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Realist Form in *Middlemarch*

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THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM OF SYMPATHY:
PARABASIS, INTEREST, AND REALIST FORM IN
MIDDLEMARCH

BY ANNA KORNBLUH

We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the totalest separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named "fair-competition" and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that Cash-payment is not the sole relation of human beings; we think, nothing doubting, that it absolves and liquidates all the engagements of man.

—Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843)¹

When the superbly indignant Thomas Carlyle excoriated Victorian society for the "cash-nexus" to which it had reduced "all the engagements of man," he charged the nineteenth century to create alternative media for "the relation of human beings."² Albeit with less nostalgia for feudalism, Friedrich Engels resoundingly approved of *Past and Present*, while disparaging the promise of novelistic realism to fulfill that charge: "All the multi-volume novels with their sad and amusing intricacies . . . you may with an easy conscience leave unread. . . . Carlyle's book is the only one which strikes a human chord, presents human relations and shows traces of a human point of view."³ Nevertheless, at least one novelist would come to avow her own praxis as a response to Carlyle's mandate. It was in Carlyle's text that George Eliot found a catalyst for turning toward the genre of the novel, heralding in her 1855 review of *Past and Present* the same striking force upon which Engels had remarked.⁴ "The most effective educator," she wrote,

aims less at perfecting specific acquirements than at producing that mental condition which renders acquirements easy; does not seek to make his pupils moral by enjoining particular courses of action, but by bringing into activity the feelings and sympathies that must issue in noble action. . . . The influence of such a writer is dynamic. He does not teach men how to use sword and musket, but he inspires their souls and sends a strong will into their muscles. He does not,

perhaps, enrich your stock of data . . . but he strikes you, undeceives you, animates you.⁵

Animated with the Carlylean vitality so appreciable here in her vigorous verbs and perpetual present tense, Eliot would soon after this review compose both “The Natural History of German Life,” a manifesto for her realism, and *The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton*, her first fiction. In both of these texts and thereafter, Eliot endeavored to keep pace with Carlyle as a “dynamic” and “effective educator” defined by a twofold effect: “bringing into activity the feelings and sympathies that must issue in noble action.” Her renowned strategy involved crafting a realist aesthetic whose careful attention to the experience of socially diverse fictional characters could inspire feeling with and therefore “noble action” on behalf of real people.⁶ In oft-quoted maxims like “if art does not enlarge men’s sympathies, it does nothing morally;” or “the greatest benefit we owe the artist is the extension of our sympathies;” or “art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot,” Eliot venerated sympathy as the *raison d’être* of her aesthetic, and in turn, as our scholarly accounts regularly recognize, she defined sympathy itself as aesthetic.⁷

Yet, as the Carlylean catalyst makes clear, Eliotic sympathy was also pivotally situated with respect to an alternative axiologic, the economic. Like Carlyle, Eliot wanted sympathy to be economically operative: the “noble action” engendered by the sympathetic aesthetic was meant to remedy unsympathetic economic associations; fellow-feeling would inspire charity for those sinking as industrial capitalism swelled and domesticate the alienation and isolation unleashed by profiteering and greed amongst those who prospered. Over the interval between Carlyle’s decrimal of the cash-nexus and Eliot’s major works, the economic dimension of sympathy became all the more pointed, as the Victorians took *laissez-faire* to new extremes, perfecting that nexus in which cash exceeds its deplored role as medium of relation between human beings and, in the words of Karl Marx, “enters into private relations with itself.”⁸ In point of fact, money’s “private relations” were promoted by an array of mid-Victorian legal and parliamentary measures—such as Peel’s Act of 1844, the Limited Liability Act of 1855, and the Joint Stock Companies Act of 1856—which are routinely cited in economics and legal textbooks today as the precedents of “financialization,” the transition to an economy in which the volume of and revenue from monetary transactions exceeds that of industrial production. As

the chain of cash connections geometrically expanded into a matrix of financial conjunctions, everyday economic bustle was thought to deviate ever further from the basic needful “engagements of man.” Moreover, the basic sense of “economy” unfurled to comprise ever more rhetorical aspects such as the figures of value cut by futures or shares. In articulating sympathy with the economic in addition to the aesthetic, Eliot therefore engaged a rapidly changing complex of values in which “economy” was more and more figuratively inflected. Thus, while her notion that sympathetic affect can be economically efficacious illuminates the pre-history of compassionate conservatism, and therefore impugns sympathy as the paramount bourgeois bargain—feeling ethically aggrandized by the aesthetic sensation of common humanity, and therefore politically absolved of the responsibility to restructure the economic inequality that debilitates experiential commonality—it is more immediately the case that her engagement with the Victorian economic context torques the very figuring of sympathy itself. Invested with economic importance and investigated with economic language, Eliotian sympathy itself starts to appear as an economy. Sympathy figures as an economy of attention and affection—a distribution of psychological resources—subject to laws of scarcity, and clamoring for regulation.

Whether concentrated in single words like the quantifiers in all the maxims quoted above (“enlarge,” “extend,” “amplify”) or dispersed throughout the entire rhetorical system of a novel like *Middlemarch*, this figure of the “economy of sympathy” primarily represents, as it did for Adam Smith, a presumed scarcity of resources.⁹ The problem of sympathy’s limited supply and inequitable apportionment surfaces everywhere from *Adam Bede*’s early prospectus for depictions of “more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people” to *Daniel Deronda*’s later program for consolidating a “too diffuse sympathy.”¹⁰ Often in Eliot’s texts, then, what limits sympathy is not so much reverence before the insuperable alterity of the object of sympathy as affective shortages proper to the subject of sympathy: it has only so much to give.¹¹ Constrained from the inside out, sympathy threatens less the swallowing of the other than the bursting of the self, with consequences that Eliot explicitly deems fatal.

Complicating Eliot’s figure of the economy of sympathy are the standards she scrupulously elaborated at the start of her novelistic career, which directly conflict with simple scarcity principles. In “The Natural History of German Life” she opined, “We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for

the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness.”¹² Sympathy, it would seem, becomes an ethical category precisely to the extent that it enjoins us to transcend our proclivities for the exceptional—heroic, sentimental, lovely. Sympathy worthy of its name reaches out toward the thoroughly unsympathetic, resisting its instinctual dispensation and exceeding any economy of feeling. Moreover, sympathy must always oppose “the vulgarity of exclusiveness,” exceeding partiality and striving for generous inclusion.¹³ Given this redistributive expansiveness of the ethical as such, the limited distribution implied by the economy image grants immunity against ethical imperatives. Victorian psychology was growing increasingly infatuated with the economy metaphor of mental and affective functioning, but Eliot’s philosophy of sympathy primed her to render the costs of that figure more transparent: the assertion that the subject can only tolerate limited quantities of excitation and affection would seem to naturalize the contingent constriction of social ties that Carlyle and Eliot decried in the cash-nexus.¹⁴

Thus, while the economy of sympathy figure usefully distills the scarcity that prompts Eliot’s ethical plea, it soon thwarts those ethics in advance. Nowhere is this contradiction more acutely construed than in *Middlemarch*, a text remarkable for the economic rhetoric employed by the narrator to deliberate sympathy, and for the narrator’s anxious tone. Reading that anxiety as a symptom of that rhetoric, the novel can be seen mapping the attractions and dangers of the metaphor of the economy of sympathy. Along the way, the novel works in both thematic and narrative registers to evade the ethical pitfalls in the economy model of sympathy by refiguring “economy.” What initially evokes the concrete scarcity of sympathy that troubles Eliot later comes to signify a pulsation of metaphoric excesses. This refiguring, I shall argue, parallels the revisions of the rhetoric of economy stimulated by the process of financialization, which altered dominant conceptions of the dynamics of “economy.” Economic production and transactions moved away from finite material goods and toward abstract representations of value like derivatives, untethering “economy” from connotations of closure and constriction, latching it instead onto images of open expansion.

By transforming the economy of sympathy from a scenario of scarcity to a refraction of finance, *Middlemarch* performs the developments in the consolidation of financial capitalism with which it is contemporaneous in both penning and setting. An indispensable stimulus for the later laws I have already mentioned was the 1833 Bank of England Charter Act, which both authorized the Bank to print paper money and

repealed bans on usury, normalizing the money-begotten-by-money that previous epochs from Aristotle to Defoe had deemed “monstrous birth.”¹⁵ Set in the 1830s in the run-up to the Charter Act, *Middlemarch* is consumed with questions of usurious and non-usurious gifts, loans, and debts, and the legal formalization of interest dynamically materializes in the text’s thoughts about sympathy. This happens in three ways: the figure of the economy of sympathy commences with the scarcity concept and concludes with the interest-based financial concept; while elaborating that transition, the narrator conspicuously uses the word “interest” to prescribe and enforce what the protagonist Dorothea Brooke and Eliot herself elsewhere call “sympathy”; and, most strikingly, all this thought about sympathy is undertaken in recurrent strange narrative moments when the text’s self-reflexivity formalizes the self-reflexive pattern of financial interest, money that buys itself.¹⁶ As the prevalent extra-diegetic occurrences reverberate, the novel accentuates the economic figures and forms to which Eliotic sympathy is inextricably bound.

In the first part of this essay, I focus on these impressive narrative structures in *Middlemarch*, suggesting that their amalgamation of financial form and affective content encapsulates the novel’s vexed connections between sympathy and economy. I propose to call these structures by the Greek term “parabasis” (meaning “to step beside”) because they are distinctive in their extra-diegetic stance: they are moments in which the narrator steps beside the text to talk about the allocation of sympathy within it. The parabases are regulative insofar as they intervene in and codify an economic distribution of interest, but they are also excessive as self-reflexive dispositions that stand beside the narrative to call attention to narrative ethics. They are therefore unusual for their inversion of *Middlemarch*’s normal narrative economy, in which a tightly woven web encompasses problematic excesses of various kinds (Dorothea’s ardency and her wealth, Will’s aestheticism, Casaubon’s jealousy, Rosamund’s greed, Lydgate’s profligacy, Fred’s debt, Bulstrode’s deceit). Furthermore, they are notable for their difference from the more generic intrusions for which Eliot’s narrators are both commended and reviled. The difference lies in the degree to which their self-reflexivity performs and intensifies their content: the reflexive narrative about narrative mobilizes the reflexive contour of “interest” through which money accumulates itself. One of the suggestions I will offer is that this extraordinary dimension of the narrative form measures the complexity of the ethical problem provoking Eliot. While her sympathetic ethics reject base economics, those ethics are

imaged through economic forms. The parabases advocate sympathetic interest and perform financial interest, disclosing the inconsistency of a sympathy that ostensibly opposes economized relations on ethical grounds even as it draws its form from them.

In the essay's second portion, I contend that the novel attributes this ethical inconsistency to capitalist modernity, principally by emplotting an opposition between the ardent ethics and "fanaticism of sympathy" (*M*, 250) of the philanthropist Dorothea Brooke and the normative wisdom of Adam Smith. Dorothea initially envisions sympathy as the ways and means of an alternative resource allotment, but is compelled over the course of the novel to moderate her "fanaticism," learn to "understand political economy" (*M*, 16), and accede to the economized sympathy it calls "interest."¹⁷ As the novel draws to a close, Dorothea's concession to this economy of sympathy brings the compensatory pleasures of romantic love. In a complementary fashion, the parabastic narrator engineers a deal for its own distribution of sympathy that allows the novel to arrive at a consoling conclusion. Yet both of these deals crackle with disquiet, evincing the novel's ongoing trepidation and ambivalence about both of the economies of sympathy it explores. By calling attention to the aestheticized quality of its thematic and formal compensations, *Middlemarch* moves to theorize sympathy as at once the "moral currency" of the realist novel and the affective correlative of financial capitalism.¹⁸

I. PARABASIS AND DANGEROUS METAPHORS

Eliot's figuration of the sympathetic economy may have converged from multiple avenues of thought about economics and economies. Foremost is the impression initially instilled by Carlyle's impassioned articulation of *laissez-faire* capitalism with emotional isolation, from which stemmed the impetus to conceive sympathy as economically interventionist. Additionally, over the course of her novelistic career, Eliot's most proximate intellectual circle would complement her idea of literary sympathy acting upon the economy with its own discourse on the economy of literature. The literary criticism of her consort George Henry Lewes and their mutual friend Herbert Spencer brought both literary form and ethical sentimentality under the umbrella of "economy," establishing a precedent for Eliot's figure of the sympathetic economy. Lewes deemed what we now call realism "Economy of Art," and composed his "Principles for Success in Literature" with a first principle of "The Law of Economy."¹⁹ "Economy" was the basis

from which all other aesthetic principles were derived, and referred predominantly to a strategic equilibrium between an author's language and a reader's comprehension: "Economy dictates that the meaning should be presented in a form which claims the least possible attention to itself as form, unless when that form is part of the writer's object, and when the simple thought is less important than the manner of presenting it."²⁰ The purpose of this inconspicuous form is to enable the most efficient readerly assimilation: "It is the writer's art so to arrange words that they shall suffer the least possible retardation from the inevitable friction of the reader's mind. The analogy of a machine is perfect. In both cases the object is to secure the maximum of disposable force, by diminishing the amount absorbed in the working."²¹ When a writer lacks this art, a reader "wastes, on interpretation of the symbols, force which might have been concentrated on meditation of the propositions."²²

Lewes's "Principles" markedly reproduce Herbert Spencer's earlier treatise "The Philosophy of Style," which emphatically insisted that the economy of art was warranted by "the economy of mental sensibilities:"

Language is the vehicle of thought, we may say that in all cases the friction and inertia of the vehicle deduct from its efficiency; and that in composition, the chief thing to be done, is, to reduce the friction and inertia to the smallest amounts. Let us then inquire whether economy of the recipient's attention is not the secret of effect, alike in the right choice and collocation of words, in the best arrangement of clauses in a sentence, in the proper order of its principal and subordinate propositions, in the judicious use of simile, metaphor, and other figures of speech, and even in the rhythmical sequence of syllables.²³

The economy of literature is dispensed by the "economy of attention," which Spencer took as the inexorable fact that "a reader or listener has at each moment but a limited amount of mental power available."²⁴ As the "cause" of good literary style, the economy of attention is also the cause of the corollary economy of emotion, for Spencer classes emotions as simply more complex forms of thought-perception, constructing a parallelism between the "economy of mental energies" and the "economy of mental sensibilities."²⁵ The "generalization" that a law of excitation and release, expansion and contraction governs the energetic economy is "equally true" of the sentimental economy.²⁶ Literary form must respond to an economy of mental energy and sentiment in which interest runs scarce.

When Spencer praised the assured effect of Eliot's prose ("I can scarcely imagine any one reading it without having their sympathies widened and their better resolves strengthened"), he might therefore just as well have praised her obeisance to the law of economy.²⁷ Though glad for his approval, Eliot could not quite square her sympathetic mores with the equation between literary economy and affective economy, and would encounter a problem with the notion of the economy of sentiment acting as cause for the economy of literary form. She was of course well acquainted with the economy of narrative form as both a material necessity and a stylistic merit, but her elemental premise that literature could widen our sympathies cannot so readily admit the fundamentality of any mean economy of sentiment. If sympathies are rigidly economized, what can be the point of writing novels? More pressing, since "our good depends upon the quality and breadth of our emotion," how can the sympathy economy coincide with an ethical subject (*M*, 441)?

It is this tension over the interaction of narrative economy and sympathetic economy that sparks the parabases in *Middlemarch*, which contemplate narrative practice in economic language. A survey of the economy of narrative form induces the novel's indelible image of "this particular web," which directly associates the expansion and contraction of the narrative's focus with consideration for costs, in contrast to the profligate digressions of bygone novelists:

But Fielding lived when the days were longer (for time, like money, is measured by our needs), when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings. We belated historians must not linger after his example; . . . I at least have so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe. (*M*, 132)

This particular novelist acts out of expediency and efficiency, containing digressions and conserving time and money. So for all the humor in this critique of the affable Fielding, there hovers an urgency and imperative that avouch something more grave: all those wincing qualifications ("I at least," "certain human lots," "this particular web," "that tempting range") and over-reaching requirements ("time," "money," "needs," "must not linger," "so much to do," "all the light I can command," "must be concentrated") augur an anxious reluctance about the constraints the passage intended to justify. Rather than the judicious

impositions of a more disciplined aesthete than Henry Fielding, these qualifications bear the earmarks of the immanent limitations of working with scarce resources. Time, money, light, concentration—all are measured by need, and need seems to outpace supply.

Even with this inscription of the economy of narrative form, Eliot pursues different insights about its correlation to the economy of sympathetic sentiment. Lingering at length over Caleb Garth, for example, the narrator acknowledges that this award of specificity and time stems from her acquaintance with and love of Caleb, neither of which the reader shares:

He took the paper and lowered his spectacles, measured the space at his command, reached his pen and examined it, dipped it in the ink and examined it again, then pushed the paper a little way from him, lifted up his spectacles again, showed a deepened depression in the outer angle of his bushy eyebrows, which gave his face a peculiar mildness (pardon these details for once—you would have learned to love them if you had known Caleb Garth), and said in a comfortable tone— (*M*, 219)

Conspicuity abounds here, with direct address to the reader within the graphic paratext of parenthesis, all intensified by the way that the plea for pardon repeats the action of the passage: the narrator, like Caleb, “measures the space at his command.” All this pointed fervor jitters around the unstable equation between narrative space and sympathetic affection—for the conditional “you would have learned to love them if you had known Caleb” not only folds affection into acquaintance; it also intimates that “love” is means enough to widen this particular web. In this moment at least, the economy of sentiment is not the cause of the economy of narrative form; quite the contrary: it is the means of exceeding the textual economy. The novelist who devised her art to promote such sentiment could not entirely align with Lewes and Spencer on this question of the economy of feeling. While there is no guarantee that holdings in the narrative economy will mature into sentimental dividends (and hence so many moments of narrative injunctions like “think no unfair evil of her, pray” or “the faults will not, I hope, be a reason for the withdrawal of your interest in him”), to presuppose an economy of sympathy would be to defeat in advance the purpose of fiction (*M*, 258, 169). Eliot’s sympathetic imperative instead leads her to quite the opposite conclusion as Lewes and Spencer: the economy of narrative form causes an economy of sympathy.

Perhaps unnerved at this departure from Lewes and Spencer, Eliot remained fascinated with the economy of sympathy figure, which consistently presides over the parabasic moments in *Middlemarch*. Not far into the novel's first book, the narrative assumes its very first oddly self-reflexive stance. Readers have just been introduced to the dilettantish Will Ladislav, but the narrator inveighs against passing "a too hasty judgment," advising: "Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous" (*M*, 77). Lest one be duped by this very caution into committing another mistake (exempting from judgment only special characters), the narration takes a remarkable turn—the paragraph breaks, and markedly shifts to the present tense and the first person: "But at present this caution against a too hasty judgment interests me more in relation to Mr. Casaubon" (*M*, 77). Up to this early point, the narrator has entertained less than charitable appraisals of Casaubon (most amusingly, "he has got no red blood in his body . . . somebody put a drop under the microscope, and it was all semicolons and parentheses . . . he dreams of footnotes" [*M*, 65]). Retracting these foregone devaluations of Casaubon's soul, the following parabasis scolds the readers whose sympathies have too hastily gone awry, and upbraids the narrator whose narrative has too capriciously promoted its protagonists. Stepping beside its own preceding narration and the collective judgments it has elicited, the speaker of this retraction singles itself out by using the first-person singular voice for the first time in the novel ("at present this caution interests me"). And as this voice reverberates under the smart of its correction, it redoubles into a first-person plural:

Suppose we turn from outside estimates of a man, to wonder, with keener interest, what is the report of his own consciousness about his doings or capacity: with what hindrances he is carrying on his daily labours; what fading of hopes, or what deeper fixity of self-delusion the years are marking off within him; and with what spirit he wrestles against universal pressure, which will one day be too heavy for him, and bring his heart to its final pause. Doubtless his lot is important in his own eyes; and the chief reason that we think he asks too large a place in our consideration must be our want of room for him. (*M*, 78)

As the narrator aligns herself with the reader by virtue of the first-person plural pronoun, she closes the gap between narrative form and readerly interest: they conjoin as the same economy, which reigns over the rhythm of this passage itself. Like the pulse of expenditure and withdrawal that Neil Hertz gauges in Eliot's journals and letters,

a movement of expansion and contraction hums within this novel: the meter taps out an economy of narrative feeling.²⁸ At first the shift from “outside estimates” in towards Casaubon’s “own consciousness” discovers there the possibility of “universal pressure.” Already in the next sentence, however, this expansive turn to a suppositional universalism of the heart contracts, abutting the economy that has exiled Casaubon from our affections: “our want of room for him.” That economy is at once textual and affective, a scarcity of narrative room and a scarcity of readerly sympathy merged under the common “our.” The polysemic “want” is further indication of the equivocation: do we lack room, or are we unwilling to give it? These are the poles of the ethical antagonism inherent to the economy model of sympathy: is the limit to sympathy our inability to feel, or our unwillingness? Would not any true ethics demand that both limits be equally trespassed?

It is such trespassing voracity of the ethical that continuously violates the narrative economy, provoking the excesses of self-reflexive parabasis. The most monumental parabasis quite vividly tears apart the very syntax of ordinary narrative progression:

One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea—but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for those too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect. . . . Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungered like the rest of us. . . . For my part I am very sorry for him. (*M*, 261)

The anxious anacoluthon here—the grammatical incompleteness, the graphic interjection of the dash—frenetically bespeaks the strain of the ethical imperative for abundance. It is of course behooving an ethical code that it is difficult to fulfill, but here narrative is rendered disjointed, impossible. For, as the proprietary tenor of “for my part” rings clear, a narrative whose narrator was ethically edified in keeping her part to herself would progress no further than a narrative whose every sentence was broken mid-stream by its own ethical protest against too much focus on any given character. While it may be a legitimate constraint of nineteenth-century fictional form that focalization tends toward the individuated and successive, rather than the collective and sustained, Eliot here again finds an exclusive “point of view” to cause the exclusivity of “all our interest.”

Like the parabasis with which I began, there is an acute apprehension in this momentous eruption about the inequity of Casaubon's share—ugly, unsympathetic, self-aggrandizing Casaubon. Taken in concert, these moments intone both an admission of what Alex Woloch would consider “asymmetrical distribution of attention,” and an ethical intervention against that asymmetry.²⁹ The breadth of that ethics, I have been suggesting, drives these strange narrative structures. Though the parabases are often motivated by solicitude for those dispossessed in the economy of sympathy, the exhaustive expansiveness of the sympathetic standard even arouses unease on behalf of that economy's heir apparent, the heroine. During one of the most painful periods of disillusionment for Dorothea, when “all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals . . . jarred her as with an electric shock,” the narrator is oddly compelled to reduce Dorothea's intense emotion to “not . . . anything very exceptional” (*M*, 181), and to proceed with low expectations for readerly sympathy:

[N]or can I suppose that when Mrs Casaubon is discovered in a fit of weeping six weeks after her wedding, the situation will be regarded as tragic. Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. (*M*, 182)

It is a somewhat contrived treatment of the heroine's extreme suffering, and I would suggest that the contrivance symptomatizes the narrator's confusion about whether indulging the heroine necessarily means depriving other characters. So charged are the stakes that this observation of the probable lack of readerly sympathy—even for the heroine even at the acme of her troubles—paves the way for the ultimate formulation of the inexorably economy of sympathy:

That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. (*M*, 182)

One of the novel's most commonly beatified adages, this diagnosis of Attention Surfeit Disorder consecrates a scarcity of sympathy irrefutably generalized to both unsympathetic “semicolons and parentheses” and preeminently sympathetic characters. Even if the narrative can

afford more sympathy toward its heroine than toward her obstructive nemesis, both will eventually founder in the economy of sympathy.

The solemnity and foreboding of this passage betoken the severity of the ethical deadlock Eliot has reached. While she is cautious not to presuppose the economy of sentiment confidently bandied about by Spencer and Lewes, her efforts eventually verify irrefutable insufficiencies of sympathy. What I would like to propose now is that the very form in which she exercises that caution—the self-reflexive contour of parabasis—brilliantly provides the instrument for turning economies textual and sympathetic from scarcity to surplus. *Middlemarch*'s self-reflexive observations ripen into the financial modality of overcoming scarcity. Lewes himself hinted at the existence of such means, qualifying his descriptions of the economy of style with instructions about spirit: "Economy is rejection of whatever is superfluous; it is not Miserliness. A liberal expenditure is often the best economy, and is always so when dictated by a generous impulse, not by a prodigal carelessness or ostentatious vanity."³⁰ The "generous impulse" provoking the parabases turns the form in which the meditations on economy take place into the model of the more ethical economic mode that the novel will adopt: after parabastically deliberating its scarcity economy of sympathy, *Middlemarch* settles on the reflux form of parabasis to hatch a different kind of economy, a financial economy fueled by the self-reflexivity of money begetting money.

Just as the Victorian economy, in the wake of the licensing of interest by the 1833 Charter Act, began transitioning from an industrial economy of goods to a financial economy of metaphors for value, Eliot's sympathetic economy undergoes a consonant process: the sympathy that cannot be literally extended is reformulated into an interest that can be metaphorically so. The solution to narrative economy, and therefore sympathetic economy, is metaphor:

Since there never was a true story which could not be told in parables where you might put a monkey for a margrave, and vice versa—whatever has been or is to be narrated by me about low people, may be ennobled by being considered a parable. . . . Thus while I tell the truth about loobies, my reader's imagination need not be entirely excluded from an occupation with lords; and the petty sums which any bankrupt of high standing would be sorry to retire upon, may be lifted to the level of high commercial transactions by the inexpensive addition of proportional ciphers. (*M*, 320)

Here, Eliot's "economy of art" emerges as the forum in which petty sums pass into high commercial transactions on the security of metaphor, "proportional ciphers."³¹ Metaphor becomes the means, in the words of Gillian Beer writing of Eliot, of "reaching constantly at something that is near it, at qualities which elude or strain, or poignantly are debarred to us."³² For "want of room," for the debarring fatal "roar," neither the realist novel nor the sympathetic subject can represent or feel for everyone. But through metaphoric exchange, the novel can broker transactions that propel outward, and the "reader's imagination need not be entirely excluded" from making substitutions that exceed these bounds. Through this brokerage, the economy of narrative form can once again cause an economy of sympathy, with the difference that both economies are opened away from scarcity by the propulsions of metaphor.

In consecrating these emanations, *Middlemarch* passes its own Bank Charter Act, tuning its philosophy of sympathy to the chorus of Parliament Members, journalists, and bankers who supported the Bank of England Charter Act. As was clear in the Parliamentary debates and media coverage around the Act, unrestricted interest is the necessary precondition and medium of a financial economy in which money buys and sells itself in a diverse variety of self-reflexive instruments devised to issue returns. "The repeal of Usury laws," wrote *The Morning Chronicle* on the day after the Act's introduction, will "increase circulation and augment the fictitious capital" that distinguishes industrial from financial economies.³³ Constellated as interest, sympathy is reformulated from an economy of goods governed by scarcity and lack to an economy of finance licensed by interest and governed by ceaseless exchange. The utmost tribute to this redemptive diffusion is the immortal final words that enable the book at last to rest in peace:

But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. (*M*, 785)

"Incalculably diffusive" names not only Dorothea's effect, but the effect of *Middlemarch* itself as it exceeds its own novelistic and sympathetic economies with the surplus sibilance "rest in unvisited tombs." As all those "s" syllables swirl around the second person in a future indefinite but always apace with the present tense of "rest,"

Middlemarch “strikes you, undeceives you, animates you” with that celebrated Carlylean pulse.

With these financial flows, *Middlemarch*’s figurative move from scarcity to emanation displaces rather than resolves the contradiction between expansive sympathy and narrow economy, for it modifies the economy of sympathy to be closer to, rather than critically distant from, the financial economy, thereby deflating the Carlylean critique of the economic nexus. Where the scarcity economy of sympathy is problematic for the arbitrary defense it furnishes against ethical obligations, the financial economy of sympathy is problematic for creating an “analogous relation between the moral tendencies of men and the social conditions they have inherited”—for, in other words, calibrating “the social affections” (the term comes from Eliot’s admired Ruskin) to the scales of advancing financial capitalism.³⁴ No longer emboldening ethical critiques of the “mutual hostility” of *laissez-faire*, as in its early conceit, the sympathy performed in the late *Middlemarch* is formally consistent with a new phase of economic capitalization and its attendant alienations.

But *Middlemarch* is not without dismay over its appropriation of the financial topology of metaphor, and the ensuing faults in its linkages between sympathy and economy. It reconstitutes sympathy as interest, and reconceives the scarcity economy of feeling as a financial economy of feeling, but these adjustments are accompanied by doubtful murmurs. Through this inquietude, Eliot’s realism propagates less a disciplined reification of finance than a critical rumination on the tropes encompassing finance and intimate affiliation.³⁵ Ironizing the coincidence between the philosophy of sympathy and the formalization of finance, the novel exposes the collusion between normative wisdom of the psychological self and emergent economic activities: the economy of sympathy functions to compensatorily ground the worrisomely abstract economy of finance. Crucial gestures in the novel effect this exposure. The plot surrounding the unsavory banker Nicholas Bulstrode is only the most obvious. Guilty of deceit, diversion of funds, and perhaps even negligent homicide, Bulstrode gives the banking industry a bad name and the episodes in which he appears a tense air. “Bulstrode seems the most unsympathetic fellow” in the entire novel (*M*, 658), and when his crimes must be confessed to his wife, tremendous effort is required to set aside her shame and “espouse his sorrow” (*M*, 707). While Mrs. Bulstrode can silence her reproaches, she cannot verbalize her sympathy:

Open-minded as she was, she nevertheless shrank from the words which would have expressed their mutual consciousness, as she would have shrunk from flakes of fire. She could not say, "How much is only slander and false suspicion?" and he did not say, "I am innocent." (*M*, 708)

Quite tellingly here, there is no simple marriage between sympathy and finance.

I will return to other such gestures in the second portion of the essay, but for now let us turn to the most emphatic. All the while that it has been improvising a financial metaphor, the narrative has from the outset explicitly delineated the danger of financial metaphors. The precise warning comes just after the very first parabasis:

Mr. Casaubon had imagined that his long studious bachelorhood had stored up for him a compound interest of enjoyment, and that large drafts on his affections would not fail to be honoured; for we all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them. (*M*, 79)

Of all the sentences in *Middlemarch*, this is probably the favorite of literary critics—but only in its truncated form: the phrase before the semicolon is habitually left unquoted.³⁶ Such truncation commits an unfortunate elision, for the meta-literary pronouncement on offer here is implicitly predicated by the shaky equation between the finitude of the book and the economy of feeling, and explicitly so by the specific archetype of the conflation of financial interest and emotional affection. For the narrator of *Middlemarch*, the paradigmatically dangerous metaphor is that of affective economy.

The danger is only exacerbated by its prevalence: not peculiar to Casaubon, the economy of sympathy is a figure in which "we all of us" are implicated. In point of fact, economic figures for affect tellingly consumed Eliot herself in letters from the time of writing *Middlemarch*. "I never before felt so keenly the wealth one possesses in every being to whose mind and body it is possible to minister comfort through love and care," she wrote in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe of 10 December 1869.³⁷ Just a few months later, this "wealth" is amassing: "For learning to love any one is like an increase of property—it increases care, and brings many new fears lest precious things should come to harm. I find myself often thinking of you with that sort of proprietor's anxiety."³⁸ Both of these letters commit Casaubon's error, casually presuming such language's suitability for intimate correspondence.

Following the lead of the warning against dangerous metaphors, I propose that the narrator of *Middlemarch* rather more critically contemplates this archetype in its very archetypal ubiquity. Such care surfaces in the way the narrative conscientiously implicates itself in the fatal actions against which it cautions. Indeed, one need only reread the parabasis with which I began to confirm this epidemic: the exhortation to a “keener interest” that initiated the foray into Casaubon’s thoughts practically trips over these conjunctures. We all of us get entangled in metaphors, but whatever ethical deliberation we may undertake is equally subject to this entanglement.

Seductive and common, financial metaphors for feeling seem perhaps unlikely to incite anything approaching “fatally” consequential actions. But, as I have been suggesting, the rhetoric of sympathetic economy that enshrouds sympathy in *Middlemarch* is problematically in tension with the extension and effusion Eliot herself stipulates as the properly ethical dimension of sympathy. Since this tension originates the caution against fatal actions, it may well be because the very idea of an economy of sympathy rationally dispenses with the ethical obligation to act sympathetically. One who can only feel so much must come to a point at which feeling ceases. The economy of feeling is in this way incompatible with the non-marketized feeling that sympathy was meant to promote. The substitution of loobies for lords offers metaphor as an outsourcing solution to this incompatibility, but it raises the specter that the two-fold impact of sympathetic feeling and noble action will fold in on itself. Rather than feeling with characters and therefore for real people, we might merely feel for ever more characters. Concocting a financial economy of sympathy by way of “proportional ciphers” may circumvent the scarcity economy, but the conflation of the very economic structures that sympathy was conceived to redress with sympathy itself remains a kind of discord worthy of an ominous warning. The extent of the novel’s ambivalence should now be clear: when *Middlemarch* resolves the ethical limitations of the ineluctable scarcity economy of sympathy by reorienting it towards interest, its solutions are undermined by its own profound admonition against the dangerous metaphor of affective economy, which retroactively casts aspersions on the initial figure of the sympathetic economy.

II. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SYMPATHY

In the remaining section of this essay, I will argue that a similar problem and similarly ambivalent solution galvanize the romance plot.

As the parabases achieve a tenuous ethics by reformulating economized sympathy into the propulsions of “interest,” a corresponding denouement transpires in the plot, which follows the philanthropist Dorothea Brooke as she moderates her “ardent sympathy” to more greatly reflect political economy.³⁹ Dorothea’s migivings about resource distribution echo those of narrator’s about sympathetic distribution, and the compromise she makes to mitigate these concerns rehearses the parabastic embrace of financial exchange.

While in the parabases it is the polyvalence of “interest” that often intones the novel’s articulation of sympathy and economy, in the romance plot the same conjunction is accomplished through the minor yet essential character of Adam Smith. Both in name and in idea, Smith appears in the pages of *Middlemarch* as philosopher of capitalism and of sympathy. Though it is not generally received as such, Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* seems to have functioned as a strong precedent for the praxis of sympathy in *Middlemarch*, and there are a number of judicious references to *The Wealth of Nations* in the novel.⁴⁰

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith’s depiction of sympathy as metaphoric is practically philological: his famous definition of sympathy as an imaginative activity to “carry us beyond our own person” by “changing places in fancy” with another deploys a transliteration of the Greek “meta-phor”: “carrying beyond.”⁴¹ What is so critical about his conception (and what marks Smith’s break from earlier theorists of sympathy) is the total refusal of the idea that sympathy could operate as spontaneous affinity for an other, and instead the insistence that sympathy is always a self-motivated exchange tendered by metaphor.⁴² Sympathy in Smith is never feeling for an other in her own right; it is always feeling “what we ourselves should feel in the like situation”—there is no such thing as feeling for the other, only self-interested projection.⁴³ *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* apprehends this scarcity economy of sympathy as a product of nature: “Nature, it seems, when she loaded us with our own sorrows, thought that they were enough, and therefore did not command us to take any further share in those of others.”⁴⁴ To exceed these insuperable bounds, sympathy can only operate metaphorically. Both the scarcity economy of feeling and the metaphoric exchange that extend that economy are Smithian constructs bequeathed to *Middlemarch* at the level of narrative form, through the parabases that avow the scarcity of sympathy and affirm the transcendent potential of metaphor.

In just this visage as theorist of the economized sympathy that grounds capitalism, Smith also makes a cameo within the plot to oppose Dorothea in political and ethical debates, serving to foreground the conflict between Dorothea's uneconomized ardent sympathy and the discourse of political economy. "Ardent" is the preferred descriptor of Dorothea, who is "alive to anything that gave her an opportunity for active sympathy" (M, 191), and who is throughout the novel busy "trying to get light as to the best way of spending money" to help others (M, 756). In the first few pages of the novel, when she debates with the more learned male characters, Dorothea pronounces of philanthropy, with characteristic zeal: "It is better to spend money in finding out how men can make the most of the land which supports them all, than in keeping dogs and horses only to gallop over it. It is not a sin to make yourself poor in performing experiments for the good of all" (M, 16). Mr. Brooke roundly dismisses her sentiment: "Young ladies don't understand political economy, you know. . . . I remember when we were all reading Adam Smith. *There* is a book now" (M, 16).

Exactly what Dorothea does not understand takes some maneuvering to establish. For she certainly grasps economic injustice all too well, channeling "all her desire to make her life greatly effective" into "schemes" for redistribution, and opining "we deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses—all of us who let tenants live in such sties as we see around us" (M, 29). To motivate an opposition between this ethical economic knowledge and political economy, the novel might easily rely on extant ethical critiques of what Carlyle termed "the dismal science." With more nuance, however, it orchestrates a clash between the ardency of Dorothea's generosity—the "gift" branded in her name *Dorothea*—and the scarcity restraints reified by the dismal discourse of economics.

When Dorothea contracts another version of the same debate about "the good of all," this tension comes into stark relief. The scene is her first substantive interaction with Will, during a visit to an art museum on her honeymoon in Rome:

"I fear you are a heretic about art generally. How is that? I should have expected you to be very sensitive to the beautiful everywhere."

"I suppose I am dull about many things," said Dorothea, simply. "I should like to make life beautiful—I mean everybody's life. And then all this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life and make it no better for the world, pains one. It spoils my enjoyment of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out from it."

"I call that the fanaticism of sympathy," said Will, impetuously. "If you carried it out you ought to be miserable in your own goodness, and turn evil that you might have no advantage over others. The best piety is to enjoy—when you can. And enjoyment radiates. It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight—in art or in anything else." (M, 205)

There are great Kantian overtones of beauty and the *sensus communis* here, and a strict Kantian sense of "fanaticism" as the supersession of limits. More arresting still is the aesthetic debate's overt economic antagonism: Dorothea's "fanaticism of sympathy," an expansive concern for "everyone," economically opposes Will's "radiat[ing]" individual "delight." Because art is inaccessible, it does not do enough in the world; because it is bounded and finite, it will always "shut out" "most people." When Dorothea sees "the beautiful everywhere," she perceives this vulgar exclusivity. Her commitment to collective enjoyment logically complements her sensitivity to mass suffering, "all the troubles of all people on the face of the earth" (M, 730). By contrast with this aneconomy, Will counters with a more moderate localized "piety" of "enjoyment" that "radiates," an idea deeply evocative of Smith's notorious figure of the "invisible hand," with which, "by pursuing his own interest (every individual) frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it."⁴⁵ Will's disquisition on the fanaticism of sympathy makes the very same point in even stronger terms: "It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight—in art or in anything else."

The divergence in aesthetic judgments between Will and Dorothea involves not so much a difference in taste as this economic conflict between lateral equitable expansion and trickle-down radiation: while Dorothea would socialize access to art, Will would disseminate aesthetic enjoyment. Curtailing her fanatical sympathy and becoming a young lady who does "understand political economy" are therefore two sides of the same coin, and with this coin Dorothea buys into the economy in which sympathy cannot be literally extended (or expended), though it can be metaphorically circulated through substitutions that radiate.

Refiguring the causal association between Dorothea's ardent sympathy and her ignorance of political economy, this lover's quarrel between expansion and radiation accordingly instantiates the dissolution of extensive sympathy into emanating interest that I have asserted plagues the narrative form itself. Sharing these conflicts, the plot and the narrative ultimately share a solution. Just as the narrative settles on

the framework of interest to inflate its sympathetic economy, the plot espouses the framework of “radiating delight,” for Dorothea eventually marries Will, a final choice that has scandalized every reader from the first reviews in 1871 to the most recent issues of *ELH*.⁴⁶ While these readers are usually quite frank about their simple dislike of Will, and therefore tend to confine their analysis to the characterological level, the novel as a whole seems less bothered by his personal shortcomings than by the fact that he comes at such a high price, both fiscally and ethically.

Will's dear value is set by Casaubon. Dorothea's original marriage had offered her an irresistible opportunity “to be of some use” both as a secretary for Casaubon's *Key to All Mythologies* and as a philanthropist backed by his funds. When “The Dead Hand” of Casaubon's will mandates that Dorothea forfeit her fortune if she marries her Will, it adumbrates a chasm between philanthropy (love of man) and love of one man.⁴⁷ Dorothea faces a choice between lovingly pursuing “the good of all” and pursuing her singular beloved. The belabored, uncertain, and climactic choice of Will represents the great act amidst this masterful catalogue of “unhistoric acts”—Dorothea simply loves him, and she opts for this private pleasure, economizing her fanatical sympathy and downsizing her redistributive program. With her pick, Dorothea also confirms the great ethical decision of the parabases, the construction of a radiating economy of sympathy. Far from an error marring *Middlemarch*, the marriage to Will might therefore be reappraised as the novel's emplotment of its acute formal dilemma.

Indeed, the marriage is further legitimated by the text's meticulous certification that though the price is high, Dorothea completely comprehends price: the romantic climax of her decision is bookended with references to political economy that highlight her learning. Having up until this late point capitulated to the dead hand, Dorothea is at work “in the library before her particular little heap of books on political economy” (*M*, 756). Will enters the scene to take his final leave in what the text portends as the last word on their unactualized love. He is fortuitously derailed by the dramatic eruption of a bolt of lightning, after which he seizes Dorothea's hand with “a spasmodic movement” (*M*, 761). She exclaims, “Oh I cannot bear it—my heart will break,” and casts off her troublesome fortune: “I don't mind about poverty—I hate my wealth” (*M*, 761). The by no means euphoric closing words of the chapter seal their vows: “We could live quite well . . . I want so little—no new clothes—and I will learn what everything costs” (*M*, 762). Choosing Will means withdrawing from philanthropy, which

also means surpassing ignorance of political economy to “learn what everything costs.” Still weightier, this knowledge redefines sympathetic and loving communions to be “spasmodic” rather than ardent. In the hard-won union between Dorothea and Will, *Middlemarch* therefore does more than repeat Smith—it evolves the notorious missing link between the two major moments of his thought, the sympathetic *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the self-interested *Wealth of Nations*. Through Dorothea’s romantic preference and the narrator’s realist techniques, the novel illuminates that political economy’s ideal capitalism founds itself on the economy of sympathy.

The spasmodic, radiating, political economy-sanctioned merger of Will and Dorothea certainly hushes her economic critiques and stoppers her philanthropic restitution. But the novel calls attention to the artifice of this compromise—with the lightning bolt’s overwrought evocation of the pathos of nature simulating the lovers’ passion, with the setting of the lovers first prolonged conversation in an art museum, and with their distressingly understated bliss. Like the Bulstrode plot, these gestures reiterate the keenest ironic zest in the text, the unshakable angst of parabasis itself. In both the plot and the narrative, these hyper-aestheticized gestures illustrate that while abandoning the ethical mandate for expansive sympathy in favor of the prevailing radiating interest may well enable Dorothea to actualize personal happiness and the narrative to close the book on further exploits monkey or margrave, this development is itself aestheticized and dangerous, made possible by “get[ting] our thoughts entangled in metaphors and act[ing] fatally on the strength of them.”

It is the melodramatic frisson of this conspicuous aestheticization which makes the novel less an instrument and more an illustration of the entangling of sympathy and economy—which makes it, in other words, an indictment of modernity’s sympathy economy figure as a metaphor upon whose strength we might act fatally. Though the narrator and Dorothea both quell their distress about inequitable distribution by incorporating the radiations of the financial economy, the text as a whole tarries over the tropology of this bargain. Its irony rustles: “[W]e deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses—all of us” who accede to arrangements of dispossession because we have “but a limited amount of mental power available” to feel for others. To borrow just one of the novel’s many resounding final phrases, the “incalculably diffusive” legacy of *Middlemarch* may well be this commitment to think those metaphors of relation from the bourgeoning

financial economy of the Victorian era which continue to advance the triumphant neoliberalism of our own.

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NOTES

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¹Thomas Carlyle, "The Gospel of Mammonism," *Past and Present*, ed. Richard Altick (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 148.

²"Cash-nexus" is a coinage widely attributed to Carlyle, though it abbreviates his phrases like "cash payment the sole nexus" or "cash payment has become the sole nexus" in his essay "Not Laissez Faire" *Chartism*, (London: Fraser, 1840).

³Friedrich Engels, "A Review of *Past and Present*, by Thomas Carlyle, London, 1843," *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, 50 vol. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 3:444.

⁴For an argument that more than one novelist responded to Carlyle's text, see Janice Carlisle's exploration of the common conception of audience that motivated Carlyle, Eliot, Dickens, and Thackeray, "Mid-Century Aims and Ideals," in her *The Sense of an Audience* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982).

⁵George Eliot, "Thomas Carlyle," in *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. Nicholas Warren (New York: Penguin, 1990), 343.

⁶In *Amos Barton*, see the important address: "For not having a lofty imagination, as you perceive, and being unable to invent thrilling incidents for your amusement, my only merit must lie in the truth with which I represent to you the humble experience of ordinary fellow-mortals. I wish to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles—to win your tears for real sorrow: sorrow such as may live next door to you" (Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. Jennifer Gribble [New York: Penguin, 1999], 59).

⁷The first maxim comes from a letter to Charles Bray dated 5 July 1859, in *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985). The second and third are both from Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life" in *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, 110. For Marc Redfield, the general association between sympathy and the aesthetic indicates a limitation of sympathy: "[S]ympathy is always already an aesthetic experience, one that can only take place within the realm of fiction, mimesis, representation, and reproduction" ("George Eliot's Telepathy Machine," in *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996], 136). Hina Nazar points out that Eliot's emphasis on sympathy distinguishes her aesthetic from earlier modes: "It situates its discourse of representation not only by reference to feeling, as the aesthetic tradition more generally does, but also, in distinction from the aesthetic tradition, by reference to a feeling for social others" ("Philosophy in the Bedroom: *Middlemarch* and the Scandal of Sympathy," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 15 [2002]: 294). On the visual and spectatorial dimensions of this aesthetic, see Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000). On sympathy as metaphor, see Thomas Albrecht, "Sympathy and Telepathy: The Problem of Ethics in George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*," *ELH* 73 (2006): 437–463. On sympathy as a novelistic project, see Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007).

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992), 255.

⁹ In focusing on Adam Smith, I should like to invite the critical liturgy on the philosophical sources and biographical experiences behind Eliot's sympathy to be more responsive to the economic context and ramifications of her ethics. For discussion of Rousseau, Wordsworth, Feuerbach, and Comte as sources for Eliot's sympathy, see Suzy Anger, "George Eliot's Hermeneutics of Sympathy" in her *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005), 95–130; Ellen Argyros, "Without Any Check of Proud Reserve": *Sympathy and its Limits in George Eliot's Novels* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Dwight H. Purdy, "'The One Poor Word' in *Middlemarch*," *Studies in English Literature* 44 (2004): 805–821; and Nazar. On the biographical sources of this philosophy and its manifestation in Eliot's personal ethical and religious praxis, see Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "Mary Ann Evan's Holy War" in *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 57–84.

¹⁰ Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 172; *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 306.

¹¹ For this Levinasian position, see both Albrecht and Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, "George Eliot's Conception of Sympathy," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (1985): 23–42. Ermarth and Albrecht both explore Eliot's understanding of sympathy as "a difficult psychic negotiation between self and other" (Ermarth, 23). I submit that Eliot's conception of these difficulties was less an abstract outline of "the other" not to be transgressed, and more a concrete confrontation with what she and other Victorians saw as material limits to the affections of the self. As a good exception to the fascination with alterity, Christopher Lane's recent study of antisocial feelings obliquely broaches the question of exhaustion by highlighting a foundational "misanthropy" that Eliot at once admits and "smothers." See the brief section "Fellow Feeling Redux," in his *Hatred and Civility: the Antisocial Life in Victorian England* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004), 134–135.

¹² Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," 111.

¹³ Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," 110.

¹⁴ Thinkers ranging from Alexander Bain to Samuel Smiles extended the image of "economy" from its eighteenth century anatomical connotations to depict processes of consciousness and sentiment. See, for a small selection, Alexander Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect* (London: Longmans, 1855); William Stanley Jevons, *Theory of Political Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1871); George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind* (London: Trubner, 1874); Samuel Smiles, *Self Help* (London: Murray, 1859); and Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology* (London: Longmans, 1855).

¹⁵ On the evolution of usury discourse and its corollary social estrangement, see Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1949). For details of the 1833 Act, see John Francis, *History of the Bank of England: Its Times and Traditions* (London: Willoughby and Co., 1847); for a Victorian analysis of usury see John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1848); and for more recent analysis of 1833 as a watershed moment, see Timothy Alborn, *Conceiving Companies: Joint Stock Politics in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁶ Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 80, 140. Hereafter abbreviated *M* and cited parenthetically by page number.

¹⁷ In linking *Middlemarch*'s shift from sympathy to interest to developing financial capitalism, I will undoubtedly echo the seminal claims of Albert O. Hirschman that "from the idea of counter-vailing passions, interests emerge as tamers, passions as those to be tamed" (*The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997], 32).

¹⁸ The phrase comes from Eliot's essay "Debasement of the Moral Currency" in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1994), 81–87.

¹⁹ Lewes, *Literary Criticism of George Henry Lewes*, ed. Alice Kaminsky (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1964), 91.

²⁰ Lewes, *The Principles of Success in Literature* (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1865), 167.

²¹ Lewes, *The Principles of Success in Literature*, 166.

²² Lewes, *The Principles of Success in Literature*, 167.

²³ Spencer, "The Philosophy of Style," in *Essays Scientific, Political, and Speculative*, 3 vol. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891), volume 2, paragraph 521.

²⁴ Spencer, "The Philosophy of Style," paragraph 3.

²⁵ Spencer, "The Philosophy of Style," paragraph 47.

²⁶ Spencer, "The Philosophy of Style," paragraph 59.

²⁷ *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Haight, 9 vol. (London: Yale Univ. Press, 1978), 8:245.

²⁸ "This alternation between exuberance and apology, expansion and shrinking, utterance and scribble, was to govern Eliot's literary production throughout her life: she lived it as a rhythm of fluctuating excitement and discouragement while she was working on her novels, followed by deep gloom when each was completed. At a number of climactic moments the play of expansion and shrinking reappears, but the rhythm is broken, lifted out of the interior life of a single character and distributed to a pair of characters, one of whom is seen expanding in loving recognition of the other, who is commonly figured as shrunken or shrinking from contact" (Neil Hertz, *George Eliot's Pulse* [Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003], 26).

²⁹ See "Characterization and Distribution" in Alex Woloch, *The One Versus the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), 12–42.

³⁰ Lewes, *The Principles of Success in Literature*, 169.

³¹ Significantly, this method of ennobling limited narratives by imaginatively investing outward buys *Middlemarch* a certain ethical breathing room, but it also reverses realism's reputed privileging of metonymy over metaphor. Rather than driving toward particularity, promoting an exchange of types for individuals (as Georg Lukács and Catherine Gallagher have argued), Eliot here trades "loobies for lords." With such an exchange of types for other types, the aesthetic and ethical principles of Eliot's realism cohere around metaphor. As this coherence is explicated through patently financial language, Eliot reformulates the ethical promise of her realism by borrowing the metaphorical premise of the financializing economy. On realism as particularization, see Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 2002). More recently and specifically regarding Eliot, see Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian," *Representations* 90 (2005): 61–74.

³² Gilian Beer, *George Eliot* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), 192.

³³ Money Market, City, Friday, *The Morning Chronicle* 1895, 1 June 1833.

³⁴ Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," 128.

³⁵ The notion of this reifying function founds the dominant paradigm in Victorian studies, as well as in studies of literature and money more generally. Patrick Brantlinger formidably contends that while “realistic fiction is often highly critical of such generalized social evils as avarice and materialism . . . its rhetorical conventions and structures involve the reification of the status quo” (*Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694–1994* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996], 146). John Vernon similarly pursues an “analogy (that) is the comparison between the novel’s claim to represent reality and paper money’s claim to represent things of enduring value: gold and silver” (*Money and Fiction: Literary Realism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984], 7). These critical assessments of Victorian realism of course owe much to Ian Watt’s seminal study of realist reification, “Robinson Crusoe, Individualism, and the Novel” in his *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, Fielding* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1957).

³⁶ See, paradigmatically, J. Hillis Miller’s “Narrative and History,” *ELH* 41 (1974): 455–473, in which he argues that the second half of the sentence forms the novel’s central deconstructive principle, but entirely ignores that principle’s context within the sentence as a whole, and therefore underestimates its political stroke, or Albrecht’s use of the second half of the sentence as epigraph for a section of his argument devoted to the ethical dangers of metaphor as a mode of imaginative relation, for “recourse to metaphor [is] a framing of the relation to the other as a similarity, not as irreducibly differential” (452).

³⁷ Eliot to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 10 December 1869, in *Selections from George Eliot’s Letters*, ed. Haight (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985).

³⁸ Eliot To Julia Cameron, 17 January 1871, in *Selections from George Eliot’s Letters*.

³⁹ Though my analysis of the plot focuses on the major plot of the romance between Dorothea and Will, it could also be argued that many of the minor plots also revolve around economic tensions. Caleb Garth “could not manage finance: he knew values very well, but he had no keenness of imagination for monetary results in the shape of profit and loss” (*M*, 236). Fred Vincy must learn that credit comes perilously close to theft: “[P]eople who spend a great deal of money on themselves without knowing how they shall pay, must be selfish. They are always thinking of what they can get for themselves, and not of what other people may lose” (*M*, 239). While Lydgate must learn to be less profligate, his wife Rosamund must learn that money does not grow on trees: “[T]hink no unfair evil of her, pray; she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact, she never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide” (*M*, 252). And, of course, much of the subplot between Will and Bulstrode, the only financial official in the novel, revolves around the banker’s avaricious and dishonest amassing of wealth. See *Middlemarch*, 677.

⁴⁰ My focus on Smith takes its cue not from Eliot’s letters or library, but from the references in *Middlemarch* itself, and from the remarkable formal resonances between Smith and Eliot. In a rare treatment of Eliot and economic philosophy, Imraan Coovadia has linked Eliot’s notion of social totality and Adam Smith’s notion of social interrelatedness, but while Coovadia sees a conceptual resonance between Smith’s invisible hand and Eliot’s web, I emphasize here the ethical and economic consequences of a formal resonance between Smith’s sympathy and Eliot’s. See Coovadia, “George Eliot’s Realism and Adam Smith,” *Studies in English Literature* 42 (2002): 819–836. David Marshall has found that *Daniel Deronda* “acts as a dramatization” of Smith’s theory, but his focus is entirely thematic, on the similarities between what he interprets as the

theatrical paradigm in Smith's theory and the spectatorial aspects of the interaction of Eliot's characters (*The Figure of the Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986], 221).

⁴¹ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 12.

⁴² Marshall has shown that Smith's mentor Lord Kames held this view of spontaneous feeling, and associates Smith's departure from it with "Defoe's view of radical separateness, isolation, and solitude of people" (170).

⁴³ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 11.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 58.

⁴⁵ Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Bantam 2003), 572.

⁴⁶ From the time of its publication in 1871 through the present, a spectrum of readers have found Will an unsuitable suitor for Dorothea, often concluding that their marriage mars an otherwise impeccable novel. In 1872 *The Spectator* called Will "altogether uninteresting . . . petulant and small," finding him even less appealing than Dorothea's first husband Edward Casaubon, and almost a hundred years later Barbara Hardy cited Will's inadequacy as the emblem of the novel's "incompleteness" (*The Spectator*, 7 December 1872; Hardy, "Implication and Incompleteness in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*" in *The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel* [London: Athlone Press, 1964], 121). The broad consensus in more recent criticism has been succinctly captured by Ellin Ringler: "Why, when Eliot herself was able to defy social tradition and achieve her own epic life, did she relentlessly consign Dorothea to the unmitigated mediocrity of a conventional marriage to Will?" ("*Middlemarch*: A Feminist Perspective," *Studies in the Novel* 15 [1983]: 57). Even critics more interested in Dorothea's agency, like feminists Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, have interpreted her choice to be "subversive" of the ossified patriarchy of "The Dead Hand" of Casaubon, but have still found Will an unsuitable suitor—"a baby" with little to offer (*The Madwoman in the Attic* [New Haven: Yale, 1979], 550). And again quite recently, David Kurnick deems the marriage a "failure . . . of epic proportions" ("An Erotics of Detachment: *Middlemarch* and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice," *ELH* 74 [2007]: 589).

⁴⁷ "The Dead Hand" is the title of book five of *Middlemarch*.