both passages I have presented from Eliot's prose has, as a meta-commentary, the status of the voice of a legislator who defines in each case the mechanisms of communication adequate for the particular aspects of reality presented. The experience that governs the first passage from Eliot's prose cited here, and the literary experience contained in the second, both show the relevance of a shared authorial and readerly relation with regard to personal history and tradition in the larger sense in the name of the possibility of communication and the exertion of influence (or initiating a reading – depending on our perspective). Though Woolf in her essay on Eliot writes about the same frustration of the creative position that was perceived by Dowden, the position which determines that "there are, even in the early works, traces of that troubled spirit, that exacting and questioning and baffled presence who was George Eliot herself,"[29] yet the power of the writer's entire oeuvre inevitably places the reader (in whatever century) in the role of a pupil spotting the hidden mechanisms of a worldview's construction. For in fact, as Woolf showed, what was and is essential in these novels is not the nostalgic resuscitation of a vanished world or one that is in the process of vanishing:

> Yet, dismiss the heroines without sympathy, confine George Eliot to the agricultural world of her 'remotest past,' and you not only diminish her greatness but lose her true flavour. That greatness is here we can have no doubt. The width of the prospect, the large strong outlines of the principal features, the ruddy light of her early books, the searching power and reflective richness of the later tempt us to linger and expatiate beyond our limits.[30]

Quod erat demonstrandum, I would dare to hope.

[28]See E. D. Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel. Time, Space, Narrative*, 2nd ed., Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1998, p. XIXff.

[29]V. Woolf, op. cit., p. 168.

[30]Ibid., pp. 170-171.

KEYWORDS

poetics of the novel

REALISM

Abstract:
The article's aim is to analyze some of the nineteenth-century transitions within the poetics of the novel as influenced by the development of psychology and other social studies. The case of an intellectual interaction between George Eliot and George Henry Lewes, partners both in life and in literary interests, permits observation of how closely the aims of realistic writers were able to be aligned with social studies scholars' ambitions to discover the mechanism of human psyche. Observed from Virginia Woolf's perspective, Eliot's *Scenes from Clerical Life* and *Middlemarch* offer examples of how Lewes's studies influenced to some extent the shape of Eliot's literary projects.

experience

modernism

PSYCHOLOGY

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Dr Marcin Jauksz is an assistant professor at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. He earned his PhD with the book *Krytyka dziewiętnastowiecznego rozumu. Źródła i konteksty „Pałuby" Karola Irzykowskiego* (The Critique of Nineteenth-Century Reason. The Sources and Contexts of Karol Irzykowski's *The Hag*) which was an examination of one of the most original Polish early modernist novels in the context of nineteenth-century philosophy and prominent crypto-autobiographical texts of the era (Stendhal, Poe, Komornicka, Sienkiewicz among others). The study earned the Konrad and Marta Górski Thesis Award in 2011. He won a scholarship from the French Government in the years 2008-2009. His current projects include research on relations between social studies and changes in the rhetoric of the novel as well as on the poetry lost on the "margins of civilization" in the late nineteenth century. He has published his work in such journals as *Wiek XIX* (The 19th Century), *Porównania* (Comparisons), *Lampa* (The Lamp) and *Polonistyka* (Polish Studies), among others.