PATTERNS OF TEMPTATION IN GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVELS

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B.L.S., University of Toronto, 1952

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

in the Department

of

ENGLISH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
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Date Friday, September 5, 1969
ABSTRACT

Shakespeare clearly found a congenial medium of expression in kings and kingship; Pope tells us that from early childhood he "... lisped in numbers, for the numbers came." Similarly, George Eliot evinces an insistent tendency to image her view of human life in a battle of temptation. The plain facts of the novels—from *Janet's Repentance* to *Daniel Deronda*—confirm the truth of this assertion. At least I would think so. But the extant criticism of George Eliot does not validate the supposition. My thesis originated in bewilderment at this discrepancy between expectation and fact. It seeks to deduce George Eliot's concept of temptation from her creative work, to elucidate its characteristic manifestations in the defeats or victories of individual temptees, to test its value in a detailed study of Maggie Tulliver and of *Middlemarch*, Book 7, to distinguish two concentric spheres of its cogency, showing how the more intense and more technical inner sphere lies embedded in a wider one reflecting George Eliot's moral philosophy, beliefs, and aims as a literary artist, and finally to intimate that the characteristic flavour of the novels stems in large measure from the felicitous interaction between these two mutually complementary spheres.

A little reflection, grounded on some acquaintance with life and with literature, soon discloses temptation as a relational concept, composed of certain interacting elements: a strong desire, an opportunity to fulfill the desire, and a standard of conduct that prohibits fulfillment. The well-known temptation in the Garden of Eden, for example, clearly unveils all three. George Eliot accepts this traditional pattern, associated primarily with Biblical and medieval ways of thought,
but substitutes humanistic for theological consequences, and thus helps to resuscitate its timeless truth. Desire, opportunity, and ethical ideal burgeon into counterbalancing forces of hitherto unsuspected mightiness, chiefly because the author sees good and evil as qualities within us rather than without. Her uncanny psychological penetration into the moral nature of man overwhelms readers with the shock of recognition.

After listing the principal temptees in each of the novels, and pointing to their pivotal role in a Manichean battle, I examine the conduct of five in detail. Mr. Farebrother of Middlemarch eminently exemplifies the pattern of success, whereas Arthur Donnithorne, Bulstrode, and Gwendolen, despite vast individual differences, unite in illustrating the opposite pattern, which of course varies too. Nevertheless, the dividing line between the two contrasted camps remains clear; in fact, the recognizable bonds between the protagonists on the two sides help to throw it into sharper focus. Human weakness and propensity to evil may make the attainment of victory a hard struggle, or they may precipitate defeat; human strength and goodness account not only for victory, but also for the gnawing torture of remorse after defeat. Throughout, George Eliot unmistakably proffers one pearl of precious advice: A vow to oneself alone never suffices for victory; one must immediately and deliberately relinquish the means of breaking it, usually by taking others into one’s confidence.

Following these relatively straight-forward object lessons, I use the concept of temptation in an analysis of The Mill on the Floss, with emphasis on its principal temptee, Maggie Tulliver; and of Middlemarch, Book 7, whose title requires the reader to account for two temptations. In both instances I conclude that lack of my critical tool had hitherto prevented a satisfying reconciliation of all pertinent facts.
Watching the reverberations of victory or of defeat spreading in ever-widening circles from the inner to the outer sphere of temptation, we realize, as do many temptees after losing their battles, that "No man is an island, sufficient unto himself"; that "Our echoes roll from soul to soul,/And grow for ever and for ever."
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Abbreviations for the Titles of the Novels

JR  for Janet's Repentance
AB  for Adam Bede
MF  for The Mill on the Floss
SM  for Silas Marner
R   for Romola
FH  for Felix Holt
M   for Middlemarch
DD  for Daniel Deronda
A NOTE ON THE WORD "TEMPTEE"

I am aware that the key word of my thesis—Temptee—is not sanctioned in any standard English or American dictionary. Since the thesis could not have been written without a word to express this concept, I have coined "temptee" on the analogy of examiner and examinee. "Tempted" as a noun seems to be confined to the single phrase, "The tempter and the tempted." I did not think that it could be used in any other context. And even the best of circumlocutions, when repeated scores of times, would have become insufferable. On this point, I hope, my readers will adopt Dr. Johnson's judgment about one device\(^1\) in *Paradise Lost*: "This being necessary was therefore defensible."\(^2\)

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\(^1\)Investing spirits or angels with form and matter.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Among those to whom I am indebted for the opportunity to undertake and to complete this bit of work, the following may be specifically named: Agnes Sapper, whose children's books first excited me with awareness of "what mightiness for evil and for good" lies dormant in literature; Professors Lloyd Wheeler and George Brodersen, whose lectures proved the only seed that would grow for me (however stuntedly) while I was enrolled in Agriculture at the University of Manitoba during the War years (that smattering of "Culture," so often perfunctorily and derisively included with professional courses, has made a great difference in my life); Professor Roy Daniells, for twenty-five years of fatherly interest and support, in addition to the rare experience of his lectures; Professor Edward McCourt, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, who first encouraged my notion that Temptation is a subject worth thinking and writing about, and suggested a possible approach for its application to George Eliot; Professors E.B. Gose and Ruby Nemser, who read the outline I submitted and recommended it as "promising"; Professor Ruby Nemser, once more, for the generous measure of time and attention she gave me during my first summer of writing and composition;
Professor William Robbins, Chairman of the Graduate Committee, whose sympathy led him to fight several administrative battles on my behalf; two administrators in the Library, University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus; Mr. Sidney Harland, Chief Librarian, and Miss Margaret M. Hammond, Head of Public Services, for unusually generous allowances of educational leave, despite much inconvenience to themselves, and particularly for that rarely granted third chance, without which I would have failed; and my supervisor, Professor Herbert Rosengarten, for two years of guidance, patience, and support, far in excess of any formal obligation.
"We live in a world which is full of misery and ignorance, and the plain duty of each and all of us is to try to make the little corner he can influence somewhat less miserable and somewhat less ignorant than it was before he entered it. To do this effectually it is necessary to be fully possessed of only two beliefs: the first, that the order of Nature is ascertainable by our faculties to an extent which is practically unlimited; the second, that our volition counts for something as a condition of the course of events."


"... let our minds rest upon that great and inexhaustible word life, until we learn to enter into its meaning. A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life."


"... my most rooted conviction is, that the immediate object and the proper sphere of all our highest emotions are our struggling fellow-men and this earthly existence."

(George Eliot to François D'Albert-Durade, December 6, 1859; Letters, III, 231)
Chapter 1

THE CONCEPT OF TEMPTATION:
REFLECTIONS DERIVED IN THE MAIN FROM GEORGE ELIOT'S APPROACH

"A man vows, and yet will not cast away the means of breaking his vow." (M, ch. 70)

Temptation may be defined as a desire that can readily be fulfilled, but ought not to be. The possibility of fulfillment implies the presence of an opportunity; the judgment that it ought to be left unfulfilled implies a standard of conduct or moral conscience. The desire and the opposing conscience reside within the same person; the opportunity to fulfill the desire lies outside him. If all three entities are present—desire, matching opportunity, and opposing conscience—the desire may be called a temptation, and the person feeling the desire may be called a temptee. This formulation accords with the facts of George Eliot's novels, and is therefore sufficient for our present purpose. Some modification of the traditional biblical tempter may also be present. If so, he will be inherent in both desire and opportunity, and therefore part of the force that propels them toward each other, in defiance of the temptee's conscience struggling
to keep them apart.\footnote{Maggie does on one occasion call Philip a tempter (MF, bk. 5, ch. 3), but she is simply expressing the momentary bafflement of a still very immature adolescent. He might with at least equal justification be regarded as her mentor. The sections on Bulstrode and Gwen-dolen include discussion of the innocent tempter as a means of self-deception: well-meant advice that he knows to be based on ignorance of the vitiating fact helps to salve the temptee's conscience.\

The devil tempts us not--'tis we tempt him,
Beckoning his skill with opportunity. (FH, ch. 47, motto)

It would scarcely be fanciful to read this motto as an expression of the trend from theology to psychology that in its influence on George Eliot may be associated primarily with the names of Comte and (especially) Feuerbach.\footnote{George Eliot's The Essence of Christianity (1854), a translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's Das Wesen des Christenthums (1841), is still in print (New York: Harper & Row, 1957). Bernard J. Paris says that the influence of this book on "George Eliot's understanding of religious experience cannot be over-estimated: (Experiments in Life . . . [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965], p. 92).}

The temptee is fighting a battle in which the potential odds, roughly speaking, are three to one against him. Half of himself—evil desire—is driven toward an opportunity that in its enticing effect upon the desire is completely undivided. His other half—opposing conscience—is grappling with both an inner and an outer enemy. Totally compatible, these enemies gravitate toward each other relentlessly, gather strength and speed as they move, and fuse the moment they touch. Time and potential are unreservedly on their side. If the temptee
(motivated and to that extent represented by his opposing moral conscience) is blind to the dangers of this combination, desire and opportunity can always be inflamed and mutually adjusted to the point where he will either yield in spite of his mental processes, or yield in a kind of trance, without effective awareness of what he is doing, or manipulate his mental processes till they seem to justify yielding: that is, till his conscience sides with the enemy. He will be fighting a losing battle, however valiantly. No man is capable of withstanding unlimited trial. Morally vigilant and imbued with an alert sense of his own weakness, the successful temptee (discussed in the previous chapter) recognizes the potential strength of his adversary and will not give it time to unfold. As soon as he grows aware of an opportunity that matches and beckons a latent evil desire within him, he will not merely resolve on resistance: unlike his opposite, the unsuccessful temptee, he will immediately endeavour to secure himself by casting away the means of breaking his resolution. The result (apart from his victory) is that all three forces in the aggregate of temptation are stifled: neither desire, nor opportunity, nor even the opposing conscience in all its twists and turns can be fully developed. So far as these forces are concerned, the successful temptee restricts George Eliot to the use of her left hand.³

Whatever his moral shortcomings, the unsuccessful temptee is not guilty of fettering George Eliot in this way. Placed at the center of

³Applied to the temptee, the words "successful" and "unsuccessful" indicate the outcome of his battle, not his merit or defect as a literary creation.
the moral struggle in her novels (as shown in the first chapter), he gives occasion for, and indeed invites, the fullest development of opportunity, and opposing conscience. Her concept and definition of him is that he can be defeated, but only with difficulty and by a narrow margin. Defeated too easily, he becomes a mere villain; unconquerable, he ceases to be a temptee or becomes the kind who succeeds and thereby restricts his creator. His value to George Eliot the novelist bent on giving "a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in [her] mind" (AB, ch. 17), depends on his delicate and almost even balance of good and evil, virtue and vice, strength and weakness. She sees him as a reflection in miniature of a similar balance in the larger world of the novel as a whole, which in its turn aims to reflect her Manichean view of human life and even of the cosmos. The evil, the vice, the weakness within the temptee are matched by corresponding qualities in the world outside him, and so are his goodness, his virtue, and his strength. Evil desire discovers its opportunity of fulfilment, and evil opportunity (often associated with another person) assumes a life of its own and arouses and beckons its double within the temptee. Conversely, his moral conscience struggling against the inner enemy can receive guidance and support from the world outside, if he takes pains to seek the support and gives it a chance to influence him effectively. The stereotyped phrase that we find what we look for is revitalized in George Eliot's fictional world.

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4W.J. Harvey's concept of a "fictional microcosm" embedded in "the macrocosm of . . . the real world" is useful and has influenced me (The Art of George Eliot [London: Chatto & Windus, 1961], p. 71.
If human life, in her view, is first and foremost a moral battle, the battle begins in the psyche of each individual, and reaches its clearest miniature expression in that of her great unsuccessful temptees. Embroiled in a larger medium as wondrously and as delicately mixed as their own souls, these temptees become the focus and the nexus of a deeply significant conflict of attractions and repulsions that may appropriately be called "temptation," temptation being a relational concept. David Cecil errs in treating it as a separate entity or personified abstraction.\(^5\) It is much more realistically and usefully envisaged as an aggregate of counterbalancing forces that (rather artificially and for convenience only) may be isolated and labelled "desire," "opportunity," and "opposing conscience." A few introductory generalizations about each of these will help to minimize repetition, and serve as a basis for analysis, in the discussion of individual case histories.

**Evil desire may manifest itself in attraction to something that** morally forbidden or in repulsion from something that is morally required. The two kinds are generally combined (since each implies its opposite), but with the emphasis clearly on either the one or the other. For the sake of easy reference, and without assuming any judgment of values, we will distinguish them as positive and negative, respectively.

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\(^5\) *Early Victorian Novelists* (London: Constable, 1934), p. 310. Rhetorical phrases like "the forces of temptation deploy themselves for the attack" or "temptation . . . retreats . . . comes back disguised . . . will sham death only to arise suddenly" suggest that Cecil has not really asked himself what the concept of temptation means. Yet he deserves credit for explicitly recognizing George Eliot's preoccupation with this subject. Within my knowledge, none of her other critics does.
Negative evil desire may be rooted in transgressions that antedate the opening of the novel. Godfrey Cass and Bulstrode (especially the latter) are examples that immediately come to mind. The basic requirements for the presentation of both kinds of desire in a work of literature are, first, an adequately realized object of attraction or repulsion, attainable or avoidable only by unethical conduct; secondly, a temptee so effectively drawn as to elicit the reader's sympathetic participation in his predicament, which consists in enormous attraction to (or repulsion from) that object, combined with an almost equally strong abhorrence of violating the moral law; and thirdly, a common background of general beliefs and basic assumptions, accepted both by the temptee and by the society in which he lives. The limited and isolated worlds (some fifty years back from the author's own time) of Hayslope and Raveloe provide a unifying ethical framework for the moral conflict in *Adam Bede* and *Silas Marner*, respectively. George Eliot does not, however, depend on such a framework, as she is concerned with common human failings that most societies in most ages would deprecate. Successful consummation of these three requirements suffices for the convincing portrayal of evil desire. Fulfilment (which in the

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6Cf. "'Tis grievous, that with all amplification of travel both by sea and land, a man can never separate himself from his past history" (FH, ch. 21, motto). Or again, "'If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment'" (MF, bk. 6, ch. 14). Thomas Pinney's article, "The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels" in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XXI (September 1966), 131-47 is pertinent. R. L. Collins' "The Present Past: the Origin and Exposition of Theme in the Prose Fiction of George Eliot" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1961) should also be mentioned.
case of negative desire may mean avoidance) necessitates the addition of an opportunity; and George Eliot usually contrives to have desire and opportunity reach their respective peaks of intensity and enticement simultaneously. The device seems natural when one is preparing the strongest possible assault upon the temptee's resisting conscience.

'The object of attraction or repulsion is of course the most important part of opportunity. To this extent desire and opportunity are inseparable. Insofar as it can be isolated, opportunity may here be defined as the author's manipulation of circumstance with a view to generating an active evil desire from tacit falsity, or with a view to facilitating and inviting the fulfilment of a previously aroused evil desire. George Eliot clearly attaches great importance to this endeavour and allows herself considerable latitude in manoeuvering--more latitude in fact than some twentieth-century critics condone. Like a general preparing his blow, she knows that its effect will not depend exclusively on its own inherent strength, but also on the point and moment of delivery. It must be carefully aimed at the victim's weakest spot, and strike when that spot is even more vulnerable than usual.

In the end, opportunity almost seems to assume a life of its own, a life somehow engendered for the express purpose of matching and boosting

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7 Cf. "Tito had never had occasion to fabricate an ingenious lie before: the occasion was come now--the occasion which circumstance never fails to beget on tacit falsity" (R, ch. 11).

8 For example, referring to Raffles' appearance in Middlemarch, C.B. Cox asks, "What evidence is there that a long-forgotten crime such as Bulstrode's is inevitably punished?" (The Free Spirit: A Study of Liberal Humanism . . . London: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 24).
the temptee's desire. (This phenomenon is quite plausible, since opportunity is usually associated with one or more human beings, just as desire is necessarily embodied in the temptee.) The temptee of course does not grasp what is happening, because his apprehension of reality has become clouded. He tends to think of opportunity as passive, deludes himself that his own steadily mounting desire remains at a safe distance, and (each single step being small) may not even realize effectively that it is mounting. Suddenly opportunity leaps to meet his advancing and growing desire, or it accentuates the magnetic pull by which it draws desire toward itself. Being made for each other, they merge upon contact and the irrevocable wrong is committed.

9 The tempter or embodiment of the opportunity may himself be a minor temptee, as Stephen Guest is. Maggie puts his case rather too favourably when she tells Lucy: "... he struggled too. He wanted to be true to you" (MF, bk. 7, ch. 4). But to the extent that he is a minor temptee, Maggie would be his "opportunity." "Desire" and "opportunity" are reversible concepts; their application in any specific pattern of temptation depends on the point of view. Throughout this thesis (with some obvious exceptions), ours is that of the principal temptee.

10 Cf. Molly Farren—Godfrey Cass's first wife—and her experience with narcotism. "She needed comfort, and she knew but one comforter—the familiar demon opium in her bosom; but she hesitated a moment ... In that moment the mother's love pleaded for painful consciousness rather than oblivion ... In another moment Molly had flung something away, but it was not the black remnant of opium—it was an empty phial" (SM, ch. 12).

11 Cf. "... everything done is done irrevocably ... even the omnipotence of God cannot uncommit a deed, cannot make that undone which has been done ... every act must bear its allotted fruit according to the everlasting laws: (Leader, II [20 Sept. 1851], 898). The extract is taken from George Eliot's review of William Rathbone Greg's The Creed of Christendom and is cited in Paris, Experiments in Life ... p. 154.
The remaining force in the aggregate of temptation is the temptee's conscience exerting itself to restrain his own evil desire and prevent its fusion with beckoning opportunity. Up to a point, desire and conscience can be distinguished from each other, but neither can be separated from him, for their interaction constitutes his psyche as a temptee. Revealed to the reader in graphic presentation and searching analysis, it becomes a source of some of George Eliot's greatest achievements. Her basic premise is that, within the mental boundaries that gave birth to evil desire, the temptee's conflict is insoluble and, provided the opportunity of fulfilment persists, must lead to disaster. Initially, he can choose between total and partial resistance, but the result will be the same in either case: a fanning of his evil desire until it assumes the proportions of monomania and ends in total yielding. Hugged close as a guilty secret, the evil desire in its turn severs his normal contact with other people, and thus tightens the state of isolation in which it thrives. The temptee is endowed with at least an average degree of will power, conscience, good intentions; but there is a limit to the efficacy of these alone: unaided by understanding and insight, they cannot save him. His tortuous mental processes and distraught, inconsequent actions will not be understood until, like George Eliot, we recognize alienation, failure in the apprehension of reality, psychological illness generally. The birth of evil desire is one item of evidence, and the temptee's manifest inability to break from his mental prison is another. Caught in a vicious cycle, he is frantically searching for a path of rescue, a guiding light, where none exists. The light is indeed there, close at
hand, but he cannot see it because it shines outside the walls.

Generally unaware of these walls, and certainly incapable of breaking through them by his own momentum, he needs a confidant, a mentor, a therapist: someone who will shake his mental kaleidoscope and orient him to a sounder attitude, a less self-absorbed outlook. Bolstering the temptee's will power and thus forestalling a rash act that would entail irremediable consequences is certainly an invaluable temporary service. But the only permanent solution consists in the attainment or recovery of a wider vision, a truer perspective: in short, of mental health. George Eliot's recognition of the intimate connection between anti-social behaviour and mental disease places her far ahead of her time and helps to explain why the temptee's struggle lends itself so readily to the enlargement that is discussed in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis. It also accounts, in part, for the great revival of interest in her since the end of the War.\textsuperscript{12}

It may be helpful to remind ourselves at this point that even Adam Bede, usually a pillar of righteousness, finds himself in a situation where his judgment becomes so clouded that, left to his own guidance, he might err more drastically than the man whose wrongdoing appears to him unforgivable. He is fortunate in having Bartle Massey and Mr. Irwine with him during those harrowing days at Stoniton, in a

bleak room near Hetty's prison. Dilating upon Adam's understandable
but dangerous craving for vengeance on Arthur, the Rector tries to
steer his thoughts toward a more constructive approach and a more
realistic apprehension of the facts:

"If you were to obey your passion—for it is passion, and
you deceive yourself in calling it justice—it might be
with you precisely as it has been with Arthur; nay, worse;
your passion might lead you yourself into a horrible
crime." (AB, ch. 41)

We recall Mr. Farebrother's oft-quoted remark: "'Character is not cut
in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something
living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.'"
Dorothea replies: "'Then it may be rescued and healed'" (M, ch. 72).
With some of her temptees, notably Gwendolen and Tito, as we shall see,
George Eliot specifically indicates the state of mind that would
constitute liberation and mental health; with others, she confines
herself to clear implication, leaving the reader to draw his own specific
inferences; or she may give him a hint, as in the following lines from
Daniel's "Musophilus," quoted as part of the epigraph for chapter 68
of Middlemarch:

"... the directest course still best succeeds.
For should not grave and learn'd Experience
That looks with the eyes of all the world beside,
And with all ages holds intelligence,
Go safer than Deceit without a guide!"

Through all this diversity, one unifying thread of guidance runs
consistently and unmistakable: emphasis on the paramount importance
of sympathy with the individual human beings who cross our path. A
single illustration may suffice: On his deathbed, Romola's brother Dino, a religious fanatic, warns his sister against her impending marriage, but his words fail to influence her because they are based on a vision that "comes from the shadowy region where human souls seek wisdom apart from the human sympathies which are the very life and substance of our wisdom" (R, ch. 15, last paragraph). By chance, his prophecy proves well-founded; but though "her trust [in Tito, now her husband] had been delusive, . . . [Romola] would have chosen over again to have acted on it rather than be a creature led by phantoms and disjointed whispers in a world where there was the large music of reasonable speech, and the warm grasp of living hands" (R, ch. 36).

While the reader's mental glance remains steadily directed toward this cardinal doctrine of human sympathy with individuals, he is not likely to fall into gross misapprehension of George Eliot's purpose.

A temptee's redemption can be achieved on one of two levels. (The concept of higher and lower is central in George Eliot's thinking: we are on safe ground in talking of levels.) On the lower level, evil

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13 Rather hyperbolically, Laurence Lerner calls the last-quoted statement "the central sentence of George Eliot's novels" (The Truthtellrs . . . [London: Chatto & Windus, 196], p. [10]) and quotes it as one of the two mottoes for his book. He is quite right, however, in stressing its importance.

14 For example, about Charles Bray's book, The Philosophy of Necessity, she remarks: "I dislike extremely a passage . . . in which you appear to consider the disregard of individuals as a lofty condition of mind. My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy" (Letters, II, 403).
desire is not in itself transcended; but it is effectively counteracted or even neutralized by a trenchant awareness of probably consequences, including an imaginative identification with other people's suffering. Assuming the role of Gwendolen's mentor, Daniel Deronda never wearies (though at times he wearies the reader) in his efforts to guide her toward at least this limited kind of rescue. They are diffused through a large part of the novel, but appear in their most concentrated form in chapter 36, from which a representative sample may be quoted: "Take the present suffering as a painful letting in of light... you know more of the way in which your life presses on others, and their life on yours... Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you."

Similarly, Parson Irwine does his best, albeit unsuccessfully, to impress Arthur with the fact that "consequences are unpitying" (AB, ch. 16). But it is Maggie, acting here as her own mentor, who gives the most poignant expression to the difference between mental disease and mental health in the face of an evil desire that has not, as such, been exorcised:

"If I had been better, nobler [other people's] claims would have been so strongly present with me--I should have felt them pressing on my heart so continually, just as they do now in the moments when my conscience is awake--that the opposite feeling would never have grown in me, as it has done: it would have been quenched at once--I should have prayed for help so earnestly--I should have rushed away as we rush from hideous danger." (MF, bk. 6, ch. 14)

Rescue on the lower level can go no farther; Maggie is here aware of its utmost reach, where it touches upon and merges into the higher
level, characterized by a state of consciousness that deflates or even extirpates the original desire. Janet's experience may be cited as a simple illustration. Thanks to Mr. Tryan's efforts and her own, she successfully withstands her long-ingrained habit of resorting to alcohol for comfort, till in the end it ceases to allure her. "How feeble and miserable the temptation [brandy] seemed to her at this moment!" (JR, ch. 25) Or again, "Janet felt a deep stillness within. She thirsted for no pleasure; she craved no worldly good" (JR, ch. 28). Such total victory may also be won by more sophisticated people grappling with more complex issues. Confronted with the choice between Harold Transome, motiveless ease, and luxury on the one hand, and Felix Holt, dedication, and poverty on the other, Esther Lyon, though quite aware that "on each side there was renunciation" (FH, ch. 49), cannot but act as she does and "has never repented" (FH, Epilogue). George Eliot states the reason in brief compass:

Nay, falter not—'tis an assured good
To seek the noblest—'tis your only good
Now you have seen it; for that higher vision
Poisons all meaner choice for evermore. (FH, ch. 49, motto)

Resisting temptation is no longer the issue: temptation has ceased to tempt because the temptee has risen to a mental level beyond its reach. So far as he is concerned, the object of former attraction and the opportunity of fulfilment are at this stage innocuous; evil desire has withered by being deprived of the medium in which it emerged and
luxuriated: his baser self, now successfully surmounted. A battleground between two contrasted moral principles in the human psyche and in the cosmos (as we have pointed out in the first chapter), the temptee is endowed with greater ethical potential than those who are less severely tried: he may sink below their average, but he may also soar above it. Kind-hearted, innocent Lucy is not far wrong in her last words to the friend who has caused her so much grief: "'Maggie,' she said, in a low voice, that had the solemnity of confession in it, 'you are better than I am. I can't . . .' She broke off there . . ."

(MF, bk. 7, ch. 4).

Like other striking characters in literature, the temptee is often remembered in his own right, as if he were an actual acquaintance, quite apart from his function in the composition. He quickens our understanding and our compassion, for we recognize his human frailty, his tragic flaw, and identify ourselves with him as an erring mortal who (in a slight adjustment of Stevenson's familiar words) means well, tries a little, and fails much. "To know all is to forgive all." And that is precisely the effect George Eliot is aiming to produce. In a letter to Charles Bray, dated July 5, 1859, she says: "If art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally." Her psychological acumen,

15 The temptee's higher state will probably entail its own set of new (and perhaps more elevated) temptations; or he may revert to a lower level, where the older ones resume their sway.


17 Letters, III, 110.
comprising even discernment of the unconscious, lends much support to the claim frequently made that she is the earliest of the "modern" novelists. For example, the account of Bulstrode's battle with his temptation includes the following sagacious and penetrating analysis:

He [Bulstrode] did not measure the quantity of diseased motive which had made him wish for Lydgate's goodwill, but the quantity was nonetheless actively there, like an irritating agent in his blood. A man vows, and yet will not cast away the means of breaking his vow. Is it that he distinctly means to break it? Not at all; but the desires which tend to break it are at work in him dimly, and make their way into his imagination, and relax his muscles in the very moments when he is telling himself over again the reasons for his vow. Raffles, recovering quickly, returning to the free use of his odious powers—how could Bulstrode wish for that? Raffles dead was the image that brought release. (M, ch. 70)

This passage is quoted and praised by J.W. Beach in a book devoted almost entirely to novelists later than George Eliot. As he observes, it makes one marvel that she could have been contemporary with Trollope. I have selected one of its sentences as the motto for this chapter, because it pinpoints the root of failure in the unsuccessful temptee, and the essential difference between him and his successful counterpart. "A man vows, and yet will not cast away the means of breaking his vow."

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18 Laurence Lerner asks rhetorically, "What had George Eliot to learn from psycho-analysis?" And he answers, "As a novelist, surely little or nothing" (The Truth-tellers . . ., p. 56).


The case histories of the great unsuccessful temptees substantiate this dictum and attest its wisdom.
Chapter 2

THE TEMPTEE AND HIS STRUGGLE: INTRODUCTORY

"Now is there civil war within the soul."

(M, ch. 67, first line of epigraph)¹

"Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul."

(DD, first line of epigraph for the whole novel)

Most of George Eliot's major characters are confronted with some kind of temptation, but there is no difficulty in naming the principal temptee in each novel. Arranged in chronological order, they are:

Janet Dempster in Janet's Repentance²

Arthur Donnithorne in Adam Bede

Maggie Tulliver in The Mill of the Floss

¹Epigraphs not otherwise identified were composed by George Eliot; some of these derive from her own previously published verse, notably The Spanish Gypsy.

²Throughout this thesis, "Janet's Repentance," the third of the Scenes of Clerical Life, will be treated as a separate novel. Its inclusion is imperative, because it represents the earliest and simplest example of the characteristic pattern. If a further justification were needed, it might be found in the technical argument that "Janet's Repentance" is easily novel-length by modern standards, being about as long as Silas Marner.
Godfrey Cass in *Silas Marner*  
Tito Melema in *Romola*  
Esther Lyon in *Felix Holt*  
Nicholas Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*  
Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*

This choice cannot be defended in brief space. Readers are asked to accept it provisionally, suspending final agreement or disagreement until they have reached the end of the thesis.

What sort of people are these temptees? Each of course is a sharply defined and highly individualized person; and indeed a number of them—notably Arthur, Maggie, Bulstrode, and Gwendolen—rank among George Eliot's best-drawn characters. Protagonists such as Adam, Romola, Felix, and (worst of all) Daniel are idealized and generally inferior as creations to the principal temptees in the corresponding novels. George Eliot's success in presenting the latter is not surprising. The struggle in the breast of the temptee epitomizes her view of life as a moral battlefield, and thus relates easily and naturally to the rest of the novel. It gives ample scope to her talent for psychological analysis, for presenting moral issues in their full complexity, and for sympathizing with individual striving, failing, and suffering. If her fiction as a whole is the artistic embodiment of a view of life, the principal temptee within each novel is the

3Godfrey Cass belongs with the group of failures treated in chapter 3. However, as a temptee he gives us little that is not exemplified in greater depth by Arthur Donnithorne. In order to conserve space for essentials, he is not discussed separately in chapter 3. Passing references to him will be found elsewhere in the thesis.
focus of that view in a specific setting. His credibility and solidity as a character is the best possible refutation of those who disparage the view of life from which he springs as dated, fanciful, or unrealistic.

George Eliot envisages the temptee as living in a moral borderland. Here is a revealing comment on one of the most convincing—

Arthur Donnithorne:

One thing is clear: Nature has taken care that he shall never go far astray with perfect comfort and satisfaction to himself; he will never get beyond that borderland of sin, where he will be perpetually harassed by assaults from the other side of the boundary. He will never be a courtier of Vice, and wear her orders in his button-hole. (AB, ch. 12)

Similarly, Janet, Esther, and Gwendolen straddle the two sides of the moral boundary portrayed, respectively, by the Tryanites and the anti-Tryanites, the world of Felix Holt and the world of the Transomes, the world of Daniel Deronda and the world of Grandcourt. Generally less schematic than I have here implied, and obscured (as it should be) by a faithful representation of the complexities of human life, this is nevertheless the basic stance of the temptee. In an oft-quoted defense against Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton's criticism of Maggie's relationship with Stephen, George Eliot enunciates what at first sight appears to be a challenging literary manifesto:

If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble but liable to great error—error that is anguish to its own nobleness—then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening
psychology. 4

Actually, as Joan Bennett points out, 5 George Eliot is here loosely paraphrasing Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero. Applied to prose fiction, her approach may have startled in mid-Victorian days, but does nothing of the kind a century later. The novelty, if there be any, does not reside in her definition and defense of the tragic hero, but rather in the view, which to her appears axiomatic, that the hero so conceived must necessarily be a temptee. 6 Her treatment of Maggie throughout The Mill on the Floss, and particularly in Book 6, entitled "The Great Temptation," leaves no room for doubt on this score. By way of evidence in brief compass, Maggie's words of impassioned self-accusation (following the semi-elopement with Stephen) may be cited:

"I feel no excuse for myself—none. I should never have failed . . . as I have done, if I had not been weak, selfish, and hard—able to think of {others'} pain without


6Obviously, it does not follow that he is a temptee and nothing else: if he were that, he would be an abstraction resembling no one in life; nor does it follow that two characters who are temptees will necessarily resemble each other closely even in that one quality. As so often, the same word is used to cover a practically unlimited variety of possibilities.
a pain to myself that would have destroyed all temptation."  
(MF, bk. 6, ch. 14)

Maggie is a temptee; she is a temptee in virtue of being "a character essentially noble but liable to great error--error that is anguish to its own nobleness." George Eliot herself thus provides a convenient working definition for at least this second chapter of the present study.

At varying levels of intensity and with varying degrees of completeness, the above definition applies to most of the characters on our list. Tito is an exception, because even at the beginning of Romola he is charming and agreeable rather than noble. With Bulstrode one hesitates. He certainly suffers great anguish and he does have a few streaks of nobility in his constitution. In Esther's case we have to substitute "would have been anguish" for "is anguish," because she is that relatively rare phenomenon in George Eliot, the temptee who succeeds in resisting.

Godfrey Cass is given almost as much space in Silas Marner as the protagonist. The conflict in his case arises from inadequate moral fiber, perpetually goaded by a rather active conscience. George Eliot tells us:

Deeper down, and half-smothered by passionate desire and dread, there was the sense that . . . he ought to accept the consequences of his deeds. . . . But he had not moral courage enough to contemplate that active renunciation of Nancy as possible for him: he had only conscience enough and heart enough to make him for ever uneasy under the weakness that forbade the renunciation. (SM, ch. 13)

A pattern is already beginning to emerge. All temptees are in a state
of moral conflict, from which it follows that they must be endowed with an active conscience and with a tendency either to act in opposition to that conscience or to fail to act in accordance with its dictates. This is their common denominator, and it is wide and flexible enough to permit of great individual variation. The conscience may or may not amount to nobility of character, and the counteracting tendency may range from mere weakness to an actual tragic flaw. Arthur Donnithorne stands about half way between Maggie and Godfrey Cass in these qualities. Stronger and nobler than Godfrey, he is yet weaker and closer to common clay than Maggie.

Our final example is by common consent of recent critics one of George Eliot's greatest creations and, in my view, her greatest temptee: Gwendolen Grandcourt (nee Harleth) in Daniel Deronda. The motto of that novel, composed by the author herself, is revealing. Obviously referring to the principal temptee, it expresses sentiments that Daniel echoes again and again in his capacity as her mentor:

Let thy chief terror be to thine own soul:
There, 'mid the throng of hurrying desires
That trample o'er the dead to seize their spoil,
Lurks vengeance, footless, irresistible
As exhalations laden with slow death,
And o'er the fairest troop of captured joys
Breathes pallid pestilence.

7"Recent" in relation to George Eliot's critics is used throughout this thesis in the sense of "after 1945." Gerald Bullett's (1947), Joan Bennett's (1948), and F. R. Leavis' (1948) discussions may be regarded as the earliest examples in book form of the "recent" approach. W. J. Harvey in the opening paragraph of chapter 9 of Victorian Fiction: a Guide to Research, ed. Lionel Stevenson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), speaks of two poles of George Eliot criticism, the second of which "essentially represents a post-1945 phenomenon."
This then is the soul of the temptee as George Eliot conceives it: a battleground between urgent, selfish desires for ease and enjoyment, irrespective of higher claims or other people's rights, and an active conscience that will forever annul these enjoyments and convert ease into pain--pain accentuated by a sense of guilt and often harder to bear than the original trial would have been. Trying to prepare Adam for the shattering disclosure of Hetty's imprisonment and its cause that he is about to make, Parson Irwine says:

"there is a heavier sorrow coming upon you than any you have yet known. But you are not guilty--you have not the worst of all sorrows. God help him [Arthur Donnithorne] who has!" (AB, ch. 39)

By and large, Parson Irwine's sentiments are George Eliot's own. She defends him at length in that oft-quoted chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*: "In Which the Story Pauses a Little." At any rate, the consciousness of guilt as "the worst of all sorrows" is a view that reverberates through *Daniel Deronda*. For example, when Gwendolen tells her mentor that she has "'thrust out others-- . . . made [her] gain out of their loss--tried to make it--tried,'" and that she "'must go on'" and "'can't alter it,'" he replies: "'That is the bitterest of all--to wear the yoke of our own wrongdoing'" (DD, ch. 36).

The first chapter, and indeed the first paragraph, of *Daniel Deronda* lends further support to a Manichaean concept of the temptee.

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8Cf. Arthur's pleading with Adam, just prior to their reconciliation: "'Perhaps you've never done anything you've had bitterly to repent of in your life, Adam; if you had, you would be more generous. You would know then that it's worse for me than for you. . . . And don't you think you would suffer more if you'd been in fault?'" (AB, ch. 48)
Watching Gwendolen at the gaming table in Beubronn, Deronda asks himself some pertinent questions about her:

Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil . . .

The link between these two, forged in the brilliant opening scene, is developed and strengthened throughout the long novel, to the point where Daniel becomes an almost allegorical figure in relation to Gwendolen—a personification of her conscience, of her better self—just as Grandcourt embodies the opposite element in her divided soul. If this element triumphs, she may become like him, for she and Grandcourt certainly have much in common. Gwendolen herself recognizes some of the affinities between them. For example, in the course of their first encounter at the Archery Meeting, she reflects "that a man of extremely calm, cold manners might be less disagreeable as a husband than other men" (DD, ch. 11). The reader is not surprised at this supposition, for he remembers her reaction to a suitor of the opposite kind:

The perception that poor Rex wanted to be tender made her curl up and harden like a sea-anemone at the touch of a finger. . . . the life of passion had begun negatively in her. She felt passionately averse to this volunteered love. (DD, ch. 7)

Or again, on the day following the engagement to Grandcourt, she remarks gaily to her mother: "'Aha! he is very proud. But so am I. We shall match each other'" (ch. 28). There is no doubt that the motto for the novel as a whole, already quoted, refers primarily to Gwendolen.
There is also no doubt that it would be a fairly appropriate motto for George Eliot's other novels, and that it could meaningfully be addressed to all of her temptees.

The temptations themselves must now be briefly summarized. Janet Dempster gives way to despair, to listlessness, and to alcoholism but is redeemed through the influence of the Reverend Edgar Tryan and her own efforts. Arthur Donnithorne seduces Hetty and then adds to the evil consequences by deceiving Adam, in a vain attempt to protect her and to exculpate himself. Maggie Tulliver yields—a long way but not all the way—to her infatuation with Stephen Guest, in defiance of the claims that Lucy and Philip have on her, and thus becomes the cause of intense suffering for both. Her earlier yielding in the matter of tacitly consenting to regular secret meetings with Philip Wakem in the Red Deeps is also presented as a temptation, but with a unique difference. For the first and last time in any comparable situation, George Eliot's sympathies are so divided that she is not prepared to commit herself unequivocally. Maggie's choice here reflects a conflict that is specifically articulated in chapter 56 of Romola and by implication elsewhere in that novel: "The problem where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion began." An autobiographical interpretation of the conflict is tempting and would not be far-fetched, but had better be resisted here as conjectural and not directly relevant.

Handicapped by inexperience as a novelist and by Victorian prudery—euphemisms like "long-accustomed stimulus" (ch. 21) are freely used—George Eliot fails to make Janet's alcoholism convincing, but it is certainly intended to be taken seriously.
Godfrey Cass has allowed his immoral brother Dunstan to trap him into a thoroughly disreputable marriage. "It was an ugly story of low passion, delusion, and waking from delusion" (SM, ch. 3). Within the novel he fails to own his first wife and their child, and to accept his responsibilities toward them. When Molly dies in the snow just outside Raveloe, and Eppie finds her way to Marner's cottage, Godfrey conceals their connection with him from everyone, including Nancy Lammeter, who within a year becomes his wife. Eppie would probably have been taken to the workhouse if Marner had not adopted her. Not until fifteen years after the second marriage does Godfrey confess his shameful past to Nancy.

Tito Melema's case is cogently summarized after his death in Romola's words to his natural son Lillo:

"He was young, and clever, and beautiful, and his manners to all were gentle and kind. . . . But because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing else so much as his own safety, he came at last to commit some of the basest deeds--such as make men infamous. He denied his father, and left him to misery; he betrayed every trust that was reposed in him, that he might keep himself safe and get rich and prosperous." (R, Epilogue)

Of all the temptees, Tito alone sinks deeper and deeper, with the result that he becomes simply a villain before the end of the novel is reached.

Esther Lyon is one of the few successful temptees. The choice facing her is between something higher and something lower rather than between right and wrong. Felix Holt's elevating influence on her
better self, which has lain dormant, combines with the frightful spectacle of Mrs. Transome's protracted nemesis to make her choose poverty and noble endeavour as Felix' wife, in preference to the luxury and motiveless ease that would have been her probable lot as Harold Transome's.

Nicholas Bulstrode, like Godfrey Cass, has done wrong before the opening of *Middlemarch*. His past sins are heavier than Godfrey's, more numerous, and of longer standing. Their nature and the motives that prompted him are described at some length in chapter 61 of *Middlemarch*. He has amassed his large fortune through years of connection with a business establishment that he knew to be—saying the least—usurious, and through cheating Will Ladislaw's mother out of her due inheritance by deliberately concealing from his first wife (Will's grandmother) that her daughter was still living and had been found. For over a quarter of a century he has imposed himself on Middlemarch as an exceptionally God-dearing, philanthropic, and public-spirited person, and he continues to do so until he is threatened with exposure by the scoundrel Raffles, a former accomplice who knows his guilty secrets. Tempted to connive at Raffles' death in a vain attempt to silence him, he yields.

Gwendolen Harleth's great temptation is Grandcourt's offer of marriage, at a time when she is smarting under the hardship of sudden poverty and of various concomitant humiliations. She accepts him as a convenience, without love, simply for his wealth and position, and in defiance of the claims of his mistress, Mrs. Glasher, and her four children. At her meeting with Mrs. Glasher and two of the children at the Whispering Stones (*DD*, ch. 14), Gwendolen promises, or at least half-promises: "'I will not interfere with your wishes.'" The
wishes, of course, are that Grandcourt should marry Mrs. Glasher and make their boy his heir. Once the initial wrong has been committed, Gwendolen finds her marriage so stifling and oppressive that she gradually develops murderous impulses toward her husband, and these constitute the second temptation that so often follows from yielding to the first.

Examining these temptations, at least in their initial phases, one finds that they are rather commonplace and may be classified under four heads:

1. An addiction, such as Janet's drinking;
2. Sexual infatuation, like Arthur's for Hetty and Maggie's for Stephen Guest;
3. Love of ease, wealth, and luxury, conjoined with the urge to escape from everything painful or disagreeable, as preeminently embodied in Tito and Gwendolen;
4. Ambition of the wrong kind, especially lust for power, memorably exemplified by Bulstrode.

These categories are of course not absolute; and they overlap. Maggie, for example, is attracted to Stephen both sexually and for the social advantages he can offer her. Tito and Gwendolen care primarily for ease and luxury, but they seek power too. With Bulstrode the emphasis lies in his craving for power, though he is not indifferent to other obvious advantages that wealth confers. The chief point is that most people at some stage in their lives experience temptations of this kind. Imaginative participation and identification are thus made easy for the other characters in the novel and for the reader.
Chapter 3

THE TEMPTEE AND HIS STRUGGLE: THE PATTERN OF SUCCESS

"'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, another thing to fall."

(Measure for Measure, II, i, 17-18; cited as epigraph, Middlemarch, ch. 66)

All of the temptees struggle, but few succeed: only two on the list of principal temptees—Janet and Esther—and three others—Farebrother, Fred Vincy, and (marginally) Harold Transome. Their success is primarily due certain methods, guides for behaviour, which they follow. These are set forth in Janet's discussion with Mr. Tryan, at the nadir of her experience, and that discussion marks the beginning of Janet's regeneration. Her dire need and bitter past experience bring her to the recognition of a truth that none of the unsuccessful temptees realizes until too late—the truth that good resolutions by themselves are not a sufficient safeguard for the future:

She wanted strength to do right—she wanted something to rely on besides her own resolution; for was not the path behind her strewn with broken resolutions? How could she trust in new ones?

(JR, ch. 16)

Janet has learned the greater part of their lesson before the novel opens. It is practically certain that she would have failed without Mr. Tryan.
George Eliot does believe very strongly that people can help one another, and indeed that they must do so if their lives are to be meaningful. Mr. Paris is absolutely right in stating that "the rescue of man by man is a recurrent motif" in her novels and in her letters.\footnote{Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p. 224.} If a temptee trusts to his own strength alone, he is generally doomed. For example, when Arthur Donnithorne fails at the last moment to make a confidant of Parson Irwine about his infatuation with Hetty, the author remarks: "the rope to which he might have clung had drifted away--he must trust now to his own swimming" (AB, ch. 16). No one can help us if we are not willing to seek and to receive help. The essential prerequisite for rescue is a core of human sympathy and affection that works in two ways: it leads us to cultivate a circle of worthy friends and mentors before the temptation arises, and it reacts forcefully against the temptation when it does arise. Fred's relations with Mary Garth and her father, and with Mr. Farebrother, which ultimately establish that average and precariously poised young man as a successful and respected member of society, constitute a striking illustration. Particularly memorable are the intense shame he feels when he confesses to Mary that he has brought financial hardship on her family (M, ch. 25), and his willingness to be reprimanded by Mr. Farebrother (ch. 66) at a moment of dangerous weakness that had led him to revert to the billiard-room at the Green Dragon, and might easily have undone all his previous efforts. His sister Rosamond, in contrast, never sees the light (with a momentary exception in chapter 81, when she
undeceives Dorothea about Ladislaw). She continues blind, egocentric, and self-righteous to the end, and ruins the immensely promising career of her husband, Lydgate. Unlike her brother, Rosamond cannot be rescued, because from her first appearance in the novel her heart and mind are closed to human sympathy and affection. Her early schooling at Mrs. Lemon's (ch. 11) is partly responsible.

Provided the basic condition is fulfilled, two potent steps will often lead to rescue in the hour of trial. The first is recognition of our own weakness and willingness to confide in others. As Mr. Tryan says to Janet at the end of their first interview:

"Open your heart as much as you can to your mother and Mrs. Pettifer. Cast away from you the pride that makes us shrink from acknowledging our weakness to our friends." (JR, ch. 19)

The second step consists in making good resolutions effective by trying to place oneself in circumstances that render yielding difficult or impossible. The act of confiding in others will often in itself lead to that result, but other measures may also be required. We must take precautions against ourselves. Mr. Tryan continues:

"Ask them to help you in guard ing yourself from the least approach of the sin you most dread. Deprive yourself as far as possible of the very means and opportunity of committing it." (JR, ch. 19)

Other things being equal, the more promptly these steps are taken, the more likely they are to succeed. Temptation should be dealt with as soon as it arises. Delay and procrastination may well prove fatal. Harold Transome—a minor temptee who is on the whole successful—strikes
the right note in what he says to Esther at a great crisis in his life: "When a man sees what ought to be done, he had better do it forthwith. He can't answer for himself tomorrow" (FH, ch. 49).

Esther Lyon has an equivalent Edgar Tryan in Felix Holt. He is in prison at the time when she is faced with her great choice between him and Harold Transome, which is also a choice between two diametrically opposite approaches to life. But even if Felix were not in prison and she could send for him or go to him, there would be no need, for by that time he dwells within her inseparably. Much earlier, when Rufus Lyon discloses Esther's history and reveals that he is not her real father, the influence of Felix Holt is stirring within her, so that she reacts in a way that leads the minister to reflect: "Surely the work of grace is begun in her--surely here is a heart that the Lord hath touched" (ch. 26). He is only superficially wrong, for we know George Eliot's view that "the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human" (Letters, VI, 98). In the afternoon of the same day, Felix and Esther go for a walk, in the course of which he urges her to develop "'such a vision of the future that [she] may never lose [her] best self.'" And in the next sentence he calls it "'a good strong terrible vision'" (ch. 27). Later, about noon of the day of the election at Treby, just before he becomes fatefuly involved in the riot, he goes to see her and, being stirred a little out of his usual reticence in matters of personal feeling, he quite spontaneously tightens the bond that has been

2 Most readers, including myself, feel that this influence works too fast to be artistically quite convincing.
developing between them since near the beginning of the novel. As so often, the chapter epigraph is significant.\(^3\) George Eliot quotes one of Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese" in full, but the first few lines suffice to suggest its tenor:

\[
\text{Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand} \\
\text{Henceforward in thy shadow. Never more} \\
\text{Alone upon the threshold of my door} \\
\text{Of individual life, I shall command} \\
\text{The uses of my soul . . . (FH, ch. 32)}
\]

We need not trace Felix' influence on Esther in further detail. The point is that by the time she faces the supreme choice of her life—the choice between two radically different suitors and between two radically different ways of life—her decision, although still difficult because it involves renunciation either way, is yet to a large extent predetermined. As the pertinent epigraph suggests, she cannot willingly choose the man and the way of life that she now unmistakably recognizes as the lower of the two:

\[
\text{Nay, falter not—'tis an assured good} \\
\text{To seek the noblest—'tis your only good} \\
\text{Now you have seen it; for that higher vision} \\
\text{Poisons all meaner choice for evermore. (ch. 49)}
\]

And so Esther renounces her legal claim to the riches of Transome Court, and weds poverty and dedication as the wife of Felix Holt.

\(^3\)The chapter epigraphs are more important in Felix Holt than in the other two novels in which they are used—Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda. Certainly they are well chosen. But the reader's need of them is perhaps indicative of a tendency in Felix Holt to "lapse from the picture to the diagram" (Letters, IV, 300). One feels too often that the chapter was developed from the epigraph, whereas Middlemarch generally gives the impression that an epigraph was found or composed for the chapter.
There is one man in George Eliot's novels whose case preeminently illustrates the characteristic pattern of success in resisting temptation: the pattern that all the unsuccessful temptees violate at their peril. Mr. Farebrother is amply endowed with the basic prerequisite of human sympathy and affection, and his wisdom and knowledge of himself induce him to adopt the technique that Mr. Tryan urges on Janet: Recognize your own weakness; confide in others; place yourself in circumstances that render yielding difficult or impossible. He also acts promptly, as Harold Transome does at "the most serious moment in [his] life" (FH, ch. 49), referred to above.

Temptation comes to the Reverend Camden Farebrother unexpectedly (M, ch. 52), at a time when he is particularly happy because Dorothea has recently conferred the Lowick living upon him. He now enjoys a much wider scope for beneficent activity, can support his relatives without having to play whist for money, and is at last in a position to express his love for Mary Garth. But Fred Vincy, who has loved Mary since early childhood and is as yet totally ignorant of Mr. Farebrother's feeling for her, enlists him as his advocate. The Vicar magnanimously agrees to attempt this difficult task of pleading Fred's case against his own interest, and carries it through with great competence and with great delicacy. Interested in the problem of temptation, we observe that he rides to Lowick Rectory "that very day" (ch. 52)--not tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, as an unsuccessful temptee would probably have resolved on doing. And at the end of his memorable interview with

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4See Appendix for a discussion of Farebrother's as the second temptation in Book VII of Middlemarch ("Two Temptations").
Mary, he uses the same technique. Sensing for the first time how he feels about her, she exclaims: "'Oh, please stay, and let me give you some tea!'" (ch. 52). But he replies: "'No my dear, no. I must get back,'" and within three minutes he is on his horse again. One can readily imagine how Arthur Donnithorne, as well as other unsuccessful temptees, would have acted in the same situation. Arthur would probably have said to himself something like this: "Now that I have definitely renounced Mary, and have even gone to the length of promoting her marriage with Fred, there is no reason why I should not enjoy her company for a short half hour. Surely I have deserved that at least."

And then he would have sat down to tea with her. (Cf. "He [Arthur Donnithorne] had made up his mind not to meet Hetty again; and now he might give himself up to thinking how immensely agreeable it would be if circumstances were different"--AB, ch. 12.) But Mr. Farebrother knows better. Realizing that he is a man and therefore liable to err, he takes precautions against his own weakness; as far as possible, he secures himself against the possibility of moral backsliding. The result is not only that he emerges victorious from the first bout with his temptation, but also that he is able to enter on the second bout (which he does not foresee yet) from a position of advantage:

Our lives make a moral tradition for our individual selves, as the life of mankind at large makes a moral tradition for the race; and to have once acted greatly seems a reason why we should always be noble. (R, ch. 39)

The auguries for Mr. Farebrother's success in the second and final battle with his temptation are now propitious.
The second battle—the battle to take advantage of Fred's backsliding—is described in chapter 66. Mr. Farebrother again emerges victorious, and the mental processes and the steps which underlie this triumph are made very clear to the reader. George Eliot here achieves a remarkable fusion of the aesthetic and didactic. She does not find it necessary to step in herself and tell us what went on in Farebrother's mind. Neither does she here employ another character to act as her mouthpiece or as a chorus. In a way that is absolutely plausible and convincing, the temptee is made to reveal his own mind to the very person whose actions constitute a temptation for him. Fred Vincy is at this time trying hard to win Mary's hand by good behaviour and worthwhile accomplishment. But he is an average young man, and as such he finds the yoke of virtue rather galling at times. Farebrother persuade him to leave the Green Dragon. In their conversation under the stars, Fred is on the defensive; most of the talking is done by Mr. Farebrother. What he says to his protege is of great interest. Essentially another rendering of Tryan's advice to Janet, it amounts to an exposition of what George Eliot regards as the only sure way in which a temptation that is really worthy of the name can be permanently resisted. By and large, her temptees either use Farebrother's method or they fail. And most of them do fail.

What is Farebrother's method? It is neatly and concisely presented in about two pages of crucial significance, and may be briefly

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There was a billiard-room at the Green Dragon, which some anxious mothers and wives regarded as the chief temptation in Middlemarch (ch. 18).
summarized as follows: Recognize that you are confronted with a temptation, and that you have your full share of human weakness. It is not enough for you to resolve that you will resist the temptation. The combination of opportunity and desire may at any time be such as to overwhelm your moral conscience. Therefore, at this moment, while you see the right path and enjoy full self-possession, you must secure yourself against the possibility of falling, nor merely by making a vow, but by "cast [ing] away the means of breaking [your] vow" (M, ch. 70; italics added). There is no other way. And how does a man secure himself? The answer is, by taking others into his confidence, so that he may "Look with the eyes of all the world beside;" so that "the hope in lies is forever swept away, and the soul recovers the noble attitude of simplicity" (R, ch. 9). The "others" will of course have to be judiciously selected, the choice depending on the individual temptee's social environment, as well as on the nature of his temptation. In the present case, Mr. Farebrother selects Fred

6Farebrother's awareness of his own weakness leads him astray on one occasion: expressed crudely and unkindly, it leads him to judge others by himself. At the great crisis in his friend Lydgate's life, he fails to rise to the occasion, as Dorothea alone does. Discussing that crisis with her, Sir James Chettam, and others, he remarks: "'It is possible--I have often felt so much weakness in myself that I can conceive even a man of honourable disposition, such as I have always believed Lydgate to be, succumbing to such a temptation as that of accepting money which was offered more or less indirectly as a bribe to insure his silence about scandalous facts long gone by'' (ch. 72). These suppositions do less than justice to his friend, who at this point is in dire need of encouragement and vindication.

7From Daniel's "Musophilus." Cited as part of the epigraph for chapter 68 of Middlemarch.
Vincy, his unconscious tempter. In his conversation with him, he faces the temptation unflinchingly, but with no arrogant or unwarranted self-confidence:

"I have said to myself, 'If there is a likelihood of that youngster doing himself harm, why should you interfere? . . . If there's a chance of his going to the dogs, let him--perhaps you could nohow hinder it--and do you take the benefit.' But I had once meant better than that, and I am come back to my old intention. I thought that I could hardly secure myself in it better, Fred, than by telling you just what had been going on in me. And now, do you understand me?" (ch. 66)

Fred does understand and is saved, and Mr. Farebrother's better self has gained a decisive victory over his lower self. But George Eliot's unsuccessful temptees are not privileged to hear him, and probably would pay no heed if they were. Though they struggle, they do not face their temptations squarely; they do not secure themselves by casting away the means of breaking their resolutions. However long and harrowing the battle, unlike Farebrother they succumb in the end.
Chapter 4

THE TEMPTEE AND HIS STRUGGLE: THE PATTERN OF FAILURE

Section 1: Arthur Donnithorne

Arthur Donnithorne is George Eliot's earliest full-length portrait of the temptee who fails to resist. Insofar as it is recorded, the actual war with his temptation is fought in three battles: the battle against meeting Hetty in the Wood for the first time (AB, ch. 12); the battle against meeting her again in the evening of the same day (ch. 13); and the battle to make a confidant of Mr. Irwine the following morning (ch. 16). Arthur loses all three, but not without a commendable struggle, a struggle that "foreshadows the inward suffering which is the worst form of Nemesis" (ch. 16). A relatively simple character, he affords a clear and memorable illustration of the interplay of forces that constitutes temptation. His moral conscience as revealed in thought and resultant action is the most fully developed of these forces, and will receive the greatest share of attention. But it cannot struggle in a vacuum, without the fuel of challenge. It must be aroused and kept under ceaseless pressure by the two counteracting forces in the aggregate of temptation, as analyzed in Chapter 1. Discussion of Arthur's case history as a temptee begins naturally with his desire and his opportunity.

The creation of an intense desire that must be resisted can be a complicated matter, as the portraits of Bulstrode and Gwendolen testify. It is the reverse of complicated in Arthur Donnithorne's case. He is a normal young man, just under twenty-one, exposed to the frequent sight (at church and at the Hall Farm) of "a distractingly pretty girl of seventeen" (AB, ch. 7), within the framework of a society that proscribes marriage between them, and at the same time regards
extra-marital relations between the sexes as one of the most heinous of sins. George Eliot's choice of setting and period rather suggest that she deliberately sought simplicity. Isolated physically and psychologically to an extent that would no longer have been possible in her own day, the village of Hayslope at the turn of the century (1799-1801) is enveloped in a morally homogeneous climate of opinion. Not a single voice is raised against the hierarchical structure of society, or against traditional attitudes to illicit sexual relations and the unmarried mother. Arthur agrees with Adam that he cannot possibly marry Hetty (cf. his letter to her, ch. 31), and Hetty herself never even attempts to defend herself on theoretic grounds. The seduction upsets a moral order that is accepted unquestioningly by all. Arthur's desire is so intense because it is all too natural, and it is evil because the society in which he lives, and whose moral views he himself shares, regards it as such.

A desire so natural and so intense requires little explanation and little reinforcement, and yet George Eliot takes pains to provide both. Hetty's physical beauty, vanity, and "narrow fantastic calculation of her own probable pleasures and pains" (ch. 31) are developed at length in chapters 7, 9, and 15, while Arthur is endowed with certain characteristics, and involved in certain circumstances, calculated to exacerbate his susceptibility. First introduced to him on his visit with Mr. Irwine at Broxton Parsonage (ch. 5), the reader is quickly made aware of Arthur's immaturity: an immaturity that his age renders plausible, but by no means inevitable. His plans for the Rector's mother at the approaching grand birthday feast (to celebrate his coming
of age) suggest that in some ways he is still the boy who long ago had thought of appointing Adam "grand-vizier" to a "rich sultan"--himself. It is not surprising that he "can hardly make head or tail" of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." We observe, too, that he feels thwarted and frustrated by his grandfather, the old Squire; that he welcomes pleasant diversions as an aid in killing time; and that a broken arm, which he is still obliged to carry in a sling, compels relative inactivity and thus increases his boredom and restlessness. By the time he rides away from the Hall Farm with Mr. Irwine (ch. 9, last few paragraphs), his infatuation with Hetty has already begun. Later (ch. 12, opening) we are shown another aspect of Arthur's immaturity: the conviction that external facts ought to adjust themselves to the convenience of a good fellow like himself. Foiled in his laudable plan to resist desire and opportunity by escape through a fishing trip, he reacts in a way that harmonizes fully with what we have learned of his character, and at the same time unveils the author's technique:

He considered himself thoroughly disappointed and annoyed. . . . It was vexatious . . . It seemed culpable in Providence to allow such a combination of circumstances. To be shut up at the Chase with a broken arm . . . shut up with his grandfather . . . And to be disgusted at every turn with the management of the house and the estate! In such circumstances a man necessarily gets in an ill humour, and works off the irritation by some excess or other. (AB, ch. 12)

George Eliot is fanning the flames of an evil desire, in preparation for an opportunity that she is arranging simultaneously and with equal skill.

As we have stated in Section 1, the object of attraction or repulsion is the most important part of both desire and opportunity.
Arthur's object of attraction is of course Hetty, whose physical beauty and (by implication) concomitant defects of character are stressed by the author, almost to the point of excess, in the first two-thirds of *Adam Bede*. Recent critics suspect and resent the obvious autobiographical motive, the "plain woman's mistrust of pink cheeks and perfect eyelashes." However this may be, George Eliot is unmistakably trying hard to inflame evil desire by rendering its object as alluring as possible. But that is not enough to meet the exigencies of temptation. The object must also be attainable. Ordinarily, in the world of Hayslope, the squire's grandson would see a dairy maid like Hetty only at Church and in her own home, where even the strongest desire could hardly lead him to do mischief. Moreover, the niece of respectable folk like the Pysers would probably resist an assault on her virtue by anyone in her own station of life. She is indignant at the bare suggestion (ch. 12) that Mr. Craig, the gardener, takes care of her when she walks through the Chase. But Arthur, in Hetty's view, belongs to a different order of beings. Her vanity and ignorance transform his wealth and social position into a free charter for amorous approaches. So far as we are informed, her moral abandonment is so absolute that one can scarcely speak of seduction, since seduction implies an initial resistance gradually conquered. She has no conscience, unless fear of shame and exposure can be called a conscience. The wishes of her whole

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2Simultaneously, and by the same technique, she is trying to account for Adam's infatuation.
being coincide completely with those of Arthur's baser self—the self that is in conflict with the better side of his divided temptee's nature. Hesitation and resistance emanate from Arthur, not from her; they are genuine, and might suffice to keep them apart (albeit by a narrow margin), if two additional factors—one negative and one positive—did not militate against self-denial.

The negative factor is Arthur's total ignorance that Adam loves Hetty and seeks to make her his wife. (Cf. "'Adam, it would never have happened if I'd known you loved her. That would have helped to save me from it" ch. 48.) The positive factor is revealed during his tete a tete with Hetty in the dairy (ch. 7). In addition to further manifesting his interest in her, and actually inviting her to go walking in the Chase, he elicits some important information. He recalls having seen her in Mrs. Best's, the housekeeper's, room, and Hetty now explains that she goes one afternoon a week to learn various kinds of needlework from Mrs. Pomfret, the lady's maid. The next occasion will be tomorrow (Thursday) afternoon, when she is going to have tea with Mrs. Pomfret. Thus the stage is already being set for the first battle of Arthur's war with his temptation. Desire and opportunity are aligned; it remains to be seen how Arthur's moral conscience will react against this formidable alliance. As he rides away from the Hall Farm with Mr. Irwine, the parson on his own initiative volunteers and proffers a hint that could be immensely valuable to Arthur at this stage:

"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 lovingly at me, the
struggle between arithmetic and inclination might become unpleasantly severe." \(\text{AB, ch. 9}\)

This hint is not rejected: it merely meets acceptance at a low level of comprehension, a level that in terms of practical efficacy is often no better than rejection. That is one of the tragedies of the human lot; it certainly proves to be Arthur's in the present instance.

Two of the three decisive battles in the war of Arthur's conscience against his own desire, backed by external opportunity, are fought and lost the very next day, Thursday, the day on which, as he has ascertained in the dairy (ch. 7), Hetty will twice be passing through the Chase: at about four in the afternoon, on her way to Mrs. Pomfret, and at about eight in the evening, on her way back home. There is no question of seduction at this stage. The seduction will occur later, at the Hermitage; it cannot be described in a Victorian novel, and even the exact time is left unspecified. The only evidence we have is Hetty's pregnancy and the "little pink silk neckerchief (or handkerchief)" that Arthur thrusts into the waste-paper basket in chapter 28 and takes out again at the very end of chapter 48. The point at issue on this crucial Thursday is simply whether he will renounce the opportunity of being alone with Hetty for the first time. He has certainly made no commitment to meet her, and yet he knows that she is expecting him. Viewed objectively, her expectation constitutes an added reason against fulfilling it. Although Arthur does not (and perhaps cannot) realize it effectively, his acts of gallantry at church and in the dairy (chapter 7, but also for some weeks prior to the opening of the novel) have already wrought considerable mischief:
Hetty had got a face and a presence haunting her waking and sleeping dreams; bright, soft glances had penetrated her, and suffused her life with a strange, happy languor . . . For three weeks, at least, her inward life had consisted of little else than living through in memory the looks and words Arthur had directed toward her. (ch. 9)

His absence from the Chase at those fateful hours (about 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.) on this Thursday would be the most convincing and the least painful way of telling Hetty that his previous attentions meant nothing, and that she would be foolish to give them any further thought.

Thursday opens auspiciously with two wise resolutions: Arthur will avoid Hetty completely that day, meeting her neither in the afternoon nor in the evening; it ends ignominiously with both resolutions broken, and with the genesis of a third—to make a confidant of Parson Irwine—which will promptly be broken the following morning. George Eliot presents the formation of this triple defeat with such uncanny insight, such recognizable truth to experience, that Arthur's inconsequent thoughts, hollow rationalizations, and frantic, futile movements seem to defy comprehension, just as they would in actual life. He turns each failure into a stepping stone to the next, and will not even acknowledge squarely to himself that a problem exists at all. No appreciable harm, he thinks, would be done if he did meet Hetty that day. His resolutions to avoid her are therefore implicit rather than explicit; he may break them without being acutely conscious of doing so. How can anyone expect to succeed in a difficult act of self-denial, when he is simultaneously persuading himself that it is really more or less unnecessary and superfluous? Locked in the mental prison that engendered his evil desire, Arthur is desperately seeking a path of
rescue or a guiding light within the walls, where none exists. As long as he stays there and the opportunity of fulfilment remains, nothing that he does or fails to do can prevent the steady intensification of his desire, until it ends in yielding and disaster, for no man's inner resistance is unlimited, and Arthur's is only average. Unperceived by him, salvation beckons outside the walls; but he is insufficiently aware of their existence, and still less of his inability to break through them without help from another human being: a human being who in this case is available and would be glad and competent to give it. One of the characteristics of involvement is inability to see clearly, realistically, and in perspective. I am reminded of two lines from one of Roy Daniells' sonnets:

And there's a causeway reaching out of sight,  
A straight road right to the Celestial City.  

His vision obstructed, Arthur cannot discern the "causeway," the "straight road": a human tragedy is clearly in the making.

Within his prison, Arthur can at first choose between total resistance and partial yielding; he tries both, one after the other, with predictable consequences. Temporarily thwarted in his plan to go fishing at Eagledale, and totally unaware that he cannot escape from himself by physical movement, he decides to "have a gallop on Rattler to Norburne this morning, and lunch with Gawaine" (ch. 12). This plan is carried out, but serves no purpose whatever. Instead of staying and chatting with Gawaine long enough to ensure that Hetty shall have

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3 Deeper into the Forest (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), p. 22.
reached the housekeeper's room and be safe out of sight before he returns, as he had tacitly promised himself, he comes galloping back in great haste at three, from fear that he might miss her. George Eliot here interjects one of her pungent comments:

I believe there have been men since his day who have ridden a long way to avoid a rencontre, and then galloped hastily back lest they should miss it. It is the favourite stratagem of our passions to sham a retreat, and to turn sharp round upon us at the moment we have made up our minds that the day is our own. (ch. 12)

Not being a callous man, Arthur is now faced with a problem that most of us manage to solve with remarkable ingenuity: the problem of justifying ourselves to ourselves. Arthur proves no exception. The desire to meet Hetty, he tells himself, is basically a "trivial fancy," inflated by his own foolish resistance this morning and by Mr. Irwine's ill-judged and unasked-for advice as they were riding away from Mrs. Poyser's diary. The only sensible thing to do is to see her this afternoon and break the spell. But he is not actually planning to see her. Their meeting, if it occurs, will be incidental. His real purpose in going to the Hermitage is to finish reading a novel--Dr. Moore's Zeluco. 4

The Hermitage is ideal for lolling on such an enervating afternoon as this. Why should he not go there? Arthur would hardly recognize himself as the same person who only twenty-four hours earlier had left the Hall Farm in the Rector's company. And yet his mental processes

are quite understandable and elicit the reader's sympathy. Having found that resistance aggravates his desire instead of bringing the gradual release he had hoped for, he naturally concludes that the only alternative course of action he can envisage must produce the opposite effect. It is hard for any human being to regard defeat as inevitable, and harder still to realize effectively that a sufficient widening of his mental horizon would enable him to transcend the problem that now appears insoluble.

As almost anyone might have predicted, the first meeting with Hetty in the Wood does nothing to assuage Arthur's craving; on the contrary, it whets his appetite for more meetings and greater intimacy. No third course of action is possible within his present confines: he had tried resistance and found that it fails; he has tried partial yielding and found that it fails at least equally. Surely now, one would think, he will become aware of the mental walls that impede his vision and of his need for help in breaking through them. But he does not. The first meeting with Hetty is exerting its negative influence, both in fomenting Arthur's mental and emotional confusion, and in providing a new rationalization. Having lost his first battle when he met Hetty in the afternoon, he is now assiduously preparing for defeat in the second by persuading himself that another meeting with her has become a duty. Despite his experience to date, he is about to repeat all the mistakes he made in the morning. Again he fails to take anyone into his confidence; again he trusts to his own judgment in a state of disturbance and infatuation; again he imagines that he can rely on his self-mastery, that he can trust in his own resolutions, without casting away the means
of breaking them. Sitting in the Hermitage between his first meeting with Hetty and dinner-time (ch. 12, concluding part), he begins his ruminations with a flash of insight and the wise resolution that he will not meet Hetty again. Then he repeats the cardinal blunder of believing that he will be able to persist in his resolution, and proceeds to reward himself beforehand by indulging in mental images of the meeting which he has heroically renounced. Maintained long enough, these indulgences lead him to the conclusion that he must see Hetty once more—for her own sake, not for his. Striking a judicious balance between offensive coldness and amorous advances, he will try to annul the false impression that he has unwittingly created in her mind; failure to make this attempt would amount to wanton cruelty. Thus the question no longer is whether he will hold aloof from Hetty this evening, but merely whether he will succeed in bearing himself "in a quiet, kind way" (ch. 12, near end of penultimate paragraph). Arthur has lowered his sights a long way since the morning of the same day.

Arthur's second meeting with Hetty (ch. 13) constitutes a double defeat: its occurrence as such violates the resolutions he made in the morning; its outcome impugns his directly preceding rationalizations. Their intimacy having advanced to the kissing stage, he can no longer save her from suffering, but he can still refrain from ruining her life. What she will endure if he now leaves her alone is as nothing when compared with her ultimate ordeal. Arthur is at last becoming aware of the mental walls that obstruct his vision, of the disaster that must ensue if he stays within them, and of his inability to break through unaided. But awareness functions on different
levels, distinguished by degrees of intensity, and his ranks just a shade too low: sitting on the borderline of effectiveness, it is easily influenced by small solicitations of circumstance, whether favourable or unfavourable. A slight shift in the kaleidoscope of events can spell the difference between deliverance and calamity. Parson Irwine's reflections after the tragedy are directly to the point, except that he might justly blame himself a little more:

It was plain enough now what Arthur had wanted to confess. And if their words had taken another turn... if he himself had been less fastidious about intruding on another man's secrets... it was cruel to think how thin a film had shut out rescue from all this guilt and misery. (AB, ch. 39; George Eliot's ellipses.)

Arthur, of course, is not favoured with the light of hindsight. Following his second meeting with Hetty on Thursday evening, he realizes in a limited way that he cannot trust his own resolutions and that he may find himself in an unspeakable position if he continues as he has done today. Perhaps, deep down in his heart, he does not really believe that such a fate could ever befall him--him of all people, a lucky, well-meaning, good-natured fellow like him. Still, he makes a decision that is wise and fills one with hope. Tomorrow morning, as soon as he has had his breakfast, he will ride to Broxton Rectory and confess his whole love problem to Mr. Irwine. "The mere act of telling it would make it seem trivial; the temptation would vanish..." (ch. 13, penultimate paragraph). It seems a reasonable expectation. Having lost his first two battles, Arthur may still be saved by this plan for the following morning (Friday). Unfortunately, however, he does not envisage another battle. Failing to anticipate any difficulties or hindrances, he finds
himself completely unprepared when they arise. His experience to
date has not appreciably affected the easy optimism that is apt to
beguile him. Will the "act of telling" be easy when he is actually
sitting face to face with the Rector? If he does get through the act,
will it necessarily make the whole affair seem trivial? Do temptations
really vanish so easily? Arthur does not ask himself these questions;
if he did, his chances of victory would be higher. The last nine words
of chapter 13--"there was no more need for him to think"--are fraught with
dramatic irony, foreshadow his third and final defeat, and draw
attention to one of its major causes. Throughout the whole of his
involvement with Hetty, Arthur does not think enough.

The next morning, Friday, Arthur goes through the motions.
Beginning even better than he had intended, he rides to Broxton
before breakfast instead of after it, and is soon seated with Mr. Irwine
at a heavily laden table (ch. 16). The stage-setting that he had
envisaged has been realized; now is his chance to fulfill the good
resolutions of the preceding night. But once again he fails, because
all the paraphernalia of his plan, however meticulously carried out,
are rendered meaningless by omission of the one essential element--
communication of his love problem to the Parson. Although subtly hidden
in the general scene and dialogue, the mental processes that impede
Arthur from making this crucial confession may (at some loss, necessarily)
be isolated and briefly listed: Reluctance to admit his weakness from
fear of forfeiting Mr. Irwine's good opinion and respect; vague and
unrealistic trust that the turn of the conversation will do his work
for him painlessly and almost automatically; delusion that his problem
is not really serious, since the Rector (whom he keeps in ignorance) does not confirm its seriousness; ⁵ doubt whether Mr. Irwine can do anything that he cannot do for himself; mistaken belief that revival of his plan to keep out of harm's way by a fishing-trip to Eagledale makes confession unnecessary; sudden mental withdrawal or shrinking back when Mr. Irwine commits the tactical error of forcing him to the brink with an abrupt, direct, and personal question; fear that the general moral discussion he himself has initiated will make subsequent confession appear far more serious than (in his view at that moment) it really is; lastly, and perhaps most important of all, there is the "backstairs influence," as George Eliot aptly calls it (ch. 16). Does Arthur really want to stay away from Hetty? Meeting her again may become much more difficult after a confession to Mr. Irwine. Half consciously and half unconsciously he has engineered the failure of his own excellent plan, the plan that could so easily have saved himself and others from hideous suffering. The interview with Mr. Irwine has proved fruitless, leaving the walls of Arthur's mental prison unshaken and unbroken. George Eliot remarks:

The opportunity was gone. While Arthur was hesitating, the rope to which he might have clung had drifted away—he must trust now to his own swimming. (ch. 16, penultimate paragraph.)

In practice this means that Arthur is now, necessarily, reverting to his frantic and futile search for a path of rescue within the walls, where

⁵"It was not, after all, a thing to make a fuss about." Heavily dependent on other people's opinion, Arthur can see himself only as they see him.
none exists, where anything that he does or refrains from doing will stimulate the growth of his desire until it proves too much for his powers of resistance. Disaster has become a near-certainty.

Revival of Arthur's faith in escape from himself by physical movement is the first symptom that the interview with Mr. Irwine has failed. His mental state—the state that makes calamity inevitable—remains virtually unaltered. On leaving the Rectory, he decides to start immediately on his fishing-trip to Eagledale (ch. 16, last paragraph), and apparently he does go there, for he is absent from the church service on the following Sunday, and Mr. Craig, the gardener, tells Adam that that is the reason (ch. 18). But it means as little as his earlier moves meant. His thoughts while engaged in fishing are not described, but may easily be surmised. Mr. Craig says that Arthur will be back again before long, for he has to supervise the great preparations for his coming-of-age party on July 30. We do not know the precise time when the actual seduction takes place, but in all probability before that date. By the day of the feast he has already given Hetty an expensive pair of earrings and a locket with his hair, and the briefly described scene that led to the giving of the earrings (ch. 22) suggests great intimacy. At the dance on the same festive day he whispers to her: "'I shall be in the wood the day after to-morrow at seven; come as early as you can!'" (ch. 26). We learn later that nemesis is already beginning for him at this time: "'Not that Arthur had been at ease before Adam's discovery. Struggles and resolves had transformed themselves into compunction and anxiety'" (ch. 29). His lies when Adam sees him with Hetty in the Grove (ch. 27) accentuate the evil, but they are in a sense well-meant for Hetty's protection—"'I thought
it was forced upon me; I thought it was the best thing I could do"
(ch. 48)--and they come to his lips like the blinking of a menaced eye, without premeditation.

Commenting on Arthur, Jerome Thale remarks: "This is of course the question, whether the fear of giving pain and the desire to be admired will produce virtue." 6 And he answers, "only as long as the conscience is clear; otherwise they are useless and pernicious." 7 His approach to Adam Bede is, I believe, in harmony with the author's intention. Without depreciating the appeal of the pastoral setting, he sees the novel as primarily an incisive scrutiny of "the basis of conduct." 8


7Ibid., p. 24.

8The words in quotation marks form the title of his chapter on Adam Bede.
Section 2: Nicholas Bulstrode

Bulstrode ranks among George Eliot's greatest temptees. All three elements of the aggregate of temptation—evil desire, opportunity, and moral conscience—are fully developed in his case and interact in a way that compels the reader's conviction. Yet one of the three outranks the other two as an outstanding achievement: the graphic presentation in all its twists and turns of Bulstrode's diseased and involuted moral conscience. Once we have admitted that Raffles, though made plausible for the moment, exists primarily for the purpose of resurrecting the temptee's evil past in the present, and is of little intrinsic interest, we have exhausted all that can be entered on the negative side of the ledger. A comment like Gerald Bullett's "the unmasking of the evangelical Mr. Bulstrode (this last a crudely conceived and mechanically contrived sequence) . . . ,"9 is surely perverse in that, though verbally defensible, it misses nine-tenths of the essentials.

Bulstrode's potentially evil desire originates in a shady past that is gradually revealed to the reader, and particularly (through his own retrospect) in chapter 61 of Middlemarch. The mental processes by which he justifies the successive steps of this past betray an enormously egocentric person, who sees himself as the hub of the universe; looking upon every convenient event in his life as a "leading" that proves him

to be directed by a remarkable and personal Providence, he concludes that he has been singled out as a special instrument in the service of God. George Eliot's famous parable of "the scratches [that] will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round . . . a centre of illumination" (M, ch. 27, opening) fits Bulstrode's egoism even more squarely than it does Rosamond's. Rules of conduct that bind other men may be flouted by him when such behaviour enhances the glory of God, he himself of course being the judge of this issue. Indeed he comes close to having a partnership with God, and virtually bargains with Him when he tries to stay the rod by offering to compensate Ladislaw for having defrauded his mother out of her due inheritance (ch. 61). Grossly deficient in human sympathy, he sees himself living under the special dispensation of a God who conveniently winks or looks the other way whenever the conduct of His "instrument" might otherwise embarrass Him. Bernard J. Paris believes that Bulstrode "perfectly exemplif[ies] Feuerbach's description of the religious habit of mind,"10 and George Eliot herself, who had translated Feuerbach, remarks: "There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men" (M, ch. 61).

For decades Bulstrode has imposed himself on Middlemarch as an exceptionally pious and philanthropic person. Since no one else, obviously, will believe that he has been granted a special dispensation, his peace of mind, his well-being, his happiness depend upon the past remaining a secret between himself and God. Both his self-respect and

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his view of God's attitude toward him rest on the good opinion and high esteem of his fellow-men—the very men, ironically, whom he regards as nonentities in the divine scheme. "The loss of high consideration from his wife as from everyone else who did not clearly hate him out of enmity to the truth, would be as the beginning of death to him" (ch. 61). This being his posture, the threat of certain disclosures, combined with the possibility of averting it by base conduct, will almost inevitably constitute a temptation. As George Eliot remarks in another novel, "The contaminating effect of deeds often lies less in the commission than in the consequent adjustment of our desires—the enlistment of our self-interest on the side of falsity" (R, ch. 9). His conduct in such a situation, should it arise, seems virtually predetermined by the train of thought that served to justify the misdeeds he is anxious to conceal. Trying to entangle Bulstrode in the relation of forces called temptation, George Eliot naturally begins with the transformation of latent or potential evil desire into virulently active evil desire; her way, as might be expected, is the creation of an imminent threat to the veil of secrecy that Bulstrode's psyche requires, almost as much as his body requires food and sleep.

Bulstrode's evil past is precipitated into the present through the agency of his former tool and accomplice, John Raffles, a selfish, light-minded, drunken blackguard, who on any scale of human values must certainly rank a long way below his former employer. Applying one of George Eliot's favourite tests, one may assert that Bulstrode does believe in something other than his own greed, whereas Raffles does not. First

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{Cf. "But a man who believes in something else than his own greed, has necessarily a conscience or standard to which he more or less adapts himself." (M, ch. 61)}\]
attracted to Middlemarch through an ingenious bit of plot contrivance—Joshua Rigg (Featherstone), who has inherited Stone Court from his natural father, old Peter Featherstone, is his stepson—Raffles soon forces himself on Bulstrode and blackmails him mercilessly. Indeed he plays a regular cat-and-mouse game with his victim, for the multiplicity of vices with which George Eliot endows him comprises a "delight in tormenting" (ch. 53). Bulstrode suffers excruciatingly, not only from the constant menace of exposure, shame, and humiliation, but also from his old accomplice's derisive parroting of religious views that (on a theoretical level) he holds with sincerity. Raffles manages to find some of the most sensitive spots. For example, he never tires of insisting sarcastically that he was sent to Bulstrode by Providence, perhaps as a blessing to both. Given this state of affairs, Bulstrode must inevitably wish that his tormentor would cease to exist, for he knows that no other contingency will put an end to his ordeal. His numerous and liberal payments to Raffles are not only the means of buying a temporary respite and a temporary silence; on the last recorded occasion, when the blackmailer is given yet another hundred pounds, the gift or bribe is accompanied by the reflection in the banker's mind "that the man had been much shattered since the first gift of two hundred pounds" (ch. 68).

Evil desire has already begun to change from its latent or potential state to a virulent, active drive. Meanwhile Bulstrode's moral conscience, representing the better part of a self even more drastically divided than that of most temptees, remains viable and alert. Nevertheless, it is in itself seriously flawed, as we have seen earlier in this Section; and to that extent it is weakened in
its power to oppose the lower part, represented by evil desire. Completion of the aggregate of temptation now calls for the introduction of an opportunity adapted to both parts of the temptee's self: it must entice evil desire and simultaneously seek to undermine the opposing moral conscience. In the present case, the first aim is attained by making fulfillment appear not only easily possible, but also legally safe; the second, by discerning the flaws in the moral conscience itself, and exploiting them through rationalizations carefully devised for the purpose and seductively insinuated. The introduction of this opportunity marks the beginning of Bulstrode's great battle with his temptation—the battle that after a prolonged and rather valiant struggle he loses, thereby adding the crime of virtual murder to his earlier misdeeds.

Seriously ill, Raffles has returned to Middlemarch and been taken to Stone Court (now owned by Bulstrode, but not his usual residence) in Caleb Garth's gig (ch. 69). Garth then informs the banker of what he has done, and at the same time severs all further relations with him (he had recently assumed employment as manager of the land connected with Stone Court), admitting that certain disclosures made by the sick man compel him to this decision. Bulstrode feels deeply mortified, and yet characteristically sees an earnest of heavenly protection in two fortuitous chances. First, so far as he knows, the secret has been betrayed to no one but honest Caleb Garth, who now allays one of his fears with a solemn assurance: "'I hold it a crime to expose a man's sin unless I am clear it must be done to save the innocent'" (ch. 69). Secondly, Raffles lies at Stone Court, where Bulstrode can keep personal watch over him and prevent communication with anyone else, even Mr. and Mrs. Abel, the house-
keeper couple. People might draw dangerous inferences from the patient's semi-coherent muttering.

The temptee's satisfaction in these two coincidences bodes ill for the outcome of the impending struggle: it reveals that, blinded by the hope of maintaining absolute secrecy, he fails to recognize the primary peril that confronts him. In the circumstances that have now arisen, his inescapable desire for Raffles' death surely constitutes a threat appalling enough to overshadow the risk of possible disclosures. But Bulstrode does no more than barely perceive his chief peril as a quite secondary danger. His thoughts cannot escape from the fixed, narrow, and ring-shaped groove in which they have been going round and round, in endless circles, for decades. Once he has arranged everything with a view to the greatest protection for himself from what he quite mistakenly regards as the primary danger—that is, from disclosures by the patient—he does "set himself to keep his intention separate from his desire. He inwardly declared that he intended to obey [the doctor's] orders" (ch. 70). In the face of his extreme liability to the commission of an abhorrent crime, that is his closest approach to a vow of righteousness. As for securing himself by casting aside the means of breaking this half-hearted vow, no thought of the kind enters his head—unless, indeed, its opposite be regarded as a relative. Far from confiding in anyone, he does not even take the elementary precaution of entrusting the patient exclusively to Lydgate's care and directions (as regards nurses or hospitalization, for example), while himself keeping out of harm's way by avoiding all contact with the patient. Preoccupied with the reverse of what ought to be his primary anxiety, he makes no more than a bow in the right direction,
while carefully preserving and even cultivating the means of transgressing his half-hearted resolution. Some of the temptees take their vows more seriously than Bulstrode does, and come much closer than he to severing their own lines of retreat. Nevertheless, they are defeated in the end, for (consciously or unconsciously) they have left a path of retreat, however narrow; in consequence, they are forced to rely on their own vision, strength, and guidance at the very moment—the peak of moral crisis—when these are most likely to fail them. It is no wonder, then, that Bulstrode will share their fate.

George Eliot introduces an element of irony into Bulstrode's struggle—an element that on a first reading of the novel cannot be perceived at the point where it operates chronologically, and may easily be missed on a second or even later reading. I have not seen it recognized by any of the published critics. Yet there is no ambiguity; the simple facts of the novel demand this conclusion. The temptee is not merely losing his battle; he is fighting one that serves no purpose at all and is indeed contrary to his own interest, however defined. Were he aware of the facts, he would realize that no disclosures on Raffles' part can at this stage add anything to the impending disaster; nor could the disaster be averted by Raffles' death in a public hospital and in the most unexceptionable circumstances. Perhaps misled, in part, by the lifelong habit of seeing himself as a special pet of Providence, Bulstrode is much too sanguine in the assumption that Garth alone knows his secret. While staying at Bilkley and before returning to Middlemarch, Raffles told the whole story to Mr. Bambridge, "a horse-dealer of the neighbourhood," whom we first meet at the beginning of chapter 23, where we are
told that his "company was much sought in Middlemarch by young men under­stood to be 'addicted to pleasure.'" His evil influence on one of these— Fred Vincy—especially in the light of its later contrast with Mary's influence, her father's, and Mr. Farebrother's, gives us some measure of the horse-dealer's character. It is Bambridge and Bambridge alone who repeats Raffles' scandal to the town at large (ch. 71, near opening), nor was there ever any chance that a man of his stamp would act otherwise in the circumstances. Though he does not and cannot then know it, Bulstrode is doomed even before Raffles delivers "his minute terror­stricken narrative to Caleb Garth" (ch. 69). Caleb, we recall, feels bound to guard the secret even from his trustworthy wife. But of course one can scarcely conceive a wider gulf between two characters than that which divides Mr. Bambridge from Mr. Garth. The diametrically opposite reactions of these two men under a common stimulus constitute a minor and yet memorable instance of the many mutually illuminating contrasts in which Middlemarch abounds. However interesting, the author's motive in this arrangement of the plot must remain conjectural. Her scheme requires, of course, that Bulstrode be exposed in the end, but she was not bound to render his battle with temptation futile beforehand. Disclosure might have come at a much later point, for example during the night when Raffles is left in Mrs. Abel's hands. Possibly George Eliot wished to point or to imply the moral that conduct based on calculations of self-interest tends to be self-defeating, since no man can know objectively where his interest lies; he had better ask himself what, in any specific situation, constitutes kindness, honesty, and helpfulness:
the answer forms part of what it is given him to know.12

Sent for by the banker, Dr. Lydgate soon arrives at Stone Court and examines Raffles, reaching the conclusion that recovery appears probable (ch. 69). Communicating only with Bulstrode, who has expressed his intention of remaining at Stone Court and personally taking care of the patient, he issues a number of medical directives, with special emphasis on the refusal of alcoholic beverages of any kind, no matter how insistently they may be demanded. Then he departs, promising to return the next morning, and the temptee is left alone with his tormentor, except for Mr. and Mrs. Abel, who help in a purely mechanical way, being ignorant of the doctor's instructions. His determination to keep them uninformed, needless even when the basic urge to prevent disclosures is accepted, certainly suggests the operation, so early in the battle, of a dangerous "backstairs influence" (AB, ch. 16). Examining Raffles' pockets—a degrading act—Bulstrode finds some comfort in the evidence (interpreted, with unconscious irony, as yet another sign of providential favour) that the blackmailer returned to town only this day, his nearest stopping place elsewhere having been Bilkley, some forty miles from Middlemarch—a sizable distance in those days (ch. 70, opening). The banker's future as a man of prominence and evangelical influence in Middlemarch has not, apparently, been ruined; it simply remains endangered.

12 Godfrey Cass's experience is similar to Bulstrode's in this respect. Having kept his fatherhood of Eppie a secret for fifteen years, he discovers that Nancy, his second wife, would have been glad to adopt her. "Do you think I'd have refused to take her in, if I'd known she was yours?!" "At that moment Godfrey felt all the bitterness of an error [i.e. his sin in failing to acknowledge Eppie] that was not simply futile, but had defeated its own end." (SM, ch. 18)
The path of self-interest thus seems perfectly clear: while Raffles continues sick, he must be prevented from making compromising disclosures to anyone, whether intentionally or through semi-coherent muttering; when he recovers (as Lydgate is expecting), why then . . . God's will be done, but it would be most convenient for His faithful instrument if it were God's will that Raffles should not recover. "What was the removal of this wretched creature?" (ch. 70) An intimation or "leading" to that effect may be forthcoming and must not be missed. Meanwhile Bulstrode watches by the patient through the night and the following morning, abiding strictly by the doctor's directions. What he fails to realize is that mental indulgence in his evil wish for the patient's death steadily reduces the margin by which he outwardly continues to do what is right, or abstains from doing what would be wrong. Lydgate's return at noon--later than scheduled--concludes the first stage of the temptee's battle. He has not lost it; yet the auguries for success in the second and final stage are unpropitious.

Pathetically ignorant of what is already pre-determined, and increasingly obsessed with the delusion that burial of Raffles would mean burial of the threatening past, Bulstrode opens the second stage of the battle by taking out an insurance against possible moral defeat (ch. 70). Offering the thousand pounds he had coldly refused on the previous day, he tries to win an ally by conferring a momentous benefit on Lydgate, entangled in dire financial straits. He does not, of course, analyze his own motives, but certainly the old habit of seeking and finding convenient "providential leadings" must make him alive to the possibility that another may be in the offing to extricate him from his
present predicament. Since some people or society in general might fail to recognize the validity (let alone sanctity) of such "leadings," he would be taking a wise precaution in binding the medical man to himself by a bond that--it proves all too true--can never be completely unravelled. "He did not measure the quantity of diseased motive which had made him wish for Lydgate's goodwill, but the quantity was none the less actively there, like an irritating agent in his blood" (ch. 70). Being a supreme egoist, he does not even think of possibly disastrous consequences for the doctor and the doctor's career. Characteristically, Bulstrode sees Lydgate, as he does nearly all others with whom he comes in contact, in the light of a convenience created primarily for his own sake.

Decades before, when cheating Sarah Dunkirk (Ladislaw's future mother) out of her due inheritance, Bulstrode asked himself, "Could it be for God's service that this fortune should in any considerable proportion go to a young woman and her husband who were given up to the lightest pursuits . . . ?" (ch. 61) A corresponding train of thought now leads him to conclude (since he is an authority on the subject) that the prolongation of a life so dissolute as Raffles' cannot possibly tend to the glory of God. Nevertheless, he carefully listens to and absorbs the doctor's latest instructions, which are to avoid (as before) giving the patient any kind of alcoholic beverage, and to administer extremely small doses of opium if sleeplessness persists. Lydgate specifies the exact point at which these doses must cease (whatever the state of the patient), and emphatically warns against the danger of their not ceasing. Following the doctor's departure, Bulstrode again finds himself alone
with the sick man, who undoubtedly, if he recovers, will resume the role of tormentor and blackmailer. (We have to remind ourselves that Bulstrode does not know the facts; if he did, he would realize that Raffles has already done his worst and is no longer in a position to blackmail him.) Mr. and Mrs. Abel continue to help in only menial ways, being deliberately kept as ignorant of the doctor's second set of instructions as of the first. This last fact combines with the sudden financial generosity to Lydgate as a revelation of the temptee's psyche on this afternoon of the second day. It seems clear that Bulstrode is exceeding the unsuccessful temptee's usual failure to cast away the means of breaking his vow. Though not acknowledging (even to himself) that he intends to break it, he is yet actively preparing for the contingency that he may.

The scene at Stone Court during the second stage of Bulstrode's battle (still ch. 70) certainly constitutes one of the most unalloyed and most arresting instances of the aggregate of temptation as George Eliot conceives it. Evil desire is approaching its peak of intensity: "imperious will stirred murderous impulses towards this brute life . . ."; the opportunity of indulging the evil desire entails little fear of legal consequences (especially since the loan to Lydgate) and hence appears all the more spell-binding and seductive; the temptee's better self—his moral conscience—faces steadily increasing odds in the tussle against this mighty alliance of opportunity with evil desire—his own lowest self. Moreover, intellectual equivocation has been a lifetime habit with Bulstrode; in a very real sense he has for decades been lying to himself (while scrupulously shrinking from a direct factual lie to others),
and in proportion as he has come to believe in the truth of his own lies, he has blurred awareness of ethical distinctions between his several selves—even between the lowest and the highest. A perverted sense of values certainly ranks among his most serious handicaps in the present crisis. The outcome of the battle is still in balance, but certain collateral trends and developments now begin to make their weight felt, all uniting in the single effect of steadily militating against the temptee's chance of victory. Afraid to take anyone into his confidence, determined to retain the means of breaking his vow, he depends solely on inward colloquy, on self-guidance (which in a crisis often means little more than random impulse); and these, taking their cue from speciously misleading outer circumstances (that is, from an opportunity carefully adapted to the flaws or weakest spots in the temptee's moral conscience) are propelling him relentlessly toward surrender.

The most potent of the collateral influences, probably, is the new force that belongs to a final opportunity. Raffles may soon fall into curative sleep and wake the next morning in a state close to convalescence. Resolution meets its ultimate and most trying test at the last moment: at the moment that will make it irrevocable. That moment may be fast approaching for Bulstrode. Then again, there is his physical state and its normal psychological consequences. By the evening of the second day he has gone without sleep for some twenty-four hours and borne a heavy load of virtually unrelieved anxiety. A man of sixty seldom in better than tolerable health, he is naturally tired, weary, near exhaustion. Although morale and morals are two quite different concepts, there is this connection between them that a low state of
morale accentuates the difficulty of adhering to a high standard of morals, for such adherence requires inner resistance, and that does in some degree fluctuate with changes in the level of morale. Bulstrode is in all probability stating the simple truth when he tells Mrs. Abel in the evening that he has reached the end of his tether, and must confide the patient to her care. He informs her of Lydgate's instructions, especially in regard to the opium (including size of each dose and frequency), which he himself has already begun to administer in accordance with the prescription, since Raffles continues sleepless and restless. Alcoholic beverages are not mentioned; they have so far been strictly kept out of the sick-room. Albeit by a rapidly dwindling margin, Bulstrode is still keeping his hands pure at this late stage in the battle. Having instructed Mrs. Abel, he goes downstairs and sits by the fire, weary almost to the point of paralysis and yet continuing to nurse his conflict.

Drawing on one of the centers of strength in her manifold talent, George Eliot now contrives, quite plausibly, the unique congruity (whether positive or negative) of inner state and outer circumstance that in a precariously balanced moral crisis finally spells the difference between victory and defeat. Seated wearily in the parlour and racked by conflicting impulses, Bulstrode suddenly remembers that he has forgotten to tell Mrs. Abel when the doses of opium must cease. The author probably wants her readers to accept this as an honest error of omission. If there is room for doubt, it is such doubt as in parallel circumstances occurs in actual life. In any case, no appreciable harm can have been done as yet; Bulstrode's absence from the sick-room has been too short.
He need only go upstairs—now, immediately—and add this crucial item of information to the other instructions he has left with the housekeeper. But he does not. At a moment when his duty shines by its own clear light, when delay may result in the death of another human being, he hesitates and procrastinates; then goes upstairs, listens outside the door of the sick-room, and finally turns into his own bed-chamber, without even seeing Mrs. Abel again and without saying a single word to her. For the first time since the beginning of the battle he has put himself unequivocally in the wrong. Why does he now, at one stroke, annul the strenuous and genuine efforts over himself he has made ever since Raffles, seriously ill, arrived at Stone Court in Caleb Garth's gig? A single error of omission, probably near-innocent initially and easily remedied, has proved the precipitating agent that turns a precarious moral balance into glaring moral defeat.

Often accused of over-explaining her characters, George Eliot does nothing of the kind in the closing phase of this temptee's battle. As Barbara Hardy remarks in her comment on "The Author's Voice" in relation to Bulstrode: "... the convention of omniscience [is] suspended. The voice is as expressive in its absence as in its presence."¹³ The temptee's consciousness is becoming blurred and intermittent, and his creator depends on our imaginative participation to see clearly where Bulstrode sees dimly, and to bridge the gaps in his consciousness. She is in effect asking us to immerse ourselves in the predicament and mentality of this temptee.

The interpretative comments which follow have no claim to being regarded as anything more than an attempt in this direction on the part of one reader—myself.

Bulstrode hesitates as soon as he grows aware of his error of forgetfulness; and hesitation, in the circumstances, is relentlessly transforming an error of forgetfulness into a crime of deliberate omission. Thus he is caught in a vicious and recognizable circle: the longer he hesitates, the greater his incentive for continuing to hesitate, since his guilt is steadily mounting. When doing nothing at all will probably keep him safe, can he reasonably be expected to court the risk of exposure to suspicion? It is his initial hesitation that starts the ball of mischief rolling; and yet this initial hesitation is so easily accounted for as to appear all but inevitable. A man whose desires accord with normal standards would not have been afraid to acknowledge and to rectify an honest error of omission, especially when it is not yet likely to have resulted in any harm. On the contrary, he would have hastened to forestall evil consequences or to keep them to a minimum. But Bulstrode, unlike his nephew Fred Vincy, never outgrows "... the notion that the highest motive for not doing a wrong is something irrespective of the beings who would suffer the wrong" (M, ch. 24).

His deficiencies in human sympathy combine with his egocentric religious fantasies to keep him locked in the lowest of "the three stages of moral development" that Bernard J. Paris recognizes in George Eliot's novels. The characteristics of this stage are that the self relate[s] to the world egoistically (or subjectively), in which case the distinction between the inward and the outward is obscured; self is seen as the center of the world and the world
as an extension of self. . . . The egoist tends to assume that the order of things corresponds to the desires of the mind; . . . 14

Bulstrode can have no faith that others will believe in the honesty of an error of forgetfulness whose results promote the fulfillment of evil desires he has been nursing for some twenty hours. He has now indulged sinful wishes for so long that in his present wearied condition he is no longer able to distinguish clearly between wishing evil and doing evil. As soon as he grows conscious of a flaw in his conduct, he sees his evil wish outside himself, as Gwendolen does in another novel when she watches Grandcourt drowning: "I . . . I know nothing--I only know that I saw my wish outside me!" (DD, ch. 56). Thus he is misled into assuming, prematurely, that the game is up; that wishing and doing have become identical. Like Gwendolen, he derives no comfort from that vision; yet it exerts great influence in that it predisposes him to keeping the road whose successive milestones may be labelled indulgence in evil wishes, error of omission, awareness of error of omission, initial hesitation, prolonged hesitation, crime of omission, and finally crime of commission amounting to near-murder.

Abstention from acting (whether for good or evil) is generally easier than acting; certainly it does not demand an equally intense state of consciousness. Bulstrode would at this point find it very difficult to make a deliberate decision leading to an overt act; inactivity requires none: it only requires that indecision continue. He is not yet lured into doing anything that he knows to be wrong; he is only induced to refrain from doing something that he knows to be right; and because of

14 Experiments in Life, pp. 128-129
his confused and overtired mental state, even that awareness is dimmed and lacks the absolute clarity warranted in the circumstances. By dint of incessantly looking at and self-debating the same subject, we lose vision, perspective, healthy common sense. Something of the sort has happened to Bulstrode. Though he apprehends what he ought to do about the opium, he apprehends it at a relatively low level of consciousness. Hence he is particularly susceptible to the temptation of allowing events to take their course. If he sits back doing nothing long enough, if he goes to bed and lets things slide, he can reasonably expect fulfillment of his wish—whether self-acknowledged or not, and as virulent as it is evil—for Raffles' death.

Bulstrode is encouraged in this attitude by his awareness that Lydgate in the light of the times (around 1831-32) is a medical reformer, perhaps even a medical radical. Without the least intimation of an evil motive, he has told Bulstrode in so many words that the almost unrestricted allowance of alcoholic beverages (especially brandy) and of doses of opium much larger than he prescribes would be standard procedure in the general medical practice accepted and followed by all his colleagues in Middlemarch. He has also expressed the view (in the banker's hearing) that patients suffering from Raffles' kind of ailment are more often killed by the treatment than by the disease (ch. 69). Though Bulstrode has in the past consistently supported Lydgate in controversies over medical innovation, he now finds it expedient to ask himself whether it seems likely that the new doctor alone is right, while all the others are mistaken. If it be true that patients of Raffles' kind are more often killed by the treatment than by the disease, perhaps Lydgate's own treatment constitutes a case in
point. After all, he is fallible, as are all other doctors. Since the moans and murmurs emanating from the sick-room prove that Raffles is still not asleep, it may be advisable—i.e., in the patient's own best interest—to continue indefinitely giving him doses of opium, regardless of what the fallible Lydgate had said to the contrary. This is the kind of apposite, felicitous rationalization that George Eliot excels in devising for her temptees. Why should Bulstrode attempt to reverse or even to check the consequences of his error of forgetfulness, when there is the possibility that they may be good for the patient? Thus rationalization confirms him in his hesitation, and hesitation in the circumstances amounts to a virtually deliberate and certainly heinous crime of omission.

How far Bulstrode himself recognizes this train of thought as a rationalization, we cannot tell with precision, but we do have evidence for concluding that he does so in only a very limited sense. He has always equated the truth with what he wanted to believe, and now exhaustion and the pressure of crisis are aggravating the effect of this habit. Whatever the degree of his awareness, the rationalization has induced him to prolong hesitation until, in the circumstances, it culminates in a major crime of omission. This crime marks the penultimate milestone on the temptee's path of regression. A crime it is, whatever the outcome, but the opium in excess of the allowance does not necessarily suffice by itself to cause Raffles' death. He might recover despite the indirect and insidious emendation of that part of the prescription; we recall Lydgate's "'there's a good deal of wear in him still . . .'" (ch. 69).

Bulstrode is unlikely to descend the moral scale to a wrung below his crime of omission, unless an additional stimulus from without precipitates
an impulsive leap to the one remaining milestone, characterized by the active crime of directly promoting the death of a patient left in his care. Resorting to her device of the innocent tempter, George Eliot lands Bulstrode at that milestone before he realizes that he is on the way. Twenty-four hours earlier he could not have believed that he would ever find himself at a point so low on the scale of evil. Characteristically, he continues to disbelieve it after his arrival.

Bulstrode's equivocations with himself regarding the soundness of Lydgate's medical judgment are of course as applicable to the absolute prohibition of alcoholic beverages as they are to the restriction on the allowance of opium. Since Lydgate himself has ordered and brought the opium, a crime of omission suffices for disregarding the restriction on its use; since he has forbidden alcoholic beverages absolutely, and of course has brought none, a more active crime of commission is needed before the patient can be treated to all the brandy he calls for and will drink. The immediate incentive to this crime springs from the impact of an innocent and ignorant tempter's pleading on a rationalization scarcely recognized as such even before, and yet potent enough to have led Bulstrode already into his lesser crime of omission. Indirectly confirmed from without by someone who clearly has no selfish motive, the rationalization suddenly turns into a shining light that seems to illuminate the path of duty. If the innocent tempter is speaking in obvious ignorance of Lydgate's orders, that vitiating fact can be overlooked or put out of mind; and if the path of duty coincides with Bulstrode's interest, that is no more than he would expect. Thus, once again, the temptee's sins in the past are misleading him in the
present; and Opportunity, skilfully adapting its attack to the weakest spots, has little difficulty in undermining his flawed moral conscience, already exhausted in its battle of some twenty-four hours with an evil desire that admits of such easy fulfillment.

While Bulstrode is undressing, Mrs. Abel knocks at his door, and when he opens it an inch, she reasons with him in the tone of a humble servant appealing to the well-known generosity and kind-heartedness of her master. In other words, at this most susceptible moment, the temptee's rationalizations are being re-echoed from outside himself, with the clearest implication that they constitute (as indeed Mrs. Abel believes) the facts of the case and that acting upon their unmistakable suggestion is obviously the fulfillment of the highest moral obligation in the circumstances. Bulstrode says nothing for many minutes; the final battle is raging within him while he listens to Mrs. Abel. The poor patient is calling for brandy, she tells him; he will swallow nothing else; he must surely die for want of support if the brandy is withheld much longer; on an occasion long past, when she was nursing another patient, the directions were that he should be allowed all the brandy he wanted; rather than see the poor creature tormented further, she is willing to give him her and her husband's own little store of rum; but she can't believe that Mr. Bulstrode would grudge so elementary a boon to the patient whom he has exhausted himself in guarding these last twenty-four hours. Pleading in this strain and along these lines, Mrs. Abel (without thinking in those terms at all) is allowing the temptee considerable time in which to make up his mind. No one, within my knowledge, has seen fit to comment in print on this scene between
Bulstrode and the housekeeper. On one level, of course, its irony is so obvious that comment seems superfluous. But there is another level, based on some awareness of the concept of temptation. I believe that recognition and enjoyment of the full adroitness of the scene is contingent on approaching it in the light of that concept.

Mrs. Abel sees herself appealing to Bulstrode's better self; and so she is, but neither in the way she understands it herself, nor in the way he responds. While unconsciously tempting Bulstrode, she is with equal unconsciousness pointing to his last chance of recovering the straight path, the path that alone can save him from murder or "something very like it." She is as good as calling his attention to the hideous consequences that must ensue if he does not inform her—now, at last—of the doctor's strict orders against allowing alcoholic beverages. Once he does that, the sequel will be equally obvious, since each step in the right direction throws light upon the next one. He ought to send for Lydgate once more (as only a short while ago he had himself thought of doing), ask him to repeat or to modify his orders in Mrs. Abel's presence, and enjoin her to adhere to them faithfully and absolutely in all circumstances. This course of action would also, automatically, check any further consequences from his sin of omission about the opium. Or better still, he ought to persuade Mrs. Abel to leave the sick-room and tell Lydgate to make his own arrangements, either by sending a nurse to the house or by having Raffles hospitalized. Then he himself ought to withdraw from the proceedings, at least to his bedroom at Stone Court, but

preferably to his own home "The Shrubs." After a night of watching he
does need sleep—more than one night of it if sleep can restore some
degree of mental health. In the present crisis, these are the minimal
safeguards required as protection against his own murderous impulses;
none of the safeguards would force him to reveal anything about the
past. They would simply imply (to himself alone) that he will rather
incur the risk inherent in Raffles' possible recovery than the risk of
conniving at murder.16

But Bulstrode no longer possesses a normal human mind. Being
the perverse creature he is, he responds primarily with his lowest self,
with evil desire; simultaneously he appeases or keeps hoodwinked whatever
better self he has left by means of the rationalization that Mrs. Abel
is unwittingly dangling before him. Mentally and physically close to
exhaustion, his vision obstructed in excess of what his mental prison
makes inevitable, he does not begin to see the situation objectively or
in perspective. His apprehension of reality has become so clouded that
he recognizes neither the supreme temptation nor the last opportunity
of rescue implicit in Mrs. Abel's words. In a reversal of ethical
standards suggestive of Satan's "Evil be thou my Good,"17 what he does
perceive dimly is rescue in terms of yielding—not to temptation undraped
but to temptation in the effective disguise of a heaven-sent "leading."

16 Perhaps we should remind ourselves once more that, in reality,
there is no risk, since the worst he fears has already happened: his
secret is known to Mr. Bambridge, the horse-dealer, who will divulge it
to the whole town. Arguing on Bulstrode's own level, one might say
that it would cost him nothing to be honest.

17 Paradise Lost, IV, 110.
As Freudians would expect, his mind reverts to a pattern established and petrified in the distant past.

Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are. (M, ch. 70, epigraph)

Like Casaubon's "characteristics," Bulstrode's mental habits are by this time "fixed and unchangeable as bone" (M, ch. 20). In the great chapter (61) that analyzes his early history, George Eliot speaks of "the train of causes in which he had locked himself..." "Locked himself" strikes one as exactly the right expression, for it implies a mental prison from which he cannot escape.

But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
Benighted walks under the mid-day sun;
Himself is his own dungeon.

The combination of inner and outer circumstances that now propels him toward murder is analogous to that which accounts for his earlier misdeeds; and not surprisingly, since both originate and thrive in the same mental prison. Though three decades have rolled by, they have not changed the prison in essentials; they have merely made escape harder by reinforcing its walls. "... the years had been perpetually spinning them [his 'pleas' or self-deceptive thoughts] into intricate thickness, like masses of spider-web, padding the moral sensibility..." (M, ch. 61).

Long accustomed to interpret chances that accord with his desires as providential "leadings"; to shun the direct crime while assuming that God winks at the indirect when it is committed by himself for a higher

18 Since this is the chapter describing Bulstrode's battle and defeat, the author is unmistakably reminding us of chapter 61, which tells us what Bulstrode has been before he settles in Middlemarch and before the novel opens.

purpose veiled from ordinary mortals; to take for granted that a special relationship—almost amounting to a partnership—exists between himself and God; and to conclude that the glory of God, as determined by himself, may require the sacrifice of people whom the same authority regards as ciphers or nonentities, Bulstrode now responds to Mrs. Abel's words by handing her the key to the wine-cooler, and assuring her, "huskily," that she will find plenty of brandy there.

Slight and innocuous in itself, this act brands him a murderer, determines the death of Raffles, and ruins the promising medical career of Lydgate. Awareness operates at different levels. Bulstrode cannot but hope that his compliance with Mrs. Abel's request will lead to the death of Raffles, and yet he is no more than slightly conscious that this result must make him guilty of murder. Up to a point, his experience here is by no means peculiar to himself, but rather exemplifies one of the tragic problems of human conduct. After all, handing a key to someone is such a simple, such an innocent deed. Why should so much fuss be made about anything so trivial? It is fatally easy to perform an act that damages others, and then virtually to forget that one has done anything of the kind, because the act, as such, seems both harmless and insignificant. This common human problem would alone be sufficient to refute the criticism of one of George Eliot's contemporary reviewers:

The description of the crime itself is wonderfully fine; but the complete equanimity with which he looks back upon it, after the great struggle which preceded it, we cannot accept as true.20

In Bulstrode, however, a recognizable and all-too prevalent human weakness becomes a weakness of a quite different kind, characterized by mental perversion and a gross lack of normal human sympathy. Days after the event he still feels that "he had accepted what seemed to have been offered" (ch. 71) and of course he attributes the offer to Providence, as he has done on so many analogous occasions in the past. The possible consequences for Lydgate do not enter his head; nor is he visited by any compassion for the man whom, as Caleb Garth points out (ch. 69), he may have helped to make worse when he profited by his vices, and who in any case is a fellow human-being. Thus George Eliot exhibits in their full hideousness the consequences of the noxious taint to which she pointed in her outline and analysis of his early past: "And to Mr. Bulstrode God's cause was something distinct from his own rectitude of conduct" (ch. 61); at the same time she substantiates indelibly the truth of one of her most passionately held convictions: "There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men" (M, ch.61).

Succumbing completely to the temptation he has set out to resist, Bulstrode certainly fails to walk staunchly by the best light that even he has; his transgression of the first of Bishop Wilson's injunctions is absolute. In this respect, however, allowing for the usual individual variations, he does not differ in kind from other great unsuccessful temptees. His uniqueness manifests itself as soon as we think of the second of the good Bishop's injunctions: "Take care that your light be not darkness." The sudden, almost terrifying, intensification of meaning that results from relating the abstract concepts of mental light and
mental darkness to Bulstrode's case—to his warped and involuted mind, his incessant autobiography, his equivocations with himself, his bargains with his God—constitutes a measure of George Eliot's achievement in creating this character. A more memorable picture of incipient aberration, undetected and untreated, gradually spreading and thickening, like a cancerous growth, until it envelops the whole mind and turns its victim into something close to a personification of mental disease, is rarely found, even in the literature of our time; nor, by inescapable implication, a more eloquent plea for the promotion of mental health. Initially, Bulstrode was endowed with considerable potential for a beneficent impact on those with whom he comes in contact. The chapter primarily devoted to his early history (61) tells us that, in those days, he thought "of the ministry as possibly his vocation," and that even now in the present, "if he could be back in that far-off spot with his youthful poverty—why, then he would choose to be a missionary." It is a calling in which he might have distinguished himself; or, at the worst, in which he would almost certainly have done less harm than in the role which he does assume. Even in that role we recognize him as a highly evolved member of the species to which we ourselves belong, and in a limited measure sympathize with his suffering. All the forces of good and evil found elsewhere in the town of Middlemarch seem to be warring in his own breast. If he is egotistical, self-deceived, and lacking in human sympathy, so are Casaubon and Rosamond; if he means well in a misguided way, so in a sense does Dorothea; if he is dogmatically religious,

\[\text{21 or "masses of spider-web," in George Eliot's phrase. (M, ch. 61)}\]
so is the Rev. Walter Tyke; if he is interested in good works and scientific progress, so are Caleb Garth and Lydgate; if he fails to bring his life into harmony with his convictions, so do Lydgate, Farebrother, Will, and Dorothea. Contrasting what Bulstrode is and what he does with what George Eliot has convinced us that he might have been and might have done, we may express our poignant sense of tragic waste in one of Marlowe's mighty lines: "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight."22

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22 The Tragical History of Dr Faustus, "Epilogue," first line.
Section 3: Gwendolen Harleth

There is another temptee in George Eliot who ends up wondering whether she is a murderess. Her name is Gwendolen Harleth, and by common consent of recent critics she ranks among the author's most impressive creations. Her great enticement to evil is marriage with Grandcourt, for whom her early feelings are ambivalent and in some degree (especially regarding his fine horses) consonant with the aphorism that "it is a very good quality in a man to have a trout stream." She does not love him, but she recognizes him as an excellent match and is prepared to accept him, partly on the advice of her uncle Gascoigne, Rector of Pennicote. But before Grandcourt proposes, Gwendolen meets Mrs. Glasher at a spot symbolically called the "Whispering Stones" (ch. 14). Mrs. Glasher demands secrecy, and then reveals that she is Grandcourt's mistress and the mother of four children by him; two of them, including the only boy, are seated on the grass nearby. Her husband being dead, she is obsessed with the wish that Grandcourt marry her and make their boy his heir; and she is convinced that he will eventually do so if Miss Harleth declines the offer that she correctly suspects him of being about to make. Seized with revulsion, and feeling that rescue has come in time, Gwendolen utters a fateful half-promise: "I will not interfere with your wishes." Determined not to marry Grandcourt, she leaves

23 An incidental and partly facetious remark of Mr. Cadwallader's in Middlemarch, chapter 8, intended as an argument in support of Dorothea's engagement to Casaubon.
early the next morning for Leubronn (ch. 14). Later we are told that on this occasion "she had not reasoned and balanced: she had acted with a force of impulse . . ." (ch. 27). Somewhat cryptically and hyperbolically, the impulse is made explicit in the epigraph for the chapter that includes the scene at the Whispering Stones:

I will not clothe myself in wreck—wear gems
Sawed from cramped finger-bones of women drowned;
Feel chilly vaporous hands of ireful ghosts
Clutching my necklace; trick my maiden breast
With orphans' heritage. Let your dead love
Marry its dead. (ch. 14)

Asserting Gwendolen's sentiments that day at the Whispering Stones, and the opposite of what she will presently do, the epigraph amounts to a challenge. "This staggering transformation," we are told in effect, "you shall witness and believe." Satisfied that, as a novelist, she has mastered the concept of temptation, George Eliot is here expressing her awareness of what she can accomplish with it.

Marriage with Grandcourt thus established as evil on several counts—lack of love, his mistress and four children, Gwendolen's half-promise to the mistress—George Eliot begins to unfold the characteristic aggregate of temptation, as discussed in Chapter 1. Its first essential element—desire for what is evil—springs from the impact on "the spoiled child" of the family's sudden loss of fortune. Book I of the novel, which bears that title, presents a brilliant flashback that in almost Freudian fashion explores the past in order to help us understand the temptee's reaction when she is torn between the pressure of hitherto unimagined humiliations and Grandcourt's glittering offer. Since she has taken no one into her confidence, she alone (within her circle) knows it to be tainted. Its attraction for her progresses
steadily toward a peak of intensity as she learns at home (having obeyed her mother's urgent summons to return from Leubronn) what "loss of fortune" means in practical terms: grinding poverty for the family (her mother and half-sisters) in a wretched and as yet unfurnished dwelling called Sawyer's cottage, formerly the home of an exciseman, where they will earn shillings and sixpences by doing needlework for various charitable purposes; and for herself a position as governess, at £100 a year, to the three daughters of Bishop Mompert and of his wife, who is morally so strict that she "objects to having a French person in the house [!!]" (ch. 24). Unable to believe that there is no alternative to a future so utterly repugnant, Gwendolen persuades herself that she possesses talent and experience enough for a distinguished career as an actress and singer, but Herr Klesmer ("one of the few convincing geniuses of fiction"24), whom she consults "in a scene which equals anything in The Tragic Muse,"25 shatters her illusions.

Gwendolen had never in her life felt so miserable. . . . For the first time since her consciousness began, she was having a vision of herself on the common level . . . the truth she had asked for with an expectation that it would be agreeable, had come like a lacerating thong. (ch. 23)

This "vision of herself on the common level" appears intolerable26 and is being envenomed on the following day when she learns from her uncle


25 Ibid. p. 238.

26 As it does to the protagonist of George Eliot's poem "Armgart," a celebrated singer whose voice, in consequence of a throat infection, loses its former distinction. Daniel Deronda's mother, who has been "the greatest lyric actress of Europe," reacts in a similar way when she "[begins] to sing out of tune" (ch. 51).
that Mrs. Mompert will not make a final decision to engage her without a preliminary interview of inspection. "After she had done herself the violence to accept the bishop and his wife, they were still to consider whether they would accept her" (ch. 24). Mr. Gascoigne tries hard to persuade his niece into adopting a sounder attitude toward her prospective employers, but the response, though she does not verbalize it, could scarcely be farther from his aim:

"Continuance of education"--"bishop's views"--"privately strict"--"Bible Society," it was as if he had introduced a few snakes . . . She saw the life before her as an entrance into a penitentiary. (ch. 24)

When the Rector calls at Offendene some days later to specify the exact time in the following week and the place for the exploratory meeting with the Bishop's wife, Gwendolen feels that the fatal iron gates of the penitentiary are about to close upon her relentlessly. Having always regarded her mother's life as a kind of warning example, she sees herself threatened with an imminent future that is equally dreary and joyless. Twenty years hence Mrs. Davilow may look at her and think: "'Poor Gwen too is sad and faded now!' (ch. 26). Intent on helping us to comprehend the psychological state of this princess denied her natural rights, George Eliot uses an apt analogy:

Imagine one who had been made to believe in his own divinity finding all homage withdrawn, and himself unable to perform a miracle that would recall the homage and restore his own confidence. (ch. 26)

Gwendolen sobs "with a sort of tender misery." Without foreseeing the arrival of the opportunity that will transform desire into temptation, she is preparing for defeat, unconsciously but assiduously, by sealing herself within mental walls impervious to the guiding light outside.
In one of those remarkable passages that inextricably fuse description or characterization with author comment, George Eliot simultaneously points to the exact source of Gwendolen's woe, arouses our sympathy for her genuine suffering, and suggests the train of thought that would bring relief in its wake:

Gwendolen had never dissociated happiness from personal pre-eminence and eclat. . . . Surely a young creature is pitiable who has the labyrinth of life before her and no clue . . . . The sweetness of labour and fulfilled claims; the interest of inward and outward activity; the impersonal delights of life as a perpetual discovery; the dues of courage, fortitude, industry, which it is mere baseness not to pay towards the common burthen; the supreme worth of the teacher's vocation . . . . (ch. 24)

The time is coming before the end of the novel when such considerations will be urged on Gwendolen by her mentor, Daniel Deronda, and will meet with their due response. A long period of intense suffering and remorse will prepare her mind and heart for their reception. At the present critical juncture in her life they cannot effectively penetrate the mental prison in which she has locked herself; they are no more than "faintly apprehended doctrines." One wishes that she could be spared, but there is no way out. Attitudes and habits of thought are seldom changed without pain. Gwendolen's perverted sense of values renders it inevitable that she will mistake true rescue for false, and false for true. False rescue is on the way; she is continuing to prepare herself negatively for its reception. When it arrives she will struggle, for the elements of goodness within her have not been uprooted; but they lie dormant or insufficiently awake, and in the end she will react to the false rescue as a fish to the worm on an angler's hook.
Gwendolen sobs "with a sort of tender misery" because she finds herself at the nadir of humiliation; as a necessary corollary, her desire to prevent the dreaded, imminent future from turning into an unbearable present has reached its highest peak of intensity. Characteristically, this is the precise moment when George Eliot introduces the second element in the aggregate of temptation—false rescue in the form of an opportunity to fulfill the desire by means of conduct unquestionably evil. Bent on creating a truly formidable conflict, she has devised an opportunity that strikes Gwendolen's weakest spot in the most trying circumstances. While she is sobbing, Mrs. Davilow enters, holding a letter—unopened—in her hand. It is addressed to her daughter and reads as follows:

"Mr. Grandcourt presents his compliments to Miss Harleth, and begs to know whether he may be permitted to call at Offendene tomorrow after two, and to see her alone. Mr. Grandcourt has just returned from Leubronn, where he had hoped to find Miss Harleth." (ch. 26)

"Few and formal" (ch. 26), these words are weighted with enormous possibilities for evil and for good. As Mrs. Davilow remarks, they leave no doubt that Grandcourt intends a proposal of marriage. Allowing him to come is therefore very nearly tantamount to accepting him. The classic battle of the temptee's moral conscience against ignoble desire, suddenly animated by dazzling opportunity, begins with Gwendolen's perusal of this letter.

At one stroke Gwendolen is offered not only total release from the harrowing dread of poverty, insignificance, drudgery, and monotony, but also (in effect) the homage needed for restoration of belief in her own divinity. We recall some of Mr. Gascoigne's words when he urged
his niece (before the family's monetary ruin) to marry Grandcourt:

"You hold your fortune in your own hands—a fortune such as rarely happens to a girl in your circumstances—a fortune in fact which almost takes the question out of the range of mere personal feeling, and makes your acceptance of it a duty. If Providence offers you power and position . . . ." (ch. 13)

Seductive even when "a girl in your circumstances" meant a young lady well provided for and expecting to remain so, the prospect of "fortune . . . power and position" must needs prove over-whelmingly alluring to the same girl in circumstances so drastically and abruptly deteriorated that she can scarcely believe them to be hers. A far less alluring vista would at this moment have seemed "easier than the dead level of being a governess" (ch. 23). Opportunity is not likely to fail in its attempt to achieve an alliance with the temptee's baser self, manifested by latent evil desire.

As might be expected, the pressure of inclination now leads Gwendolen to seek rationalizations that are bound to undermine her moral conscience. Impelled by such feelings to remember, adopt, and expand her uncle's reasoning, his drift of thought, she is certain to arrive at the most comforting beliefs. Equating duty with worldly advantage, he has fostered her ingrained conviction—very similar to Tito's—that she is singled out for almost supernatural favours and exempted from a normal share of the common human afflictions. If Grandcourt was sent by Providence in her days of material affluence, when she hardly needed him, and if acceptance of his offer amounted to "almost . . . a duty" at that time, would she not be justified in concluding (by an inference from her uncle's logic by no means stretched) that destitution has made the duty absolute; or if not quite, that it may easily be raised to
this state by remembering what the husband of Gwendolen Grandcourt would probably do for her poor mother (whom she does love) and for her poor half-sisters (whom she despises)? Why should she refrain from accepting him, when her view of duty can so readily be brought into agreement with the strong urge to snatch at his bait? It is true that neither her uncle, nor her mother, nor anyone connected with her has the least intimation of what she heard and saw at the Whispering Stones and of her half-promise to Mrs. Glasher. Her mother almost certainly, her uncle probably, would judge quite differently if they did. But their ignorance necessarily keeps them silent on the subject, and thus helps Gwendolen to persuade herself that Mrs. Glasher and her children are little more than a bad dream she had long ago, since no one substantiates their existence for her. Instead of making a confidant of someone whom she trusts, she tries to imagine what "anybody" would say, and then gives herself the desired answer: "The verdict of 'anybody' seemed to be that she had no reason to concern herself greatly on behalf of Mrs. Glasher and her children" (ch. 27). Mrs. Glasher seems very unreasonable in her wishes; and if Gwendolen did marry Grandcourt, she would exert the wife's influence to stimulate his conscientious care for these dependents.

Like other phenomena, Gwendolen's battle may be regarded from various points of view. Trying to come as close as possible to George Eliot's own, we can safely guide ourselves by the epigraphs she has

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27 Prior to urging his niece to accept him, Mr. Gascoigne had indeed heard pejorative gossip about Grandcourt's past, but he lacked any precise knowledge and, for Gwendolen's sake (so the benign but worldly Rector imagined), he closed his mind to the gossip (ID, ch. 13).
obligingly provided. If these accord both with the facts of the novel and with the theory of temptation expounded in Chapter 1 of the thesis, our general approach would seem to be vindicated. The first epigraph tells us (poetically) what Gwendolen ought to do:

He brings white asses laden with the freight
Of Tyrian vessels, purple, gold, and balm,
To bribe my will: I'll bid them chase him forth,
Nor let him breathe the taint of his surmise
On my secure resolve. (ch. 26, first stanza of epigraph)

Within the confines of Gwendolen's present circumstances and her present attitude toward them, Grandcourt's offer must needs be so spellbinding that rejection becomes almost superhumanly difficult. The purport of his letter being quite unmistakable, her one and only chance of effective resistance lies in refusal to see him. If she cannot withstand him at a distance, it is most improbable that she could do so when he is actually facing her, with all the beguilement of wealth and position at his command, and in consequence of a letter that virtually implies acceptance beforehand. Without delay or vacillation, while resolution is strong, while she still sees what is right, Gwendolen ought to cast aside the means of breaking the vow she made to herself and to Mrs. Glasher by telling Grandcourt (in a short letter: his servant is waiting) that there is no point in coming; that he can have nothing to say to her that anybody may not hear; that an interview with her would serve no useful purpose. If it was morally wrong to marry him before the family lost their fortune, it is equally wrong now. The loss of fortune does not affect the moral issue, though it does enormously increase the temptation. If she has doubts—and she has—she ought to consult with others. But at this supremely critical juncture in her life, when her moral conscience
is being tried to the limit of its strength or even beyond, and requires all the outside support it can muster, she not only fails to take anyone into her confidence, but allows herself to be propelled in the direction she desires by advice or suggestions—from her mother and retroactively from her uncle—that she knows to be based on ignorance of the full facts. Thus she acts in the most perverse way possible by turning potential allies of her better self into tempters whose efficacy is intensified by their innocence. Had they been apprised of the scene at the Whispering Stones, her mother, her uncle, and perhaps others might have come to the rescue. Relying on herself alone, Gwendolen remains exceedingly vulnerable and is predisposing herself to moral defeat.

The second epigraph is slightly more subtle in its significance than the first. Telling us what Gwendolen mistakenly thinks she is doing rather than what she does do, it constitutes a memorable expression in verse of make-belief, of rationalization, of self-deception.

Ay, 'tis [resolution] secure;
And therefore let him come to spread his freight.
For firmness hath its appetite and craves
The stronger lure, more strongly to resist;
Would know the touch of gold to fling it off;
Scent wine to feel its lip the soberer;
Behold soft byssus, ivory, and plumes
To say, 'They're fair, but I will none of them,'
And flout Enticement in the very face. (ch. 26, epigraph, second stanza)

No temptee in George Eliot, major or minor, ever succeeds in doing what is here suggested. The bravado, in fact, amounts to a self-contradiction as soon as it is examined. If enticement has ceased to entice, there is no challenge and no point in exposure; if it continues to entice, there
is no certainty of success in resistance, and a grave risk of irreparable failure--failure that will probably hurt many others besides the foolish experimenter. Being the exact opposite of casting aside the means of breaking one's vow, the sentiments pictorially expressed in this second epigraph formulate the way Gwendolen, and those whom she epitomizes, beguile and delude themselves until the consequences of failure tear the blinkers from their eyes. In view of the perverse state of mind she has been cultivating, the mental prison in which she has locked herself, one can scarcely conceive a plausible alternative to Gwendolen's reaction and conduct at that great turning point in her life marked by the arrival of the letter. Wholly incapable at this juncture of recognizing (let alone breaking through) the walls that confine her psyche, she sees no release from pain other than Grandcourt's offer, and within those walls that pain is so acute that she would have to be almost superhuman to renounce the prospect of deliverance.

Although insufficiently alert at this crisis, the better side of Gwendolen's divided tempter's nature--the side that will later scourge her mercilessly--has not ceased to exist. "Her dread of wrong-doing . . . was vague . . . and aloof from the daily details of her life, but not the less strong" (ch. 27). She cannot say to herself, "I will embrace evil"; neither can she say, "I will abjure the rescue offered by Grandcourt's letter and its implications." Yet that, in effect, is the choice she must make, whatever she says or does not say. "The alternate dip of counterbalancing thoughts begotten of counterbalancing desires had brought her into a state in which no conclusion could look fixed to her" (ch. 27). She tries to reconcile the irreconcilable, to
combine two mutually exclusive courses of action. Disguising her true motives with rationalizations, she prepares the way for acceptance of Grandcourt's offer while staunchly asserting her determination to reject him, and finds arguments in support of the view that the purely hypothetical marriage, which of course will never eventuate, would not really commit her to evil.

The third epigraph expresses the true meaning—as distinct from the make-belief meaning—of the second. Gwendolen has persuaded herself that she allows Grandcourt to come in order to "flout Enticement in the very face." Her real purpose is of course quite different.

Desire has trimmed the sails, and Circumstance\(^{28}\) Brings but the breeze to fill them. (ch. 27, epigraph)

Gwendolen would renounce Grandcourt willingly enough; what she cannot bring herself to renounce are the advantages (as they seem to her) that he offers. Since she cannot have them without him, she is beginning to wish that she had never met Mrs. Glasher; that she had remained in ignorance of Grandcourt's past, so that there would be no reason (within her knowledge) against her acceptance of him. (It hardly occurs to her that there might be reasons against marrying a man like Grandcourt, even if he had no mistress and children.) His servant is waiting for an answer. Concerned at keeping him waiting too long, Mrs. Davilow unintentionally goads her daughter into writing hurriedly, simply on the ground that something has to be written. She also urges the consideration that Grandcourt must feel a real attachment, since the family's financial disaster has not deterred him from renewing his suit.

\(^{28}\) "Circumstance" is clearly equivalent to the element in the aggregate of temptation that I have called "opportunity" throughout this thesis.
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\(^{28}\) "Circumstance" is clearly equivalent to the element in the aggregate of temptation that I have called "opportunity" throughout this thesis.
Deluding herself that the door stays wide open and she remains entirely free, Gwendolen pens a note that, short as it is, virtually commits her and cuts off retreat.

"Miss Harleth presents her compliments to Mr. Grandcourt. She will be at home after two o'clock tomorrow." (ch. 26)

Why shouldn't she be at home tomorrow afternoon and why shouldn't she tell Grandcourt so? She can let him come, have a talk with him, exert her power again as she has exerted it before, and finally refuse him. Certainly she will refuse him. This nominal resolution persists until he actually arrives, but dwindles progressively into "a form out of which the blood has been sucked" (ch. 27).

Once she is seated face to face with Grandcourt, the end is near. She cannot bear to let him go, for the simple reason that she cannot contemplate a return to the prospect of Sawyer's cottage, Mrs. Mompert's children, and all the other concomitant humiliations of destitution and insignificance. Her attempt to defer a decision by alluding to the family's loss of fortune proves self-defeating, because his implied promise of generous maintenance for her mother—a promise that he fulfills—sustains the most effective of her rationalizations. And so she finally agrees to marry Grandcourt, without realizing the full implications of her consent, mistakenly supposing him unaware of her meeting

29 Several recent critics have singled out this proposal scene for high praise. They include (chronologically) F.R. Leavis in The Great Tradition (New York: G.W. Stewart, 1948), Robert Speaight, and Walter Allen. Speaight's comment: "Before writing of this quality criticism is silent" (George Eliot [London: Arthur Barker, 1954], p. 114); and Allen's: "That is great writing" (George Eliot [New York: Macmillan, 1964], p. 177).
with Mrs. Glasher, and in the fallacy that she will be able to "manage" him. Informing her mother of the engagement, she declares triumphantly, "'Everything is to be as I like!'" (ch. 27). Fraught with unconscious irony, these words reverberate in the reader's mind when "Gwendolen gets her choice" and her nemesis begins. The nemesis entails further temptations, including murderous impulses toward her husband. But by that time she has made a confidant and mentor of Deronda, who regards "her remorse [as] the precious sign of a recoverable nature" (ch. 56) and helps to save her from irretrievable ruin. A badly bruised creature, strikingly transformed from the proud, self-assured young lady who met Grandcourt's mistress at the Whispering Stones, and yet clearly recognizable as the same human being, Gwendolen at the end of the novel is beginning a painful ascent from the bottom of the moral slope, hoping that, in Deronda's words, she "may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born" (ch. 70).

30 She feels deeply mortified when learning, much later, "that her husband knew the silent consciousness, the silently accepted terms on which she had married him" (DD, ch. 48).

31 The words in quotation marks constitute the title of Book IV of Daniel Deronda.
Chapter 5

A PARADOXICAL TEMPTEE: MAGGIE TULLIVER

On one level, Maggie Tulliver's decisions and conduct perfectly exemplify the pattern of failure illustrated in the preceding chapter; and if I confined myself to dealing with her on that level, I could appropriately discuss her in an additional section added to the other three. Treated in that way, however, she would simply sustain a pattern already firmly established. Therefore I devote a separate chapter to Maggie, emphasizing the qualities that make her different, paradoxical, challenging to the critic, and (I am convinced) of particular significance for an adequate interpretation of The Mill on the Floss.

Maggie as a temptee moves on two planes, which (broadly speaking) correspond to the twin injunction for human conduct quoted repeatedly from Bishop Wilson: "Walk staunchly by the best light you have; take care that your light be not darkness." To some extent, every responsible human being, and certainly every temptee, has to come to terms with both of these injunctions, but the relative emphasis varies enormously. Alone among George Eliot's temptees, Maggie bears the brunt of the second injunction in a measure at least equal to that of the first, and probably greater. Her uniqueness derives in part from this cause. She appears to me as primarily a highly successful artistic embodiment of three outstanding characteristics in her
creator. Two of these are intense and conflicting impulses: the impulse toward conformity and the impulse toward rebellion. The third is the state of mind resulting from their collision within the same individual, and from that individual's need to maintain her psychic integration by reconciling what can be reconciled, and by facing the unalterable with resignation. The two conflicting impulses find their correlative in Maggie as a conventional temptee and in Maggie as a misguided temptee. The author evinces her state of mind in the results of Maggie's dual role, in her comments on these results, and in her analysis of the characters.

The key to an understanding of Maggie and of The Mill on the Floss lies in George Eliot's awareness of a problem that must cause grief and waste of potential whether a decision is made or evaded, and regardless of what decision is made. George Eliot herself confronted the problem in several of its manifestations, in each case made a decision after the most careful deliberation, and in each case paid to the full the price she had foreseen. By the time she wrote The Mill on the Floss (1859-60), she had fought and won three great inner battles: the battle for religious emancipation; the battle for an intellectual life in London amidst minds of her own caliber; and the battle for love and "someone to lean upon" in her illicit union with Lewes. As a result of this experience, she was intensely conscious of what she had escaped from, and of what she would or might have become if (like Maggie) she had regarded escape as a
temptation to be resisted. The reiterated contrast in The Mill on the Floss between breadth of vision and stifling narrowness reflects this awareness. Conversely and equally, however, she writhed under the price she had to pay in severance from her family, in social ostracism, and in exile from her native Warwickshire and its beloved countryside. Triumph at emancipation and grief at its concomitant deprivations divide The Mill on the Floss between them.

Readers who derive this impression are being affected as the author desired. In a letter to John Blackwood (April 4, 1861), she affirms that "the exhibition of the right on both sides" sums up "the very soul of [her] intention in the story."¹ Those who strive to find George Eliot's meaning—rather than their own—in the novel must appreciate such a plain statement of her aim. Less directly, but more formidably, they will find it corroborated in "The Antigone and Its Moral" (1856),² an article of high importance (however incidentally) as a gloss on The Mill on the Floss (1860). Since it cannot be quoted in full, I have tried to select the most applicable and illuminating statements. Torn from the context, they do not carry their

¹Letters, III, 397.

full charge; yet much remains, and none distorts the drift and tenor of George Eliot's reasoning.\(^3\)

... two principles, both having their validity, are at war ... The best critics have agreed ... in recognizing this balance of principles, this antagonism between valid claims; ...

... the struggle between Antigone and Creon represents [the] struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws ... Wherever the strength of a man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned,\(^4\) there is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon; ...

The exquisite art of Sophocles is shown in the touches by which he makes us feel that Creon, as well as Antigone, is contending for what he believes to be the right, while both are also conscious that, in following out one principle, they are laying themselves open to just blame for transgressing another ... which cannot be infringed without harm.

Perhaps the best moral we can draw is that to which the Chorus points—that our protest for the right should be seasoned with moderation and reverence, and that lofty words ... are not becoming to mortals.

On a surface level, at least, the relevance of these statements to The Mill on the Floss can scarcely be missed. Broadly speaking, Antigone equates with Maggie, whose intellectual and aesthetic hunger meets with no comprehension and no response from the people—including the nearest relatives—who compose her little world; Creon equates with

\(^{3}\)All quotations from this article are found on pages 263 and 264 of the Pinney anthology. The grouping is mine.

\(^{4}\)The directly autobiographical bearing of this phrase is as unmistakable as it is poignant.
Tom, the Dodsons, and the society of St. Ogg's, in their blind, persistent adherence to traditional standards and practices that are narrow, biased, at best barely mediocre, impervious to the most precious of human values; the final injunction of the Chorus equates with the author's comments and analysis, which distinguish this novel from her others in their reiterated emphasis on tolerance, on ethical flexibility, on comprehension of individual circumstances and individual limitations, on the rejection of stereotyped maxims or slogans as a basis of judgment; and "the exquisite art of Sophocles" equates with George Eliot's own success in convincing us that, even at his worst, Tom (like Creon) contends for what he believes to be right, that his (mental) eyes give "no warning of their imperfection," that (again like Creon and like the rest of us) he cannot help being "imprisoned within the limits of his own nature" (Bk. 7, ch. 3), that, in short, to know all is to forgive all.

Despite imperfections that few would dispute, The Mill on the Floss ranks high as a work of art, partly because George Eliot does accomplish her self-avowed aim: "the exhibition of the right on both sides" (Letters, III, 397).

Despite the best intentions, Maggie acts primarily as a misguided temptee, who confuses her own wider vision and larger-hearted feelings with temptations to be resisted because they diverge from standards and practices George Eliot has expounded in "A Variation of Protestantism Unknown to Bossuet" (MF, bk. 4, ch. 1). Though straining to be just
and impartial, the author convinces us indelibly of her revulsion from their stifling narrowness, their bigotry, their lack of vision, their inability even to conceive anything better than being, in T.S. Eliot's words, "Assured of certain certainties." A comment of hers on Lydgate, in *Middlemarch*, serves incidentally to define the source of her revulsion. There she dilates upon "the supremacy of the intellectual life," manifested in the "serene activity" springing from "a seed of ennobling thought and purpose," and points to the gulf between such a life and "the absorbing soul-wasting struggle with worldly annoyances" (*M*, ch. 73). And Maggie, fighting against herself in a battle as valiant and painful as it is futile, tries her utmost to regard those standards as the best she has, and to walk staunchly in their light. By their very narrowness, the Dodson standards drive her to this misguided, racking, and foredoomed attempt, because they force her into baneful antagonism between trying to reconcile the yearnings of her heart with those of her intellect and aesthetic sensibility, all three of which tower high above average in their intensity. Her father and her brother--the two idols of her life--cannot dissociate normal familial affection from adherence to their petty aims, blinkered views, and gross, materialistic standards. In order to retain their love, Maggie attempts virtual self-mutilation--she calls it resignation; Philip calls it stupefaction--by trying to stifle her craving for intellectual
and aesthetic fulfilment. The whole debate between the two in the Red Deeps (Bk. 5, chs. 1, 3, and 4) centers upon this issue. Philip possesses, in large measure, the resources needed to assuage the conflict that rends Maggie. If she gives him the chance, he can build a bridge of reconciliation across the two sides of a harrowing self-division. Alone within her circle of acquaintances, he conjoins absolute devotion with ample gifts for appeasing that other hunger—almost equally peremptory—which her father and brother scarcely even recognize, and certainly do not begin to satisfy.

The resemblances between Maggie and her creator consist in comparable endowments, comparable circumstances, and in the clash between the two, which occasions a comparable inner torment. But in the decisions they reach, in their success or failure to stand by them, and in the consequences of the actions they actually do take, Maggie and George Eliot exemplify the two momentous and completely opposite alternatives of their analogous dilemma. Among its sundry manifestations in the novel, the perplexities lacerating Philip and Maggie rank highest in interest and pertinence for the present discussion. Timeless, tragic, virtually insoluble, they admit of no panacea. Eager to obviate misreading and to attune our minds, the author emphasizes in advance that no mortal can justly apportion claims so conflicting as those being debated in the Red Deeps. Any hypothetical best decision must needs be
limited to finding the least painful solution or (like Dorothea) "the least partial good" (M, ch. 20).

Though actuated by jumbled motives, Philip and Maggie try hard and earnestly. Close attention soon reveals the scenes between them as an exemplification and embodiment of the ideas found in "A Variation of Protestantism Unknown to Bossuet." From the very beginning of the novel we have watched Maggie rising "above the mental level of the generation before [her]," while witnessing again and again the exceptional strength of those "fibres" of the heart by which she remains "tied" to that generation. But now circumstances have conspired to transform these two sides of her development into a conflict of the acutest kind. The preceding generation denotes her beloved and stricken father, who has always "taken the part" of his "little wench"; it denotes her brother, the idol of her childhood, who is now labouring single-mindedly to restore the family's respectability; and it denotes her feeble-minded mother, reduced to near-imbecility by the loss of her household treasures. Philip's remonstrances notwithstanding, Maggie cannot deliberately make a decision that will sever or endanger those bonds of family affection: they are sacred to her; they constitute the foremost mainstay of her inner balance. Their loss or violation might easily lead to psychological disintegration. "The need of being loved would always subdue her" (MF, bk. 6, ch. 4). Maggie certainly shares that quality with her creator; almost
equally, however, she shares another: though she cannot live without love, she cannot live by love alone. Her rise above the mental level of parents and brother manifests itself in an overpowering urge quite alien to them: in acute intellectual hunger; in a near-irresistible craving for mental and aesthetic satisfactions—for knowledge, music, literature, and art. That side of her psyche exists no less than the other; it requires at least a limited outlet, at least some degree of satisfaction. It cannot be ignored or amputated without grievous mangling of her personality.

Irreconcilable in her own family, the two contrasted sides of Maggie's nature harmonize in her relations with Philip: within the circle of her acquaintances, he alone can satisfy her need to love and to be loved, as well as her intellectual and aesthetic hunger. She "will never do anything to wound [her] father" (Bk. 5, ch. 4), but what her father does not know cannot hurt him. And Philip does not prove slow or tongue-tied in his efforts to persuade her. Using language suggestive of "A Variation of Protestantism Unknown to Bossuet," he expresses his own abhorrence of the Dodson standards—"... the dead level of provincial existence" (Bk. 5, ch. 3)—memorably characterizes the effect of their "oppressive narrowness" on a nature like Maggie's, and utters warnings that subsequent developments establish as well-founded prophecies. George Eliot, we know, recognized all sides of the dispute and—on a conscious level at least—aimed above all else at
"the exhibition of the right on both sides." She portrays Maggie's struggle as a conventional temptee with sympathy, insight, and respect; she allows full scope for the expression of scruples, doubts, and hesitations. She emphasizes editorially that they are well-founded. But equally, at least, she gives us no ground whatever for thinking that she regards Philip's view of the problem as a temptation that ought to be resisted, indubitably and unequivocally, in the sense that Arthur Donnithorne ought to resist his urge to seduce Hetty, Bulstrode his urge to promote Raffles' death, and Gwendolen hers to marry Grandcourt. As I shall re-assert in Chapter 7, the discussions and agitated debates of The Mill on the Floss are in one respect unique within George Eliot's fiction. Here alone does the author refrain from taking sides, from loading the dice. Here alone are we not forced to the conviction that her sympathy lies wholly on one side or wholly on the other.

The debate in the Red Deeps is a case in point. Despite the fairest presentation of Maggie as a conventional temptee, multiform evidence within the novel, blended with knowledge of the author's biography, compels the conclusion that, in a measure at least equal to—and probably greater than—her affinity for Maggie's views and struggle, George Eliot concurs with statements of Philip's, such as the following:

"... you are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into
dullness all the highest powers of your
nature. . . . You are not resigned: you are
only trying to stupefy yourself. . . .
Maggie, . . . don't persist in this wilful,
senseless privation. It makes me wretched
to see you benumbing and cramping your
nature in this way. . . . I foresee that
it will not end well: you can never carry
on this self-torture. . . . It is less
wrong that you should see me than that you
should be committing this long suicide."
(Bk. 5, ch. 3)

". . . no one has strength given to do what
is unnatural. It is mere cowardice to seek
safety in negations. No character becomes
strong in that way. You will be thrown into
the world some day, and then every rational
satisfaction of your nature that you deny
now, will assault you like a savage appetite."
(Bk. 5, ch. 3)

Maggie's failure to resist Philip may be one confirmation of
his assertion that she is trying to do something unnatural,
and that the needful strength will be denied her. Much
more significant, however, and certainly fraught with un-
conscious irony, is her immediate answer to the last state-
ment quoted above. When he predicts that "' . . . every
rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will
assault you like a savage appetite,'" Maggie replies:
"'Philip, how dare you shake me in this way? You are a
tempter.'" He denies the charge, of course, adding that
"' . . . love gives insight, Maggie, and insight often gives
foreboding.'" On a second reading of the novel, we know
that the foreboding will find its exact fulfilment in the
episode with Stephen Guest--"The Great Temptation"--that
Philip might have enabled her to resist.

Unveiled by the concept of temptation, by the facts
of the author's life, and by the debate just discussed, the topography of the Red Deeps (physical and human) emerges in full clarity; we see two planes, representing the Bishop's twin injunction; and struggling upon them we see two temptees, representing the tragic self-division of a misguided heroine trying to walk staunchly by something much closer to darkness than to light—the Dodson standards and practices. However unconsciously, Maggie functions as two distinct entities: they may be tagged misguided temptee and conventional temptee; they objectify a loosely correlative fissure within George Eliot, evidently productive of remarkable creative energy and vitality; and they give good reason for envisaging The Mill on the Floss as her exploitation of that fissure in a work of art.

One may regard this novel as the author's Apologia Pro Vita Sua, engendered by the passionate urge for self-justification springing from slanders and gross misconstructions.\(^5\) Inevitably, however, George Eliot expressed

\(5\)George Eliot's yearning to justify herself finds rather painful expression in two sentences from a long letter (dated September 4, 1855) to her intimate friend Caroline Bray:

"Light and easily broken ties are what I neither desire theoretically nor could live for practically. Women who are satisfied with such ties do not act as I have done—they obtain what they desire and are still invited to dinner."

(Letters, II, 214; quoted in Haight, George Eliot, p. 190.)

One may be thankful that George Eliot soon learned to resort to the medium of art for her justification.
that urge in a form totally different from Newman's. A mid-Victorian novelist, she knew that she could not defend herself by trying to win sympathy for a human being whose actions corresponded to her own. Nor would she have wished to do so, for she feared that "... her example should be seized upon by the lightminded as an excuse for sexual licence." Still adhering to the novelist's way, she therefore vindicates herself by implication, impressing us indelibly with the possible consequences when an individual like Maggie, whose endowments and circumstances approximately suggest her creator's, reaches the opposite decision and, however hesitantly and faltering, struggles to carry it out.

Insofar as The Mill on the Floss amounts to the author's Apologia Pro Vita Sua, Philip's remonstrances in the Red Deeps are not addressed to Maggie alone. They also draw the contemporary reader's attention to the grievous social loss and bitter personal suffering that would probably have ensued from George Eliot's adherence to the standards immortalized throughout her book and epitomized in "A Variation of Protestantism Unknown to Bossuet." Blended with our knowledge of the author's biography, the novel alone provides sufficient ground for this interpretation. Fortunately, however, a direct statement from a letter to Sara Hennell, one of her life-long friends, favours the skeptic with corroborating evidence:

"If I live five years longer, the positive result of my existence on the side of truth and goodness will outweigh the small negative good that would have consisted in my not doing anything to shock others, and I can conceive no consequences that will make me repent the past." (Letters, II, 342)

This letter is dated June 5, 1857. George Eliot was then engaged on her Scenes of Clerical Life and had not yet attained wide fame. The passage just quoted may therefore excite some admiration as a prophecy come true. Before the five years stipulated had elapsed--Adam Bede (1859), The Mill on the Floss (1860), Silas Marner, (1861)--most Victorian readers would have agreed with its sentiment.

Owing to Philip's ambivalent function in relation to Maggie, her crucial role of dual temptee expresses itself as a dual failure: failure to recognize that he is a mentor rather than a tempter, and failure to resist the tempter whom she mistakenly believes him to be. Both parts of this failure stand in glaring contrast to George Eliot's own conduct in roughly analogous circumstances, as well as to Antigone's as interpreted in her article on Sophocles' play. In a letter to John Chapman written on October 15, 1854--about three months after her "elopement"--she states her position and attitude with confidence and self-assurance:

"I have counted the cost of the step that I have taken and am prepared to bear, without irritation or bitterness, renunciation by all my friends. I am not mistaken in the person to whom I have attached myself. He is worthy of the sacrifice I have incurred . . . ."

Rightly or wrongly, she conceives Antigone's conduct as basically equivalent to her own, and summarizes it in a similar vein:

... [Antigone] declares that she deliberately disobeyed [Creon's proclamation], and is ready to accept death as its consequence. It was not Zeus, she tells [Creon]--it was not eternal Justice that issued that decree. The proclamation of Creon is not so authoritative as the unwritten law of the Gods ... 8

The direct antithesis of Maggie's conduct looms glaring in both instances. Fully cognizant of all relevant facts, George Eliot and Antigone make their decisions to rebel, act in full accordance, and accept the consequences without flinching. Maggie, on the other hand, makes the opposite decision--the decision to conform--and then falters and wobbles pitifully, and partly fails, in her attempt to carry it out.

This is the point where the direct autobiography of resemblance yields to the indirect and more complicated autobiography of antithesis. Though comparable in endowments, temperament, and circumstances, the two temptees poised on that fateful frontier make antithetical decisions, take antithetical actions, and garner an antithetical harvest. They do, however, share one piece of common ground. Both are willing to incur, and do incur, sacrifices to avoid wounding their fathers, whom both of them love. For twelve years--from the marriage of her sister Christiana in May 1837

8Pinney, Essays, p. 263.
until his death in May 1849—Marian acted as her father's housekeeper. None of his other children cared for him as she did.\footnote{9} Similarly, Maggie tells Philip from the start that she will never do anything to wound her father, and submits to the grossest abuse from Tom for the sake of abiding by that resolution. One would think that the author's agreement with Maggie on that issue could not be doubted. But the evidence belies this supposition. Robert Speaight declares: "Maggie's surrender to Tom on this question was simply a case of the weaker nature succumbing to the stronger."\footnote{10} We have previously quoted George Eliot's plaint in a letter about \textit{The Mill on the Floss}: "'... special cases of misinterpretation might paralyse me.'"\footnote{11} As an instance of such misinterpretation, Speaight's statement surely takes high rank. In the total picture, however, this small area of agreement between the two temptees amounts to no more than the exception that proves the rule. Maggie, we have seen, violates her nature in an attempt—as ill-advised as it is nobly motivated—to guide herself by the Pearson-Dodson standards. The best intentions notwithstanding, she thereby inflicts a maximum of grief

\footnote{9}{To the end of her days, George Eliot regretted the brief alienation caused by her refusal to go to church. The issue arose in January 1842; by the middle of May she had yielded and resumed going to church with her father for the remaining seven years of his life.}

\footnote{10}{George Eliot (London: Arthur Barker, 1954), p. 54.}

\footnote{11}{Letters, III, 397.}
upon all concerned and totally wrecks her own life. In complete contrast, the author (however reluctantly) embraces the opposite side of the frontier and declares herself "'quite prepared to accept the consequences of a step which I have deliberately taken ... . . . The most painful consequences will, I know, be the loss of friends.'"\textsuperscript{12}

In October 1854, when she wrote these words to Charles Bray, she certainly suffered cruelly—\textit{The Mill on the Floss} bears indirect witness—\textit{from the consequences known to her at the time}. Those that lay ahead and have made her immortal she did not even remotely foresee.\textsuperscript{13} No prescience of the kind entered into her decision, which sprang exclusively from the urge to reconcile the deepest cravings of her psyche: the need to be loved and the need to allay her intellectual hunger. Like Esther Lyon, she recognized "the best thing that life could give her" while fully aware that "it was not to be had without paying a heavy price for it, such as we must pay for all that is greatly good" (FH, ch. 49). Intelligence to make the right choice in her circumstances and strength to bear the suffering it entails—those qualities enabled her to avoid the self-mutilation that spells poor Maggie's doom. In Bishop Wilson's terms, she not only walked staunchly

\textsuperscript{12}Letters, II, 179.

\textsuperscript{13}In the end, they did help her to achieve some compromise with the opposite world: not only acceptance by Victorian society at large, but also a degree of eventual reconciliation with her family, especially with the second generation of Evenses (her nephews and nieces).
by the best light she had, but also made sure that her light was not darkness.

Opportunities for exemplification abound throughout the whole of George Eliot's work, and also in the facts of her life. The obvious scarcely requires formal proof. Chapter 5 in Professor Haight's definitive biography takes its title—"The Need to be Loved"—from an author's comment on Maggie during the debate headed "Brother and Sister": "The need of being loved would always subdue her" (MF, bk. 6, ch. 4). In a world of vanishing religious faith, George Eliot finds her one pillar of absolute strength and support in the sanctity of human relations, and especially, of course, in those between husband and wife, between parents and children, and among siblings. Whenever she touches on this subject, the note of lukewarm and perfunctory praise that characterizes even her relatively favourable comments on the Dodsons yields to its exact opposite—a tone of absolute, unqualified conviction. It may be useful to quote here once more the pertinent passage from the "Bossuet" chapter. The author is speaking of those who

... in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. (MF, bk. 4, ch. 1)

So far as depended on George Eliot, differences in mental level—however great—could not weaken those fibres of the heart. Not theory merely, but inmost need, kept them absolute and inviolable. Her relation with her sister
Chrissey—a decent girl, but not in the least intellectual—constitutes a case in point. She did require a little time to reach that stage of intellectual development, but it remained constant throughout the whole of her mature life. For example, on October 9, 1843—just over a month before her twenty-fifth birthday—she wrote in a letter to Sara Hennell:

"When the soul is just liberated from the wretched giant's bed of dogmas . . . there is a feeling of exultation and strong hope. . . . But a year or two of reflection . . . must, I think, effect a change. Speculative truth begins to appear but a shadow of individual minds, agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the truth of feeling as the only universal bond of union." (Letters, I, 162)

And a quarter of a century later (December 21, 1869), when her immense fame was already approaching its zenith, she wrote in the same strain to Barbara Bodichon, one of her life-long and most intimate friends: "'I cling strongly to kith and kin, even though they reject me.'"14 For all its brevity, that sentence points to the core of its author's emotional dilemma.

"Life is justified by love"—these words conclude George Eliot's poem "Self and Life."15 Fame and genius notwithstanding, love remained for her the only justification of life; to the very end of her days she could see no

14Letters, V, 74.

other. But by their very nature and definition, love and affection are a two-way relationship, a mutual exchange, an accord of reciprocal potentials. Confined to one person alone, that potential—even at its peak—cannot generate love. The most felicitous combination of good sense and good feeling in George Eliot elicited no response from brother Isaac and from those he epitomizes. There was the crux of her grief and problem; there is the crux of Maggie's; there is the primary autobiographical inspiration of The Mill on the Floss. Again and again throughout the novel, George Eliot pleads for tolerance; at one point, in a memorable phrase, she urges us to "... remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision" (MF, bk. 7, ch. 3). We know, of course, who had the wider vision, and who the more confined—the incredibly confined. Understanding what causes lack of response, George Eliot can forgive it. Simultaneously, however, she knew, and experienced with exceptional intensity, that neither understanding, nor forgiveness, nor tolerance can assuage the grief of unrequited love.

 Conveniently, and without appreciable distortion, Tom in the novel may be equated with brother Isaac in George Eliot's life; and with correspondent justification, George Eliot's and Maggie's battleground—that is, the Pearson-Dodson milieu—may be discussed primarily through these two individuals, who are so outstanding as representatives that they almost amount to personifications. Making the
individual stand for the type is surely the simplest and oldest of metaphors. This being granted, let us glance at the war of words between Tom and Maggie, directly following "the most painful scene in the novel," according to Professor Haight. Having heaped his brutal and grossly unjust insults on Philip in the Red Deeps, Tom walks away with Maggie "still holding her wrist tightly, as if he were compelling a culprit from the scene of action" (Bk. 5, ch. 5). They exchange heated words; feeling Philip's pain as if it were her own, and in addition to hers, Maggie (for this once) does not assume immediately that her brother's condemnation proves her guilt. Indeed, this is the one scene in which she comes close to defining Tom's light as false, and her own as true. Unlike her creator, however, she lacks the courage of her convictions—or rather, perhaps, she cannot maintain her convictions against the tyranny of the majority. Philip excepted, everybody whom she knows would side with Tom, corroborating his censorious and disdainful view of her conduct. Does it seem likely that she alone could be right? So she quickly resumes her role of misguided temptee, trying to fight against her own true light.

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16Introduction, Riverside Edition, p. x. I myself regard it as one of the two most painful, rivalled by Tom's turning his sister from his door when she comes back from her "elopement." (Bk. 7, ch. 1).

17The author implies, I think, that Maggie is right in her decision to submit to anything rather than wound her father; but wrong in yielding to Tom beyond that point.
In this paragraph, however, our interest centers on Tom's reply to one of the vehement remonstrances Maggie utters while still in sight of the true light:

"Pray, how have you shown your love, that you talk of, either to me or my father? By disobeying and deceiving us. I have a different way of showing my affection." (Bk. 5, ch. 5)

Unquestionably sincere, these words are illuminating. On the basis of George Eliot's injunction—"... remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision"—they can be readily defended. But they state and exemplify perfectly the basic emotional problem George Eliot has endowed Maggie with, because it was her own.

"'I have a different way of showing my affection.'"

Tom is speaking in anger here and exposing his psyche at its worst. About a year later, in a scene that shows him at his modest best, he expounds that "different way," and specifies the exact form it would take in its application to Maggie.

"... you might have lived respectably amongst your relations, until I could have provided a home for you with my mother. And that is what I should like to do. I wished my sister to be a lady, and I would always have taken care of you, as my father desired, until you were well married." (Bk. 6, ch. 4)

Isaac Evans, we know, held similar notions about the welfare of his sister Marian, the future George Eliot. Fortunately, one of her closest friends has summarized them (with judgments implied) in a letter that survives. On February 22, 1843,
about two years after Marian had come under the emancipating intellectual influence of the Brays and Hennells, Mrs. Cara Bray wrote to Sara Hennell, her sister:

"It seems that brother Isaac with real fraternal kindness thinks that his sister has no chance of getting the one thing needful—i.e. a husband and a settlement—unless she mixes more in society, and complains... that Mr. Bray, being only a leader of mobs, can only introduce her to Chartists and Radicals, and that such only will ever fall in love with her if she does not belong to the church."

The "real fraternal kindness" was sincere enough. Isaac might have echoed Tom's words to Maggie: "'You think I am not kind; but my kindness can only be directed by what I believe to be good for you'" (Bk. 6, ch. 4). Within the narrow limits of their standards and understanding, both men did desire the welfare of their sisters. The following author's comment would be equally appropriate if "Tom's" were replaced by "Isaac's": "The brother's goodness... could only show itself in Tom's fashion."

If asked to characterize Tom in the fewest possible words, I would choose intransigence, narrowness, and self-righteousness. Exemplified again and again throughout the novel, these qualities are repeatedly and cogently analyzed, explicated, and denounced—occasionally by authorial comment and by Philip, but more often by Maggie's indignation, communicated at times in a direct outburst (as in that scene in the Red Deeps), but more frequently through her creator's

18Haight, George Eliot, p. 48.
account of her thoughts. The magnitude, quality, and crucial importance of Tom's impact on his sister and on Philip stem from his possession of these qualities. For they sustain his role as outstanding representative of the Pearson-Dodson standards, so memorably sketched in the "Bossuet" chapter. Combined with the author's psyche, these standards underlie the autobiographical inspiration of The Mill on the Floss. The artistic embodiment of that inspiration demands a tussle with irreconcilable pressures and impulses, and hence a medium plausible as a source of the tussle and suitable for its dramatic presentation. Neither Maggie alone, nor even her interaction, as such, with Philip can meet these requirements. A third element is needed: the leaven of an opposite psychological pressure, relentless and ever-felt. When Tom Tulliver provides it in an eminent degree, the interaction with Philip generates an unusually perplexing aggregate of counterbalancing forces that steers Maggie into a dual struggle--into an attempt to ride simultaneously in opposite directions--and thus renders her paradoxical as a temptee.

Maggie, then, resembles George Eliot's other temptees in that she straddles a dividing line between two sharply contrasted ethical worlds; like her counterparts, she is solicited from both sides, and endowed with conflicting elements that respond to both. By way of maintaining a due perspective, let us recall the author's definitions—the word seems almost justified—of three of her temptees.
Arthur Donnithorne "will never get beyond that border-land of sin, where he will be perpetually harassed by assaults from the other side of the boundary" (AB, ch. 12). Godfrey Cass "had not moral courage enough to contemplate that active renunciation . . . he had only conscience and heart enough to make him forever uneasy under the weakness that forbade the renunciation" (SM, ch. 13). Bulstrode "was simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs" (M, ch. 61). In the same vein and for the same purpose, let us once more envisage Janet, Esther Lyon, and Gwendolen standing on the frontiers between two worlds that, at the very least, exemplify a near-absolute conviction of most Victorian intellectuals, George Eliot unquestionably included. It finds its neatest expression in an aphoristic line from In Memoriam: "There is a lower and a higher." Recalled here simply for illustration, these temptees differ enormously in their psyches, in their circumstances and problems, and in their performance as strugglers. But they do share one crucial bond; there is a nexus that unites them; the ethical issue they confront admits of no doubt. The author knows what they ought to do,

19 George Eliot quotes the line as part of the epigraph heading chapter 43 of Felix Holt. She intends it to refer to Esther, who will soon have to choose between the worlds represented by her two suitors—Harold Transome (the lower) and Felix Holt (the higher).
and she conveys her conviction to the reader in no uncertain terms.

Alone among the major temptees, Maggie stands outside that most vital nexus. As fully developed as any of her counterparts, and on one level fighting a virtual textbook battle—a battle perfectly illustrating the characteristic pattern previously elucidated—she nevertheless, on the strength of that exclusion, ranks as an anomaly, in a class by herself. She cannot usefully be discussed as though circumstances allowed her to find direction in those basic common assumptions that may unite diverse individuals and enable each to derive support from the sense of belonging. Perplexing her with a fundamentally different ethical issue, the author deprives her of the "kindly light" that the other temptees find easier to see—albeit on a low level of perception—than to follow. Maggie too straddles a frontier dividing two worlds, but worlds that cannot, plainly and simply, be categorized as right and wrong, or even as higher and lower. Rather, the antithesis they pose recalls George Eliot's interpretation of the Antigone: "Two principles both having their validity, are at war with each." Beyond reasonable doubt, the primary incentive for this unique departure from her usual practice resides in personal experiences before and during the composition of the novel.

Poised precariously on a frontier that divides two

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20Pinney, Essays, p. 263.
irreconcilable worlds, Maggie endures all the torment that arises from acute inner conflict. Neither world is homogeneous. On the contrary, each by itself, without the least reference to the other, illustrates eminently "the mingled thread in the web of . . . life," to which the author draws attention in Book 5 of the novel, appropriately entitled "Wheat and Tares." In the same chapter (no. 7) of that Book she adds, "... mingled seed must bear a mingled crop."

Thus, once again, in harmony with her oft-quoted aspiration "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in [her] mind" (AB, ch. 17), she stresses her eagerness to present, impartially and realistically, the limited right and its obverse limited wrong.

Let us begin with the Pearson-Dodson world—the world in which Maggie was born and raised. We recall that the author emphasizes the impact of its "oppressive narrowness" (Bk. 4, ch. 1). Because of that narrowness, "two principles, both having their validity, are at war"—even within the confines of that world, irrespective [for the moment] of its relation to any other. So enormous a distance separates their levels of validity, that these two principles may, without serious oversimplification, be labelled "good" and "bad." The good one, of course, consists in the basic human and familial affections, primarily manifested in Maggie's relation with "the two idols of her life" (Bk. 4, ch. 2)—her father and her brother. And the bad one, obviously,

21Pinney, Essays, p. 263.
exposes itself in the Pearson-Dodson standards, which even
cJudgment by the kindest possible light cannot rate higher
than barely mediocre. No inherent or absolute reason necessi-
tates antagonism between two principles functioning on such
widely disparate planes of cogency. Common experience tells
us that one can like and even love people—or at the very
least feel kindly toward them—without remotely sharing their
attitudes and opinions. (George Eliot's deep attachment to
her father, whose politics and religion were anathema to her,
constitutes a case in point). Maggie could easily have
adopted an analogous attitude toward her father and her
brother. But narrowness, intransigence, self-righteousness,
ignorance—these and cognate qualities in her nearest rela-
tives force her into an avoidable and most painful conflict.
Mr. Tulliver loves his "little wench" with an intensity
almost equal to hers for him; and though incapable of anything
proportionate, Tom does command the potential for a lower
degree of affection. But father and son alike fail to disso-
ciate affection and love from conformity to their standards
and practices. In its effect on Maggie, this aggregates the
most baneful expression of their glaring limitations. It
exacts from her a fearful price for the retention of good
and normal familial affections—affections that most people
long for and receive, and that she craves with exceptional
ardor. Given Maggie's instincts and endowments, the price
amounts to nothing less than compliance with standards and
practices that must desecrate her nature, and thus conduce
to the disintegration of her psyche.

Both for emphasis on disparity and for convenience of reference, the territory on the other side of the frontier may be tagged the Philip-Stephen world. As with its correlate, we will examine it in isolation before turning to the conflict between the two worlds. The stress must fall on Philip, who outranks his rival in significance for the present discussion, as well as in his worth as a human being. Despite her decision to the contrary, Maggie cannot resist his solicitations to meet him regularly in the Red Deeps. The magnitude of his impact and her resultant failure cause no surprise. Fettered and frustrated as an involuntary dweller in "The Valley of Humiliation," she responds to—indeed gravitates toward—the only source of alleviation within her sight and reach. The following extracts from the author's analysis suggest the main elements composing his influence:

... an opening in the rocky wall which shut in the narrow valley of humiliation... She might have books, converse, affection... making her mind more worthy of its highest service... some width of knowledge... a kindness to Philip... It was so blameless, so good... that there should be friendship between her and Philip... . (Bk. 5, ch. 3)

Despite his imperfections, these are sound considerations—reasons rather than excuses or rationalizations—provided we ignore the other side of the frontier, as in this paragraph I am trying to do. Philip does deserve reproach for hurrying Maggie into a premature engagement (Bk. 5, ch. 4), when he

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22Title of Book 4; the next Book—"Wheat and Tares"—begins with their first meeting in the Red Deeps.
knows that she had only thought of him as a precious friend of long standing. Nearly two years later he recognizes and acknowledges this error in the letter he writes shortly before her death (Bk. 7, ch. 3). Likewise, one may grant that, as a husband, he might have proved biologically deficient, possibly to the point of tempting her into infidelity with someone like Stephen, who on most other counts stands a long way below him, and could neither adequately match nor adequately complement Maggie's nature. Philip, in contrast, evinces great potential for doing both, and yearns to unfold, expand, and substantialize it unreservedly and exclusively for her happiness. In conjunction with the restricting conditions of Maggie's social setting, this endowment and this urge impart such value to Philip's offer that it looms palpably as an embodiment of "that higher vision [which] poisons all meaner choice for evermore" (FH, ch. 49, part of epigraph). At least one would think so, since its positive, unequivocal worth emerges impressively even by the light of an absolute standard of judgment. "She might have books, converse, affection . . . some width of knowledge . . . kindness . . . friendship . . . ." Precisely, Philip would reconcile what the Pearson-Dodson standards have forced into cruel and unnatural conflict: the needs of the heart and the needs of the mind. Her emotional cravings and her aesthetic-intellectual hunger mediated and assuaged, Maggie would cease to be self-divided.

Maggie, we know, achieves no such happy consummation:
indeed, she could hardly miss it by a wider margin than she does. In dire need of the help that Philip is eminently fitted, and ardently longing, to bestow on her, she yet denies him the opportunity by failing to provide its indispensable prerequisite. That prerequisite consists in a decision she alone can reach, poised on her frontier. He does his best to steer her toward it, but the final responsibility must remain hers. And Maggie, as we have seen, fails for one basic reason: she mistakes the true light for a temptation to be resisted, while trying to guide herself by the faint glimmer of the Dodson standards. (The rider "basic" needs to be stressed; as usually happens in life, Maggie's choice does not lie between black and white; it might reasonably assume the form of an unequivocal emphasis that does not preclude alleviation by compromise. We will presently enlarge on these modifications, because they account for the plausibility of Maggie's dual role as a temptee). Nevertheless, those Dodson standards mislead her into reaching the alternative and opposite decision, whose characteristics and results may be summarized as follows: it precludes Philip from helping her effectively and decisively; it is unnatural, cannot be carried out, and predisposes her to later "assault" by a "savage appetite," as he correctly discerns and foresees; it makes the worst of the worlds on both sides of the frontier; it embraces the conflict between those worlds and petrifies it in her psyche; it spells maximum pain for herself and maximum pain for those
connected with her; and it predetermines her ruin, leaving her with no more than a choice of the path by which she will reach that tragic and as yet unrecognized goal. The plight arising from her calamitous decision recalls, rather poignantly, Maggie's own childhood explication of a picture from Defoe's *The History of the Devil*.

"That old woman in the water's a witch—they've put her in to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned . . . she's innocent . . . But what good would it do to her then, you know, when she was drowned?" (MF, Bk. 1, ch. 3)

Alienated from the Philip-Stephen world by her attempt to do the unnatural, and from the Pearson-Dodson world by her failure to carry it out, Maggie finds herself in an impossible position, in a position that no one's psyche sustains indefinitely. Alienation causes pain; double alienation intensifies the pain; and the irreconcilable conflict of rival alienations tends to engender that warping effect on the personality, so memorably depicted in *Silas Marner*,23 as well as in many a novel of our own century.

Our earlier discussion of the autobiographical inspiration underlying *The Mill on the Floss* fuses tightly with the mental picture of Maggie, in the stance characteristic of George Eliot's temptees, straddling the frontier between the Pearson-Dodson and the Philip-Stephen worlds. By its very nature, that fusion—the fusion of Maggie the temptee with Maggie the autobiographical projection—radiates light.

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the light that enables us to recognize her as a paradox among the temptees and to account for the paradox; the light needed for resolution of the riddle posed at the beginning of this chapter. Clearly enough, Maggie's psyche and circumstances parallel those of her creator as closely as decorum, propriety, and the needful aesthetic distance permit. Broadly speaking, the Pearson-Dodson world, with its emphasis on the author's maternal aunts, and on Marian-Maggie's relationship with father and brother, represent the world of the author's childhood: the world which she mentally outgrew by a staggering distance, while remaining tied to it by the strongest fibres of her heart.

Once more, at this point, let us remind ourselves of the "Bossuet" chapter and of the article on the Antigone. Professor Haight's well-chosen words help to evoke the strength and pathos of those "fibres":

She was a country girl at heart; only by remembering that can many curious contradictions in her life be understood. The yearning for blue sky, an orchard full of old trees and rough grass, for hedgerow paths among endless fields, haunted her always . . . . (Letters, I, xlvii)

Less closely, but nonetheless recognizably, the Philip-Stephen world on the other side of the frontier, represents the author's life in the most advanced intellectual circles of London; her association with the Westminster Review,

24 If I seem to have overemphasized Antigone in this chapter, let it be remembered that George Eliot refers to her again at the end of Middlemarch (penultimate paragraph), where the juxtaposition with Saint Theresa forms part of the author's attempt to sum up the quintessence of her creed.
her relationship with John Chapman, Herbert Spencer, and many other liberals, including (of course) George Henry Lewes.

Loosely equating the character and circumstances of Maggie with those of her creator, we may now summarize the "antagonism between valid claims" in this dual application. The good qualities of the Dodson-Pearson world comprise normal familial affections (especially between father and daughter, and between brother and sister), and a physical environment endeared from earliest childhood (Dorlcote Mill in Maggie's case; Griff in the author's). Its bad qualities, though endless in their ramifications, may all be summed up in George Eliot's own term, "oppressive narrowness." In the world on the other side of the frontier, the assets consist of intellectual, aesthetic, and biological satisfaction: mental companionship conjoined with physical love. Pope's "the feast of reason and the flow of souls" may in part characterize those assets. The disadvantages inextricably fused with them can be stated as easily as they are hard to endure: alienation from the basic familial affections; alienation from the endearing physical environment of childhood; emotional adherence to moral standards and traditions, outgrown by the intellect. So far, then, autobiography transmuted into art expresses itself through resemblance: two comparable temptees straddle the frontier between two comparably contrasted and comparably incompatible worlds.

Undoubtedly, The Mill on the Floss presents a conflict,
and presents it effectively. But the author's and reader's primary concern does not center on the conflict as such. It centers on the validity of the conflict, just as (according to the article so often cited in this chapter) it does in Sophocles' play. In the perspective of George Eliot's work as a whole, this focus of interest stands out as an unusual phenomenon: one more of the characteristics that distinguish *The Mill on the Floss* from her other novels. Rarely, always reluctantly—and never without a bodyguard of qualifications—does she admit this validity. Its most succinct expression—though by no means its most extended or effective portrayal—occurs in another novel:

The law was sacred. Yes, but rebellion might be sacred too. It flashed upon [Romola's] mind that the problem before her was essentially the same as that which had lain before Savonarola—the problem where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion began. (R, ch. 56)

Misled by George Eliot's intellectual width and, above all, by her union with Lewes, critics have generally underrated her conservative streak. Broadly speaking, the heroine's two roles as temptee reflect her creator's self-division, expressed in the passage just quoted. As a misguided temptee—a temptee who mistakes light for darkness and darkness for light—Maggie indirectly vindicates the author, because her ordeal directs attention to that "sacredness of rebellion" she failed to see or tried to withstand. In effect, she is saying to the reader: "If my creator had decided and acted as I have done—if she had vainly tried to conform—she would have been ruined as I have been; this impressive
chronicle of my failure, which you find so moving, would never have been penned." Thus she points to the special circumstances and to the extremity of the choice that confronted her creator, implying that "the sacredness of rebellion" begins when the attempt at obedience is foredoomed to failure because it imposes negations beyond the individual's endurance, and hence would result in useless agony for all concerned. Failure to recognize "the sacredness of rebellion" would have ruined the author, for the same reason that Philip rightly discerns and predicts in Maggie's loosely analogous case.

"I foresee it will not end well; you can never carry on this self-torture."
"I shall have strength given me," said Maggie, tremulously.
"No, you will not, Maggie: no one has strength given to do what is unnatural." (MF, bk. 5, ch. 3)

Discerning no sacredness beyond that of obedience, and in consequence mistaking light for darkness, darkness for light, and her mentor (Philip) as a tempter, Maggie suffers beyond the common human measure, causes others to suffer, and dies. By the paradox of art, this tragic ordeal quickens her creator's life and elevates The Mill on the Floss to George Eliot's Apologia Pro Vita Sua.

But George Eliot, we have seen, believed "the sacredness of rebellion" to be a last resort. As an aesthetic teacher, she was much more concerned to inculcate "the sacredness of obedience." Maggie's dual struggle offers tremendous scope to the author for doing full justice to both claims--rebellion and obedience--and to clothe the
manifestations of those claims in the form of autobiographical or semi-autobiographical revelations. The paradox and complexity of The Mill on the Floss derive, basically, from Maggie's dual struggle, which represents the rivalry between valid claims: those of rebellion and those of obedience. Maggie's function as a misguided temptee points to the sacredness of rebellion, whereas her tremendous struggle as a conventional temptee—and her partial success or only partial failure in that role—emphasize the sacredness of obedience. And the resulting dialogues and agitated debates allow great latitude for authorial comment. None of George Eliot's impulses as a writer—aesthetic, moral, autobiographical—could have been satisfied with turning The Mill on the Floss into the feeble Apologia that would have evolved from hinging her self-justification on "the sacredness of rebellion" alone. Operating in unison, all three impulses goaded her into providing the widest and most fruitful range for the claims on the side of obedience. Once inspired, she found that they coalesced readily, each reinforcing the others. Similarly, an argument is strengthened by exhibiting the premises on the other side as fairly and as fully as possible before refuting them, or before demonstrating that they are outweighed. "Candor in controversy is as rare as being a saint," John Henry Newman remarked on one occasion. (Mill came close to being one of those saints). But in a work of creative literary art—as distinct from an argument—such candor leads to bounty, amplitude, complexity,
provided the contending elements fuse organically in a single effect. They certainly do so in *The Mill on the Floss*: the effect squares with our prognosis, and also manifests itself in the author's remarkable display of creative vitality. One might praise her novel in Dryden's words about Chaucer: "Here is God's plenty." Incidentally, her success merits regard on two collateral counts: it points to the falsity of the "Art for Art's Sake" approach to literature, which postulates a necessary cleavage between the ethical and the aesthetic sources of creativity; and it goes a long way toward answering a pivotal question that Browning poses near the end of *The Ring and the Book*: "Why take the artistic way to prove so much?"25

As a conventional temptee, the heroine (we have seen) achieves partial success; fails by a narrow margin when she does fail. Claims that spring from "the sacredness of obedience" do command momentous validity: the author presents them fully and convinces us of this innate human truth. Maggie strays into her other role—the role of misguided temptee—not because she makes the wrong decision between right and wrong, but because, in a situation requiring her to choose between the mixed good and evil on both sides, she errs in her judgment of emphasis. George Eliot's deepest instincts sympathize with many of the values that Maggie as a conventional temptee struggles so gallantly to uphold. We have already discussed these values. It will suffice here

25XII, 841.
to emphasize once more the depth of the author's belief in
the familial affections and in the potency of attachment to
an environment endeared from early childhood. This state of
mind persisted to the end. In her last novel she wrote:

A human life, I think, should be well rooted
in some spot of a native land, where it may
get the love of tender kinship for the face
of the earth, for the labours men go forth
to . . . The best introduction to astronomy
is to think of the nightly heavens as a little
lot of stars belonging to one's own homestead.
(DD, ch. 3, opening paragraph)

Thus Maggie's struggle as a conventional temptee serves in
part to express the author's nostalgia for what she had
been forced to renounce, and the fear that light-minded
people might point to her example as justification for
sexual licence or other forms of loose living. Trying to
exhibit the right on both sides and to mediate the antagonism
between valid claims, George Eliot in this novel pleads for
tolerance, sympathy with individual sorrow and individual
joy, careful allowance for special circumstances, and a
spirit of ethical flexibility rooted in an open mind. Among
dozens of pertinent illustrations that might be quoted here,
the following may serve as one representative example:

. . . the mysterious complexity of our life is
not to be embraced by maxims . . . the divine
promptings and inspirations that spring from
growing insight and sympathy . . . . the
insight that comes from a hardly-earned
estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid
and intense enough to have created a wide
fellow-feeling with all that is human.
(MF, bk. 7, ch. 2, part of last paragraph)

There is no escape from pain in this life, but there is the
chance of slow, gradual amelioration; and each individual,
within his sphere, should try to contribute toward that modest—but realistic and worthwhile—goal. The concluding paragraph of George Eliot's essay on the Antigone harmonizes with the spirit that quickens and pervades The Mill on the Floss.

Perhaps the best moral we can draw is that to which the Chorus points—that our protest for the right should be seasoned with moderation and reverence, and that lofty words . . . are not becoming to mortals.26

One might express a cognate sentiment in more familiar language: "Judge not that ye be not judged."

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26Pinney, Essays, p. 265.
In all areas of human endeavour, a theory or a conviction must necessarily stand or fall by the results of its application. But in literature, at any rate, the results of such an application will be worthless or positively misleading, if the theory becomes a Procrustes Bed, into which the facts of a given work must be fitted. The preceding discussion (Chapter 5) stems from an attempt to measure the heroine of *The Mill on the Floss* against the characteristic "Pattern of Failure," as illustrated in Chapter 4, while remembering that the "Pattern," derived from other temptees, would not necessarily be applicable to Maggie, whose creator never formulated it explicitly; and that, at best, it can be only instrumentally useful, in casting light upon a novel, which was not written for its vindication. The resultant image of Maggie as a paradox, comprising the dual role of conventional temptee and of misguided temptee, and the concurrent enlargement or re-adjustment of the traditional approach to *The Mill on the Floss*, give ground for both confidence and caution: for confidence, because the concept of temptation—including a characteristic "pattern of failure"—has substantiated its value as a critical tool; for caution, because George Eliot, exhibiting the flexibility characteristic of mastery, evidently uses the concept in a variety of unexpected
guises and for a variety of purposes. There is real danger in assuming that the application of the concept must square with a preconceived formula in the critic's mind.

The present discussion (Chapter 6), which focuses on *Middlemarch*, Book 7—"Two Temptations"—scrutinizing the meaning and significance of that title, subjects my theory—that the concept of temptation (with special emphasis on the temptee) underlies George Eliot's thinking—to the test of one further practical application. In this respect it parallels its immediate predecessor (Chapter 5). But it does not confine itself to paralleling the discussion of Maggie; it also complements that discussion in a number of ways. Though these ways do not amount to absolute categories, they may, for convenience, be broadly delineated as follows:

*First*, the examination of Maggie emphasized the "pattern of failure"; the examination of *Middlemarch*, Book 7, emphasizes the "pattern of success," as illustrated, with detailed exemplification from Mr. Farebrother, in Chapter 3. *Second*, the earlier study depended on the positive elements in the "pattern of failure"; the present study depends on their negative obverse, pointing to the author's evidently deliberate abstention from the use of palpable, attractive opportunities, and surmising her purpose. *Third*, just as false conceptions about Maggie spring, in part, from the tacit and unfounded assumption that one temptee can play one role only, so false conceptions about Lydgate spring, in large measure, from an equally misleading failure to draw a distinction—stressed
in my concluding Chapter—between Temptation in its widest sense, whereby practically all men become temptees, and Temptation in its more precise, more limited, and semi-technical sense. Fourth, both novels—as we have shown, or are about to show—share another source of critical misinterpretation, a source I have tried to remedy in my opening Chapter: failure to think explicitly and accurately about temptation, to recognize it as a relational concept, to break it into its component parts, and to realize its potential in George Eliot's work. Fifth, and last, the results of the two companionate studies confirm the need for great caution—great respect for the facts—in applying the concept, for its function in Book 7 of Middlemarch differs widely from that in The Mill on the Floss, and yet shares one common element: unexpected and unforeseeable elasticity in its use, thus indirectly emphasizing the need for approaching each novel individually, as a separate work of art, and envisaging the concept of temptation as no more than a possibly useful critical tool, which may or may not vindicate itself—through encompassing all the pertinent facts, and through reconciling contradictions by showing that they unite in a single effect. In this spirit of circumscribed confidence, of confidence tempered by the need for caution and moderation—by awareness that "Lofty words are not becoming to mortals"—do we now proceed to an analysis of a commonly held view about the "Two Temptations" in Book 7
of Middlemarch.

Everybody is agreed that one of the "Two Temptations" in the title of Middlemarch, Book 7, is Bulstrode's, but there is disagreement about the other. I am convinced that the Rev. Camden Farebrother's is meant (see Chapter 3), that George Eliot deliberately juxtaposes it to Bulstrode's. Both men are tempted, but only one of them falls. The critics, however, take a different view. At least two of them specifically raise or discuss the question of whose temptation (besides Bulstrode's) is meant in the title of Book 7, and both concur that it is Lydgate's. Barbara Hardy devotes one short sentence to the subject: "'Two Temptations' are Bulstrode's and Lydgate's."¹ David Daiches is more explicit:

The 'Two Temptations' of the title of Book VII are Bulstrode's and Lydgate's.... Lydgate's temptation is more complicated; it is to accept a much needed loan from Bulstrode when, on reflection, he has some doubt of Bulstrode's motives in consenting to give it; and it is also to succumb to financial and other pressure and give up his research ambitions and medical ideals, which means giving up his integrity. Both men yield....²

This approach is worth examining in some detail.

Two of Mr. Daiches' statements need not detain us long. "Lydgate's temptation is more complicated [than Bulstrode's]." On the analogy of George Eliot's practice


with all her indisputable temptees, we may be sure that it would not be complicated—in the sense of hard to define—if Lydgate were intended as a temptee. His circumstances repeatedly invite the author to present him in that role, and she consistently resists their prompting. Perhaps it is a pity. He would probably have ranked among her greatest, along with Arthur, Maggie, and Gwendolen. And again: "It [Lydgate's supposed temptation] is also to succumb to financial and other pressure and give up his research ambitions and medical ideals, which means giving up his integrity." But first, the greater part of Lydgate's experience along these lines is concentrated in "Sunset and Sunrise," and does not fall within "Two Temptations." If George Eliot had wanted to refer to it in a title, she would certainly have chosen that of the book in which it is emphasized. Secondly, the request for a loan and its acceptance are motivated by the desire to forestall most of

3 In the titles of Middlemarch, Book 7, and of The Mill on the Floss, Book 6, George Eliot is obviously using the word "Temptation" in its limited, specific, and semi-technical sense. This is also the sense in which I am using it throughout this chapter. In literature as in life, most people—Lydgate certainly included—are temptees if the word "temptation" is defined in its widest possible sense, to mean anything alluring that tends to prevent us from being the best that we can be, and doing the best that we can do. The two senses in which the word may be used are discussed in chapter 8 of the thesis.

4 These include his brief lapses of taking opium and of gambling at the "Green Dragon" (ch. 66), which are not in the least exploited in the way characteristic of George Eliot when she presents a character struggling against a temptation.
the evils that Mr. Daiches here enumerates. If these evils did constitute a temptation, then the effort to avoid them by any honest and lawful means could only be regarded as the fulfillment of a duty. Thirdly, these evils do not constitute a temptation, for the good reason that Lydgate never sees them as anything but evils. They lack even that modicum of superficial attraction which is required by the common definition of the word "temptation." A person or an object or a set of circumstances may attract in some respects and repel in others, but a "temptation" that repels and does nothing in the opposite direction is simply a contradiction in terms.

The remaining point requires more detailed refutation. "It [Lydgate's supposed temptation] is to accept a much needed loan from Bulstrode when, on reflection, he has some doubt of Bulstrode's motives in consenting to give it." Mr. Daiches seems to have forgotten the time sequences and the nature of Lydgate's doubt, as I shall now try to establish.

When Lydgate requests a loan of Bulstrode in chapter 67, he is ignorant of Raffles' existence. He feels most

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5 It might be argued that their attraction consists in their being the path of least resistance; but Mr. Daiches does not make this point, which is in any case a dubious one, considering Lydgate's nature and inclinations on the one hand, and his painful duty to Rosamond on the other. If it were accepted, Lydgate's efforts to escape from the (supposed) attraction of these evils would have even less claim to being regarded as a yielding to temptation.

6 This last fact is stated specifically in chapter 73, fifth paragraph.
reluctant and does have harrowing doubts, but not about "Bulstrode's motives in consenting," since Bulstrode refuses. They meet again in the afternoon of the same day (ch. 69). Their conversation centers on Raffles' illness; no reference is made to what had passed between them in the morning. "Doubt of Bulstrode's motives in consenting" is out of the question.

Bulstrode offers the thousand pounds on the next day, when the doctor calls at Stone Court by appointment, for the purpose of re-examining the patient (ch. 70). Lydgate's thoughts and reactions, insofar as they are relevant to the point at issue, are fully presented. They make it quite clear that his own harassment and subsequent sense of relief are at first too great to leave room for speculation about his benefactor's motives.7 Slightly later, as he is leaving Stone Court, he does reflect on this subject, and his thought is stated clearly and plainly: "It appeared to him a very natural movement in Bulstrode that he should have reconsidered his refusal; it corresponded with the more munificent side of his character" (ch. 70). These words surely constitute an absolute refutation—up to this point—of Mr. Daiches' assertion that "on reflection, [Lydgate] has some doubt of Bulstrode's motives in consenting to give [the loan]."

Doubt does beset Lydgate as he rides away from Stone Court, and its nature is stated as unambiguously as his directly preceding reflections on Bulstrode's motives:

7The execution has this day been put into Lydgate's house.
There crossed his mind, with an unpleasant impression, as from a dark-winged flight of evil augury across his vision, the thought of that contrast in himself which a few months had brought—that he should be overjoyed at being under a strong obligation—that he should be overjoyed at getting money for himself from Bulstrode. (ch. 70)

It is quite clear that these doubts do not in the least concern themselves with Bulstrode's motives. Lydgate is disturbed because he has put himself in a position of dependence, as we would expect him to be in view of his extreme reluctance to apply for a loan in the first place.

Lydgate had so many times boasted both to himself and others [e.g., to Farebrother in chapters 17 and 45] that he was totally independent of Bulstrode, to whose plans he had lent himself solely because they enabled him to carry out his own ideas of professional work and public benefit—he had so constantly in their personal intercourse had his pride sustained by the sense that he was making a good social use of this predominating banker . . . . (ch. 67, second paragraph)

The above passage is surely ample to account for Lydgate's sense of retrogression, and to interpret the phrase "a dark-winged flight of evil augury across his vision."

Evidence in support of Mr. Daiches' claim continues to be lacking.

Lydgate returns to Stone Court in the middle of the following morning (ch. 70), just before Raffles dies. He had not expected him to die and feels uneasy. What he suspects is "ignorance or imprudence" as factors in the patient's death; there is still no evidence that he suspects the banker's motives in lending the money. Later on the
same day (ch. 70) Mr. Farebrother, who has heard of the execution in Lydgate's house, comes to see him. Told of the loan, he praises it as an act of generosity, partly in an attempt to counteract his personal dislike of the donor. Lydgate does not orally disagree, but his thoughts on the subject do not harmonize with the Vicar's. He has now begun to be troubled by doubts regarding Bulstrode's motives.

Lydgate felt uncomfortable under these kindly suppositions. They made more distinct within him the uneasy consciousness which had shown its first dim stirrings only a few hours before, that Bulstrode's motives for his sudden beneficence following close upon the chillest indifference might be merely selfish. (ch. 70)

The timetable is important at this point. Lydgate receives his loan about noon on the day before Raffles dies. Death occurs after half-past ten on the following morning; that is, at the very least twenty-two hours later. His suspicions at the actual moment of death do not go beyond "ignorance and imprudence." Farebrother pays him a visit on the same day, some time after Lydgate has returned home from Stone Court. The "first dim stirrings" of an "uneasy consciousness" regarding Bulstrode's motives manifest themselves "a few hours before" the visit; that is, very shortly after Raffles' death (but not at its actual occurrence), and over twenty-two hours after his acceptance of the loan. And what are his suspicions in regard to these motives? No more than that they "might be merely selfish," probably in a sense little worse than he knows the banker's patronage to have been from the beginning of their connection. The contrast may simply be with his
earlier attribution of the loan to "the more munificent side of [Bulstrode's] character" (ch. 70) and with Farebrother's mistake of the same kind. There is no evidence that he even now suspects him of anything positively evil, either in relation to Raffles or to anyone or anything else. This state of mind persists until Bulstrode is publicly exposed at a meeting on a sanitary question in the Town Hall, about ten days after Raffles' death (ch. 71). As he listens to the lawyer, Mr. Hawley, who leads the informal prosecution, Lydgate is "undergoing a shock as from the terrible practical interpretation of some faint augury." Thus it is quite clear that he has not, in the interval, advanced significantly or appreciably beyond the "first dim stirrings" of an "uneasy consciousness" that he felt on the day of Raffles' death and Farebrother's visit, over twenty-two hours after his acceptance of a loan.

Mr. Daiches asserts that Lydgate's temptation partly consists in "accept[ing] a much needed loan from Bulstrode when, on reflection, he has some doubt of Bulstrode's motives in consenting to give it." His claim could be allowed if the reflections occurred at the time of Lydgate's request for a loan or before, and if they included some apprehension of evil—as distinct from merely selfish—motives. The evidence

8In its context, the word "sanitary" carries an ironical secondary meaning. The question that Mr. Hawley and his friends regard as a necessary preliminary to the main purpose of the meeting is one of moral sanitation through the removal of Bulstrode.
is incontrovertible that they do neither. Regarding Bulstrode's motives, Lydgate continues as blind as George Eliot deems consistent with plausibility, until he reluctantly leads Bulstrode (who is too shaken to walk unaided) from the meeting in the Town Hall. Then he suddenly sees with shattering clarity, and actually infers more than the facts known to him render strictly inevitable. He reaches a more balanced judgment later in the day (ch. 73), when he has ridden out of town in an attempt to find release from extreme inner tension, and is self-communing. Now fully aware of the grounds and nature of the suspicions against Bulstrode and himself, he nonetheless recognizes that he has no warrant for regarding Bulstrode's guilt as certain. "And yet—and yet... it is just possible that the change towards me may have been a genuine relenting... In his last dealings with this man [Raffles] Bulstrode may have kept his hands pure, in spite of my suspicion to the contrary" (ch. 73). Even "some days later" (ch. 76), when he is opening himself fully to Dorothea, who alone among the Middlemarchers rises to the occasion, he expresses uncertainty regarding Bulstrode's motives and actions. Wishing to give him the benefit of the doubt, he says, "'How my orders came to be disobeyed is a question to which I don't know the answer.'" (He never will). "'It is still possible that Bulstrode was innocent of any criminal intention—even possible that he had nothing to do with the disobedience, and merely abstained from mentioning it'" (ch. 76). In this scene with Dorothea, Lydgate
is searching his soul and trying hard to lay the full truth before her; above all, to omit nothing against himself for which even the most slender foundation can be found. Talking to her with this aim, he tells her of "his uneasy consciousness that the acceptance of the money had made some difference in his private inclination and professional behaviour, though not in his fulfilment of any publicly recognized obligation" (ch. 76). It is the utmost charge that can with the smallest degree of justice be brought against him. Absolute certainty and knowledge in psychological matters are rarely possible, if ever. Insofar as there can be a definitive judgment on Lydgate's case, Dorothea pronounces it after having heard his full revelation: "'You have not been blamable before any one's judgment but your own. . . . You shall be cleared in every fair mind'" (ch. 76).

Given Middlemarch in its actual form, a convincing defence of the view that Lydgate's constitutes one of the "Two Temptations" is impossible. Mr. Daiches, however, does not make the strongest case on his side that can be made. The facts do give him two possible openings, neither of which he takes. Lydgate expects Raffles to recover, and feels uneasy when he finds him at the point of death (ch. 70). Yet he refrains from questioning either Bulstrode or the housekeeper, as he probably would do if he were not under a sense of deep obligation for the loan he has received on the day before.
He was conscious that Bulstrode had been a benefactor to him. But he was uneasy about this case. He had not expected it to terminate as it had done. Yet he hardly knew how to put a question on the subject to Bulstrode without appearing to insult him; and if he examined the housekeeper—why, the man was dead. (ch. 70)

As we have seen, he suspects nothing worse than "ignorance or imprudence." Nevertheless, his sin of omission on this occasion troubles him after the exposure.

If he had not received any money . . . would he . . . have abstained from all inquiry even on finding the man dead?—would the shrinking from an insult to Bulstrode . . . have had just the same force or significance with him? (ch. 73)

Those who wish to make a case for the view that Lydgate's is one of the "Two Temptations" must necessarily dwell upon and magnify this phase of his relations with Bulstrode and Raffles. Their case would be weak, since George Eliot would have developed the phase much more fully if she had intended to give it the emphasis that inclusion in the title of Book 7 implies, and since (as we are about to see) she deliberately by-passes much better opportunities for presenting him as a temptee. Still, if Mr. Daiches had said, "Lydgate's temptation consists partly in allowing the loan from Bulstrode to influence his reaction to Raffles' death, which comes to him as a surprise on medical grounds," he would have expressed an opinion that does not directly violate the facts of the novel, and could be respected even when it is believed to be mistaken.

Shortly after Raffles' death, Lydgate experiences the
"first dim stirrings" of an "uneasy consciousness" regarding Bulstrode's motives in lending him the money. Here is a second opening that Mr. Daiches fails to take. His claim that Lydgate's acceptance of a loan from Bulstrode constitutes a yielding to temptation is simply mistaken. Nothing of any weight can be said in its defence. He would have some degree of plausibility on his side if he had said instead: "Lydgate's temptation, in part, is to retain a loan from Bulstrode after he has begun to feel doubts regarding the banker's motives in consenting to give it." We recall that later, after the exposure, Lydgate does return Bulstrode's money (ch. 81). Dorothea's generosity (ch. 76, last paragraph) enables him to do so. Unfortunately, however, he does not think of her in time as a possible creditor.\(^9\) He is unable to return the money when doubts of Bulstrode's motives first assail him, simply because he has already spent much of it on the day before, when he was quite unsuspicous. As soon as the cheque is in his pocket, "he put his hack into a canter, that he might get the sooner home, and tell the good news to Rosamond, and get cash at the bank to pay over to Dover's agent" (ch. 70). Furthermore, the word "doubt" is still too strong to express what he feels on the day of Raffles' death and Farebrother's visit. All that he experiences at this stage are the "first dim stirrings" of an "uneasy

\(^9\)This fact is as deplorable as his marriage with Rosamond. Once he was in debt, Dorothea would have been by far his best recourse.
consciousness" regarding motives that he suspects of nothing worse than being selfish. Considering his bankruptcy and everything that return of even the remainder of the money would entail, he should not be expected to act on such a slight prompting or foundation. We can scarcely believe that George Eliot would give the name of temptation to anything so tenuous as this, even in passing; and in fact she does not. Still less can we believe that she would single it out for attention in the title of a book. As it stands, Mr. Daiches' claim is refuted by the facts of the novel. The emendation I have proposed frees it from that charge, but does not appreciably add to its credibility.

The two feeble openings for the view that Lydgate's is one of the "Two Temptations" may be regarded as the proverbial exception that proves the rule. They are easily accounted for on the ground that George Eliot must necessarily make his mental state and actions in regard to Bulstrode and Raffles appear plausible; she must not portray him as so naive or so virtuous that we can no longer recognize a human being. In his difficult circumstances, he participates

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10In contrast, the word "temptation" (or the corresponding verb) is used repeatedly in connection with Farebrother's trial (ch. 66).

11George Eliot does not stretch Lydgate's guilelessness beyond the limits of plausibility. It accords with what we have previously seen--his susceptibility to women, his lack of political skill, his impracticality in financial matters--and in the present circumstances it is naturally accentuated. The pressure of harrowing personal problems--impending bankruptcy and marital discord--leave him little inclination to take an interest in other people's affairs. Furthermore, Bulstrode's secret and consequent desires are more evil than anyone of average decency would be likely to suspect,
in the temptee's experience to the extent that most men do at some point of their lives (see footnote 3). What is significant is that, in the face of the most obviously inviting circumstances, the author takes pains to keep his share to the minimum that is compatible with her integrity as an artist. His suspicious conjectures are formed as late as possible, and even then they graze the mark rather than hit it. On the first day (ch. 69), he is not "surprised at a little peculiarity in Bulstrode"; forms "no conjectures, in the first instance, about the history of Raffles"; and finally supposes that "'Raffles is an object of charity to Bulstrode.'" On the second day (ch. 70), he ascribes the offer of the money—refused on the first—to "the more munificent side of [Bulstrode's] character": disturbed he is, certainly, but only because he has put himself in a position of dependence, contrary to his earlier boasts and resolutions. And even on the third day (still ch. 70), as we have seen, his surmises about Bulstrode's motives are carefully steered as far from the truth as is consistent with plausibility, and kept that way until the public exposure, more than a week later. Bulstrode constantly fears disclosures in the doctor's hearing, especially from the two most apparent sources—the patient himself and Mrs. Abel, the housekeeper, who administers the opium and brandy in all good faith. But Raffles, we are told, "took little notice of Lydgate's presence, and continued to talk or murmur incoherently"
(ch. 70); and Mrs. Abel, as we learn from Lydgate's self-communion after the public exposure, reveals nothing while "Raffles . . . continued alive and susceptible of further treatment" (ch. 73). Professionally, his acceptance of the loan influences him only to the extent that he refrains from questioning Bulstrode or the housekeeper, and certifies in writing that the death is due to delerium tremens.

Novelists rarely create opportunities for the purpose of not using them; but they may create them for manifold other purposes, including beguilement of the characters in their novels, and a corresponding beguilement of their readers. George Eliot's purpose requires that the imputations later raised against Lydgate should be substantially false, and yet tinged with truth enough to aggravate the injury they cause. Readers who mistake him for a temptee are paying unconscious tribute to her powers as a creative writer. Quite possibly, they are being affected as she intended that they should be—at least on a first reading. Certainly she has contrived a decoy of spurious appearances, compelling enough to mislead all but one of the

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12 Hawley later uses her as a source of information, as Lydgate tells Dorothea in chapter 76.

Middlemarchers, and compelling enough to lure the reader into adopting the Middlemarch point of view. After disclosure of the evil past at that meeting in the Town Hall (ch. 71), no one can doubt Bulstrode's wish to be rid of Raffles. Everybody knows that he died in Bulstrode's house, and that Lydgate was the doctor who attended him; equally, everybody knows that Lydgate has been floundering in dire financial straits for some time, and that he received a thousand pounds from Bulstrode on the day preceding the death of the patient. The author has proffered an attractive invitation for the "putting of two and two together" (ch. 71), and the Middlemarchers accept it with alacrity. They err in doing so, but to no greater degree than would the people of other communities, anywhere and at any period. Leaping from impressions to a definite conclusion, mingling the true and the false inextricably, relieving tedium with gossip, feeling virtuous or clever at others' expense—within these manifestations of a timeless and recognizable human bias, the Middlemarchers exhibit an enormous (and yet expected) spectrum of individual variation. We are not surprised that it ranges all the way from coarseness and ludicrous crudity to kindliness and judicious balance: from the surmises of "Mrs. Dollop, the spirited landlady of the Tankard in Slaughter Lane" (ch. 71) to those of Mr. Farebrother, who feels "deeply mournful" (ch. 71) at the time of the exposure, and two days later delivers a tentative, carefully balanced judgment, designed (in part) to dampen Dorothea's ardour of helpfulness.
"It is possible—I have often felt so much weakness in myself that I can conceive even a man of honourable disposition, such as I have always believed Lydgate to be, succumbing to such a temptation as that of accepting money which was offered more or less indirectly as a bribe to insure his silence about scandalous facts long gone by. I say, I can conceive this..." (ch. 72, italics added)

And so, we may be sure, can George Eliot. For that very reason has she taken so much care (as we have demonstrated) that Lydgate shall not be tried beyond his strength. Though perfectly plausible in its assessment of him, Farebrother's statement gives a succinct account of what did not happen—of what the author labors to prevent from happening. The equivalent of a blueprint rejected, it tells us (in effect) what the plot would have been if George Eliot had decided to present Lydgate as a temptee. Treating the rejected blueprint as though its embodiment were wrought into the novel, failing to see Mr. Farebrother in the role of a temptee (though the words quoted suggest that he himself does), the critics have found it easy to concur, basically, with his tentative version of probabilities. Since the title of Book 7 requires them to account for two temptations, they eagerly seize upon the obvious possibilities of the situation, and ignore or slur over or miscontrue the gulf between their approach and the facts of the novel. Like the Middlemarchers, they mistake the opportunity for the practice—for the actual treatment—whereas the striking disparity between them proves the opposite intention on the author's part.  

14Cf. Lydgate's words in his outpouring to Dorothea: "'It is one of those cases on [sic] which a man is condemned on the ground of his character—it is believed that he has committed a crime in some undefined way, because he had the motive for doing it; and Bulstrode's character has enveloped me, because I took his money'" (ch. 76).
One Middlemarcher only rises above the level of Mr. Farebrother's construction—Dorothea, who alone proves right. Her role as a modern Saint Theresa would become confused—at least so far as her relations with Lydgate are concerned—if the suspicions against him were substantially true. George Eliot takes deep interest in the suffering and predicament of a superior individual who is cruelly misunderstood, because his motives and actions are judged by the lowest common denominator of the community in which he lives. Maggie is an earlier example, especially on her return from the "elopement" with Stephen. The "world's wife" in St. Ogg's—MF, bk. 7, ch. 2—finds her counterpart in Middlemarch—M, ch. 74. Mrs. Dollop's views of Lydgate—M, chs. 45 and 71—illustrate an extreme case in point.

Helping someone of this kind and in this position exacts some of the finest human qualities. Sir James and Mr. Farebrother try to discourage Dorothea from attempting anything so delicate and so hazardous (ch. 72). But they fail because Dorothea, in effect, guides herself by Caleb Garth's principle: "'That signifies nothing—what other men would think. I've got a clear feeling inside me, and that I shall follow . . .'" (M, ch. 56). Her recent painful experiences have led her to be "interested now in all who had slipped below their own intention" (ch. 50). Talking with Lydgate when nearly everyone has turned against him, she says: "'There is no sorrow I have thought more about than that—to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail'" (ch. 76).
Lydgate's "spots of commonness" (ch. 15) render him vulnerable, but they do not in themselves make failure inevitable.

The immediate, precipitating cause of Lydgate's failure is "this petty medium of Middlemarch" (ch. 18), and more specifically two of the Middlemarchers: Rosamond and Bulstrode, who in relation to him represent the negative and positive side of evil. Between them, broadly speaking, they ruin his life and deprive society of the valuable contribution he would probably have made. As Mr. Irwine says, "Men's lives are as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe: evil spreads as necessarily as disease" (AB, ch. 14). In the same vein, Felix insists that Esther "may be either a blessing or a curse to many" (FH, ch. 10).

Obviously, circumstances would be less potent against us if we ourselves were better or wiser or stronger; but our fellow-men, to a large extent, make the circumstances. If others had been better or greater, they would have tried, like Dorothea and Mr. Farebrother, to support and encourage Lydgate's admirable purposes, and to protect him against his weaknesses, instead of exploiting them, as Rosamond and Bulstrode do. His experience and actions conform to and illustrate a theme that, with variations, permeates all of the novels; apropos of Dorothea, the author stresses it in

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15Cf. "He once called her his basil plant; and when she asked for an explanation, said that basil was a plant which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brains" ("Finale").
her "Finale": "The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive." The theme certainly forms an integral part of George Eliot's interest in Lydgate.

Lydgate is a very different man from Bulstrode, but not in the sense that he is developed as an obvious foil to him. The titles of the books in Middlemarch are for the most part intended to suggest contrasts, somewhat analogous to that between Hetty and Dinah in "The Two Bed-Chambers" (AB, ch. 15). It is unlikely that George Eliot, drawing the reader's attention to certain areas of human experience canvassed in her novel, such as love problems (3) and temptations (2), would simply enumerate the number of examples. They are juxtaposed for a reason more cogent than that they can be grouped under a common label: the purpose, quite clearly, is mutual illumination. If Lydgate were intended as a temptee at all, she would probably have made him resist with success: would have made him refuse the money, as Ladislaw does (ch. 61). Mr. Daiches misses this point when he says, "Both men yield" (p. 61). His failure here is surprising, for though his booklet on Middlemarch contains only a single, brief reference to Mr. Farebrother (p. 60), it is a perceptive one and evinces limited recognition of the vicar's role as a foil to Bulstrode. Commenting on George Eliot's discussion of Bulstrode's moral consciousness,

16Barbara Hardy also recognizes this (p. 108); she says "parallels and contrasts." And yet, surprisingly, she fails to discern Farebrother as a foil to Bulstrode in "Two Temptations."
he says: "The further implication, that state of mind rather than doctrine is what produces true morality, also reinforces what is suggested elsewhere in the novel—by the character of Farebrother for example." If Mr. Daiches had acted on this insight and carefully examined "the character of Farebrother" in action and in the full context of the novel, he would probably have realized that, in Book 7, George Eliot is subjecting the "true morality" of these two contrasted personalities to the test of temptation.

Farebrother passes this test with flying colors. His technique and conduct are discussed at some length in Chapter 3 of the thesis. In the pantheon of George Eliot's temptees, he is the most instructive—not the most histrionic—exemplar of resistance and success. There is good reason to think that she has a special predilection for him as a foil to Bulstrode. Evidence for this belief is to be found partly in Middlemarch, partly in other novels, and partly in her great essay "Worldiness and Other-Worldiness: the Poet Young," which may be regarded as a convenient nexus for views that also permeate other essays or articles and many of her letters.

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18 W.J. Harvey comments on it as follows: "This is one of the great critical essays of the nineteenth century and it contains in embryo nearly all we need to know about the moral and aesthetic bases of George Eliot's novels." The Art of George Eliot (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 37.
summarizes these views succinctly and memorably:

The sum of our comparison is this: In Young we have the type of that deficient human sympathy, that impiety towards the present and the visible, which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion, to the remote, the vague, and the unknown; in Cowper we have the type of that genuine love which cherishes things in proportion to their nearness, and feels its reverence grow in proportion to the intimacy of its knowledge. 19

I cannot take space to defend fully the opinion that, broadly speaking, Bulstrode reflects Edward Young. It seems to me that anyone who has read both the essay and the novel must concur, though the degree of the resemblance is debatable. Two items of evidence may, however, be cited. One of them consists in "worldliness" and its opposite as key terms in Bulstrode's cant. They are bandied about between him and Mr. Vincy in their sparring about Fred (ch. 13), and also (in a less combative vein) between him and his wife when they discuss Rosamond's engagement (ch. 36). Talking with Lydgate earlier in Chapter 13, he contrasts his own "sacred accountableness" with the "worldly opposition" of those who differ from him (in this case about the appointment of his protégé, Mr. Tyke, as chaplain at the old infirmary).

The other item of evidence is George Eliot's amply established abhorrence and admiration, respectively, of the two antipodal approaches to life that she here identifies.

(whether rightly or wrongly does not matter) with Young and Cowper. For example, in a letter to Charles Bray (November 13, 1857), she remarks:

I dislike extremely a passage . . . [in his book The Philosophy of Necessity] in which you appear to consider the disregard of individuals as a lofty condition of mind. My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy. (Letters, II, 403)

Thomas A. Noble speaks of George Eliot's "doctrine of sympathy" and rightly calls it "the central concept of [her] moral philosophy." Most conspicuous in Scenes of Clerical Life, as he points out, it also permeates her later novels. In Middlemarch she comments as follows on Bulstrode's evil past and on the curious mental processes by which he justifies it to himself: "There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men" (ch. 61). Earlier in the same chapter she says, "Metaphors and precedents were not wanting." One is reminded of Felix Holt's contemptuous outburst: "Oh yes! . . . give me a handful of generalities and analogies, and I'll undertake to justify Burke and Hare . . . ." (FH, ch. 16). The tendency of her age (and ours) "to see a ground for complacency in statistics" (JR, ch. 22) was particularly repugnant to George Eliot, who felt that "the misery of one casts so tremendous a shadow as to eclipse the bliss of ninety-nine" (Ibid.)

It would be unfounded to assert with equal confidence and bluntness that Farebrother reflects William Cowper. What may justly be claimed is that in relation to Bulstrode, Farebrother parallels George Eliot's view of Cowper more closely than does any other character in Middlemarch. His very name is suggestive of fairmindedness and human brotherhood. Mary Garth equates him with the Vicar of Wakefield (ch. 57), for whom most readers cherish an affection. Lydgate calls him "one of the most blameless men I ever knew" (ch. 50). Like Mr. Irwine in Adam Bede, he is lax in his strictly parochial duties and even plays cards for money (ch. 50). He also smokes a pipe, an indulgence which "Bulstrode and Company" hold against him (ch. 17), though it is really a mote as against their beam. His faults, if they can be called that, are venial; theirs are of the spirit. In essentials he is a thoroughly good man—again like Mr. Irwine—as is manifested in many small ways, among which his care for his mother, aunt, and sister, and his generosity to Fred are conspicuous. What he does for Fred serves as a gloss on Bulstrode's pretentious and pompous moralizing (ch. 13) about that average young man, just as his genuine friendship for Lydgate (e.g., chs. 17, 63, 70) contrasts with Bulstrode's use of him as a convenience. One recalls Mrs. Poyser's pithy comparison between Mr. Irwine and his successor, Mr. Ryde, as quoted by the aged Adam Bede in direct conversation with his creator: "Mr. Irwine was like a

21Since George Eliot, unlike Dickens, seldom uses names in this way (except in some of her essays), the exception with Farebrother is worth noting.
good meal o' victual, you were the better for him without thinking on it, and Mr. Ryde was like a dose o' physic, he griped you and worreted you, and after all he left you much the same'" ([AB, ch. 17). In more conventional English, but in the same spirit, Lydgate tells Dorothea that "'a good deal of [Mr. Tyke's] doctrine is a sort of pinching hard to make people uncomfortably aware of him'" ([M, ch. 50). As Mr. Ryde is unfavourably contrasted with Mr. Irwine, so Bulstrode's protégé, Mr. Tyke, is unfavourably contrasted with Mr. Farebrother. Tyke teaches what Bulstrode calls "spiritual religion," by which he means his own opinions ([M, ch. 17). We may be sure that George Eliot essentially agrees with Mr. Farebrother when he tells Lydgate:

"I am opposed to Bulstrode in many ways. I don't like the set he belongs to; they are a narrow ignorant set, and do more to make their neighbours uncomfortable than to make them better. Their system is a sort of worldly-spiritual cliqueism: they really look on the rest of mankind as a doomed carcase which is to nourish them for heaven." ([M, ch. 17)

The vicar's sentiments and expression are here very close to several passages from "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness; the Poet Young." In an earlier conversation with Lydgate, Bulstrode calls Farebrother "'a man deeply painful to contemplate'" (ch. 13). One can hear George Eliot saying to herself, "We'll put them to the test." She does, and draws our attention to the fact in the motto for chapter 66--"'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,/Another thing to fall'"--and in the title of Book 7--"Two Temptations."
Chapter 7
THE FUSION OF TWO CONCEPTS: AESTHETIC TEACHING AND TEMPTATION

Long before Henry James, George Eliot worked out and held decided views on the theory of the novel in general, and on her own art in particular. She expressed them in many pertinent and familiar pronouncements.1 Because of their high relevance, I quote a few of them here. On July 5, 1859, about five months after the publication of Adam Bede, she wrote in a letter to her friend, Charles Bray:

If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally... the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures. (Letters, III, 111)

And some seven years later (August 15, 1866), in a letter to her young Comtist friend, Frederic Harrison,

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she remarked:

I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it ceases to be purely aesthetic—if it lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram—it becomes the most offensive of all teaching. (Letters, IV, 300)

In her later years, especially, she emphasized that her social contribution must be made through the medium of art. Thus on January 25, 1876, she commented in a letter to Dr. Joseph Frank Payne:

But my writing is simply a set of experiments in life[2]... . I become more and more timid—with less daring to adopt any formula which does not get itself clothed for me in some human figure and individual experience, and perhaps that is a sign that if I help others to see at all it must be through that medium of art. (Letters, VI, 216-217)

Like the rest of us, George Eliot often fell a long way below her own ideal; her work certainly exhibits serious lapses from the picture to the diagram; and in a letter (dated October 29, 1876) to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe—author of Uncle Tom's Cabin—she defends the Zionist part of Daniel Deronda on blatantly didactic grounds. Her best work, however, does achieve a close approach to the presentation of life in its highest complexity; partly for that reason, it succeeds in enlarging the


3Letters, VI, 301-302.
reader's sympathies. And her best work, certainly, includes the struggles of her great temptees.

These struggles are presented so convincingly, so perceptively, so dramatically, that a creative reader, participating imaginatively, may identify himself with the temptee, experience the thrill or shock of recognition, and in consequence amend his own conduct. Possibly alien to us (though I fail to see why it should be), such a response appeared natural to the author's contemporaries. Fortunately, we possess some evidence of its occurrence. Readers' reactions to two of the greatest temptees—Bulstrode and Gwendolen—included the following instances: in November, 1872, when Middlemarch, Book 7, had just been published, a Minister, preaching a sermon on the prophet Hosea, referred to Bulstrode in these terms:

"Many of you no doubt have read the work which that great teacher George Eliot is now publishing and have shuddered as I shuddered at the awful dissection of a guilty conscience. Well, that is what I mean by the prophetic spirit."^4

Similarly, a young lady in New York gratefully ascribed her rescue from probable disaster to beholding in the experience of Gwendolen an ominous semblance of the doom she herself had been unconsciously courting: "... much gratitude for being saved, by reading Daniel Deronda, from marrying a man whom [I] could not love,

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but whom [I] was disposed to accept for the sake of his wealth . . . ."5 Precisely. A number of the temptees conclude one phase of their tussle in doing what at the outset appeared as abhorrent and as impossible to them as it does to the reader, who perhaps murmurs something like, "Here but for the grace of God go I," on realizing that, despite equal revulsion and equally good intentions, he too may (in Pope's words) "... first endure, then pity, then embrace." Hence he cannot but be driven to take precautions against himself, and to try to learn through the medium of George Eliot's art what the temptees there portrayed learn only in consequence of harrowing suffering, both for themselves and others, and generally not until it is too late; not too late, indeed, for profiting from their experience by doing better in future, but too late to undo the harm to others, and in part to themselves, that has already arisen from their past conduct. Thus, simply by the outstanding success with which she depicts the struggles of her great temptees, George Eliot fulfills in ample measure one of her main functions as an aesthetic teacher of morals. Her aesthetic and her didactic impulses triumphantly fuse into a single, powerful, and salutary effect on the reader.

George Eliot thinks of life primarily as conduct,

defined in its widest sense to include the part that, roughly speaking, corresponds to Arnold's "culture." Viewed in this way, the problems of human choice and action find neat expression in one of Bishop Thomas Wilson's maxims, repeatedly quoted by Arnold throughout *Culture and Anarchy*: "'First, never go against the best light you have; secondly, take care that your light be not darkness.'" As exacting in its application as it is concise, this crucial injunction (or its equivalent) shines as a guiding star from the sky above George Eliot's fictional world. Apt to be metamorphosed into manifold, baffling impediments upon contact with an actual set of circumstances, it constrains each individual to a life-long, ceaseless struggle. His performance in that struggle determines his worth and (in human as distinct from theological terms) his salvation. It also entails far-reaching consequences for all those who come in contact with him, and indeed for human life in general. Each one of the novels abounds in confirmation of these last two statements. By way of obvious illustration, we may cite part of the author's comment on Maggie's culminating dilemma, one of Felix's exhortations to Esther, and a few of the famous closing words of *Middlemarch*.

6The quotation is found, among other places, near the opening of chapter 4, entitled "Hebraism and Hellenism." In the "Notes" to his edition of *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 213, John Dover Wilson tells us that Arnold first found a copy of the Maxims in his father's study at Fox How in 1867. The Bishop's dates are 1663-1755.
"Moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot" (MF, bk. 7, ch. 2); "You may be either a blessing or a curse to many" (FH, ch. 10); "The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts" (M, "Finale").

Once we accept Bishop Wilson's maxim as an adequate formulation of George Eliot's basic approach to human life, we recognize that the word "temptation" must be understood in two senses—with the usual proviso that the distinction is not absolute—whenever we are discussing her novels. In its wider sense it encompasses everything that hinders us from following one part or both parts of the Bishop's injunction: from doing the best we could do and being the best we could be. It includes—borrowing Arnold's terms—our "ordinary self" as distinct from our "best self" and the "spots of commonness" (M, ch. 15) in a Lydgate. In its more limited and semi-technical sense, it refers to a major character struggling with a specific temptation, and to the elaborate presentation of that struggle and its consequences. Obviously, every temptee in the second sense is also a temptee in the first; and obviously, the distinction between our "ordinary self" and our "best self" is emphasized throughout Culture and Anarchy, and especially in the last few pages of chapter 2, entitled "Doing as One Likes."
too, most human beings (in literature as in life) are concerned with temptation if we define the word in the first sense. The common and mistaken belief that Lydgate's is one of the "Two Temptations" in Book 7 of Middlemarch derives from failure to distinguish between these two senses.

Why is the charge "Temptation—nothing else" more applicable to George Eliot's fiction than to most other works of literature? Partly because of the inclusion in every novel of a major character grappling with temptation in the limited and semi-technical sense, but primarily because she views, presents, and judges her characters—and also encourages the characters to judge themselves and others—in terms of their endeavour to apply Bishop Wilson's injunction or its equivalent. These efforts are of course beset with endless difficulties and problems—psychological, social, intellectual. The pattern of temptation provides a local habitation and a name for the struggle and for the hindrances; it is their embodiment.

Let us briefly recapitulate the pattern. At the center of the conflict stands the principal temptee, planted (metaphorically speaking) with one foot on each side of the moral boundary that divides George Eliot's fictional world. His struggle to resist is described at length and with great penetration, and usually culminates in defeat. The defeat results in acute and protracted nemesis, both for himself and for most of
those with whom he has been associated. Nemesis may even be present when a principal temptee resists successfully, as Esther Lyon does; the appalling spectacle of Mrs. Transome's nemesis helps her to make the right choice. The associates participate in the conflict, not only through the suffering that the principal temptee unwittingly inflicts on them, but also through animated discussion in various forms of the moral issues involved. Their own problems and cases often present parallel or contrasting situations that serve to illuminate and enrich the central conflict. The author's voice, used with increasing subtlety as we pass from the early to the later novels, hovers over the scene, commenting, guiding, analyzing; and in general helping us to keep hold of the central moral clue in the midst of much complexity.

The rhythm of life, upset by the temptee's wrongdoing, is usually restored in some degree before the novel ends, and the temptee himself derives the well-known purgatory benefit from his suffering (unless he sinks deeper and deeper, as Tito does). He ends a sadder and a wiser man; wiser because he would know better if he could relive the span of his life that we have witnessed; sadder because he knows that he cannot. The wrong that he has inflicted on others is in a large measure irretrievable; and the opportunity for a morally higher life that had beckoned to him is gone and may
never recur. We recall Arthur Donnithorne's belated realization that "There is a sort of wrong that can never be made up for" (AB, "Epilogue"), and Gwendolen's feeling that "She [is] a banished soul--beholding a possible life which she had sinned herself away from" (DD, ch. 57).

Moral continuity resulting from singleness of vision is the central clue, I believe, to an understanding of George Eliot's novels. It is also the hallmark of her pattern of temptation and a major source of its scope and power. Many excellences and some weaknesses that critics have either noted in isolation or partially missed fall in line and cohere once we recognize her fictional world as the emanation of a mind that sees, guides, and judges in terms of the struggle to apply Bishop Wilson's injunction, and that is able to present the struggle with unusual breadth and power. Singleness of vision does not, of course, mean narrowness of vision. The two parts of the injunction give equal weight to the conscience and to the mind (or consciousness)--roughly equivalent to Arnold's "Hebraism and Hellenism" and the standards that George Eliot brings to bear upon both are of the highest. All men must fight the battle to walk staunchly by the best light they have and to take

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care that their light be not darkness. Thus the principal temptee, straddling the two moral worlds into which the novel is divided (broadly speaking) and fighting his battle with a specific temptation, is seen in perspective as part of the great battle with temptation in the wider sense—the battle from which none can escape; in which all men, within the novel and without, must participate.

By and large, George Eliot does divide her world into two camps, with a boundary between them, but moral continuity is maintained because she applies the same standards of judgment to both sides, and perceives and exhibits the grades of goodness and badness with unusual penetration. She never forgets that a small glass and a large glass cannot hold the same amount of water, though they may be equally full. At her best she even recognizes that there is no absolute break as we pass from one side of the dividing line to the other. In *Felix Holt*, for example, the two contrasted poles are the world of the protagonist and the world of Transome Court, where Harold and his parents—that is, his mother and his natural father, the unsavoury lawyer Matthew Jermyn—are the principal figures. Between them stands Esther Lyon, legal heir to Transome Court, and wooed by both Felix and Harold. A temptee in the limited and semi-technical sense, she is, inevitably, also a temptee in the first and wider sense; she is part of the spectrum or hierarchy of individual and
unfolding moral values that extends from pole to pole, cutting across any boundary between moral camps, as climate and vegetation ignore political boundaries.

Early in the novel, before the influence of Felix Holt has begun its fermenting work within her, Esther might be rated lower than two good women of very limited scope—Mrs. Transome's faithful attendant, Denner, and Felix's mother, Mrs. Holt. They at least are useful, devoted, active, and frugal, while the unregenerate Esther is vain, idle, frivolous, and luxury-loving. But her potential as a human being is greater than theirs, and once the best that lies latent within her has been stirred, she reaches moral heights that are certainly beyond the ken of Mrs. Holt. With Denner one hesitates to make a dogmatic pronouncement. More intelligent than Mrs. Holt, she might in propitious circumstances have developed a long way beyond her actual level in the novel. As for Mrs. Transome, the contrast between what she is and what we are constantly made aware that she might have been is so poignant that it hurts. Those most intimately associated with her at Transome Court—her son Harold and Harold's natural father, Matthew Jermyn—are discriminated with equal skill and insight. A long way below Felix Holt, Harold nevertheless towers above Jermyn, whose own standards are higher than those of his electioneering agent, Mr. Johnson. As Shakespeare can have three murderers on the stage for
ten minutes and make each speak differently, so George Eliot discerns and presents the varieties of moral scope.\(^9\)

In consequence of such discernment, the result of an outlook as homogeneous as it is wide and penetrating, an atmosphere of moral continuity pervades the novels. Even the minor characters contribute significantly to the central theme. For example, nearly everyone in *The Mill on the Floss* struggles tenaciously to remain faithful to the best light he has—that is, in effect, to guide himself by the first part of the Bishop's twin injunction. The principal temptee—Maggie—tries very hard; but so does Tom, and much more successfully; so does Mrs. Glegg, especially in the chapter entitled "Showing that Old Acquaintances are Capable of Surprising us" (Bk. 7, ch. 3); so does benighted Mrs. Tulliver; so (ironically and to his own ruin) does the headstrong and impetuous father; so does Philip Wakem. The author's moral vision extends equally to the principal temptee, to minor temptees of the semi-technical kind, and to the other characters, most of whom are also temptees—in the wider and looser sense. Applying the same moral standards to all, as George Eliot herself does, the reader perceives that their judgments of each other are often grossly astray. Shocked by sudden recognition of the close correspondence in this respect between the

\(^9\)The discussion of *Felix Holt* in this paragraph and the preceding one owes something to Joan Bennett's *George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art* (Cambridge, 1948), ch. 9.
novel and actual life, he may henceforth orient himself toward greater caution, understanding, and sympathy in reaching conclusions about his fellow-men. Whenever George Eliot influences a reader in this way, her aim of moral teaching through art is vindicated triumphantly.

The plot impinges primarily on the second of the twin injunctions: "Take care that your light be not darkness." Confronted with challenge, crisis, exceptional circumstances, unforeseen revelations of character, everyone—that is, the temptees in the semi-technical sense, as well as those in the wider and looser—is forced to re-examine his previous guiding stars, his previous "light." It is this jolt—often amounting to a violent wrench, a dislocation—that occasions the agitated moral debates so characteristic of the novels, and lends support to George Eliot's conception of her own work as "simply a set of experiments in life" (Letters, VI, 216). It also gives full scope to her talent for psychological analysis, for showing how a character develops, and for presenting moral complexity—social and intellectual—without moral confusion. Her novels never distress the reader by representing human life as a bewildering maze to which no clue can be found. Within obvious limits, she knows what to think and what to believe. Her "experiments" do lead to certain conclusions, or confirm those they were devised to confirm. Anxious to give all that she has, and seeing the only
practicable way in the fullest possible communication, she is prepared to complement the voice of her characters with the judicious use of her own.

George Eliot's ability to show how a character develops, so remarkably displayed in the figure of the principal temptee, extends equally to those with whom he is associated, and indeed to most of the major characters. Examples abound throughout the novels. Adam Bede and Tom Tulliver, for instance, rigid and self-righteous, from the beginning of their respective novels walk staunchly (and with great success) by the best light they have, but both discover before the end that their previous light had been partly darkness. Tom's change takes the form of a sudden flash of insight in the last few minutes of his life:

It ["the full meaning of what had happened"] came with so overpowering a force—it was such a new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life that had lain beyond his vision, which he had fancied so keen and clear. (ME, bk. 7, ch. 5)

Adam's is much more gradual and protracted, and may easily be imagined to continue (under his wife's influence) beyond the close of the novel. His words to Arthur just prior to their final (except for the "Epilogue") parting in the Wood (AB, ch. 48) may be cited as particularly striking illustrations. Reva Stump's book on George Eliot is questionable, but she does have a point
in emphasizing the importance of vision. At times one is reminded of Shakespeare's "Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile." It is not surprising that so intellectual an author as George Eliot should do full justice to that part of the Bishop's twin injunction.

Talking about Lydgate after Bulstrode's exposure, Farebrother and Dorothea exchange these words:

"Character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do."

"Then it may be rescued and healed," said Dorothea. (M, ch. 72)

The truth expressed in this dialogue is demonstrated again and again in George Eliot's writings. Silas Marner will immediately come to mind as an obvious example. But the person referred to in the dialogue is himself a memorable illustration. The completely convincing presentation of Lydgate's tragic transformation from ardent scientist and medical reformer to fashionable physician ranks among George Eliot's great achievements.

The author leads us to think that Lydgate's fall is due to his own "spots of commonness"(M, ch. 15) combined with "this petty medium of Middlemarch" (ch. 18).

10Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels (Seattle, 1959). Also to the point are the protagonist's words on vision during his walk with Esther in chapter 27 of Felix Holt.

11Love's Labour's Lost, I, 1, 77.
Her special aptitude for presenting life as a moral struggle is in large measure dependent on her ability to show how the inner and outer fact interact, and to do full justice to both. Ever mindful that "there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it" (M, "Finale"), she deliberately involves her temptees in circumstances calculated to expose and act on their weakest spots. Emphasis on the "medium" is very strong throughout the novels, so much so that a fine anthology entitled *Scenes of English Town and Village Life in the Early Nineteenth Century* might be compiled from George Eliot's fiction. The worlds of Milby, Hayslope, St. Ogg's, Raveloe, Treby Magna, and Middlemarch are memorable cases in point. They should not, however, be regarded as "background," except in the sense that they constitute the outer fact for each of their inhabitants. It is much more helpful to think of them as arenas in the struggle to apply Bishop Wilson's twin injunction. This view emphasizes moral continuity resulting from the author's singleness of vision and judgment, and reminds us that practically all of her characters are temptees in the

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12 Much less felicitously, George Eliot adheres to the same principle in her presentation of Florence at the close of the fifteenth century (cf. Romola, ch. 21, second paragraph, and Letters, IV, 97). The only intentional exception—the exception that proves the rule—is *Daniel Deronda*, where the protagonist's and Gwendolen's rootlessness forms part of the author's conception (cf. DD, ch. 3, opening).
first and wider sense of the word. The arenas become not only the physical but the moral setting for the concentrated struggle that is focused on the principal temptees—on the temptees in the more limited and semi-technical sense.

A comparison of *Middlemarch* with Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* may be illuminating. They are alike in some respects: both emphasize discussion, both present many varied points of view, both are preoccupied with moral problems, both are remarkable for their play of ideas. But Huxley's novel is talky in a way that George Eliot's is decidedly not. Her closest equivalent, perhaps, is a long philosophical discussion in blank verse, entitled "A College Breakfast Party." Far less would be lost if all the characters in *Point Counter Point* were simply sitting round a table and discussing their subjects than would be lost if the characters in *Middlemarch* were to do the same. Partly this is simply due to a difference in talent. Huxley may be George Eliot's equal in intelligence, but she is by far the more gifted novelist. To a much greater extent than Huxley can she embody her ideas in living, recognizable characters and situations. Mark Rampion, for example, is everlastingly advocating the "whole life," but we never see him living it. By contrast, Lydgate's intellectual passion is splendidly actualized (as is Klesmer's musical genius in *Daniel Deronda*): the reader is not asked to believe—he sees and feels. Her best characters assume a life of their own, far beyond any
requirements of the moral scheme; or rather, the moral scheme itself becomes more complex in proportion as the characters develop. One may suspect an original diagram, but it is far out of sight.\textsuperscript{13}

Like Browning, George Eliot seems to find that "speaking truth" can best be done "the artistic way."\textsuperscript{14} Her novels are distinguished, powerful, and absorbing (at times great), not because of any qualities inherent in the pattern of temptation, but because the pattern resulted from extraordinary talents used in the artistic presentation of a single, coherent, and intense vision of human life. Writing in the 1930's, Huxley lacked

\textsuperscript{13}Cf. "I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it ceases to be purely aesthetic—if it lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram—it becomes the most offensive of all teaching" (Letters, IV, 300). Partial lapses do occur; they include Romola, Felix Holt, and (especially) Mordecai in Daniel Deronda. Their relative infrequency is one measure of George Eliot's greatness and inspiration.

\textsuperscript{14}Cf. The Ring and the Book, XII, 841-844; also, George Eliot's remark, "If I help others to see at all, it must be through that medium of art" (Letters, VI, 217). Bernard J. Paris derives the title of his book (Detroit, 1965) from words in the same letter: "My writing is simply a set of Experiments in Life" [capitals and italics added]. The intolerance, sarcasm, and dogmatism of her essays on Dr. John Cumming ("Evangelical Teaching . . .") and on Edward Young ("Worldliness and Other-Worldliness . . ."), both in Thomas Pinney, ed., Essays of George Eliot (New York, 1963), may be contrasted with the pity, understanding, and even sympathy she shows toward Bulstrode, whom she endows with most of the characteristics that she flays in these gentlemen.
the vision (or any equivalent)\textsuperscript{15} that constitutes so vital a source of George Eliot's creative energy, and imparts so characteristic and memorable a stamp to the image of human life she has left us. It is an image that, in Milton's words, one would not willingly let die. Based on a secular faith in the potential nobility and gradual perfectibility of human nature—George Eliot called herself a "meliorist"—it appeals to the modern reader, for it emphasizes psychological analysis and development, social background, and intellectual complexity. Freed from theological or other dogma,\textsuperscript{16} George Eliot steers clear (except for occasional lapses) of the oversimplification and rigidity that, by twentieth-century standards, vitiate the approach to temptation in many older works of literature. Her humanism has found wide recognition and admiration in

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{15}If one had to find a motto for Point Counter Point (other than Huxley's own), one might choose two lines from Macbeth (I, i, 11-12) that George Eliot cites and specifically deprecates in her essay "Moral Swindlers" (Impressions of Theophrastus Such [Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1901]), ch. 16, p. 158: "'Fair is foul, and foul is fair;/Hover through the fog and filthy air.'"
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{16}Auguste Comte's, for example. Richard Congreve, founder of the Positivist community in London, and a close friend of George Eliot and Lewes since 1859, wrote in 1880: "She is not nor ever has been more than by her acceptance of the general idea of Humanity a Positivist . . . [she] never accepted the details of the system, never went beyond the central idea" (quoted by Gordon S. Haight in Letters, I, lxii).
\end{quote}
the 1960's, even from critics whose interest does not center on her. At the same time she does descry and follow certain guiding stars of conduct; she does have convictions and regards it as part of a novelist's responsibility to make the reader aware of the fact. We are never permitted to throw up our hands in moral despair. She abhors the tendency—so characteristic of our time—to see a confusion that makes nonsense of ethical judgments. Complexity must in all circumstances be grappled with, as a dog grapples with a bone. There always remains "the least partial good" (M, ch. 20) to be sought by means of "the conduct which, in every human relation, would follow from the fullest knowledge and the fullest sympathy."

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18 "Moral Swindlers," in Impressions of Theophrastus Such . . . , Library edition (Edinburgh and London; William Blackwood and Sons, 1901), p. 158. Omitted from Thomas Pinney's collection, this essay is at present out of print. -- In chapter 50 of Adam Bede, George Eliot refers to sympathy as "the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love."
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