THE REPRESENTATION OF MEMORY IN THE WORKS OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH AND GEORGE ELIOT

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Thesis submitted to Newcastle University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
December 2010

Abstract

Studies of memory in the works of William Wordsworth and George Eliot have hitherto focussed mainly on individual recollective memory. By contrast, this study explores habit-memory in the work of both writers, on both an individual and a collective level. It proposes that for Wordsworth as well as for Eliot, habit-memory can enhance moral awareness and maintain the cohesion of a community.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first discusses 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. Drawing on the idea of an ethics of memory in the work of the philosopher Avishai Margalit, I argue that the two writers regard habit cultivation as an important means of developing a sense of universal humanity in their characters as well as in their readers.

The second chapter looks at the relationship between habit and duty through a discussion of 'Ode to Duty', *Silas Marner* and *Romola*. Wordsworth's notion of duty, a universal law governing both the natural and the human world, is different from that of Eliot, which is identified with the habitual feelings of the body. Despite this difference, both believe that habit can help mould an individual into a duty-bound being.

Chapter Three deals with the relationship between habit and guilt in Book X of *The Prelude*, *Adam Bede* and 'Janet's Repentance'. Rather than looking at guilt over a real transgression, it examines what Frances Ferguson terms 'circumstantial memory', the remorse that occurs when the unforeseen outcome of an action is interpreted as though it had been intentional. Wordsworth and Eliot differ in their view of the origin of wrongdoings and the pattern of recovery from guilt, but they both believe that this recovery can never be complete.

The final chapter shifts from individual to collective habit-memory. Adopting a phenomenological approach to habit in discussing 'Michael' and *The Mill on the Floss*, I suggest that Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory can help us to understand Michael's and Mr. Tulliver's embodied relationships with their patrimonial land. I also draw on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Maurice Halbwachs to show that the habitual lives these characters lead and their attachments to their habitual states of being are collectively rooted. The chapter concludes by examining the two writers' criticism of the intrusion into agrarian society of capitalism, which disrupts the transmission of collective memory from one generation to another.

Contents

Acknowledgements

During this long journey, I've accumulated numerous debts, many of which I will never be able to repay. First of all, I am fortunate to have two most supportive, encouraging and considerate supervisors, Dr. Michael Rossington and Professor T. R. Wright, to whom my gratitude is beyond expression. Their knowledge and expertise have been invaluable for me during every stage of the writing of this thesis, and will, I believe, benefit me throughout my life.

I am grateful to the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme and to Newcastle University for funding this project.

I must thank Professor David Bromwich, under the inspiration of whose paper delivered at the 2008 Wordsworth Summer Conference my second chapter took shape. I am also indebted to Professor Frances Ferguson, Professor Nick Crossley and Dr. Anne Whitehead, who all responded generously to the questions I raised to them while writing Chapters Three and Four.

My thanks also go to Dr. Katie Harland, who has not only been a friend for me to turn to in times of difficulty, but has also proof-read the whole thesis and given me helpful suggestions on how to improve my arguments.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for everything they have done for me throughout these years. I owe my greatest debt to my husband, without whose love and support the project would never have been completed. My mother's love, care, reassurance and faith in me have proved to be the strongest emotional prop. My son, who has been 'something between a hindrance and a help', has provided me with many welcome distractions, which have made this journey more enjoyable.

Introduction

Memory studies in Wordsworth and Eliot have drawn critical treatment for more than half a century. Most attention, however, has often focused on the way in which the recollection of a past event, through re-interpretation, feeds into or disrupts the present identity constructed by characters in the works of the two writers. Admittedly, this is a very significant aspect of memory. There is, however, another equally important area of memory which has not gained adequate critical attention. This category of memory, which is described by James Booth as 'a rich deposit of habit, of body memory and habits of the heart', is where the persistence of the past finds its best expression. Distinct from recollection, which is often self-conscious and which involves an effort to 'preserve the past from erosion', this form of memory is 'often barely visible to us in the present'. Rather, it does its work 'almost automatically'.[1] In absent-mindedly yielding to an accustomed way of behaving, in the skills we have learned and performed with great ease, and in the mode of conduct we have inherited from our community, we see the work of this memory. This thesis will take habit-memory as its central concern, attempting to explore both its mechanism and its social and political significance in the writings of Wordsworth and Eliot. Particular attention in the four chapters will be given to: the relationship between habit-memory and universal humanity; duty; guilt; and finally collective memory and the way it helps maintain the cohesion of a community.

This chapter, as the introduction to the thesis, will start with Eliot's life-long reading of Wordsworth. It will then move on to an overview of memory criticism in

[1] W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. x.

past decades, followed by an explanation of the theoretical approaches that will be adopted in this research, and finally, a summary of how the thesis is structured.

Eliot's Reading of Wordsworth

Stephen Gill notes that '[b]y the late 1830s […] Wordsworth's fame was widespread and assured'. He was 'the king-poet of our times', as Elizabeth Barrett put it.[2] This popularity was cemented by the award of an honorary degree at Oxford in 1839, and the Laureateship conferred in 1843. To the Victorians, both Wordsworth's work and his life were 'a spiritually active, empowering force'.[3] Many people found his poetry immensely therapeutic, and some even experienced spiritual conversion after reading it.[4] Though Eliot did not undergo a dramatic conversion of the kind recorded by William Macready, John Stuart Mill, and William Hale White, Wordsworth still played a very significant part in her life. He was not only one of the forces who shaped her moral values, but also proved a strong influence on her theory of novel writing.

Wordsworth was read by George Eliot throughout her adult years 'with undimmed enthusiasm'.[5] Wordsworth was clearly a very significant writer for her, as she shared her reading of him with the most important people in her life. The earliest correspondent with whom Eliot shared such feelings about reading Wordsworth was Maria Lewis, the governess whose evangelicalism was the strongest influence on her early years. It was on 4 September 1839, when she was nearly twenty years old, that Eliot wrote to Lewis, saying that she had been reading 'scraps of poetry picked up from

[2] Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 16; p. 10.
[3] Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, p. 41.
[4] For a detailed discussion, see Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, which gives examples of five readers who regard Wordsworth's poetry as spiritual balm: William Charles Macready, Sir William Gomm, John Stuart Mill, William Hale White, and William Whewell. Mill's *Autobiography* contains the account of his reading of Wordsworth.
[5] *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by John Rignall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 449-50.

Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth, and Milton'.[6] Her enthusiasm for Wordsworth must have intensified during the following two months, for on her twentieth birthday, 22 November 1839, she wrote to Lewis again, declaring that 'I have been so self-indulgent as to possess myself of Wordsworth at full length, and I thoroughly like much of the contents of the first three volumes which I fancy are only the low vestibule to the three remaining ones' (*Letters*, I, p. 34). The edition she was reading at that time was the first three volumes of the fifth collected edition of *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, in six volumes, published by Moxon in 1836-37. These volumes include 'Poems of the Imagination', 'Poems Referring to the Period of Childhood', 'Poems founded on the Affections', 'Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803', and 'Miscellaneous Sonnets', the headings of which he adopted in 1815, when the first two-volume edition of his collected poems was published. They also contain essays such as the 'Preface' to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface', and the 'Preface' of 1815.

If she read all these volumes thoroughly, in other words, it can be assumed that by the time she was twenty, Eliot had read most of Wordsworth's major works (with the exception of *The Prelude*, which was not published until 1850, and *The Excursion*), as well as the most important of his essays on poetic theory.[7] About a year later, in October 1840, she told Lewis that she had 'just been delighted' with Wordsworth's short poem 'On the Power of Sound', and recommended that she read it (*Letters*, I, p.

[6] George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954; repr. 1975), I, 29. All subsequent quotations of these books, abbreviated *Letters*, are from this edition are from this edition with page and volume numbers given in parentheses. Though this is the earliest written record, Stephen Gill has noted that Ellis Yarnall records Eliot saying in 1873 that 'I began to read Wordsworth when I was fifteen, and have gone on ever since with continually increasing pleasure'. See *Wordsworth and the Coleridges: With other Memories Literary and Political* (New York, 1899), p. 101.

[7] No record is given as to when Eliot first read *The Prelude*. Thomas Pinney remarks that he found no quotations from *The Prelude* in Eliot's writings until 1867. However it is unlikely that she waited till 1867 to read it. Her own copy of *The Prelude* was the second edition, published in 1851, therefore she could have read it at a much earlier time. Thomas Pinney, 'Wordsworth's Influence on George Eliot' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Yale University, 1960), p. 23.

68). It seems that Wordsworth had become Eliot's idol by then, for on 21 June 1841 she told Lewis that she had collected some rose-leaves from Wordsworth's garden, a common way for his admirers to show reverence for the 'king-poet of our times' (*Letters*, I, p. 99).[8]

With her introduction to Charles and Caroline Bray and induction into the advanced thinking of the day in the beginning of the 1840s, Eliot began to share her reading of Wordsworth with the couple. The poet, in fact, appears to have helped calm some of Eliot's religious anxieties. On 18 June 1844, for example, while she was translating Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*, she wrote to Mrs Charles Bray, describing her mood by quoting from 'Tintern Abbey': 'I am quite happy, only sometimes feeling "the weight of all this unintelligible world"' (*Letters*, I, p. 177). In May 1852, she asked the Brays to forward her copies of Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron and Wordsworth (*Letters*, II, p. 25).

After Eliot's union with George Henry Lewes, he became her co-reader of Wordsworth. She recorded many a time when Lewes read Wordsworth to her during the most productive years of her novel writing. On 18 January 1858 she told Sara Hennell that she and Lewes 'are reading now with fresh admiration for his beauties and tolerance for his faults' (*Letters*, II, p. 423). This suggests that she was reading Wordsworth in a more critical way than before. The next day her journal recorded that 'We are reading Wordsworth in the evening—at least G. is reading him to me'.[9] They could have been reading *The Excursion* at that time, for about two weeks later, Eliot

[8] At the zenith of his fame, Wordsworth was idolized by the Victorians. His home, Rydal Mount, became a shrine. Common people were in the habit of gathering leaves from his garden as a way of expressing their reverence. Those who were not able to go there in person would entrust those who had the luck to go there to get some for them. Eliot was probably one of these, as she was likely to have acquired the leaves from her brother Isaac, who spent his honeymoon in the lakes and Scotland in June 1841. (Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, pp. 10-11).

[9] Thomas Pinney, 'George Eliot's Reading of Wordsworth: The Record', *Victorian Newsletter*, 24 (1963), 20-22 (p. 21).

wrote, ‘G. has finished the Excursion, which repaid us for going to the end by an occasional fine passage even to the last’ (*Letters*, II, p. 430). Lewes’s journal recorded that he was reading Wordsworth to Eliot during the last week of July 1858, while Eliot was working on *Adam Bede*.[10] About a year later, when Eliot was working on *The Mill on the Floss*, Lewes read *The Excursion* aloud to her on 6 and 8 September 1859 (*Letters*, III, p. 149). In 1867, when Eliot was writing *The Spanish Gypsy*, Lewes’s journal from 27 to 28 June 1867 shows that he read *The Prelude* to Eliot.[11] On 26 December 1877, Eliot wrote to Miss Charlotte Carmichael, describing the poet as ‘our incomparable Wordsworth’ (*Letters*, VI, p. 439).

During the last years of her life, Eliot shared her reading of Wordsworth with her husband, John Cross. This habit of reading carried on until a few weeks before her death. In April 1879, about a year before their marriage, Cross recorded that they read at this time ‘much of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth’ (*Letters*, VII, p. 140). After their marriage, they continued to read Wordsworth.[12] In the fall of 1880 they ‘were constantly reading together, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth’. And in the last month of her life, Eliot read F. W. H. Myers’s newly published life of Wordsworth in the ‘English Men of Letters’ series.[13]

Though the above reading lists are by no means comprehensive, they at least suggest that Wordsworth and Shakespeare were always Eliot’s favourite authors, showing her persistent enthusiasm in their works throughout her life. This lifelong reading and re-reading made it easy for Eliot to quote lines from Wordsworth’s poems to describe her feelings and thoughts. It seems that either consciously or unconsciously,

[10] Pinney, ‘George Eliot’s Reading of Wordsworth: The Record’, 21.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] John Cross, *George Eliot’s Life as Related in Her Letters and Journal*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1885), III, 370, 384.

Wordsworth became a constituent of Eliot's own way of thinking. As Stephen Gill puts it, '[t]he unostentatious allusion to lines and phrases in her letters indicates the easy commerce of her own thoughts with Wordsworth's words'.[14] She herself also confesses that 'I never before met with so many of my own feelings, expressed just as I could <wish> like them' ((*Letters*, I, p. 34)). On 27 October 1840, quoting from Wordsworth's 'My Heart Leaps Up', she writes that it is joyous to 'have the wind of heaven blow on one after being *stived* in a human atmosphere, to feel one's "heart leap up"' (*Letters*, I, p. 71). 'Tintern Abbey' must be one of the poems which best expressed Eliot's feelings, as she quotes it many times in her letters and essays, with a certain line mentioned more than once. In February 1848, commenting on the works of three English landscape painters, she says that 'they bring a whole world of thought and bliss—"a sense of something far more deeply interfused"' ((*Letters*, I, p. 248). 'The weight of all this unintelligible world' was not only quoted in her 1844 letter to Mrs Bray, which has been mentioned above, but also reappeared in a letter to John Blackwood on 23 June 1866 (*Letters*, IV, p. 277). In 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine', Eliot describes the poet as one 'whom the lovely objects of Nature have always "haunted like a passion"'.[15]

Wordsworth's moral values can also be seen to have shaped Eliot's. As early as February 1848, she wrote to John Sibree and expressed her faith in the ultimate triumph of 'sympathy, all-embracing love, the super-added moral life' over 'egotism'. She supported her view by quoting from Wordsworth's poem 'These Times Strike Monied Worldlings with Dismay': 'Every gift of noble origin / Is breathed upon by hope's perpetual breath' (*Letters*, I, p. 251). Eliot's aspiration for 'something higher, something nobler', which is often expressed by the protagonists of her novels, also has its source in

[14] Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, p. 147.
[15] George Eliot, 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine', in *The Essays of George Eliot*, ed. by Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963; repr. 1967), p. 242.

Wordsworth. On 12 February 1874, writing to Mrs William Smith, she says that she cares very much for 'the demonstration of an intense joy in life on the basis of "plain living and high thinking"'. The quotation is from Wordsworth's poem 'O Friend! I Know Not Which Way I Must Look' (*Letters*, VI, p. 17). Moreover, throughout her life and artistic creation, Eliot remains faithful to the maxim advocated by the poet in *The Excursion*: 'we live by admiration, hope, and love'.[16]

Wordsworth also had a strong influence on Eliot's artistic theories. The most important of them is art as a means of extending sympathy and of removing the social division between the rich and the poor. In 'The Natural History of German Life', Eliot states that

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. […] When Wordsworth sings to us the reverie of 'Poor Susan,' […] more is done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness, than by hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations.[17]

In his introduction to this essay, which was written between May and June 1856, Thomas Pinney writes that it 'makes clear the Wordsworthian conviction […] that the highest function of art is "the extension of our sympathies" towards "the life of the People"'.[18] It is worth noting that it was during this summer that Eliot was planning to write fiction. Her early novels, *Adam Bede* and *Silas Marner*, published in 1859 and 1861 respectively, as we shall see, manifest the Wordsworthian principles she cherished.

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[16] *The Excursion*, Book IV, Line 760, quoted by Eliot in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1879), p. 179.
[17] Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Essays of George Eliot*, pp. 270-1.
[18] Thomas Pinney, Introduction to 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Essays of George Eliot*, pp. 266-7 (p. 267).

The Treatment of Memory in Criticism of Wordsworth and Eliot

Memory studies in Wordsworth have until now mainly focused on recollective memory. Despite being one of the major themes of Wordsworth studies up to now, memory was not a central issue during the poet's own time. *The Critical Heritage*, for example, shows that memory was mentioned only occasionally by Wordsworth's contemporary reviewers, and that there was no systematic exploration of the topic.[19] Memory does not seem to have been a major concern for Victorian readers, either. In fact, it is difficult to find an article dedicated to Wordsworth's treatment of memory until the late 1930s, when Bennett Weaver published an essay entitled 'Wordsworth's *Prelude*: The Poetic Function of Memory'. This is perhaps the earliest in-depth study of memory in Wordsworth. In this essay, Weaver notices that the poet's treatment of memory is not confined to the passive recollection of past events. Instead it is creative, enabling the mind to assimilate everything and resulting in the creation of a poetry of 'another truth than the truth of tabulation'.[20]

From the 1960s onwards, critics saw childhood recollection as important in the formation of Wordsworth's poetic identity, the development of his poetic power and his moral growth. Christopher Salvesen studies how Wordsworth, 'by way of memory', achieves 'a more unified view of self within time present and past'.[21] As a 'persistent exploration of the nature and significance of memory', *The Prelude* manifests Wordsworth's power to maintain 'the elements of continuity' between his past and

[19] *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage 1793-1820*, ed. by Robert Woof (London: Routledge, 2001), I.
[20] Bennett Weaver, 'Wordsworth's *Prelude*: The Poetic Function of Memory', *Studies in Philology*, 34 (1937), 552-63 (p. 557).
[21] Christopher Salvesen, *The Landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), p. 76.

present selves.[22] Wordsworth's 'spots of time' show his theory of memory as a positive source of 'nourishment and inspiration'. Not only the pleasant, but also the painful and insignificant experiences can be 'fruitful',[23] contributing to the 'calm existence' which the narrator believes he now has.[24] Herbert Lindenberger also discusses how Wordsworth's early experiences gain inward meaning through memory, and become 'the mysterious sources of life and power' in *The Prelude*.[25] In this process, chronology is of little consequence: 'When assertions of inward power were needed to counterbalance the effects of the external world, Wordsworth did not hesitate to take them out of chronological sequence'.[26] Nevertheless, Wordsworth's construction of such a moral development through acts of memory is not regarded as problematic. There is no questioning of Wordsworth's unified and organic identity.

Some critics, however, find such a narrative of progressive development problematic. As early as 1964, Geoffrey Hartman noticed that Wordsworth's 'spots of time' represent memory clusters of traumatic fixation or flashbacks.[27] As Hartman himself summarizes, Wordsworth's memory is always bound up with a particular place, a psychology of what Hartman terms 'spot syndrome'. These spots, being at the same time 'particular *places* in nature' and 'fixed *points* in time',[28] are both 'mythic' and 'realistic'. They represent the poet's obsession with seeking the origin, which 'inspires him to evoke quasi-sacred sites of "first encounter," binding contacts between his

[22] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 75.
[23] Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 30.
[24] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850, Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 1805, I, line 360.
[25] Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's* Prelude (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 134.
[26] Lindenberger, p. 170.
[27] Geoffrey Hartman, *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader*, ed. by Geoffrey Hartman and Daniel T. O'Hara (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 296.
[28] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964; repr. 1967), p. 212.

imagination and earth', as though earth had 'specific localities' that could 'restore poetic strength and lead to a future as strong as the past'.[29] Such an understanding of Wordsworth's memory facilitates Hartman's own thinking about the way that memory is bound up with a particular place, and leads him to the development of a theoretical exploration of trauma later in his career.

Historically-minded critics also suggest that Wordsworth suppresses aspects of his past. Kenneth Johnston reveals a Wordsworth never known before, a poet with many aspects of his youth lying hidden, including working as a spy for the Home Office.[30] However, Hunter Davis later points out that this information is wrong. The person who acted as a secret agent was not Wordsworth the poet, but one of his cousins, Robinson Wordsworth. [31] In a similar way, David Bromwich's *Disowned by Memory* investigates the troubled elements beneath the surface of Wordsworth's poetry of the 1790s, which emanate from his extremely uncomfortable experiences in France.[32] Stephen Gill's study also suggests that Wordsworth's seemingly unified self is constructed through the suppression of his inconvenient past. Gill finds that there is an 'evasion of memories that threaten to overwhelm or subvert the interpretative pattern being created'.[33] Lucy Newlyn points out that in handling the guilty materials of his life, for example, Wordsworth is 'suppressing the major transgressions' while 'bringing minor misdemeanours into the foreground'.[34] The problem of Wordsworth's unified identity

[29] Hartman, *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader*, p. 296.
[30] Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth* (London: W. W. Norton, 1998; repr. London: Pimlico, 2000).
[31] Hunter Davis, *William Wordsworth: A Biography*, rev. edn (London: Frances Loncoln, 2009), p. xii.
[32] David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[33] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 3.
[34] Lucy Newlyn, '"The Noble Living and the Noble Dead": Community in *The Prelude*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 55-69 (p. 59).

has also been approached from a post-structuralist perspective, from the viewpoint of trauma theory and with reference to the Freudian notion of repression.[35]

The focus of this thesis, as I explain below, is not recollective memory, but habit-memory. It seeks to explore not only the mechanism of habit, but also its social and political significance. There are two works dealing with Wordsworth's treatment of habit to which I am particularly indebted. One of them is David Bromwich's aforementioned *Disowned by Memory*. Although this book deals mainly with Wordsworth's guilty feelings during the French Revolution, which runs as an undercurrent in his poetry of the 1790s, Bromwich emphasizes strongly the role of habit in moral experience and its function in the amelioration of feelings and the cementation of communities. 'Habit', David Bromwich believes, 'is not just *a* guide' for the poet, '[i]t is the most reliable guide we have', working more effectively than reason when converting man to moral virtue.[36] By following this blind and animal spirit we discover a sense of belonging to humanity. My understanding of the moral implications of habit is built upon that of Bromwich. However, by situating habit in Wordsworth's poetry within the theoretical frameworks of both his own time and that of the twentieth century, my research marks a significant departure from Bromwich's research, which mainly locates Wordsworth's work historically.

[35] For a post-structuralist approach, see Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as Defacement', *Modern Language Notes*, 94 (1979), 910-30. It is generally agreed that poetry writing for Wordsworth is a means of coming to terms with the traumatic memories in his childhood and the French Revolution. For a detailed discussion of trauma in Wordsworth, see Geoffrey Hartman, 'Trauma within the Limits of Literature', *European Journal of English Studies*, 7 (2003), 257-74; Anne Whitehead, 'Geoffrey Hartman and the Ethics of Place: Landscape, Memory, Trauma', *European Journal of English Studies*, 7 (2003), 275-92; Cathy Caruth, 'An Interview with Geoffrey Hartman', in *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment: Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading*, ed. by Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 296-317. For a Freudian interpretation, see Richard Onorato, *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in* The Prelude (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), David Ellis, *Wordsworth, Freud and the Spots of Time: Interpretation in* The Prelude (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Eugene Stelzig, 'Wordsworth's Bleeding Spots: Traumatic Memories of the Absent Father in *The Prelude*, *European Romantic Review*, 15 (2004), 533-45.

[36] Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory*, p. 33 (original emphasis).

James Chandler's *Wordsworth's Second Nature* is another work dealing with habit in Wordsworth. It examines, from a political perspective, how Wordsworth was influenced by Burke's notion of 'second nature' and his conservative ideology, and how the poet sees human nature as cultivated by custom, habit and tradition. While Chandler's book is helpful in the development of my idea of the political significances of habit, his book is not concerned particularly with memory.

In the last chapter of my thesis, I will explore the representation of collective memory in the work of Wordsworth and Eliot. My interest in the collective nature of habit in Wordsworth is developed in response to the growing attention to collective memory in recent years. As Michael Rossington has pointed out, ways of remembering are now more and more seen to be 'fostered and shared by family, religion, class, the media and other sources of the creation of group identities'. Moreover, collective memory plays a vital role in 'conceiving of a society's past'.[37] This is also the reason why critics have begun to investigate the role collective memory plays in Wordsworth's poetry, though one has to admit that research in this field is still relatively new. Drawing on Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* and his idea that we can now only seek to 'decipher our experience in terms of what we can no longer experience' because memory has given place to history, Lisa Hirschfield contends that *The Excursion* dramatizes 'the divorce of memory from history', and at the same time seeks 'to intervene in this process'. The poem demonstrates 'this act of decipherment', which emerges from and thus defines 'the remains of ancestral, customary traditions of rural English life and Lake District communities'.[38] My approach to collective memory is different from that of Hirschfield. I will draw on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and

[37] Michael Rossington, 'Introduction' to 'Collective Memory', in *Theories of Memory: A Reader*, ed. by Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 134-8 (p. 134).
[38] Lisa Hirschfield, 'Between Memory and History: Wordsworth's *Excursion*', *Romanticism On the Net*, 16 (1999) <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385/memory.html> [accessed 20 April 2008] (10 para. of 41).

Maurice Halbwachs to demonstrate Wordsworth's belief that collective memory is vital for the cohesion of a community and that social changes should proceed gradually, without damaging the collective roots of society.

Memory studies in George Eliot follow a similar pattern to those in Wordsworth in their focus on recollective memory. At first, memory is seen to help preserve the continuity between the past and present and construct a stable personal identity. Noting Eliot's frequent use of plants as a metaphor for the growth of personality, Thomas Pinney goes on to compare memory to 'the network of veins […] carrying nourishment to the remotest branches of the tree'.[39] This typically Romantic metaphor attempts to smooth over the problematic aspect of memory. Memory also protects Eliot's protagonists from becoming a prey to the inclination of the moment. In *The Mill on the Floss*, memory is the only force that keeps Maggie in touch with her past and urges her to resist her natural passions.[40]

In recent years, memory in Eliot is more often seen as a subversive force, destabilizing the fixed identity her characters have constructed. Working on the relationship between music and memory in *The Mill of the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*, Delia da Sousa Correa concludes that music shows 'the uncanniness of submerged physical memory lurking within the subjective memories from which we construct ourselves'.[41] This view is shared by Michael Davis, who holds that on the one hand, memory of the past shapes the present, while on the other, the relationship between past and present identity remains 'highly problematic'. In *Daniel Deronda*, for instance, it is precisely Deronda's emotional 'distancing' from his childhood memory which signals

[39] Thomas Pinney, 'The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels', in *George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by George Creeger (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 47.
[40] K. M. Newton, *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1981), p. 117.
[41] Delia da Sousa Correa, '"The Music Vibrating in Her Still": Music and Memory in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 21 (2000), 541-63 (p. 558).

'his establishment as an emotionally mature and directed adult'. The harmonization of past with his present discovery of his Jewish identity is achieved only through 'the exclusion of a large part of that past'. In a similar way, Deronda's mother, though having been brought up as a Jew, struggles to 'escape the "spots of memory" which Wordsworth sees as the shaping force of his poetic identity'.[42]

Recollective memory in Eliot has also been studied in the light of the Freudian notion of repression and trauma. Drawing on a variety of Freudian theories, critics attempt to show that his ideas can enhance our understanding of the way in which psychic wounds operate in Eliot's characters. Michele Moylan contends that in *The Mill on the Floss*, Freud's notion of 'oceanic' feeling sheds light on our understanding of 'why Maggie chooses to give up Stephen in favor of her ties to the past'.[43] Dianne Sadoff argues that the Freudian primal scene of seduction serves as a metaphor in Eliot's fiction. In *Romola*, for example, the heroine 'rejects the law of the father', but cannot break with father figures, thus 'creating an unresolved tension' between 'paternal authority and daughterly desire'.[44] Laura Emery and Margaret Keenan suggest that psychoanalytic ideas about trauma and mastery can 'enhance our understanding of Silas' in *Silas Marner*, who, through isolating himself, attempts to master loss but fails to do so. When events repeat the trauma, his old wounds reopen. This time, he begins to heal 'by acknowledging the intolerable pain of loss to himself and others'.[45]

Some critics have recognized that Eliot's depiction of the psychic wound and its recovery pattern anticipates later theories of trauma. Carl Rotenberg has noted that

[42] Michael Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), p. 76; pp. 84-5.
[43] Michele Moylan, 'The Moral Imperatives of Time and Memory in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*', *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, 11 (1990), 369-77 (p. 370).
[44] Dianne Sadoff, '*Romola*: Trauma, Memory and Repression', in *George Eliot*, ed. by K. M. Newton (Essex: Longman, 1991), pp. 131-43 (p. 131).
[45] Laura Emery and Margaret Keenan, '"I've been robbed!": Breaking the Silence in *Silas Marner*', *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 59 (1999), 209-23 (p. 209).

Freud was an admirer of George Eliot and may have been influenced by her. In *Daniel Deronda*, the treatment of the relationship between Deronda and Gwendolen displays Eliot's remarkable understanding of how a treatment relationship works decades before the development of psychoanalysis.[46] Jill Matus explores the way in which psychic shock and its effect on memory are represented in *Daniel Deronda* long before the concept of trauma 'had even been named, let alone been classified as a psychic disorder'. She thus contends that, in representing psychic shock, Eliot is arguably 'a precursor of later theories of trauma'.[47] Chapter Three will continue this discussion, but rather than focusing on the Freudian trauma, I will look at the late-twentieth-century theorist Cathy Caruth's conception of trauma and discuss the extent to which Eliot's treatment of psychic wounds and their recovery pattern is similar to and differ from that of Caruth.

While recollective memory in Eliot has attracted extensive critical attention, this is not true of habit memory. For individual habit, several critics have noticed the importance of the physiological basis of habit and its relationship with the development of moral sense. Terry Wright has illustrated how Comte's Positivist cerebral theory illuminates Eliot's belief that 'egoistic instincts can be broadened by careful exercise and meditation into altruistic attachment and universal love'.[48] Sally Shuttleworth discusses the influence of Lewes's theory of reflex action on Eliot, who sees moral habit

[46] Carl T. Rotenberg, 'George Eliot – Proto-Psychoanalyst', *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 59 (1999), 257-69.
[47] Jill Matus, 'Historicizing Trauma: The Genealogy of Psychic Shock in *Daniel Deronda*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 (2008), 59-78 (p. 61; p. 73). Another article which is about Eliot's treatment of psychic wound but which is not from a Freudian approach is Louise Penner, '"Unmapped Country": Uncovering Hidden Wounds in *Daniel Deronda*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30 (2002), 77-97. The article situates the discussion mainly within the framework of nineteenth-century theories of memory to explore the hidden wound of Gwendolen.
[48] T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 192.

as based on 'physiological channels established in the mind by previous action'.[49] Michael Davis continues the discussion of the relationship between reflex action and moral sense, but from the broader perspective of nineteenth-century psychology.[50]

Reflex action is indeed an important way of explaining the mechanism of habit cultivation, which I will continue to engage with in my thesis. However, I find this approach alone inadequate, as it treats the body merely as a machine which responds passively to external stimuli. In Chapter Four, I will adopt a phenomenological approach to habit and examine how Merleau-Ponty's theory of habit and an individual's embodied relationship with the environment facilitates an understanding of habit memory in Wordsworth and Eliot. I will argue that in 'Michael' and *The Mill on the Floss*, for example, the body is represented not as a passive force, but as an agency which is capable of both feeling and knowledge.

Collective memory in Eliot has also been explored by critics. In 'History and Memory in *Adam Bede*', Gail McGrew Eifrig discusses the way in which communal memory is related to the present and the future through the study of rituals and customs: the funeral, the celebration of birthdays, the trial and the wedding.[51] A more theoretically informed and in-depth study of collective memory in Eliot is Hao Li's *Memory and History in George Eliot*. Drawing extensively on both nineteenth-century and current theories on collective memory, Hao Li explores Eliot's conception of the mechanisms and functions of communal memory in terms of its relation to history. She defines communal memory as a kind of collective habit, which is made up of forms of 'collective mentality and moral consciousness, shared feelings, manners, rituals,

[49] Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 108.
[50] Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology.*
[51] Gail McGrew Eifrig, 'History and Memory in *Adam Bede*', *Soundings*, 76 (1993), 407-20.

customs as well as verbal expressions, which have evolved over generations'. It works as 'a framework of knowledge and presupposition consciously or often unconsciously *inherited* and *shared*'.[52] I draw on this notion when defining my concept of collective memory and discussing its representations in Wordsworth and Eliot. However, Hao Li draws a distinction between memory in Wordsworth, which she sees mainly as an individual phenomenon, and memory in Eliot, which she sees as collective.[53] My research will show that collective memory, which Hao Li sees as crucial in Eliot, also plays an important role in Wordsworth's poetry.

So far I have been looking at memory research in Wordsworth and Eliot separately. Now I will examine the comparisons that have been made between them. Many Wordsworthian themes in Eliot's novels have been identified, and comparisons have been made showing both their affinities and the extent to which Eliot reworks Wordsworth's themes. Frequently discussed topics include: childhood and nature, the primacy of feelings in moral judgment, the authors' similar attitudes towards political reform, humble and ordinary life as their subject matter, and the extension of the readers' sympathy as their artistic aim.[54]

Memory is also a major subject of comparison, but in relation to each individual writer, the focus is on recollective memory. Critics have pointed out the difference

[52] Hao Li, *Memory and History in George Eliot: Transfiguring the Past* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 1; p. 3 (original emphasis).
[53] Li, p. 49.
[54] For comparisons between childhood and nature, please see U. C. Knoepflmacher, 'Mutations of the Wordsworthian Child of Nature', in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. by U. C. Knoepflmacher and G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 417-22. For the primacy of feelings in moral judgment, see Donald Stone, *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). For their attitudes towards political reform, see Edward Dramin, '"A New Unfolding of Life": Romanticism in the Late Novels of George Eliot', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26 (1998), 273-302 (pp. 278-9). For humble life as their subject matter, see Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, and Pinney, 'Wordsworth's Influence on George Eliot', 1960). For the extension of readers' sympathy, see Basil Willey, *Nineteenth-Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

between Wordsworth and Eliot in their treatment of childhood recollection. Knoepflmacher sees that Eliot attempts to follow Wordsworth but fails: *The Mill on the Floss*, for instance, 'vainly enlists the Romantic's power of memory', because childhood no longer provides the Wordsworthian 'sustenance of faith'.[55] Stephen Gill also remarks that while memory in Wordsworth is a saving intercourse, in this novel it lacks this 'saving egotism'.[56] The relationship between early recollections and the sense of selfhood is another major concern. Thomas Pinney holds that both writers see the importance of early memory in developing a sense of continuity. The difference between them, he claims, is that memory in Wordsworth is 'egocentric' while in Eliot it is more closely connected with duties to others.[57] Santanu Majumdar questions the unified self constructed through memory in Eliot, arguing that while she follows Wordsworth in depicting memory as a force of retaining identity in her early novels, in her later novels memory casts doubt upon the unity of selfhood.[58] Comparisons have also been made concerning the relationship between memory and morality. Thomas Pinney singles out the ethical primacy of early affections for both writers. Old and familiar objects and associations are cherished because they supply all the meaning of life and are inseparable from the feelings which exalt them.[59] Robert Dunham holds that Wordsworth and Eliot share the view that all experience has ethical implications, and that they seek to stimulate enriching personal memory as a means of nourishing the natural moral impulse.[60]

[55] U. C. Knoepflmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 175.
[56] Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, p. 159.
[57] Pinney, 'The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels', p. 47.
[58] Santanu Majumdar, 'Memory and Identity in Wordsworth and in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*', *The Critical Review*, 36 (1996), 41-61.
[59] Pinney, 'Wordsworth's Influence on George Eliot', p. 154.
[60] Robert Dunham, 'Wordsworthian Themes and Attitudes in George Eliot's Novels' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Stanford University, 1971), p. 231.

In these works, however, Wordsworth's theories of memory, as well as his poetic creations, moral standards and political attitudes, have often been used as the background or framework against which Eliot's works are judged and evaluated. My approach will be different. I acknowledge that Eliot read and absorbed Wordsworth but I focus on the very different contexts in which they write. In each of the four chapters, I will treat them separately as two distinct writers, and explore their representation of memory within the different theoretical and historical backgrounds in which they are situated. An analysis of their similarities and differences will be made in the last section of each chapter.

Theoretical Approaches

The focus of this study, therefore, is not recollective memory, but habit-memory, which is represented as both an individual and a collective experience. The reason for choosing this topic is not only that habit-memory has been largely marginalized in memory studies of these two writers in the past, but also because it has been overlooked in traditional philosophy, which I will soon demonstrate. Recollective memory will still be discussed; however, it will be approached mainly in relation to habit-memory.

Recollective Memory and Habit-Memory

Past studies have shown that memory can be seen as both an individual and a collective phenomenon.[61] Individual memory can be further divided into two sub-categories: memory as 'the power to recollect and to recognize specific things' and memory as the 'retention of language and skills'.[62] I will follow William Brewer by

[61] For more details, see Rossington, 'Introduction' to 'Collective Memory', p. 134.
[62] *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward Craig, 10 vols (London: Routledge, 1998), VI, 296.

calling these 'recollective memory' and 'habit memory' respectively.[63] It must be pointed out that in spite of their distinctive qualities, they have been seen by philosophers as connected and supportive of each other.

Habit-memory has three characteristics. First, it is sedimented in the body and is therefore, as Anne Whitehead classifies it, a type of body memory.[64] It is performative, since the body remembers it by acting out past experience. Whether riding a bike, nursing a baby or playing a musical instrument, we demonstrate that we remember the skill by carrying it out with ease. Finally, habit-memory is automatic and unselfconscious. The acquisition of a habit may involve conscious effort but once a habit has formed, it does its work 'almost automatically'.[65]

Habit-memory plays an important role in the development of moral sense. According to Aristotle, moral virtues are 'the product of habit'.[66] Like the acquisition of skills in arts and crafts, moral virtues are established as habits through exercise. Morality can thus be seen as an area shared by individual and collective habit-memory. It is individual in the sense that it involves individual effort for cultivation. It is also collective because it is a mode of conduct that a particular community shares, and it can be passed down from one generation to another.

Though habit-memory is of vital importance, it has not been given adequate attention in the past. As Paul Connerton has noticed, habit-memory has been 'largely

[63] William Brewer, 'What Is Recollective Memory?', in *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, ed. by David Robin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 21-31.
[64] Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 12.
[65] Booth, p. x.
[66] Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. by J. A. K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 55.

ignored'.[67] The marginalization of habit-memory is no coincidence. It can be seen to go back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when habit-memory was treated as a passive force of remembering. Coleridge, for example, expresses a most negative opinion on habit. In response to Locke, Hume and Hartley's philosophy that habit is 'essential, the mainspring which governs physiology, psychology, and epistemology',[68] he contends that it deprives human agency and degrades men into inanimate objects. As he vehemently attacks it in *Biographia Literaria*, he implies that associationism seems to suggest to him that man has a disposition similar to 'a weather-cock' which 'had acquired a habit of turning to the east, from the wind having been so long in that quarter'.[69] Coleridge admits that there is some associative power in the mind, but asserts that it is wrong to elevate the role of habit at the expense of the will, which is connected with the creative and imaginative power of the mind. His hierarchical dichotomy between imagination and fancy also follows this line of argument. Imagination is related to the creative power of the mind, which intends to 're-create', to 'idealize' and to 'unify'. It shows that man is an active agent and puts man's initiative into best play. Fancy, by contrast, is an inferior form of mental activity. Being a product of habitual association, it is nothing more than 'a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space'.[70]

Lewes takes a different approach to that of Coleridge in his discussion. For him, memory, as acquired reflex actions, has the broadest connotation, including both recollection and habit-memory.[71] 'Recollection' is the 'higher form' of memory

[67] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 25.
[68] Richard Fadem, 'Coleridge, Habit, and the Politics of Vision', in *Coleridge's Biographia Literaria: Text and Meaning*, ed. by Frederick Burwick (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), pp. 88-104 (p. 91).
[69] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. by H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 214.
[70] Coleridge, p. 313.
[71] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: Second Series: The Physical Basis of Mind* (London: Trübner, 1877), p. 462. It needs to be pointed out that Lewes does not adopt the specific term habit-

because it is 'exclusively human', in that there is 'an effort, a search, and a finding'. By contrast, habit-memory is 'the lower, or animal form' of remembering, which is characterized by passivity: 'Images and ideas arise spontaneously, […] and intrude themselves into the current of thought'.[72]

Though Coleridge and Lewes approach habit from different perspectives, the former pairing it with imagination while the latter contrasts it with recollection, they share the view that habit is an inferior form of mental capacity. Passively responding to external stimuli, it deprives an individual of his agency, degrading him into an animal or inanimate object.

Such a negative view of habit-memory continues far into the late nineteenth century. Like Lewes, Henri Bergson also makes a distinction between these two types of individual memory, though he uses 'pure memory' to refer to 'recollective memory'.[73] According to him, the main distinction between the two is the presence or absence of memory images when the past is recovered: 'Pure memory records, in the form of memory-images, all the events of our daily life as they occur in time' (Bergson, p. 92). In contrast, 'habit-memory' recovers the past 'not in the memory-images which recall them', but through 'intelligently coordinated movements which represent the accumulated efforts of the past'. Bergson's use of the term 'pure memory' also points to the hierarchical nature of his dichotomy. Pure memory is 'memory *par excellence*'. It is

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memory. His argument is slightly vague in that he contrasts recollection, in which there is an effort of searching, with all other forms of involuntary memory, which are characterized by passivity. One may argue that involuntary memory does not necessarily mean the same as habit-memory, though the two concepts sometimes overlap. However, when talking about involuntary memories, Lewes actually refers to habitual associations which crop up automatically and effortlessly, and which, I suggest, are within the realm of habit-memory.

[72] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: Third Series (Continued)* (London: Trübner, 1879), p. 119.

[73] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), p. 21. All subsequent quotations of this book are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

superior because ‘man alone’ possesses it, while both man and animals are capable of habit-memory (Bergson, p. 93; p. 94).

Bertrand Russell follows Bergson in distinguishing between the two types of individual memory. Instead of ‘pure memory’, Russell adopts the term ‘true memory’. He also calls it ‘knowledge memory’, for he believes that true memory constitutes knowledge. Russell holds that the distinction is ‘vital to the understanding of memory’, with the immediate qualification that it is more theoretically convenient than practically possible.[74] Like their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors, both Russell and Bergson conceive of recollective memory as the privileged form, while habit memory involves little human agency and makes man not so different from a gramophone or some other mechanical recording device.

Though recollective memory and habit-memory have their own unique qualities, with the former often considered superior to the latter, it is not possible to separate the two. Bergson holds that the two forms of memory ‘lend to each other a mutual support’ (Bergson, p. 98). A. J. Ayer also maintains that though habits are independent of recollection, performance of a skill is sometimes ‘facilitated by the occurrence of a recollection of a particular instance of learning’.[75] The interaction between recollective memory and habit-memory will be discussed in this thesis, with the emphasis on how the two forms of memory work together to enhance the development of moral habits.

Habit in Associationism

From the discussion above, we can begin to understand that habit-memory has not been given adequate critical attention, and has been considered an inferior form of

[74] Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), p. 166.
[75] Brewer, p. 31.

memory in traditional philosophy. However, in British empirical thought, it was regarded as an essential force governing physiology, psychology and epistemology. I will now focus on the three thinkers who are most relevant to my research: David Hume, David Hartley and George Henry Lewes. All of them attempt to explain human behaviour in terms of physical causation, suggesting that the body abides by the same law as objects in the natural world. Their theories of habit, based on a mechanistic view of the human body, illuminate our understanding of the way in which habit works in Wordsworth and Eliot.

In the opinion of David Hume, habit is 'the great guide of human life'. He identifies habit as an important principle of human nature: 'For whatever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding, we always say, that this propensity is the effect of *Custom*'.[76] Its effect upon the mind is twofold: 'bestowing a *facility* in the performance of any action […]; and afterwards a *tendency* or *inclination* towards it'.[77]

Moral sense has nothing to do with reason, either. Hume notes that '[i]f flame or snow be presented anew to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat or cold', the same principle follows 'when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits'.[78] Likewise, 'to have the sense of virtue, is

[76] David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 43 (original emphasis).
[77] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by David Norton and Mary Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000; repr. 2001), p. 271 (original emphasis).
[78] Hume, *Enquiries*, p. 46.

nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character'.[79]

Hume's privileging of feeling over reason had a great impact on Romantic writers. His idea of the significant role custom plays in our moral life is especially helpful in understanding Wordsworth's belief that 'habit does the work / Of reason' in the cultivation of moral awareness.[80] As Anne-Lise François points out, 'a good Humean reader […] resembles a good Wordsworthian reader in that both recognize and privilege the cumulative significance, acquired over time, of things that may initially appear of little moment'.[81]

Hartley's system goes a step further than that of Hume by analysing the physiological mechanism of habit formation. His thought can be seen as that of Hume 'transferred to the physiological sphere', though Edwin Boring remarks that he wrote 'relatively independently of Hume'.[82] Hartley groups human actions into two categories: automatic and voluntary. Automatic actions, such as the jerking back of the finger when touching a hot poker, are generated by automatic reflexes. This involves 'a circuit by which an impulse travels up the sensory nerves to the brain and then from the brain down the "motory" nerves to the muscles'.[83] He then goes on to describe how automatic action can become voluntary. The motion of grasping in a child may initially be automatic. But through sufficient repetition, 'the will to grasp is generated, and

[79] Hume, *A Treatise*, p. 303 (original emphasis).
[80] William Wordsworth, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), lines 92-3. All subsequent quotations of this poem, abbreviated OCB, are from this edition with line numbers given in parentheses.
[81] Anne-Lise François, 'To Hold in Common and Know by Heart: The Prevalence of Gentle Forces in Humean Empiricism and Romantic Experience', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 7 (1994), 139-62 (p. 142).
[82] Edwin Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950), p. 196; p.195.
[83] Richard Allen, *David Hartley on Human Nature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 163.

sufficiently associated with the action to produce it instantaneously'. As a result, the action becomes 'perfectly voluntary'.[84]

In a similar way, voluntary actions can become automatic through repetition. At the early stage of learning to play a harpsichord, the player moves his fingers from key to key slowly. Gradually, the acts of volition grow 'less and less express', until finally, there is no intervention by voluntary will. The movement becomes 'secondarily automatic'.[85] This process shows the dialectical relationship between voluntary and automatic actions. These two modes of action, rather than being in opposition, are 'in alliance'.[86] If voluntary powers, as Hartley maintains, are of the nature of memory, secondarily automatic actions are also of the nature of memory. Through repetition and practice, we remember so well that we can perform certain actions automatically, without the need to resort to voluntary efforts.

Like Hume, Hartley links habit with the development of moral sense. His project is much more ambitious, however. Hume connects virtue with an instinctive feeling of pleasure and stops there. Hartley shows how the desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain further leads to the evolution of an individual's moral growth. Moral sense is acquired through the association of pleasurable sensations with certain objects. The world, he suggests, was designed by Providence as 'a system of benevolence', so that ideally, or under a proper educational regimen, the mind will undergo an evolutionary process through sensation, imagination, ambition, self-interest, and sympathy, until at last we acquire a moral sense. Thus human individuals may be regarded as 'a sort of refinery in which the loftiest spirituality is being mechanically distilled out of sense'. Moral sense,

[84] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 3 vols (London: Johnson, 1791), I, 105.
[85] Hartley, I, 108.
[86] Allen, p. 168.

which is the last to be acquired, is regarded as 'the final outcome of Nature's holy plan'. It is 'generated necessarily and mechanically' as an inevitable destination.[87]

If Hume is helpful in understanding Wordsworth's preoccupation with habit in the enhancement of moral awareness, Hartley's theory on the dialectical relation between automatic and voluntary actions and the way in which memory operates as an accumulative force of the past further reveals how habit works to mould an individual into a duty-bound being in 'Ode to Duty'.

In the nineteenth century, associationists continued to engage with the mechanical-response explanation of habit formation. While many associationists discussed the mechanism of reflex action, the most relevant to my research is George Henry Lewes, whose theory of habit, particularly his idea that cultivation is more essential than inheritance in the development of moral sense, and the way the accumulative force of the past determines an individual's moral choice upon emergency, has the most direct influence on Eliot.

Lewes's theory of habit is very similar to that of Hartley. He also explains automatic actions in terms of muscular contraction and reflex action. Hartley argues that through training, voluntary actions can be transformed into secondarily automatic actions, and Lewes expresses a similar point: 'habits, Fixed Ideas, and what are called Automatic Actions, all depend on the tendency which a sensation has to discharge itself through the readiest channel'. Learning to speak a new language is very difficult at first, because 'the channels through which each sensation has to pass have not become established'. Once frequent repetition has 'cut a pathway', however, this difficulty is

[87] Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background: Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), pp. 143-52.

overcome: ‘the actions become so automatic that they can be performed while the mind is otherwise engaged’.[88] Lewes’s ‘Automatic Actions’ here closely resemble what Hartley terms ‘secondarily automatic actions’, actions that become automatic through training.

Lewes also equates acquired reflex actions with memory. In his view, physiologically speaking, memory is but ‘an organized tendency to react on lines previously traversed’. Acquired reflex actions involve the ‘very reproduction of experience, which in the sphere of Intellect is called Memory’.[89] The process of remembering is that of creating a new channel through which a sensation discharges itself through repetition. We remember very well when we perform an action with perfect ease, because the pathway is well established so that we no longer need to rely on voluntary powers to carry it out.

Like Hume and Hartley before him, Lewes discusses habit cultivation in relation to moral sense: ‘All men are trained to act rightly on emergencies by what is a kind of moral instinct, organized in previous habit of acting rightly’.[90] The habit of acting appropriately in emergencies is an automatic action, which does not need to resort to voluntary powers. Since memory is what we call an acquired reflex action, the very process of the acquisition of moral habit involves the process of remembering. What we do in an emergency is the result of memory, the accumulated force of our past, habitual action. As the word ‘instinct’ suggests, it is independent of the conscious will.

[88] George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1859-60), II, 58-9.
[89] Lewes, *The Physical Basis of Mind*, pp. 462-3.
[90] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: First Series: The Foundation of a Creed*, 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1874-75), I, 306.

What differentiates the nineteenth-century associationists from those of the eighteenth century is their evolutionary perspective. To summarize, they hold that reflex actions, when repeated frequently, can be inherited by following generations.[91] However, scientists differ on the role played by inheritance in the acquisition of moral sense. For Herbert Spencer, moral instinct can be inherited, and has nothing to do with individual experience. Moral intuitions, he says, are the result of 'accumulated experiences of utility, gradually organized and inherited'. They have 'no apparent basis in the individual experiences of utility'.[92]

For Lewes, cultivation is more important than inheritance. Inheritance only leads to moral aptitude: 'It no more brings with it conceptions of what is right, what wrong, than the musical aptitude brings with it a Symphony of Beethoven'.[93] Without learning and training, however, this aptitude remains dormant since moral sense can only be developed through repeated practice. In Lewes's view, therefore, an individual's own moral history is more important than the moral history of the species.

This development from Hume and Hartley to Lewes, which involves a gradual shift in emphasis towards a greater recognition of the role habit plays in moral education, the physiological process of habit formation and the issue of inheritance, is a key element of this thesis. This movement, especially the emphasis on physiology and inheritance, which marks the development of science from the Romantic to the Victorian period, is also a point where Eliot moves far beyond her predecessor.

[91] For more details, see Boring, pp. 240-4.
[92] Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), II, 89.
[93] Lewes's version of 'The Moral Sense' from the appendix of K. K. Collins, 'G. H. Lewes Revised: George Eliot and the Moral Sense', *Victorian Studies*, 21 (1978), 463-92 (p. 484).

Habit in Phenomenology

So far I have been discussing habit-memory from the perspective of British associationism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I will now approach it from a different perspective, the phenomenological approach to habit as advocated by the twentieth-century French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty is not happy with the mechanical explanation of habit acquisition adopted by the modern behaviourists, of whom the eighteenth and nineteenth-century associationists can be seen as precursors.

I adopt the phenomenological approach because I find associationism alone inadequate in understanding habit in Wordsworth and Eliot. In some of their works, 'Michael' and *The Mill on the Floss* for example, habit is not represented as the body's mechanical response to the external world. It is an active agent. The characters created by the two writers, as I hope to show, demonstrate an embodied understanding of their environment.

In associationism as well as in modern behaviourism, as we have seen, the body is modelled after Newton's clockwork universe. It abides by the law of physical causation and is thereby 'divorced from the world of meaning, purpose and agency'.[94] Following this mechanical view of the body, habit is understood in terms of a conditioned reflex, as can be seen in my discussion of Hartley and Lewes above.

Basing his theory on a deconstruction of the body-mind dichotomy, Merleau-Ponty revises earlier notions of the body, which goes back to Descartes, who, being the most important exponent of Dualism, sharply separates body and mind. Merleau-Ponty

[94] Nick Crossley, *The Social Body: Habit, Identity and Desire* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), p. 63.

contends that 'I am my body'. 'The body is our anchorage in the world'. The human body is not a machine passively responding to external stimuli, but an agent which can feel, see and hear. Merleau-Ponty also revises the traditional concept of 'understanding' as 'subsuming a sense-datum under an idea', suggesting that it is the body which understands a significance.[95]

The body understands significance by forming a habit. To be more specific, to form a habit means to grasp a significance in terms of the body, and to achieve 'the harmony between what we aim at and what is given'.[96] But how does the body grasp a significance? It does so by incorporating the spatial objects it inhabits into the body itself, so that they become extensions of the body. As can be seen, this notion of habit is different from the behaviourists' view of habit, which is a fixed reflex action; it is a 'bodily know-how'.[97] If the associationists' notion of remembering is the establishment of a reflex action, through which a sensation can be discharged easily, Merleau-Ponty's notion is that we remember through the incorporation of spatial objects into the body itself.

Habit in Collective Memory

So far I have been looking at habit-memory from an individual perspective, but I want now to move on to its collective aspect. As Michael Rossington has pointed out, 'within the disciplines of sociology, history and cultural theory, the phrase "collective memory" proposes that practices of remembrance are shaped and reinforced by the societies and cultures in which they occur'.[98] Just as there are different types of

[95] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 231; p. 167.
[96] Merleau-Ponty, p. 167.
[97] Crossley, p. 52.
[98] Rossington, 'Introduction' to 'Collective Memory', p. 134.

individual memory, so collective memory comes in different forms, which James Booth groups into roughly two categories: institutional and habitual.[99]

In habit, then, we see not only the re-enactment of an individual's past, but also a collective past. This collective past is best exemplified in such timeless practices as conventions, rituals and ceremonies. But collective habit-memory is not necessarily restricted to these. In everyday life, in our customary acts, in the way we think, we all bear the imprint of our forefathers. Pierre Bourdieu, a sociologist who builds his theory upon the work of Merleau-Ponty and who extends his insights into the sociological sphere, maintains that individual habits are but 'variants' of their 'collective root'.[100] The difference between Bourdieu and Merleau-Ponty, besides their engagement in different subject areas, lies mainly in the fact that Bourdieu puts more emphasis on the collective aspect of habit, whereas Merleau-Ponty is more concerned with the individual. Thus his theory works as a bridge between the individual and the collective habit-memory in this research. His concept of 'habitus', 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions', is an appropriation of the Latin word *habitus*.[101] In stressing 'habitus' as 'systems' and considering the individual habitus as but a 'variant' of its 'collective root', Bourdieu highlights the fact that such a body memory is a re-enactment of a collective past.[102] In saying that 'habitus' is 'durable' and 'transposable', he also stresses its function of giving an individual and a social group a sense of continuity. This explains Maurice Halbwachs's idea that an individual's resistance to the change of a specific physical setting 'can emanate only from a group'.[103]

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[99] Booth, p. x.
[100] Crossly, p. 94.
[101] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 72.
[102] Crossly, p. 94.
[103] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 134.

Situating the individual within the social group to which he belongs, Bourdieu's theory of habit sheds light on our understanding of the collective nature of the customary behaviour and habitual attachment of Wordsworth and Eliot's characters to their patriarchal land and the community in which they were born.

Habit in Political Writings

Since collective memory plays an important role in daily life and in maintaining the cohesion of a community, it has been a major concern in political writings. Edmund Burke, for example, attaches great importance to the transmission of the whole body of collective values from the past to the present. For him, we are the bearers of our collective memory. This inheritance comes in the form of habit, custom, morality, prescription and even prejudice, and constitutes our very identity: 'All those habits, customs, and local superstitions' are 'human nature'.[104] They have an anchor-like quality, giving us a sense of who we are. If we cast them off, we will not know 'to what port we steer'.[105]

The same holds true of society. If society is an edifice, the collective past made up of shared beliefs and practices constitutes the models and patterns upon which it is built. A drastic break away from it would be destructive, leaving us with 'no compass to govern us'.[106] Therefore, we need to be extremely cautious when social changes are brought about.

The German social historian Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl holds a similar view to Burke on the significant role collective memory plays in both an individual and a

[104] David Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 45.
[105] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 173.
[106] Burke, p. 172.

society. While Burke's focus when discussing individuals and a societies' complicated relationships with their past is the community of the *ancien régime*, Riehl's central concern is the lower classes. In *The Natural History of German Life*, which George Eliot reviewed at great length, he proposes the notion of 'incarnate history', suggesting that we all 'physically embody, and carry forward through the generations, the nature of our collective being […] in our customary acts, emotional responses, and social relationships'.[107] This expresses a similar idea to Burke's that an individual is a physical carrier of his collective past. This past makes itself present through the way we act, think and feel and our relationships with other people. If we are deprived of our customary way of life, we will suffer serious mental disturbance.

Society works in a similar way to the individual. Like Burke, Riehl also believes that a social structure is a complicated inheritance from the past, which proves the best choice of the previous generations. Development can only take place while 'allowing those roots to remain undisturbed'. If they are thrown away instead of being carried down to the following generations, it will be 'destructive of social vitality'. [108]

The way in which Burke and Riehl deal with habit is of great significance to Wordsworth and Eliot in their thinking about the role that habit plays in providing an individual with a sense of anchorage and in maintaining the cohesion of a community. Furthermore, it gives direction to why the two writers consider it crucial for social changes to proceed slowly, without damaging the collective root.

[107] Tim Dolin, *George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 112.
[108] George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 281; p.283.

Habit-Memory in Wordsworth and Eliot

It is nothing new to say that both Wordsworth and Eliot are preoccupied with the past. While an individual is what his past makes him, this past is largely habitual. For Wordsworth and Eliot, habit-memory is important in both individual and collective life. As far as the individual is concerned, it is important for the development of his moral awareness. For the collective, it is vital for the cohesion of a community and thus closely connected with the manner in which social change should be conducted.

Habit-memory is crucial in the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It is also important in regulating moral conduct. Both Wordsworth and Eliot see humans as essentially moral beings, therefore the acquisition of moral habit is a crucial part of their artistic theory and practice, as Chapter One will attempt to show. Both their theories of literary creation and their works manifest their belief in the gradual amelioration of human nature through habit cultivation. An individual's moral habit is also closely bound up with his sense of duty, as Chapter Two will demonstrate, and the way he treats wrongdoings in the past, which is my focus in Chapter Three.

Morality, as I have mentioned earlier, has been situated by some thinkers within the realm of habit-memory. It is about how the body remembers to act rightly, voluntarily, and, more importantly, involuntarily, as in the performance of other skills. For Wordsworth, the cultivation of this bodily practice is a much more reliable means of obtaining moral virtue than reason. In 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', 'habit does the work / Of reason', and makes sure the continuation of a timeless practice 'else unremembered' (OCB, ll. 92-3; l. 83). In 'Ode to Duty', it further 'breed[s] a second Will more wise'.[109] Both of these poems will be analysed in detail in the thesis.

[109] William Wordsworth, 'Ode to Duty', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), line 48.

The representation of habit-memory in Eliot's novels involves a dialogue with the scientific developments of her age. Gall's phrenological discoveries, Comte's cerebral theory and Lewes's reflex theory all attempt to demonstrate the physiological basis of moral sense and thereby make possible the development of moral habit through adequate practice. For Eliot, character is formed through repeated behaviour in the past. An individual can never do anything drastically different from his habitual past. Changes are possible, but can only take place gradually. In case of emergency, one remembers how to act rightly through the previous cultivation of moral habits. Many of Eliot's characters show an awareness of this law and a conscientious practice of it in order to strengthen this body memory.

If an individual is what his habitual past makes him, the same holds true for society. As Riehl points out, '[t]he external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it'.[110] Therefore, for both Wordsworth and Eliot, habit-memory is also important for collective life, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four.

In the view of both of these writers, habit-memory is the fabric from which society is woven. This explains why they think society should change slowly. On the other hand, they recognize that there are times when changes are necessary. Eliot, in particular, is torn between these two oppositions, recognizing the importance of the past while legitimizing the value of change.

[110]Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, pp. 281-2.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into four chapters, of which the first three look mainly at individual habit-memory. Chapter One investigates the relation between habit and morality in the artistic practice and theory of Wordsworth and Eliot, while Chapters Two and Three study the relationship between habit-memory and two fundamental issues in their writings: duty and guilt. The final chapter shifts to a discussion of collective habit-memory. Most of the chapters begin by summarizing an aspect of contemporary theories of memory, which, I suggest, is relevant to an understanding of both writers. I then move on to discuss individual works by each writer, concluding with a comparison between the two. The four chapters are arranged thematically rather than in chronological order by the composition date of the texts.

The first chapter looks at the relationship between the cultivation of moral habit and a sense of universal humanity. I begin by introducing the idea of an ethics of memory in the work of the modern philosopher Avishai Margalit, which sheds light on an understanding of Wordsworth and Eliot's projects of universal humanity. In discussing Wordsworth, my focus is on 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'. Drawing on Hume's theory of habit, I argue that, for Wordsworth, habit, not reason, is the dominant moral guide. It not only steers the villagers towards virtue, but also leads Wordsworth's readers to form new habitual attitudes towards the poor and marginalized people in society. In so doing, Wordsworth envisages the possibility of a society in which there is no division between rich and poor.

The texts by Eliot discussed in this chapter are *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. These two most canonical novels are dealt with at the very beginning of the thesis because they best exemplify Eliot's humanitarian project. I examine some of the

sources of the image of the web in these novels — Feuerbach's religious humanism, for example, and the concept of organicism in Victorian science — and argue that her web of human relations is sustained by the memory of caring for others. Like Wordsworth, Eliot believes that this project can be achieved through habit-cultivation. The physiological basis of moral sense, and Lewes's idea that cultivation is more important than inheritance in the development of moral sense, make it possible for an individual to perfect his moral sense through repeated practice. This section concludes with a discussion of Eliot's artistic theory, for she regards the extension of the reader's sympathy through her novels as the result also of habit formation.

The second chapter looks at the relationship between habit and duty. Both Wordsworth and Eliot believe that an individual should not indulge in absolute freedom, but needs to submit to duty. Moreover, the sense of duty for them is obtained through experience rather than existing *a priori*, as proposed by Kant. It is identified with will and inclination. I suggest that, for Wordsworth, duty is a universal law which governs both the natural and the human world. My reading of 'Ode to Duty' suggests that the memory of duty prevents the course of an individual's life from going astray in both his calling and his moral development. Hartley's theory on the dialectical relationship between voluntary and involuntary actions further illuminates an understanding of the way in which Wordsworth attempts to bring unruly instincts under control and to convert them into involuntary adherence to dutiful behaviour. Ultimately, Wordsworth wishes the memory of duty to become an involuntary action.

In my discussion of Eliot in this chapter I draw on Lewes's reflex theory and argue that in *Silas Marner* and *Romola*, duty is identified with inner voice, namely reflex action and reflex feelings of the body. Eliot argues that the duties stipulated by

external laws should arise in individuals as a manifestation of an inner voice. If there is no such inner sanction, for instance for loyalty to an unfaithful husband or a mistaken prophet, they can be regarded as false duties against which rebellion is justified. Eliot also recognizes, however, that even the claims of such 'false' duties are never totally invalid. By rebelling against them one may be setting oneself against some good that society has sanctioned. Both Romola and Silas Marner ultimately manage to devote themselves to new duties while maintaining a connection with their past in a critical way.

The third chapter discusses the relationship between habit and guilt. It does not look at guilt over a real transgression, rather it examines what Frances Ferguson terms 'circumstantial memory'. This may be summarized as the sense of remorse that occurs when the unforeseen outcome of an action is interpreted in such a way as to make it seem as though it was subliminally intended. Circumstantial memory has the potential both to wound and to heal, to incriminate but at the same time to undo the guilt with which an individual is overloaded. The text by Wordsworth discussed in this chapter is Book X of *The Prelude*, in which the poet almost appears to hold himself responsible for the blood shed during the French Revolution and blames himself for his involvement in it as though there were a force within him that seductively led him to engage with it. However, I depart from Ferguson by suggesting that Wordsworth's guilt is not undone and arguing that there is a tug of war between self-recrimination and self-justification in his psyche.

Eliot's treatment of guilt in *Adam Bede* and 'Janet's Repentance' in *Scenes of Clerical Life* also bears a similarity to Ferguson's notion of 'circumstantial memory'. Adam's feeling of implication in his father's death and Mr. Tryan's remorse over

Lucy's death represent this kind of memory most accurately. I then investigate Eliot's determinism, which has its source in Christianity and Victorian science, and consider why Eliot burdens her characters with such a sense of guilt even though the outcomes of their actions are not deliberately intended. I then draw on Bunyan and Mill's treatment of guilt to illustrate that instead of letting her protagonists forever indulge in guilt, Eliot turns it into a positive emotion, which provides them with an opportunity to recognize their moral blemishes and to reform their moral habits. This process is paralleled by the healing of their traumatic guilt. In this respect, Eliot can be seen as a precursor of modern trauma theory.

While the earlier chapters consider individual habit-memory and its relationship with a series of key issues—universal humanity, duty and guilt—the fourth and final chapter shifts to collective habit-memory. I adopt a phenomenological approach to habit and thus provide an alternative way of considering habit-memory. In discussing Wordsworth I focus in particular on 'Michael', suggesting that Merleau-Ponty's theory illuminates our understanding of Michael's embodied relationship with his patrimonial land, which is manifested in his love for it and his resistance to its loss. I then draw on Pierre Bourdieu to argue that both attachment and resistance are the collective sentiments of his family group. 'Michael' shows Wordsworth's criticism of the intrusion of capitalism, which has prevented the inheritance of the collective memory of the agrarian culture.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, Mr. Tulliver's relationship with his mill is found to be similar to that between Michael and his land. His resistance to its loss, too, is the collective resistance of his family group. Mr. Tulliver's blind clinging to his habitual past, which leads to his own destruction, and Maggie's painful commitment to her

collective past reflect Eliot's conflicting views on the inheritance of collective memory which is characteristic of agrarian culture.

On the whole, as the conclusion of my thesis will show, both Wordsworth and Eliot are preoccupied with the role of habit-memory in the development of an individual's moral awareness and the coherence of a community. However, compared with her predecessor, Eliot is engaged with a wider range of scientific dialogue and her treatment of habit-memory is more nuanced.

Chapter One

Habit and Humanitarianism in

'The Old Cumberland Beggar', *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*

Introduction

In *The Convention of Cintra*, Wordsworth envisages society as a concentric circle, with the self as the centre and benevolence as 'the outermost and all-embracing circle'.[1] Eliot's religion of humanity also advocates the extension of concern from the self to an ever-widening circle. This chapter will explore the humanitarian projects of the two writers and argue that for both Wordsworth and Eliot, the network of human relations is sustained by a memory of the needs of others and of our concern for them. This memory, I suggest, can be enhanced through habit cultivation.

My reading of Wordsworth's poem, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', and Eliot's novels *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* will show that, similar though their positions are, Eliot puts more emphasis on an individual's conscientious effort in extending his concerns for others, often under the guidance of a morally superior person. By contrast, what Wordsworth values is the unconsciousness of this process, and the person who converts others to virtue does not have to carry moral agency.

[1] William Wordsworth, *The Convention of Cintra*, in William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I, 340.

Thick and Thin Relations

Before my discussion of habit memory, I would like to draw on Avishai Margalit's idea of 'the ethics of memory', as it will facilitate an understanding of the humanitarian projects of Wordsworth and Eliot. *The Ethics of Memory* is a philosophical work written in the twenty-first century. Its particular concern surrounds the relations between different ethnic groups. In the book, Margalit introduces the binary concepts of 'thick' and 'thin' relations, which derive from Gilbert Ryle's definition of thick and thin descriptions.[2] Thick relations are in general 'our relations to the near and dear'.[3] Thin relations are 'our relations to the stranger and the remote'. They are 'backed by the attribute of being human' (Margalit, p. 7). Memory is inherent among thick relations. Margalit argues that 'we usually care about our parents, children, spouses, lovers, friends, and by extension about some significant groups to which we belong'. As a result, memory is 'the cement that holds thick relations together' (Margalit, p. 32; p. 8). Communities formed by memories are 'families, clans, tribes, religious communities, and nations'. In contrast, memory is lacking within thin relations: 'We usually lack an attentive concern for the well-being of most members of the human race' (Margalit, p. 69; p. 32). Love is a thick relation that can only be directed to those with whom we have 'historical relations, and not just a brief accidental encounter'. Therefore, it is very difficult to form a community out of universal humanity: 'It is hard to carry the memory of isolated and unconnected events and people, taken from very different histories' (Margalit, p. 44; pp. 79-80).

[2] In thick and thin descriptions, 'thick' and 'thin' have to do with interpretation. Thick descriptions move beyond neutral observation in order to capture the layers of meaning and implication inherent in a speech or gesture. They are culturally bound and historically sensitive. Thin descriptions are more context-independent. This concept is given much wider currency by the anthropologist by Clifford Geertz. It is an attempt to capture a stratified structure of meaningful structures, or the accumulated structures of inference and implication that the anthropologist encounters in the field.

[3] Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 7. All

Margalit also distinguishes between 'ethics' and 'morality': ethics 'guides our thick relations' while morality regulates our thin relations. It is precisely morality's role to 'overcome our natural indifference' towards those with whom we hold thin relations (Margalit, p. 37; p. 33).

Margalit's division between thick and thin relations is similar to the division between 'bonding' and 'bridging' by Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. 'Bonding' is similar to thick relations: it refers to the act of reaching out to those closest to you. Putnam suggests that people are closely connected with and care for one another when they are from a similar background. 'Bridging' is similar to thin relations, in that one does not necessarily feel internally concerned with those to whom one is thinly related. Morality is the only external guide, and enables people to get on well with others. Bridging with those with whom one cannot bond but must get along is necessary for communities to survive and prosper. In what follows, I will discuss the extent to which Wordsworth and Eliot's humanitarian projects fit within and are different from Margalit's theory, and how they see habit as a reliable guide to universal humanity.

'The Old Cumberland Beggar'

In Wordsworth's own time 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' was well received. Many readers spoke highly of its moral significance, and some critics further pointed out the poem's educational value. Sir George Beaumont, for example, said that it 'had more

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subsequent quotations of this text are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

purified his mind than any Sermons had done'.[4] James Montgomery suggested that it has 'taught us new sympathies'. In this aspect Wordsworth was far superior to any 'preceding poet' (*CH*, p. 208). Thomas Noon was particularly impressed by the beggar's function as a binding force of past charities, saying that the poem was 'one of those which linger most tenderly on our memories', with some lines 'at once more tear-moving and more sublime than the finest things in Cowper' (*CH*, pp. 871-2). On the other hand, a few readers did not like the didactic style of the poem. Charles Lamb, for example, said that 'the instructions conveyed in it are too direct and like a lecture' (*CH*, p. 100).

Contemporary criticism, however, takes a different turn. It is largely focused on the way in which the poem reflects Wordsworth's critical response towards the relief of poverty and the war on mendicity launched by the political economists of his time. Mark Koch contends that the poet responds to this social phenomenon not by 'challenging the dogma of utility', but rather by 'adopting the language of utilitarianism' and defending the mendicant 'on the ground of his utility'.[5] Gary Harrison discusses the ideological contradictions in the economy of charity in Wordsworth's time and shows that this poem is 'one of the forms through which that ideology is produced'.[6] David Simpson, on the other hand, points out that the poem is 'anti-Benthamite'.[7] David Chandler, while recognizing the value of such research, does not agree that this poem presents a

[4] *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage 1793-1820*, ed. by Robert Woof (London: Routledge, 2001), I, p. 130. All subsequent quotations of this book, abbreviated *CH*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses

[5] Mark Koch, 'Utilitarian and Reactionary Arguments for Almsgiving in Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar"', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 13 (1989), 18-33 (p. 23).

[6] Gary Harrison, 'Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar": The Economy of Charity in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 30 (1988), 23-42 (p. 24).

[7] David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 172.

'straightforward' account of Wordsworth's views on poor relief in the late 1790s, and Malthus's *Essay* in particular.[8] A similar view is held by Philip Connell, who maintains that the poem's connection with Malthus's *Essay* is questionable. Though *The Fenwick Notes*, written in 1843, are directed against 'the political economists', they should be treated as a 'reflection of Wordsworth's personal and political concerns in 1843' rather than an 'authoritative insight into the origins' of the poem.[9] My major concern about 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', however, is not so much the poem's relationship with poor relief, but rather the mechanism of habit and how Wordsworth thinks it helpful in addressing the problem of social division in his time.

There are a few points on which Wordsworth's treatment of thick and thin relations differs from that of Margalit. The two writers write at different times with different motivations. While Margalit, like Putnam, deals with ethnic relations in the twentieth century, Wordsworth is concerned with the relationship within a pre-industrial society. More importantly, unlike Margalit, Wordsworth supports the idea of universal humanity. Margalit's memory cements only thick relations, but Wordsworth wants it extended to thin relations, especially to the poor and the distressed. He wants to remove the boundary between thick and thin relations and to see how people within the same community can be thickly related through and through. He makes no distinction between morality and ethics. Instead, he advocates the Christian project of making all relations thick.

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[8] David Chandler, 'Wordsworth versus Malthus: The Political Context(s) of "The Old Cumberland Beggar"', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 115 (2001), 72-85 (p. 72; p. 74).
[9] Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 24.

Different though their ideas are, Margalit's theory is helpful in understanding Wordsworth's use of memory and how he thinks strangers should be treated within a local community. Both of them address the problem of social division. While Margalit deals with cultural diversity among different ethnic groups, Wordsworth addresses the problem of divisions within the same culture. In Wordsworth's time in Britain, the country was divided along different lines, one of which was the increasing division between the rich and the poor as a consequence of industrialization. Poverty was one of the most important issues confronting Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Wordsworth's *A Guide through the District of the Lakes* records how the '*estatesmen*' became poverty-stricken by the invention and universal application of machinery and lost their land.[10] With the widening gap between rich and poor, the political theory advocated by Edmund Burke that man can only love those to whom he is immediately related threatened to intensify such a division. Burke famously claims that 'to be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle […] of public affections'.[11] Thick relations provide a model upon which society at large is built. Patriotism, and even love of mankind, must be an extension of the love for those nearest to us. Hazlitt, though himself a radical all his life, gives his enemy Burke credit for his insight: man is essentially 'a creature of habit and feeling'.[12] A man acts in accordance with his nature to love his relatives, because he can only love those he knows best and

[10] Wordsworth, *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, in *Prose Works*, II, 224. 'Estatesmen' is an etymologizing perversion of statesmen, which means Cumberland or Westmorland yeomen (*OED*).
[11] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 135.
[12] William Hazlitt, 'Character of Mr. Burke', in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Jon Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 55.

who most affect him. This is because with his limited understanding, he cannot show equal concern to everyone.

The widening gap between the rich and the poor was manifested by hatred towards the poor, and the cruel 'war upon mendicancy' recorded in *The Fenwick Notes*.[13] Together with the ethics of self-reliance and the prevailing attitude suggesting that poverty resulted from a refusal to accept one's social place and attendant duties, this gave rise to the workhouse system, where the poor were supposed to work for their relief. [14] Most of these workhouses were comfortless and unhealthy asylums for the deprived, and aggravated the division between the rich and the poor. Another social division lay between the well-educated and the poor, which I will discuss later in this section. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' captures these divisions. But Wordsworth is not happy with the use of morality, or bridging, to mend them, as they are merely external means of getting along. He wants memory, which is inherent in thick relations, to be cultivated among thin relations. He wants the rich and the educated to feel internally bound to the poor.

This project is achieved through habit-formation. Here I would like to turn to Hume's theory of habit as it contributes to an understanding of Wordsworth's view that habit is the guide of moral life. Discussions of the connection between Hume and Wordsworth are often centred on their treatment of personal identity. In the view of Robert Langbaum, Hume sees the continuity of personal experience as a fiction. By

[13] William Wordsworth, *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), p. 56.
[14] See David Robert, *The Social Conscience of the Early Victorians* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University

contrast, Wordsworth sees it as 'the fundamental reality'. Thus, in dealing with the issue of identity, Wordsworth bears more resemblance to Locke and Hartley than to Hume.[15] Although he does not connect Wordsworth directly with Hume, Thomas Keymer puts Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, which is repeatedly invaded by 'a sense of disjuncture', within the context of the sceptical philosophy of the eighteenth century, in which Hume's instability of subjectivity occupies a central place.[16] Michael Rossington points out that both find it difficult to know the past. He argues that Hume's idea of memory, which seeks to overcome the 'essential discontinuity' in human experience, anticipates Wordsworth's treatment of memory in *The Prelude*.[17]

Hume expresses a deep distrust of reason. For him, habit, or custom, is an important principle of human nature:

> For whatever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding, we always say, that this propensity is the effect of *Custom*.[18]

Press, 2002), pp. 44-54.

[15] Robert Langbaum, *The Mysteries of Identity: A Theme in Modern Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 29.

[16] Thomas Keymer, 'Sterne and Romantic Autobiography', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. by Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 173-93 (p. 186).

[17] Michael Rossington, 'Introduction: Enlightenment and Romantic Memory', in *Theories of Memory: A Reader*, ed. by Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 70-4 (p. 72).

[18] David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 43 (original emphasis).

Its effect upon the mind is twofold, 'bestowing a *facility* in the performance of any action […]; and afterwards a *tendency* or *inclination* towards it'.[19] 'All inferences from experience', Hume argues, are 'effects of custom, not of reasoning'. Hence, habit is 'the great guide of human life'.[20] It is particularly important in guiding moral life, and any theory of morality should, 'by proper representations of the deformity of vice and beauty of virtue, beget correspondent habits'.[21] For Hume, morality is 'more properly felt than judg'd of'.[22] He refutes the claim of moral rationalists that reason alone can arrive at vice and virtue. Rather, he suggests, reason can only decide if the possible consequences of an action are pernicious or useful, and it is up to feeling to decide which to choose. Moral approval is a feeling of pleasure and moral disapproval a feeling of pain: 'to have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character'.[23]

In his 'Essay on Morals', written in 1798, Wordsworth's argument is similar to that of Hume. Habit, instead of reason, is shown to be a guide, and Wordsworth asserts that '[i]n a [? strict] sense all our actions are the result of our habits', over which reason is 'impotent'.[24] Like Hume, Wordsworth also opposes reason to feeling where morality is concerned, and feeling is the decisive factor: 'We do not *argue* in defence of our *good* actions, we feel internally their beneficent effect'. The performance of virtue is a habitual act carried out absent-mindedly: 'Even when we are called upon to justify our conduct,

[19] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by David Norton and Mary Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000; repr. 2001), p. 271 (original emphasis).
[20] Hume, *Enquiries*, pp. 43-4.
[21] Hume, *Enquiries*, p. 172.
[22] Hume, *A Treatise*, p. 302.
[23] Hume, *A Treatise*, p. 303 (original emphasis).
[24] Wordsworth, 'Essay on Morals', in *Prose Works*, I, 103.

we perform the task with languor & indifference'.[25]

'The Old Cumberland Beggar', I suggest, is an example of how habit guides moral life. In his note to the poem, Wordsworth emphasizes the historically habitual nature of begging. Beggars 'confined themselves to a *stated* round in their neighbourhood, and had certain *fixed* days, on which […] they *regularly* received alms'.[26] In this light, it is not insignificant that the old beggar looks virtually unchanged over the years: old, weak and helpless. Regular begging in turn leads the alms-givers to a virtuous life:

> Where'er the aged Beggar takes his rounds,
>
> The mild necessity of use compels
>
> To acts of love; and habit does the work
>
> Of reason, yet prepares that after joy
>
> Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
>
> By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursued
>
> Doth find itself insensibly disposed
>
> To virtue and true goodness. (OCB, ll. 90-7)

The beggar makes the villagers' behaviour habitual. 'Use' here, of course, means

[25] Wordsworth, 'Essay on Morals', in *Prose Works*, I, 104 (original emphasis).
[26] William Wordsworth, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 49 (my emphasis). The quotation is from Wordsworth's introductory note to the poem. All subsequent quotations of this poem, abbreviated OCB, are from this edition with line numbers given in parentheses.

'accustomed practice or procedure' (*OED*). 'Compels' conveys the power of habit: the villagers cannot help but be charitable. As the Humean concept of habit suggests, the beggar's itinerary is important. It facilitates charity and fosters a tendency to give. As with the acquisition of skills, the better one is trained, the more spontaneous the performance becomes. The involuntary and absent-minded charity of the horseman-traveller, the toll-gate tender and the post-boy suggests that they are very well trained to perform acts of benevolence. Conversely, the less frequently one repeats the action, the more easily one tends to forget about it. As the poet remarks, if it were not for the punctual presence of the beggar, human nature would probably yield to another habit: 'by sure steps' given to 'selfishness and cold oblivious cares' (OCB, ll. 86-7).

The act of habitual charity gives the villagers a 'sweet taste of pleasure'. 'Insensibly disposed' is a striking phrase in which the adverb refers to the 'unconscious' nature of the prompting to generosity (*OED*). The customary act of charity and the pleasurable feeling which follows are achieved without the exercise of the will. Rather, they are 'unpursued'. The villagers are not conscious of what they are doing, nor do they resort to any process of reasoning. It seems that virtuous acts, pleasure and the exalted feeling of virtue are a train of motions and emotions triggered spontaneously by giving to the beggar. By asserting that moral sense involves a habitual feeling of pleasure, Wordsworth refutes Godwin, who is opposed to the reliance upon habit for moral guidance and stresses instead that virtuous actions should be preceded by a rational decision based on correct premises.[27] Though reason can perhaps also achieve this,

[27] William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: William

Wordsworth contends that habit works more effectively. It is 'a guided, but unreasoning, impulse' which 'gives all the sanction to an act that we could hope to obtain from rational reflection'.[28]

Besides habitualizing their behaviour, the presence of the beggar also prompts the villagers to think in a particular way:

> minds like these,
> In childhood, from this solitary being,
> This helpless wanderer, have perchance received,
> […]
> That first mild touch of sympathy and thought,
> In which they found their kindred with a world
> Where want and sorrow were. (OCB, ll. 101-8)

The villagers are not only trained to perform benevolent acts mechanically, they are prompted to come to the awareness that others are living in a world of suffering and deprivation, as the phrase 'sympathy and thought' suggests. 'Mild touch' indicates that such awareness is not arrived at through analytical reasoning, as is advocated by Godwin. Rather, it is an intimation, even an epiphanic experience, very similar to the education

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Pickering, 1993), IV, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice: Variants*, 33-4.
[28] David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 33.

Wordsworth receives from nature in poems such as 'Nutting' and the 'Stealing of the Boat' episode in *The Prelude*. Such a mode of awareness, once set into motion, will crop up as involuntarily as the performance of charitable deeds. This is what Locke terms the 'habit of Thinking', which is settled by 'custom' and belongs to 'Trains of Motion in the Animal Spirits'.[29]

As Robin Jarvis points out, the cultivation of the benevolent instinct of the villagers is 'rather like the formation of the mind and morals of the child by the subliminal influence of natural objects which Wordsworth theorizes in Book I of *The Prelude*'.[30] In Book VIII, the poet summarizes nature's influence on his mind:

> [...] all without regard
>
> As both may seem—are fastening on the heart
>
> Insensibly, each with the other's help,
>
> So that we love, not knowing that we love,
>
> And feel, not knowing whence our feeling comes.[31]

The position of 'Insensibly' at the beginning as well as the repetition of 'not knowing'

[29] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975; repr. 1979), p. 396.
[30] Robin Jarvis, 'Wordsworth and the Use of Charity', in *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832*, ed. by Stephen Copley and John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 200-17 (p. 210).
[31] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850, Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 1805, Book VIII, lines 168-72. All subsequent quotations of this poem are from this edition with line numbers given in parentheses.

highlights the unselfconscious manner of the way in which nature works on the mind. Just as the beggar ‘disposes’ the villagers ‘insensibly’ to moral virtue, so nature disposes the poet ‘insensibly’ to the love of mankind, without the exercise of his will and his awareness of the development of such a feeling.

What Jarvis does not point out is the similar function of nature and the beggar in the extension of love from thick relations to thin relations through nurturing habits, namely memory:

> For I already had been taught to love
> My fellow-beings, to such habits trained
> Among the woods and mountains, where I found
> In thee a gracious guide to lead me forth
> Beyond the bosom of my family,
> My friends and youthful playmates. ’Twas thy power
> That raised the first complacency in me,
> And noticeable kindliness of heart,
> Love human to the creature in himself
> As he appeared, a stranger in my path,
> Before my eyes a brother of this world. (VIII, ll. 69-79)

Nature's education is a training of 'habits', or more specifically habits of love, that goes beyond the narrowness of the love for one's relatives and friends to include human beings in general. In this process, thin relations (a stranger in my path) are converted into thick relations (a brother of this world). Furthermore, Wordsworth seems to be concerned about the social implications of Burke's emphasis on the importance of relatives in the development of our love of mankind in general. That is, as my earlier argument shows, Burke's emphasis on the centrality of love for one's relations may result in love stopping at those closest to us, and going no further. The role of nature is important, as Wordsworth needs to be 'taught' and 'led […] forth' to love those thinly related to him. Likewise, without the presence of the old beggar, the villagers' love and concern will be limited to those 'with whom they dwell' (OCB, l. 132). Transition to the love of man in general cannot happen by itself; it has to be 'trained' through nurturing habits. Something is needed to effect its happening, either a natural object or a human being.

It must be noted that though the education the villagers receive through the beggar bears some similarities with the education the poet receives from nature in its unconscious process and the movement from thick to thin relations, there are a few points on which they differ. Firstly, nature in *The Prelude* carries moral agency whereas the beggar does not. Moreover, in being led by nature towards benevolence and love of mankind, the poet's role is characterized by passivity. In the case of the beggar, by contrast, the villagers play an active role. They need to perform acts of benevolence in order to remember the needs of others.

Though the workings of habit in this poem may be divided into its influence on behaviour and thinking, there is no clear-cut distinction between the two. They work together to reform the moral habit of the local community. As the poet says, ‘let him prompt the unlettered Villagers / To tender offices and pensive thoughts’ (OCB, ll. 162-3), with ‘tender offices’ indicating the act of benevolence towards the beggar and ‘pensive thoughts’ denoting the awareness of the deprivation of other people prompted by the presence of the beggar. In this way, people will be able to reach out to the far and remote and develop the Christian conception of brotherhood:

> [...] Many, I believe, there are
> Who live a life of virtuous decency,
> Men who can hear the Decalogue and feel
> No self-reproach, who of the moral law
> Established in the land where they abide
> Are strict observers, and not negligent,
> Meanwhile, in any tenderness of heart
> Or act of love to those with whom they dwell,
> Their kindred, and the children of their blood.
> Praise be to such, and to their slumbers peace!
> —But of the poor man ask, the abject poor,
> Go and demand of him, if there be here

> In this cold abstinence from evil deeds,
>
> And these inevitable charities,
>
> Wherewith to satisfy the human soul.
>
> No—man is dear to man:
>
> […] we have all of us one human heart. (OCB, ll. 125-46)

The rich practise Margalit's theory of ethics and morality: they love only those closely related to them, 'their kindred and the children of their blood'. For Wordsworth, this is only 'inevitable charity', namely, a natural act common to all. It does not constitute a special virtue.

Wordsworth's view can be seen to belong to the Christian tradition, exemplified in Jesus's denial of blood relationships in Matthew 12:50.[32] In claiming that 'whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother', Jesus attempts to remove the boundary between thick and thin relations and to create a Christian commonwealth. Similarly, Wordsworth preaches that an individual should overcome his natural concern, which is confined to kinship, and extend it to the poor. The reason is simple: 'We have all of us one human heart'. Moreover, removal of the boundary between thick and thin involves actively reaching out. In the Bible, Jesus states that humankind must do 'the will of my Father in heaven'. Jesus also tells a rich young man that abiding by the Commandments alone does not constitute a virtuous life (Matthew 19:

[32] Wordsworth's religious outlook will be dealt with in the next chapter.

16-29; Luke 18: 18-22). A literal and rigid understanding of the Commandments misses the essence of Jesus's teaching. Only when the young man gives everything he has to the poor will he be assured of treasure in heaven. In this respect, therefore, Wordsworth can be seen to echo the Bible. He is not impressed with those 'strict observers' of the Decalogue, since 'strict' may well denote rigidity and lack of human warmth as well as unrelaxing adherence to moral law. With only 'cold abstinence' from evil deeds, the virtue of the rich is at best that of passivity; they only try to get along with people who are thickly related to them. For Margalit, this may be natural, as we all tend to love those sharing a meaningful past with us rather than those with whom we have only an accidental encounter. But for Wordsworth, this is not enough. A mere clear conscience does not make a true Christian. The absence of 'self-reproach' highlights the complacency of the rich. It is especially ironic if we remember that the well-off accused the poor of lacking in fine feelings, forgetting that they are the salt of the earth. Hedged between disapproval and irony, the phrase 'Praise be to such, and to their slumbers peace!' also acquires an ironic twist in this context.

While this poem brings to light 'the process of being converted by the work of habit',[33] a parallel process takes place in Wordsworth's readers, the polite audience for whom Wordsworth is writing and with whom he has a great deal in common. As mentioned earlier, the gap between this group of people and the poor is another social division Wordsworth wants to bridge. In a letter to John Wilson, Wordsworth laments that well-educated people have a habitual misunderstanding of the poor: they 'cannot bear to

[33] Bromwich, p. 34.

see delicate and refined feelings ascribed to men in low conditions of society, because their vanity and self-love tell them that these belong only to themselves and men like themselves in dress, station, and way of life'.[34] This misunderstanding occurs because they do not reach out to the lower classes. They only 'associate with' people of their own class, and 'few descend lower among cottages and fields and among children' (*LWW*, p. 52). This may be compared to the 'vulgarity of exclusiveness' Eliot refers to in her essay 'The Natural History of German Life', which I will discuss in detail in the next section.[35]

'The Old Cumberland Beggar', and in a sense *Lyrical Ballads* as a whole, are intended to correct this habitual mistake. The poems in *Lyrical Ballads* seek to 'disconcert the polite reader, […] to suggest that his "natural" modes of feeling and response are not "natural" at all'.[36] A poet, Wordsworth says, should not only reflect, but also 'rectify men's feelings' and 'enlarge our feelings of reverence for our species, and our knowledge of human nature' (*LWW*, p. 52; p. 43). This task is accomplished through the formation of new habits. Reading Wordsworth's poetry is a process of habit formation, or more accurately, of habit reformation. Wordsworth is aware that in writing poetry, a poet is expected to satisfy certain readerly expectations conditioned by previous reading experiences, which he calls 'habits of association'.[37] Yet he sets out to 'counteract' and reform rather than gratify reading habits, because in his eyes, the habits of his readers are

[34] William Wordsworth, *Letters of William Wordsworth: A New Selection*, ed. by Alan Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 51. All subsequent quotations of this book, abbreviated *LWW*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses

[35] George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 263.

[36] Heather Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 54.

[37] Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads', in *The Major Works*, p. 596. All subsequent quotations of this article, abbreviated PLB, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

not healthy. He mourns their ‘degrading thirst’ for sensational literature, like ‘frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse’ (PLB, p. 599). Such reading habits are pernicious and threaten morality. For Wordsworth, poetry has a pragmatic purpose, which is to educate readers and ameliorate their feelings:

> For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated. (PLB, p. 598)

Anne-Lise François comments on the way in which Wordsworth ‘puts his trust in “habits of the mind”’, both on a personal level and in relation to his readers.[38] His habits of mind will ultimately lead to the amelioration of his readers’ habits of mind through the act of

[38] Anne-Lise François, ‘To Hold in Common and Know by Heart: The Prevalence of Gentle Forces in

reading. The habits thus work on two levels. On the one hand, poetic composition relies on healthy 'habits of mind'. It departs from sensational literature and habitually connects the 'feelings' of the poet with 'important subjects', most often found in the life of rural people. If he follows such habits 'blindly and mechanically', Wordsworth insists, a poet will be able to produce works of enlightening and educational value. On the other hand, his poetry puts a demand on his readers, encouraging them to follow his habit of creation. If they can follow the 'important subjects' the poet represents and appreciate the way in which he 'describes objects' and 'utters sentiments' in the same manner as the villagers follow the beggar, their reading habits will be rectified, and their attitudes towards the poor corrected.

Moreover, in order for the well-educated to understand his poetry, Wordsworth encourages them to overcome their narrow-minded exclusiveness and associate regularly with the poor. This is not only because his poetry is about poor people, but also because their simple life is free from 'false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, […] effeminate habits of thinking and feeling' and is thus more representative of human nature (*LWW*, p. 52). Wordsworth points out to John Wilson that unlike Wordsworth himself, middle class people do not have regular association with the poor and the marginalized: 'A man must have done this habitually before his judgment upon the Idiot Boy would be in any way decisive with me. I *know* I have done this myself habitually' (*LWW*, p. 52, original emphasis). Wordsworth claims, in other words, that his readers, after regular association with rural people, will be able properly to understand his poetry.

Humean Empiricism and Romantic Experience', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 7 (1994), 139-62 (p. 156).

By correcting the habits of the well-educated in thinking about the poor and thus removing the boundary between the two groups, Wordsworth claims, the poet will ultimately move a step closer to his project of universal humanity:

> In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, […] the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. (PLB, p. 606)

Transcending the differences of space, race, and culture which divide the human world into different thick relations, Wordsworth has in mind a commonwealth which is universal and eternal, and which knits men into one thickly related brotherhood.

'The strangest feature of Wordsworth's account of thoughts and feelings, and the way that together they may achieve an amelioration of the affections', according to Bromwich, 'is the central role he assigns to habit'.[39] Through Margalit's thick and thin relations and Hume's theory of habit, I have attempted to show that in Wordsworth's view, besides this central role in the development of an individual's sensibility, habit also has the social function of cementing a community. With the help of this reliable guide, humanity will 'live, and spread, and kindle' (OCB, l. 101). With this in place,

[39] Bromwich, p. 96.

Wordsworth envisages a society in which there is no division because there is no distinction between thick and thin.

Middlemarch and *Daniel Deronda*

Critical studies of the role of memory in George Eliot's last two novels, especially *Daniel Deronda*, are often centred around the problematic relationship between past and present. Santanu Majumdar contends that in *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's memory disrupts the sense of a unified selfhood. The way memory works in this novel, he suggests, 'paves the way for' *Daniel Deronda*, in which the disruptive role of memory plays 'an even larger part'.[40] Delia da Sousa Correa also points out that in *Daniel Deronda*, musical memory 'complicates issues of identity' and undermines the distinctions between 'consciousness and oblivion, future and past'.[41] In a similar vein, Michael Davis suggests that it is precisely Deronda's distancing from his childhood memory which signals 'his establishment as an emotionally mature and directed adult'. The harmony between his racial past and present is achieved 'to the exclusion' of a large part of his childhood past.[42] My main concern, however, is not so much the relationship between memory and individual identity, but the way in which these novels demonstrate, in a manner similar to that observed in Wordsworth, how habit cultivation can extend memory from an individual to his fellow creatures and breed a sense of universal humanity.

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[40] Santanu Majumdar, 'Memory and Identity in Wordsworth and in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*', *The Critical Review*, 36 (1996), 41-61 (p. 60).
[41] Delia Da Sousa Correa, '"The Music Vibrating in Her Still": Music and Memory in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 21 (2000), 541-63 (p. 542).
[42] Michael Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 84-5.

In a claim that amounts to an announcement of the effective death of God before Nietzsche's famous declaration, Eliot says that salvation can no longer be found in God, but in human relations: salvation is 'not to be sought in metaphysical refinements about a "personal God", but is to be found in our idealization of human relations and human needs'.[43] Her claim, as I hope to demonstrate, is informed both by Feuerbach's religious humanism and by the concept of organicism in Victorian science. Such an idealized human relationship, she argues, can be achieved through memory. As in Wordsworth's case, Margalit's distinction between thick and thin relations can illuminate our understanding of the role played by memory in Eliot's humanitarian project. However, rather than extending memory from the thick to the thin, which is the case in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', Eliot believes that people should extend memory from themselves to their fellow men, whether thickly or thinly related to them. Remembering the well-being of other people, Eliot suggests, will enable us to overcome our innate selfishness so that we will be able to reach out to our fellow creatures.

Eliot's belief in human relations is informed by Feuerbach, whose *The Essence of Christianity* she translated into English and with whose ideas she could at one point announce that she 'everywhere' agrees.[44] Feuerbach argues that the theological concept of God to be found in Christianity is 'human nature purified' and 'made objective'.[45] As such it should serve to strengthen the ties of human relations. Christianity goes wrong,

[43] George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954, repr. 1975), VI, 87. All subsequent quotations of these books, abbreviated *Letters*, are from this edition.
[44] Eliot, *Letters*, II, 153.
[45] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by Marian Evans (London: John Chapman, 1854), p. 14. All subsequent quotations of this book are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

however, when it encourages men to love each other for the sake of God, that is to say, when it makes the love of man derivative of the love of God. Instead, Feuerbach posits that love in itself is original and religious:

> The relations of child and parent, of husband and wife, of brother and friend, —in general, of man to man,—in short, all the moral relations are *per se* religious. Life as a whole is, in its essential, substantial relations, throughout of a divine nature. (Feuerbach, p. 268)

'The true or anthropological essence of religion' (the title of Part I of *The Essence of Christianity*) consists of the command to love one another. The problem with Christianity is that it reverses the fundamental and the derivative. The love of man, which should be fundamental, becomes subordinate to the love of God. And the idea of God is such that it alienates men from the love of each other by making them believe that only through his holy power can their relations become holy. Feuerbach wants to restore what is original and wants men to see that their relationships with each other are sacred '*in and by themselves*' (Feuerbach, p. 268). Moreover, Feuerbach can be seen to extend the divinity of moral relations from the thick to the thin, from the near and dear to man in general.

Eliot's echoes of Feuerbach are most obvious in 'Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming', a scathing attack on what she sees as the subordination within this fundamentalist strand of Christianity, in particular of human love to the love of God. Human relations in themselves, she insists, are essentially religious while the theological

concept of God is 'an extension and multiplication of the effects produced by human sympathy'.[46] It can serve to intensify such religiousness by 'sharing and aiding our human sympathies' and 'strengthening the bond between man and man' (ET, p. 169). Dr Cumming, however, preaches that human love is derivative of the love of God, which can only weaken human ties and make people feel that they have relation only 'to Him' (ET, p. 169). Like Wordsworth, in other words, Eliot relates the command to love one another to Christianity, although her understanding of theology is more radical.

Eliot's belief that salvation lies in human relations can also be related to the concept of the 'organism', which is central to Victorian Science because 'advances in geology and biology' had demonstrated 'the essential unity of life forms and organic systems'.[47] Darwin argues that 'all living and extinct forms can be grouped together in one great system [...] connected together by the most complex and radiating lines of affinities'.[48] Spencer, Lewes and Comte extend the notion of 'organism' from the biological to the sociological sphere. They propose that 'the growth and interdependence of society—the social organism—are governed by the operation of the same immutable laws that govern physiological life'.[49] Comte further relates the notion of 'organism' directly to humanity: he sees humanity as 'the greatest of all organisms'.[50] With 'love' as

[46] Eliot, 'Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 169. All subsequent quotations of this article, abbreviated ET, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.
[47] Tim Dolin, *Authors in Context: George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 201.
[48] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, quoted from Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 167.
[49] Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 5.
[50] Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1875-77), I, 267. All subsequent quotations of this work are from this edition with volume and page numbers given in parentheses.

its principle, its existence depends entirely upon ‘mutual Love knitting together its various parts’ (Comte, I, p. 264).

Organicism is important for Eliot because after her abandonment of the theological doctrines which knit human relations into one brotherhood through God’s love, it answers her need to retain this thick relation without the need to resort to a metaphysical God. As Tim Dolin points out, it enables her to retain ‘the commanding ethical dimension built into the very notion of an organism’s interdependence’.[51] I would like to suggest that Comte’s idea of humanity, as an organism knitted together by love and memory, is particularly important for Eliot.

Habit cultivation, for Eliot, is essential in cultivating our memory of our fellowmen and in actualizing our idealized relation to humanity in general. There are three issues central to habit cultivation in the Victorian period: inheritance versus cultivation, the physiological basis of moral habit, and the importance of the social medium. In what follows, I will deal with these issues one by one, as this will demonstrate the importance of habit in Eliot’s humanitarian project.

There was a wide debate in the Victorian period about whether the ability to care about others was inherited or cultivated. Spencer’s evolutionary associationism holds that the formation of moral instincts, like that of other instincts, is the result of accumulated experiences of utility, gradually organized and inherited. It has no basis in ‘the individual

[51] Dolin, p. 203.

experiences of utility'.[52] Darwin's view on inheritance and cultivation is more balanced than that of Spencer. He does not deny the importance of cultivation as Spencer does. For him, sympathy, as one of the social feelings, is 'fundamentally innate and inherited'. However, its development cannot be separated from social factors such as 'habit, imitation and the wishes of the community'.[53]

At the other end of the spectrum, Mill and Lewes hold that cultivation is more important. For Mill, moral feelings, like other skills, are acquired through training. What is innate only plays a very little part, which enables moral feelings to spring up spontaneously 'in a certain small degree'. Their development relies on cultivation. Yet moral feelings are not less natural because they are acquired. Like the capability of speaking a language, they are 'a natural outgrowth' from our nature. In other words, they are our second nature.[54] Lewes, as I mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, also sees cultivation as essential for the development of moral habits.

Eliot is sympathetic with Mill and Lewes regarding the priority of cultivation over inheritance. Her view on this issue is expressed in her editing and revising of Lewes's posthumous work, the first volume of the third series of *Problems of Life and Mind*: *The Study of Psychology*.[55] In the section entitled 'The Moral Sense', she points out that the moral sense in man

[52] Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), II, 89.
[53] See Davis for a more detailed discussion, p. 54.
[54] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism and on Liberty*, ed. by Mary Warnock, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 206.
[55] For a detailed discussion of the similarities and differences between Lewes's and Eliot's versions of this section, see K. K. Collins, 'G. H. Lewes Revised: George Eliot and the Moral Sense', *Victorian Studies*, 21 (1978), 463-92.

> cannot properly be said to be connate otherwise than as a musical sense is connate: it no more brings with it conceptions of *what* is right, *what* wrong, than the musical aptitude brings with it a symphony of Beethoven. What it carries are certain organised predispositions that spontaneously or docilely issue in the beneficent forms of action which the experience of society has classed as right. [56]

Eliot disagrees with Spencer that moral sense can be inherited without any basis in individual experience, saying that this is an exaggeration of the action of heredity (*SP*, p. 152). Eliot does believe that moral sense is inherited, but the inheritance is schematic, like musical aptitude, which alone can never make a Beethoven. In order for it to work, sustained training is necessary. We train our children and domestic animals to develop the right habit by giving 'expressions of approbation and disapprobation'. Similarly, men are trained to develop moral habits by the approbation and disapprobation from 'custom, law and public opinion' (*SP*, p. 145).

Eliot's belief in the supreme role of habit cultivation over inheritance in the development of moral habits is also influenced by phrenological conceptions that moral sense is physiologically based, and can be enhanced through exercise. According to Franz Joseph Gall's phrenology, 'psychological faculties were dependent on separate organic

[56] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: Third Series: Problem the First: The Study of Psychology: Its Object, Scope, and Method* (London: Trübner, 1879), p. 145 (original emphasis). All subsequent quotations of this book, abbreviated *SP*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

structures within the brain'. It was therefore 'possible to estimate an individual's character from the shape of his skull'.[57] Originally, Gall's theory had nothing to do with morality, but some of his disciples developed a 'moral philosophy' out of it, and the idea of the possibility of cultivating moral actions through the exercise of these faculties. Charles Bray, for example, proposed that although 'all the faculties were supposed to exist in everyone in different degrees', they were modifiable through exercise or neglect (Wright, p. 35; p. 36). Auguste Comte's cerebral theory can be seen as a development of Gall's phrenology. He divides the 'affective motors' into two basic groups, the personal, or egoistic, and the social, or altruistic. These emotional faculties form 'a ladder, a scale against which individuals can be measured and up which they can climb or fall' through proper exercise or neglect (Wright, p. 36). Inborn egotism is thus modifiable through practice. Comte also points out that the victory of social feeling over innate self-love is rendered possible only by 'a slow and difficult training of the heart' (Comte, I, p. 285). Different as they are, both Comte and Bray emphasize the importance of cultivation in the modification of innate qualities. As in the acquisition of other skills, the more one practises altruism, the better one is able to perform it. Eliot's familiarity with Bray and Comte's theories is well documented.[58] Many of her characters, as I will show in the next section, gradually overcome their egotism and learn to care more about the well-being of their fellow creatures through constant exercise.

While exercise is important in modifying people's inherited propensity for charity

[57] T. R. Wright, 'From Bumps to Morals: The Phrenological Background to George Eliot's Moral Framework', *The Review of English Studies*, 129 (1982), 34-46 (p. 35). All subsequent quotations of this article are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.
[58] For a detailed discussion, see Wright, 'From Bumps to Morals: The Phrenological Background to George

and enhancing their ability to care about others, a proper social medium is also indispensable in the cultivation of moral habits. 'Medium', like 'organism', is an important concept in Victorian science. Lewes defines it as 'the sum of external conditions affecting the organism' and terms it one of the two factors that produce an individual object.[59] Darwin notes that man has the capacity to be habituated to a new social medium: 'he has great power of adapting his habits to new conditions of life'.[60] During the process of adaptation, Lewes points out, new habits are formed:

> Corresponding with the fluctuations in the Medium there must necessarily be fluctuations of Adaptation, […] it is only when these fluctuations cease that the Adaptation becomes Habit. This is the interpretation of the phrase "Habit is *second* nature".[61]

An organism is capable of adapting itself to its medium. More importantly, a change of medium can lead to a change of habit. Once the fluctuation of adaptation ceases, an action becomes ingrained into memory and the performance can be carried out with greater ease.

My reading of *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* will suggest that Eliot's idealized human relation is realized through an individual's memory of his fellow men. Memory is important in prompting Eliot's characters to reach out to those either thickly or thinly related to them, and in strengthening the bond between man and man. As Hao Li

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Eliot's Moral Framework'.

[59] Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind, Second Series: The Physical Basis of Mind*, p. 41. The other factor is the relation of the constituent molecules to each other within an individual object.

[60] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (New York: Prometheus, 1998), p. 131.

suggests, for Eliot, memory of other people's sufferings may 'remind a character of the need to cherish sympathy'.[62] Many of her characters are in the habit of remembering the difficulties their fellow creatures are going through. Dinah's 'loving remembrance' of the people in Snowfield, for example, keeps her always close to them.[63] Deronda often reminds himself that there are less fortunate people in the world, and this in turn prepares him for helping Gwendolen and Mirah out of their trouble. Felix Holt too remembers the misery of others and is preoccupied with making life easier for those within his reach.[64] Dorothea's concern about 'the lot of others' is a haunting memory, which she cannot dispel until her engagement in 'some active good' can relieve their difficulties:

> The idea of some active good within her reach 'haunted her like a passion,' and another's need having once come to her as a distinct image, preoccupied her desire with the yearning to give relief, and made her own ease tasteless.[65]

Eliot here evokes Wordsworth's treatment of memory in 'Lines Written above Tintern Abbey'. Like the sounding cataract which 'haunted' the poet 'like a passion', Dorothea's recollection of Lydgate's misery becomes so overwhelming that it takes possession of her.

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[61] Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind, Second Series: The Physical Basis of Mind*, p. 45 (original emphasis).
[62] Hao Li, *Memory and History in George Eliot: Transfiguring the Past* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 125.
[63] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. by Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 157. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated *AB*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.
[64] George Eliot, *Felix Holt, The Radical*, ed. by Fred Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 225. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated *FH*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.
[65] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. by David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 715-6. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated *M*, are from this edition with page numbers given in

Despite operating within a framework informed by Victorian science, Eliot clearly associates her cultivation of moral habits with that of Wordsworth.

Comte's idea of humanity illuminates an understanding of the workings of memory in Eliot. Comte, as we have seen, sees humanity as the greatest organism, extending to 'Time as well as Space'. Correspondingly, social sympathy is characterized by the feeling of 'Solidarity, or union with the Present' and 'of Continuity, or union with the Past' (Comte, I, p. 291). In the above examples, memory works mainly on the present, and its particular emphasis is on space. It strengthens our ties with our fellow-creatures and links us to a much wider circle.

However, as Comte suggests, a sense of union with the present alone is not enough. The sense of '[c]ontinuity, or union with the Past' is more important. Without it, social sympathy is a 'barren' feeling, present life becomes 'without roots' and the future is left 'undetermined' (Comte, I, pp. 291-2). A better understanding of the collective past enables an individual to understand his own past better and to recognize where the future lies. I will deal with the relationship between an individual and his collective past more extensively in Chapter Four, but here I would like to suggest that Eliot shares Comte's view that the union with the past cultivated by memory is of great importance in the development of moral habits.

A good example of this process is provided by Deronda's sense of undecidedness

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parentheses.

before his racial identity is revealed to him. The narrator tells the reader that when Deronda's sympathy is not rooted in the past, it does not have a focus, but is 'many-sided'.[66] Tending to sympathize with everything, even vice, he is not able to take any definite action, which is motivated by 'that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force' (*DD*, p. 336). Since he is ignorant of his past, his indignation is neutralized and rendered ineffective. He also suffers from a sense of uncertainty and is not sure where his future lies.

After his racial identity is revealed to him, Deronda's sympathy becomes well focused and practical:

> It was as if he had found an added soul in finding his ancestry—his judgment no longer wandering in the mazes of impartial sympathy, but choosing, with that noble partiality which is man's best strength, the closer fellowship that makes sympathy practical—exchanging that bird's-eye reasonableness which soars to avoid preference and loses all sense of quality, for the generous reasonableness of drawing shoulder to shoulder with men of like inheritance. (*DD*, p. 693)

Memory, as well as knitting us together with our fellow creatures in the present, also binds us with past generations. Without the union with a 'closer fellowship', sympathy is

[66] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. by Graham Handley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 335. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated *DD*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

'impartial'. It is detached and distanced, as the phrase 'bird's-eye' suggests. This is what Comte means when he calls sympathy a 'barren feeling', which leaves the present 'rootless' and the future 'undetermined'. It may sound as though it does justice to everyone, but it may also be a 'maze' in which one gets trapped. In avoiding preference, Deronda finds action impossible. In comparison, partiality grounded in the union with his ancestors is nobler because it gives him 'strength', which is the motivation of action and condition of moral force. It is the feeling of having obtained an 'added soul'.

This passage also shows that thin relations need to be grounded in thick relations. Deronda's relation with his ancestors is a thick relation, as the phrases 'closer fellowship', 'shoulder to shoulder' and 'noble partiality' suggest. By contrast, his relation with the people around him is a thin relation, as the phrase 'bird's-eye' points out. Thin relations need to be grounded in thick relations, otherwise sympathy will not be practical.

The ultimate goal of Eliot's humanitarian project, which is strengthened by the memory of both present and the past generations, is individual and collective happiness. Eliot remarks in one of her letters that 'the principle that that which is best in ethics is the only means of subjective happiness' [sic], by which she means that of an individual.[67] However, this happiness is not obtained at the expense of another person's loss, but is in harmony with his happiness: 'The good of one is the good of all' (ET, p. 169). This attitude is in line with the utilitarian morality advocated by Mill, who tries to rescue utilitarianism from its Benthamite calculating and quantitative principles. In his view,

[67] Eliot, *Letters*, I, 143.

pleasure is the ultimate pursuit of man, but there is a distinction between higher and lower pleasures. Happiness, as a criterion of 'morality', is one of these higher pleasures.[68] 'The good of others' becomes something with which an individual identifies, and the 'prevention or mitigation of unhappiness' is what he always bears in mind.

The unity between the happiness of the helper and the helped permeates *Daniel Deronda*. The salvation obtained through idealized human relations not only brings about salvation to the sufferer, but also happiness to those who offer the help. After 'set[ting] to some hidden work of reclaiming a life from misery', the narrator announces, we will 'look for our triumph in the secret joy' this brings (*DD*, p. 349). Moreover, through the sympathy we show to others, we 'make others glad that they were born' (*DD*, p. 754). This unity can also be found in *Middlemarch*, in which Dorothea's happiness lies in making everybody's life 'beautiful' (*M*, p. 205).

The ability to remember the needs of fellow men, however, is not something that Eliot believes comes easily. Quite the opposite, it is a cultivated virtue, which relies on habit cultivation for its development. In Comte's cerebral theory there are ten 'affective motors', seven of which are 'personal' and three 'social'. The point of positive morality lies in 'compressing egoism' and 'developing altruism' (Comte, IV, p. 246). As the narrator of *Middlemarch* points out, 'we are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves' (*M*, p. 198). Selfish as we are by nature, however, we have the potential to develop our altruistic feelings by meditation and

[68] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. by John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

practice. Through taking care of a creature we have rescued, we are able to exercise and consequently to strengthen our faculties of love and caring. In the end, 'our pride becomes loving, our self is a not-self for whose sake we become virtuous' (*DD*, p. 349). Many of her characters, Gwendolen and Esther, for example, gradually develop a capacity for altruism. On the other hand, Charles Bray's idea that all the faculties exist in different people in different degrees can also be found in Eliot's novels. 'Our consciences', the narrator of *Daniel Deronda* tells us, 'are not all of the same pattern'; they are 'as various as our memories' (*DD*, p. 475). Some people, such as Deronda and Dorothea, are born with a much higher degree of moral sense than others, and are more capable of caring for people around them. But even in these people, if this inherited capacity is not exercised, it will decline and decay.

No passage makes clearer the importance of developing innate altruism through exercise than the following from *Daniel Deronda*:

> Suppose the stolen offspring of some mountain tribe brought up in a city of the plain, or one with an inherited genius for painting, and born blind—the ancestral life would lie within them as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations, and the spell-bound habit of their inherited frames would be like a cunningly-wrought musical instrument, never played on, but quivering throughout in uneasy mysterious moanings of its intricate structure that, under the right touch, gives music. (*DD*, pp. 697-8)

1991), pp. 168-9.

In both this passage and the one quoted earlier in this section, Eliot compares moral sense to the potential for performing music. While the previous passage points out that cultivation is necessary to bring this aptitude into full play, this passage goes a step further by emphasizing the psychological disturbance which can arise when the claims of inherited habit are not satisfied: this will cause poverty of mental life, uneasiness, and unfulfilled longing. 'Quivering' suggests that in spite of the lack of proper conditions for its growth, inner aptitude refuses to be altogether stifled. It stirs with life, with the desire to grow. The phrase 'uneasy mysterious moanings' further implies the painful feeling of this sense of restlessness and lack of fulfilment.

The references to 'dim longing' and 'mysterious moanings' indicate that the object that Deronda longs for is not quite clear. He suffers from a lack of fulfilment, but is not quite sure to what he should commit himself. Only 'the right touch', that is to say, the proper initiation and cultivation, can release his altruism from its 'spell-bound' habit and render it active and effective. Deronda confesses to Mordecai that '[i]t is through your inspiration that I have discerned what may be my life's task. It is you who have given shape to what, I believe, was an inherited yearning' (*DD*, p. 697).

Exercise, then, in Eliot's view, is important in nurturing the habit of caring for one's fellow creatures. This exercise, however, cannot take place without the interaction with a social medium. Lydgate's habit of 'car[ing] much for those who suffered hardships', for example, is facilitated by his profession as a doctor. The narrator tells us

that ‘his profession had familiarised him with all grades of poverty’ (*M*, p. 327). This enables him to understand the difficulties of others and develop his altruistic instincts. As a result, unlike Dorothea’s unsympathetic sister Celia, he can form ‘some true conclusion’ of her trials after her husband’s death (*M*, p. 462).

The social medium can even bring about the early development of certain habits. The effect of Deronda’s unknown parentage is an example of this. This unique environment develops an ‘early-wakened sensibility’ and raises in him a ‘premature reflection on certain questions of life’ in him (*DD*, p. 160). It enables Deronda to develop the habit of thinking imaginatively about other people’s suffering. We are told that Deronda suffers from a feeling of injury because his unknown parentage gives him the impression that he might be Sir Hugo’s illegitimate son (*DD*, p. 162). This painful experience nurtures in him a ‘hatred’ of all injury, and he develops a habit of ‘learning how human miseries are wrought’ (*DD*, p. 163). It also prompts him to ‘construct the hidden story of his own birth’ from an the early age. The exercise of imagination in this way enables him to imagine similarly miserable elements in other people’s lives. He is able to ‘weav[e] probabilities’ about Gwendolen’s unhappy marriage and ready to assist Mirah in finding her brother (*DD*, p. 404).[69]

The cultivation of the habit of caring for others, as is shown in the above examples,

[69] This analysis tends to simplify the relationship between individual habits and the medium in which he is set, but this relationship is more complicated than discussed above. Individuals in the same medium can develop very different habits because their own physiological and psychological conditions also play a crucial role. The same medium which prompts Deronda to develop sympathy with the less fortunate can, in many cases, ‘turn a self-centred, unloving nature into an Ishmaelite’ (*DD*, 160). A more detailed discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this study. Here I am just showing the importance of social medium in the formation of moral habits.

need not be deliberate. Lydgate and Deronda do not make conscientious efforts to remember others' needs. Rather, the habit is developed through their adaptation to the social medium in which they are set. To borrow Wordsworth's phrase, they are 'insensibly disposed' (OCB, l. 96) to virtue and goodness. This unconscious mode of habit formation is somewhat similar to what Wordsworth advocates in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and the education he receives from nature in *The Prelude*.

The cultivation of a sense of other people's needs, however, enacted through an individual's interaction with the social medium, can also be a conscious process. In this case, I would like to suggest, the social medium is often constituted by the opinions and teachings of those to whom we are thickly related, who are at the same time morally superior to us. Our love of and respect for them render us receptive to their teaching and motivate us to bring our thoughts beyond ourselves through conscious efforts. As the narrator of *Middlemarch* summarizes, men hold half their rectitude in the mind of the being they 'love best' (*M*, p. 227). The narrator of *Daniel Deronda* also points out that another person's opinion is 'the breathing-medium of all our joy', and may be 'our virtue in the making' (*DD*, p. 709). Through love of Felix Holt and admiration of his virtue, Esther overcomes her self-centredness and remembers the needs of others, including those of her father. Gwendolen's conscientious efforts to reach out to those for whom she initially showed no concern comes from Deronda. He thus becomes 'a part of her conscience' (*DD*, p. 386). By following his guidance and adapting herself to his standard, she gradually comes to remember more of the need of others. He urges her to

> look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action—something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot. (*DD*, p. 416)

Deronda encourages Gwendolen to struggle to take her thoughts beyond the narrow circle of self and extend it to other people. If habit is a mechanism which propels one to repeat an action with ease, the imperatives 'look on', and 'try to' suggest that Deronda wants Gwendolen to make a deliberate effort to instil this habit. It is apparent that Deronda's teaching works through Gwendolen's memory when she emphasizes that 'I shall remember your words—every one of them' (*DD*, p. 717). Towards the end of the novel, she writes to Deronda and says once again that 'I have remembered your words' (*DD*, p. 754). Quite distinct from Lydgate and Deronda, as well as the villagers in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', who are 'insensibly disposed' to showing more concern for others (OCB, l. 96), in Gwendolen's case there is a clear will to remember, a consciousness on her part of the need to develop altruistic habits. A similar case can be found in *Felix Holt*, in which the moral education Holt gives to Esther is made effective through its registration in her memory: 'Every word Felix had said to her seemed to have burnt itself into her memory' (*FH*, p. 110). The word 'burnt' highlights the fact that what he says has forced its way into her consciousness.

Although the social medium can develop in an individual the habit of caring more

about others either unconsciously or consciously, Eliot suggests that the passive and unconscious process can be transformed into an active and conscious one. As Deronda tells Gwendolen:

> Take the present suffering as a painful letting in of light. […] You are conscious of more beyond the round of your own inclinations. —You know more of the way in which your life presses on others, and their life on yours. […] When we are calm we can use our memories and gradually change the bias of our fear, as we do our tastes. Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you. Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision. (*DD*, pp. 421-2)

> One who has committed irremediable errors may be scourged by that consciousness into a higher course than is common. […] Feeling what it is to have spoiled one life may well make us long to save other lives from being spoiled. (*DD*, p. 420)

Gwendolen realizes even at this stage that her wrongdoing has caused irrevocable suffering to others, and her remorse is intense. However, she has not yet realized that it can be the starting point of her moral reformation. Through this painful experience, she can come to know the interconnectedness between her life and that of others. Deronda wants her to transform her guilt into positive action, as the phrase ‘letting in of light’

suggests. She can use this event to guard herself against similar mistakes in future.

The interaction between recollective memory and habit-memory mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis is manifested in this passage. To make 'consequences passionately present', Deronda insists, involves the vivid recollection of a particular wrong Gwendolen has committed and the harmful consequence it has brought about to others. She should use the recollection of this particular event, Deronda suggests, as an '*aide-mémoire*'.[70] It will gradually help her to form the habit of taking other people's feelings into account when performing an act. I will deal with the relation between guilt and the formation of moral habits in greater detail in Chapter Three, but here we see the effect of one kind of memory on another.

Deronda draws a parallel between Gwendolen's guilt about the wrongs she has committed and such biological properties as 'tastes' and 'quickness of hearing', and says that the former can be 'gradually changed' through the use of memory. This shows Eliot's belief that moral habits, though physiologically based, can be enhanced through proper exercise.

While Gwendolen develops the habit of reaching out to others with the help of Deronda, Eliot tells us that art can also extend memory from oneself to one's fellow man:

[70] A. J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), p. 137.

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. […] When Wordsworth sings to us the reverie of 'Poor Susan', […] more is done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness, than by hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations. 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.[71]

> In this world there are so many of these common, coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence. […] Let Art always remind us of them. (*AB*, p. 178)

As opposed to 'obliterating', the words 'remember' and 'remind' suggest that the lower classes are forgotten. Art, in other words, has the social function of promoting social cohesion and the capacity to do so more effectively than religion and philosophy. It works through memory. By 'remind[ing]' the rich of a world of suffering beyond their own privileged lives, it takes people out of their narrow self-concern and nurtures their sympathy so that they will be able to reach out to the lower classes, thus healing the division between different classes within the social hierarchy. Eliot's affinity to Wordsworth is again recognized here in her mention of his poem 'Poor Susan'. As discussed above, Wordsworth also believed that art could and should reform the moral

[71] Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', pp. 263-4.

habits of his readers.

Eliot thus assigns to art a significant role in the development of moral habits, in curing us of our initial selfishness and in making us aware of the need of others. She sees it as a possible step towards the realization of idealized human relation, which answers needs and alleviates difficulties. With everybody caring about the well-being and suffering of others, she believed, the world could gradually be brought into brotherhood.

Coda

Having looked individually at Wordsworth and Eliot's humanitarian projects, I will conclude this chapter with a summary of the affinities and differences between the two writers. Unlike Avishai Margalit, who contends that we can only love those with whom we are thickly related, both Wordsworth and Eliot believe that morality and memory should be directed towards general humanity. We need to feel internally bonded with and care about the well-being of our fellow creatures in general, both those closest to us and people of chance encounter. Universal humanity is the ultimate goal of their humanitarian projects.

However, the two writers tackle different issues and respond to the particularly pressing circumstances of their time. In response to the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Wordsworth intends to bridge this division, and see how society can be thickly related throughout in a

Christian brotherhood. Though linking the higher classes with the lower is also one of Eliot's concerns, her project is more to do with the problem of salvation as a result of the loss of religious faith in her time. Since there was no metaphysical God to give people strength when they were in trouble, Eliot suggested an alternative source of comfort in her writing: an idealized human relation, strengthened by concern for the well-being of one's fellow creatures. Moreover, with the dissolution of the Christian brotherhood knitted together by God's love, she sees memory as an alternative method of binding people together. It can be argued that memory is central to her secular religion of humanity.

Another difference lies in the two writers' treatment of thick and thin relations. For Wordsworth, as for Margalit, concern for thick relations is of inherent importance. Wordsworth teaches that this concern needs to be extended to thin relations as well, especially to the poor and the marginalized people in society. Eliot, on the other hand, contends that concern for oneself is stronger in most than concern for others. We have to work hard to extend our thoughts and memories to other people, whether thickly or thinly related to us.

Eliot's implicit treatment of thick and thin relations is also more dynamic than that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth simply suggests that it is far from adequate to remember only one's immediate relatives, and suggests that strangers also deserve attention. He implies that we should care about them as much as about our nearest and dearest. Eliot's case is more complicated. She suggests that memory of thick relations, especially those

who are morally superior, can enhance our relations with others, whom we do not initially care about. On the other hand, thin relations need to be grounded in thick relations. Otherwise sympathy will be so diffusive that action will be impossible. We may in this case find ourselves in a similar situation to that of Deronda, trapped in a sense of indecision and an inability to follow a definite line of action.

For Wordsworth as well as for Eliot, habit is an important vehicle in leading characters to better remember their fellow creatures, and towards a sense of universal humanity. Moral virtue produces in their characters a feeling of happiness. It is worth pointing out, however, that in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' Wordsworth seems to be more concerned about the happiness of those who perform charitable deeds than that of the recipient of charity. We are not told how the beggar feels after receiving the involuntary charities from the villagers. In Eliot's novels, however, the alleviation of other people's pain produces a sense of happiness in both the giver and the recipient.

Compared with Wordsworth, Eliot investigates the mechanism of habit in greater depth. While Wordsworth's theory of habit can be seen in the light of Hume's associationist philosophy, Eliot is engaged with evolutionary associationism as a result of the development of evolutionary theory in her time. Hence, habit cultivation becomes a much more complicated issue. It involves not only the matter of forming a moral habit through the repetition of a certain action, as is discussed in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', but also its relationship with habit inherited from previous generations. Her discussion of the social medium and the physiological basis of moral habit is also a fruit of the scientific

developments of her time. As we have seen, Eliot situates habit cultivation within a much wider context.

Reliant as they are on habit in the reformation of our moral life, the two writers are aware that habit can work both ways. Whereas a proper medium can nurture one's memory of other people, and 'keep alive / The kindly mood ', an improper medium may reinforce one's habitual apathy towards them, as the phrase 'else unremembered' suggests (OCB, ll. 83-4).

In spite of their agreement that habit is a mechanism which disposes men to the reformation of their moral habits, the two writers differ over who is responsible for installing this mechanism and setting it in motion. For Wordsworth, humble people and natural objects perform this role. These people themselves do not necessarily carry moral agency, as is the case with the Cumberland beggar, who remains unaware of his effect upon others. Eliot's case is very different: she proposes that a morally exemplary person leads us towards remembering more of other people.

Another difference lies in the fact that for Wordsworth, habit formation is an unconscious process, and occurs without the agent's realization of his moral improvement. 'Insensibly disposed' and 'unpursued' are phrases he uses to describe it (OCB, l. 95; l. 96). The education of the villagers in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and the poet in *The Prelude* provide an example of this kind. For Eliot, this process can be either conscious or unconscious. But she emphasizes more the conscious effort exerted by

her characters to reform their moral habits. Gwendolen's promise 'I shall try', 'I shall remember your words' is a good example of her conscientious attempt to cultivate altruism (*DD*, p. 717).

Lastly, both writers see art as a means of reforming the habit of their audience. As Stephen Gill has noticed, what Wordsworth did in poetry, George Eliot seeks to do 'sixty years later for the novel'.[72] While the poem and the novels reproduce the experience of being converted by habit and disposed to 'virtue and true goodness' (OCB, l. 97), a similar process takes place among the readers whom Wordsworth and Eliot wish to address. Both writers are aware of the tensions between classes, which prevent the rich from reaching out to the poor. They see it is their responsibility as writers to correct this mistake by changing their readers' habits. The process of reading itself, they hope, can be the mechanism by which their readers overcome their narrow self-concern and come to a better understanding of human nature.

[72] Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 153.

Chapter Two

Duty and the Accumulative Force of the Past in 'Ode to Duty', *Romola* and *Silas Marner*

Introduction

In the first chapter, I contended that moral sense is physiologically based and discussed how the development of moral habits can nurture a sense of universal humanity. In this chapter I will explore the physiological mechanism of habit formation in more detail and discuss its relationship with duty.

Commenting on Wordsworth's 'Ode to Duty', Stephen Gill says that it is 'no one's favourite poem'. It is 'quoted by the sterner Victorians, but by hardly anyone else'.[1] As a Victorian moralist, Eliot certainly admires this poem, for she uses lines 49 to 56 as the motto for Chapter LXXX of *Middlemarch*.[2] Her interest in Wordsworthian duty also finds expression in *Daniel Deronda*. Lines 237-9 of Book IX of *The Excursion* were considered for the motto of Chapter XLIII, though they were later substituted by Keats's 'Sonnet on Seeing the Elgin Marbles':

> The primal duties shine aloft like stars;
> The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless
> Are scattered at the feet of men like flowers.[3]

[1] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; repr. 1990), p. 226.
[2] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. by David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 737. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated *M*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.
[3] Editor's note in George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. by Graham Handley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 501.

Although Eliot is interested in Wordsworth's vision of duty and quotes him now and then for the mottos of her novels, her understanding of duty is not exactly the same as that of her predecessor. Despite their similar views on the importance of man binding himself to duty and the close-knit relationship of habit and duty, there are several points on which they diverge from each other. For example, Wordsworth's duty has a Christian connotation. It is the 'Stern Daughter of the Voice of God', as he calls it.[4] Eliot's duty is divorced from Christian connotations. To borrow Basil Willey's phrase, her intellectual trajectory 'begins with God' but 'ends in Duty'.[5] Moreover, Eliot sanctions rebellion against false duties. Thus her notion of duty is more radical than that of Wordsworth.

The Wordsworthian Duty: Newton and Hartley

In this section, I will argue that for Wordsworth, the sense of duty is cultivated through habit. Wordsworth's notion of duty, as a universal law which governs both the natural and the human world, is formed under the influence of Newton's law of nature. It is different from Kantian duty which is *a priori*, and is instead cultivated through experience. I will then draw on David Hartley's theory on reflex-action and the dialectical relationship between automatic and voluntary action to show that Wordsworth particularly emphasizes the role of habit, the accumulative force of the past, in moulding an individual into a duty-bound being.

The Wordsworthian sense of duty can be seen to have developed from Newton's discovery of the law of nature. Newton's theories of physics are one of the most important contributions to eighteenth-century science. Among them is the theory on the

[4] William Wordsworth, 'Ode to Duty', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), line 1. All subsequent quotations of this poem, abbreviated OTD, are from this edition with line numbers given in parentheses.
[5] Basil Willey, *Nineteenth-Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 215.

forces that cause motion. In the *Opticks*, Newton proposes that 'particles exert attractive and repulsive forces upon each other'. These 'attractive repulsive forces' include gravitation, cohesion, electricity, heat, etc. They work on both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic levels. For example, 'gravitation acts on the macrocosmic level to draw apples to earth and the planets toward and hence around the sun, while cohesion acts at the microcosmic level to hold atoms together in molecules'. Newton's images of the cosmos can be briefly described as 'a vast empty space in which a walnutful of atomic matter has crystallized into lattices, […] which are held in positions of more or less stable equilibrium by forces of attraction and repulsion'.[6] Newton considers these principles by which things are formed as general laws of Nature.

However, Newton remains puzzled over the causes of these principles. In the *Opticks* he declares that the First Cause 'certainly is not mechanical'. He thus concludes that it is God who preserves and maintains the universe: 'Lest the systems of the fixed Stars should, by their gravity, fall on each other mutually, he hath placed those systems at immense distances one from another'.[7]

By regarding God as the designer of the universe, Newton follows an old tradition within Christian doctrine – natural theology. Its main assumption is that without the need for 'special revelation', any individual can 'discern certain fundamental truths about the existence of a Supreme Being' by 'observing the physical creation and consulting one's internal dispositions'.[8]

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[6] Richard Allen, *David Hartley on Human Nature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 88-9.
[7] Isaac Newton, *Opticks*, quoted from Ben Schneider, *Wordsworth's Cambridge Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 170.
[8] Robert Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 64.

Natural theology dates back to as early as the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, who attributes the order in the inanimate world to the direction of 'a transcendent being having intelligence and intention'.[9] Copernicus and Kepler, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scientists, follow the idea of natural theology, but it is Newton who gives it 'the most decisive impetus'. He sees evidence of design in the structure of the universe, arguing that only 'an intelligent being' could have 'calculated the correct tangential component of each planet's velocity to ensure that it went into a stable orbit'.[10]

Wordsworth was well acquainted with Newton's works. At Hawkshead Grammar School, he enjoyed reading Newton's *Opticks*.[11] He was examined on it at St. John's College in Cambridge in December 1789. He 'thought well of its author', thinking him 'perhaps the most extraordinary man that this country ever produced'.[12] In 1790, he read *Principia*. Newton is also one of the few personages mentioned by the poet in *The Prelude*. From his bedroom Wordsworth could see on moonlit nights '[t]he antechapel, where the statue stood / Of Newton with his prism and silent face'.[13]

Taking into consideration Wordsworth's familiarity with and admiration of Newton's works, it is not surprising that he was also a follower of Newton's religious outlook. Robert Ryan's book explains why he disagrees with Jonathan Wordsworth that Wordsworth's dominant religious belief in the 1790s was pantheism. He suggests that

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[9] John Brooke, 'Natural Theology', in *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*, ed. by J. L. Heilbron <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.thml?subview=Main&entry=t124.e0504> [accessed 16 November 2009]

[10] John Brooke, 'Natural Theology', in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 58-63 (pp. 59-60).

[11] For more details, see Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, p. 28.

[12] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 107.

[13] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), The 1805 Edition, Book III, lines 60-1. All subsequent quotations of this poem are from this edition with book and line numbers given in parentheses.

Wordsworth believed in natural theology, a belief popular in the eighteenth century whose main proponent was Isaac Newton. Though it gradually gave way to more orthodox Christian belief later on, natural theology never totally disappeared in Wordsworth's religious outlook. Its coexistence with orthodox Christianity is best exemplified in the dialogue between the Wanderer and the Pastor in *The Excursion*.[14]

Newton's theory on the laws of nature illuminates our understanding of Wordsworth's thinking about duty, the timeless truth and universal law that governs both natural objects and the human world. If the forces of motion are the laws through which Newton believes natural objects themselves are formed, 'duty' is the word Wordsworth uses to describe the law that governs the universe. During the five years starting with the composition of 'Ode to Duty' in 1804 throughout the writing of the essay 'Reply to "Mathetes"', 'duty' is an issue which continually engages the poet's mind. In the Ode, which was composed in 1804 and published in 1807, he passionately eulogizes 'duty' as the 'Stern Lawgiver', which 'preserve[s] the Stars from wrong' (OTD, l. 49; l. 55). More importantly, 'duty' also prevents human beings from wandering off the right path. It is 'a Rod / To check the erring' (OTD, ll. 3-4), 'From vain temptations dost set free' (OTD, l. 7). In 'Reply to "Mathetes"', written about two years after the Ode was published, Wordsworth quotes lines from it towards the end, maintaining that all modes of existence, both moral and physical laws, are 'subservient to' the spirit of 'Duty'.[15]

[14] For a detailed discussion, see Ryan, pp. 80-119. Ryan contends that the reason for Wordsworth's shift to a more orthodox Christianity was his gradual reintegration into the religious life of his community, and his belief that a national Church would bring order and stability to the whole nation.

[15] Wordsworth, 'Reply to "Mathetes"', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), II, 24. All subsequent quotations of this article, abbreviated RTM, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

While Newton sees God as the maintainer of the law of nature, Wordsworth sees God as the producer of duty. Though the 'Ode' is dedicated to 'duty', the poet keeps emphasizing that duty comes from God, not anywhere else. Duty is the 'Stern Daughter of the Voice of God' (OTD, l. 1), which 'dost wear / The Godhead's most benignant grace' (OTD, ll. 49-50). Schneider points out that the line 'Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong' (OTD, l. 55) in this poem comes from Newton's idea that God preserves the universe in the scholium at the end of *Principia*.[16]

As a universal law which governs both the natural and the human world, Wordsworthian duty is different from Kantian duty. Kantian duty is *a priori*, not derived from experience. An action has moral worth only if it is free from inclination or desire. It is done 'for the sake of duty alone'.[17] Quite the opposite, Wordsworthian duty is not *a priori,* but obtained through experience. Man is not born with the ability to abide by this law. It is an ideal for which he can strive through learning. Habit cultivation, as I will show later, is the most reliable means of approaching this ideal. The work of habit involves bringing unruly instincts under control and regulating them into dutiful channels. It also involves forming the right moral behaviour through making mistakes. Duty, in other words, can only become habitual through these experiences.

While setting itself in contrast with Kantian duty, Wordsworthian duty, I would suggest, is in alliance with David Hartley's theory on the formation of moral habit. Hartley's moral philosophy is developed from Newton's scientific system. His *Observations of Man: His Frame, His Duty and His Expectations*, published in 1749, well before Wordsworth was born, formed part of the intellectual landscape in the

[16] Schneider, pp. 170-1.
[17] Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. and ed. by H. J. Paton (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 70.

eighteenth century to 'equate the moral with the physical world'.[18] The work not only shows on many occasions Hartley's admiration of, and indebtedness to, Newton, but also adopts Newton's system in his analysis of 'the mechanism of all our mental processes'. Moreover, he uses it to explain 'the evolution of our moral characters from childhood to manhood, and the development of the moral sense out of simple sensation' (*ECB*, p. 137).

In Hartley's opinion, moral sense is not inborn, but 'factitious'.[19] The *OED* quotes Hartley's usage of this word and explains it as 'arising from custom, habit, or design; not natural or spontaneous; artificial, conventional'. Moral sense is not innate. It is acquired through an individual's interaction with the external world. For Hartley, the world is designed by Providence as 'a system of benevolence' (Hartley, II, p. 131), so that ideally, 'through the association of pleasurable sensations with certain objects', the mind will go through an evolutionary process from sensation, imagination, ambition and self-interest to sympathy and the acquisition of a moral sense. Thus human individuals may be regarded as 'a sort of refinery in which the loftiest spirituality is being mechanically distilled out of sense' (*ECB*, p. 143; p. 144).

Critics have long recognized that Wordsworth's poetry can be seen as in dialogue with this aspect of Hartley's moral theory. Basil Willey suggests that in terms of Hartley's delineation of the development of the mind 'from sensation, through imagination to reflexion', he can be seen as a 'spiritual forerunner of Wordsworth' (*ECB*, p. 137). Alan Grob remarks that the mental evolution from simple sensation to

[18] Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background: Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), p. 137. All subsequent quotations of this book, abbreviated *ECB*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.
[19] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 3 vols (London, 1791), I, 420. All subsequent quotations of this book are from this edition with volume and page numbers given in parentheses.

moral sense theorized by Hartley is best exemplified in *Tintern Abbey*.[20] Douglas Kenning points out that the seven steps of the development of the mind from sensation to moral sense, where virtue eventually 'becomes habit', can be found in some 'rejected drafts for book eight of *The Prelude*'.[21]

For the purposes of my discussion, I would like to concentrate on one particular point of Hartley's moral system, which has escaped critical attention: the physiological process of the formation of habit, and the dialectical relationship between automatic and voluntary actions. This seems to me to be helpful in understanding the work of habit in 'Ode to Duty'. Discussing the physiological basis of habit, Hartley starts with the analysis of automatic actions such as the jerking back of the finger when touching a hot poker. This sort of action is generated by automatic reflexes. It involves 'a circuit by which an impulse travels up the sensory nerves to the brain and then from the brain down the "motory" nerves to the muscles'.[22] This automatic action can become voluntary through repetition. The motion of grasping in a child may be automatic at the very first. But through sufficient repetition, 'the will to grasp is generated, and sufficiently associated with the action to produce it instantaneously'. In this case, the action of grasping becomes 'perfectly voluntary' (Hartley, I, p. 105).

By the same token, voluntary actions can also become 'secondarily automatic' through repetition. Hartley uses 'secondarily automatic' to describe reflex actions that are not inborn, but are performed as though they were so because through practice, they have passed the stage of voluntariness. At the early stage of learning to play a harpsichord, the player moves his fingers from key to key slowly. Gradually, the acts of

[20] Alan Grob, *The Philosophic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry and Thought 1797-1805* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973), pp. 135-6.
[21] Douglas Kenning, *Necessity, Freedom and Transcendence in the Romantic Poets: A Failed Religion*, Studies in Art and Religious Interpretation, XXIII (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), pp. 16-7.
[22] Allen, p. 163.

volition grow ‘less and less express’, until finally, there is no intervention by voluntary will. The movement becomes ‘secondarily automatic’ (Hartley, I, p. 109; p.105). As can be seen, automatic and voluntary actions are not mutually exclusive, but dialectical and mutually convertible.

Memory plays a key role in the mutual conversion between these two types of action. From the above analysis, we discover that sufficient repetition is the condition of conversion between automatic and voluntary actions, and further between voluntary and secondarily automatic actions. Repetition enables the body to remember, and to perform an action through the guidance of the conscious will. Hartley points out that ‘all our voluntary powers are of the nature of memory’ (Hartley, I, p. 381). They are the manifestation of the accumulative force of the past, and the re-enactment of the past in the present. Likewise, repetition can also enable the body to remember very well, so that the performance can be carried out in spite of the control of the conscious will. Secondarily automatic actions, in this light, are also of the nature of memory. Adequate repetition enables us to remember so well that we can perform certain actions automatically, without the need to resort to voluntary efforts.

Hartley’s idea of the dialectical relation of automatic and voluntary actions and the work of memory sheds light on the way habit works in ‘Ode to Duty’. I will start with how the poet believes that habit can curb the unruly instincts that threaten to drive him away from his poetic calling.

‘Ode to Duty’

The problem of how a writer was to fulfil his duty was a major concern for Wordsworth during the first decade of the nineteenth century. In a letter written to

Thomas Poole, he laments Coleridge's inability to dedicate himself to his duty as a writer of genius:

> I give it to you as my deliberate opinion, formed upon proofs which have been strengthening for years, that he neither will nor can execute any thing of important benefit either to himself his family or mankind. Neither his talents nor his genius mighty as they are nor his vast information will avail him anything; they are all frustrated by a derangement in his intellectual and moral constitution — In fact he has no voluntary power of mind whatsoever, nor is he capable of acting under any *constraint* of duty or moral obligation.[23]

What stands out in the above passage is the relationship between duty and imagination. Duty means constraint. But instead of hindering imagination, it is in Coleridge's case the very condition that makes artistic creation possible. Coleridge is duty-bound to write something worthy of his talent and beneficial to himself and to other people. His failure to do so cannot be explained away simply as a consequence of writer's block. It results from a lack of self-control and is therefore a failure in duty. For Wordsworth, as I will explain later, 'voluntary power' is crucial if a writer is to bring his unruly instincts under control and fulfil his literary duty. It is also significant for an individual's moral development, as morality implies 'voluntary obedience' (RTM, p. 24). In this letter written in 1809, Wordsworth assumes the moral high ground. Several years earlier, in 1804, however, Wordsworth was himself plagued by Coleridge's problem.

[23] William Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Alan G. Hill and others, 2nd edn, 8 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967-93), II: *The Middle Years*, rev. by Mary Moorman (1969), p. 352.

It is now generally agreed that 'Ode to Duty' was composed in the early months of 1804, roughly the same time when lines 55-271 of Book I of the 1805 Prelude were written.[24] These lines can therefore be read as a context for the Ode. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth presents himself as a predestined great poet: 'I was a chosen son', endowed with 'holy powers / And faculties, whether to work or feel' (III, ll. 82-4). His poetic mission is to 'dedicate' himself to 'chosen tasks' (I, l. 34), which refers to the writing of *The Recluse*, assigned by Coleridge in the spring of 1798 in Somerset. In both of the quoted lines, Wordsworth emphasizes the word 'chosen', which 'entails responsibility and risk as well as privilege'.[25] The poet privileges himself over his fellow creatures because of his unusual poetic power. By acknowledging this superiority, he also accepts the duty of completing the grand poetic task that Coleridge has laid on his shoulders. But more importantly, 'chosen' also entails 'risk', the danger that the task may be left unfulfilled. In that case, it may end up with anxiety, guilt and endless self-blame. This is exactly what is tormenting Wordsworth. From line 142 onwards, the poet is troubled by being constantly driven away from his desire for an epic subject by 'less quiet instincts':

> The mind itself,
> The meditative mind, best pleased perhaps
> While she as duteous as the mother dove
> Sits brooding, lives not always to that end,
> But hath less quiet instincts – goadings on

[24] For the time of the composition of the Ode, see the editor's note in William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 104. For the time of the composition of lines 55-271 of Book I of *The Prelude*, see the editor's note in William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 556, and 'The Texts: History and Presentation', in William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850, Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, pp. 510-26.

[25] *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 110.

That drive her as in trouble through the groves. (I, ll. 149-54)

The mind is compared to a brooding dove, following duty when engaged in creative activity. But there are 'less quiet instincts', which make the workings of imagination 'unwelcome tasks'. In pushing these tasks away, the poet is haunted by guilt in deserting his duty, just like the mother dove, who walks 'in trouble' through the groves. Instincts may sometimes prove troublesome and hinder artistic creation, which is considered a duty. Like the servant who has buried the talent his master gives him in Matthew 25: 14-28, Wordsworth sees himself as one who has wasted the talent God has given him: 'Like a false steward who hath much received / And renders nothing back.' (I, ll. 270-1).

The vocabulary of the Ode is similar to Wordsworth's complaint in these lines. As Angela Esterhammer observes, the passage and the Ode are similar in 'both theme and structure at the point where Wordsworth expresses his intense frustration about his inability to begin a poetic project'.[26] In the Ode Wordsworth depicts himself as a prey of 'less quiet instincts' as in the first book of *The Prelude*. He is overwhelmed by 'the weight of chance desires' (OTD, l. 38) that distract him from his duty of poetic creation. As he describes, he 'shoved unwelcome tasks away' because he does not want anything to 'press / Upon' his 'present happiness' (OTD, ll. 29-31). In 'Too blindly have reposed my trust', 'Too blindly' reveals the poet's remorse, guilt and sense of betrayal (OTD, l. 28). It points to the lack of human agency, a similar force that drives the mother dove away from the maternal duty God selects it to perform. An early draft contains the following line, which Wordsworth eventually deleted: 'Foresight does but breed

[26] Angela Esterhammer, 'Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty": Miltonic Influence and Verbal Performance', *Wordsworth Circle*, 24 (1993), 34-7 (p. 36).

remorse for times to come'.[27] It reveals the guilt by which Wordsworth is overwhelmed for not being able to fulfil his commitment. Such guilt does not come from his self-blame alone, as he confesses, 'Transgressor indeed I have been, from hour to hour, from day to day', but also from the reproach by his own family: 'Many and Many a time have I been twitted by my wife and sister for having forgotten this dedication of myself to the stern lawgiver'.[28]

The form of the Ode also calls for attention. It is modelled after Gray's 'Ode to Adversity', which in turn resembles Horace's 'Ode to Fortune'. However, it deploys aspects of the elevated, sublime idiom associated with the traditional, Pindaric ode. Hartman comments that 'childhood and practical duties are not traditional themes for elevated treatment'. As a result, according to his view, the form is used as a 'serious parody' here, because Wordsworth is determined to 'take common household duties as seriously as if they were indeed divine law'.[29] If the Ode is about the poet's anxiety over his inability to complete *The Recluse*, then one can understand why the poet chooses the Ode form. The writing of *The Recluse*, which the poet regards as an 'honorable field', a 'holy life of music and of verse' (I, l. 52; l. 54), certainly fits in with the elevated and sublime idiom of Pindaric ode.

Some critics see the Ode as an expression of Wordsworth's desire to abandon imagination in favour of the submission to duty. Harold Bloom claims that 'what Wordsworth seeks to abandon here is the autonomy of his own imagination, which is

[27] *MS. 44, Commonplace Book*, quoted from Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, p. 105.
[28] Quoted from the editor's note in William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-49), IV, (1947), 418.
[29] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964; repr. 1967), p. 282.

one with his freedom'.[30] David Bromwich suggests that a major concern for Wordsworth in his poetry between 1798 and 1807 is 'the opposition between imagination and duty'. Through the Ode, he argues, the poet is 'asking duty to save him from the fate of a being as accidental and changeable as the young man […] recalled in "Tintern Abbey"', who is the prey of the freedom of imagination.[31] If we read the lines quoted from *The Prelude* together with the Ode, it is apparent that the Ode is not a farewell to imagination in favour of duty. The tension is not between imagination and duty, but between imagination as a duty and the less quiet instincts which prevent him from the fulfilment of this duty. In a broader sense, it is between the poet's sometimes troublesome instincts and duty. The Ode invokes the help of duty to set artistic imagination going.

Though similar in vocabulary, the Ode is very different to the 'Mother Dove' episode of *The Prelude*. In the 'Mother Dove' episode, the poet seems not to be able to do anything about the unmanageable thoughts that disrupt his poetic creation: 'With me is now such passion, which I blame / No otherwise than as it lasts too long' (I, ll. 155-6). He is simply an unfortunate prey to his unruly but overwhelming instincts. But in the Ode, Wordsworth presents himself as having found a way of bringing these unruly instincts under control.

The means to rescue lie in habit. David Bromwich has divided Wordsworth's poetic development between 1798 and 1807 into five phases. The first phase is the premoral state, a state of primitive pleasure, during which the mind is not 'aware of a conscience that would judge'. During the second phase, the poet begins to fear his own power and desires to control his action. Phases three and four are 'the world of habit',

[30] Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company* (London: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 188.
[31] David Bromwich, 'The "Ode to Duty" and the Idea of Human Solidarity', *Wordsworth Circle*, 40 (2009), 9-16 (pp. 9-10).

where Wordsworth both uses habit to control moral conduct, and reflects upon this reliable guide. The last phase is the world of duty, in which 'the resolution takes on for Wordsworth a permanent authority and the appeal becomes impersonal'.[32] Rather than seeing the phases of habit and duty as divided, I would suggest, they are fundamentally linked. Duty, as a law coming from an external authority, can best be approached through the modification of personal habit, the gradual accumulation of a particular way of acting. Through 'denial', 'restraint' (OTD, l. 47), or 'self-sacrifice' (OTD, l. 62), it can counter-balance the unruly animal instincts that the poet is powerless to control and make fundamental changes in him. And as the word 'breed' suggests (OTD, l. 48), it will gradually mould him into a duty-bound being, travelling along his poetic orbit as do 'the Stars' and 'the most ancient Heavens' (OTD, ll. 55-6). The result is a self with 'a second Will more wise' that is far superior to the one under the sway of unruly instincts (OTD, l. 48), with 'second Will' emphasizing the birth of a new self through the work of habit.

The epigraph added in 1837 further expresses the poet's belief in the sort of conversion brought about by habit. The motto is adapted from Seneca's *Moral Epistles* upon the suggestion of Barron Field, the poet's disciple. The English translation is 'Not only sound in his judgment but trained by habit to such an extent that he not only can act rightly, but cannot help acting rightly'.[33] This reminds us of Hartley's example of the harpsichord player. At the initial stage the learning was painful, laborious and conscientious. But eventually memory settles in so well that he can play while talking to someone else. He no longer needs voluntary efforts to ensure the carrying-out of the right performance. Habit has established a well-worn path so that the right movement takes care of itself. The same holds true for the cultivation of moral habits. The phrases

[32] For a detailed discussion see Bromwich, 9-16.
[33] The translation is quoted from the editor's note in Wordsworth, *Poems in Two Volumes, and Other Poems: 1800-1807*, p. 407.

‘can act rightly’ and ‘cannot help acting rightly’ point to the two Hartleian stages of habit acquisition: the voluntary and the automatic stage. When the bodily reflex is well established, an individual will not only perform the right moral action consciously, but automatically follow the well-worn path habit has cut out. The accumulative force of the past has become self-regenerative, and he does not need to think before acting out. However, the difficulty during the earlier stage is great, as is embodied in such words as ‘denial’, ‘restraint’ (OTD, l. 47), and ‘self-sacrifice’ (OTD, l. 62). These words are suggestive of a struggle, involving great efforts of self-control under the command of a strong will. This is quite different from the way habit is shown to develop in Chapter One, where the virtuous habits of the villagers in ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ are formed imperceptibly. No wonder the poet uses the word ‘Stern’ to describe duty, the ‘Lawgiver’ (OTD, l. 49). It gives full expression of the pain he felt when trying to give up his waywardness. But it remains worthwhile because when the right habit settles in and has its way, carrying out his duty will be pleasant and enjoyable, as shown by the lines ‘thou dost wear / The Godhead’s most benignant grace’ (OTD, ll. 49-50) which come immediately after ‘Stern Lawgiver’, to temper its severity.

Throughout, the poem is invaded by a tension between Wordsworth’s determination to relinquish unruly instincts and a sense of doubt about whether he can indeed carry out his poetic task: ‘But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may’ (OTD, l. 32). The subjunctive mood and the concession he makes indicate that though the desire to serve duty is whole-hearted, the poet lacks confidence in his commitment. In this light, the poem reads more like an on-going struggle than a look back at a problem that has been resolved. Also, the poet claims that the decision to submit to duty is made ‘through no disturbance’ of his soul, nor is there any ‘strong compunction’ (OTD, l. 33; l. 34). This is certainly not true. The relevant lines from *The Prelude* and

the deleted line of the Ode which I mentioned earlier reveal that he is suffering from intense guilt. Moreover, his promise that he will submit to Duty's guidance 'from this hour' and the exclamation 'Oh! let my weakness have an end!' (OTD, l. 59; l. 60) suggest that he is full of fears that he is still prey to such weakness, and that it will not come to an end as he has hoped. His eventual inability to complete *The Recluse* proves this.

So far I have been focusing on the duty of poetic creation. But the poem also seems to me to be discussing moral duties in general. There are two reasons for this. First, though the poet does not say explicitly that this poem also applies to general moral issues, the epigraph added in 1837 depicting a morally righteous man suggests that the desire for self-discipline in poetic creation also applies to moral behaviour. Secondly, in 'Reply to "Mathetes"', a letter discussing how youth can reach moral perfection by self-education through interaction with nature, Wordsworth concludes by quoting the last stanza of the Ode (OTD, ll. 57-64), contending that moral law is 'subservient' to 'the power of Duty'(RTM, p. 24). Therefore I find it insufficient to discuss the Ode without reference to moral duties in general.

Since 'Reply to "Mathetes"' concludes with the final stanza of the Ode, it can be seen as a further context for this poem. The letter was written five years after the Ode was composed. In answer to Wilson and Blair's letter submitted to *The Friend* in 1809 that youth is in need of a moral teacher in what they term a 'degenerate' age, Wordsworth replies that young people should rely on themselves, instead of a moral instructor, to solve their moral problems.[34] An important part of this scheme of self-

[34] Owen and Smyser, 'Introduction' to 'Reply to "Mathetes"', II, 3-5 (p. 4).

education is that moral behaviour will eventually become a habitual part of us through the mistakes we make:

> As that Man cannot set a right value upon health who has never known sickness, nor feel the blessing of ease who has been through his life a stranger to pain, so can there be no confirmed and passionate love of truth for him who has not experienced the hollowness of error. […] There is nothing whereupon the Mind reposes with a confidence equal to that with which it rests on those conclusions, by which truths have been established the direct opposite of errours once rapturously cherished and which have been passed through and are rejected for ever. (RTM, p. 21)

To use Derrida's term, there is a hauntology at work in this passage. The term is introduced in *Specters of Marx,* which Derrida uses as a pun for the philosophical term 'ontology', a term about which he is sceptical.[35] In spite of Marx's preoccupation with getting rid of the ghosts of the past, Derrida says that he can never be successful. A presence is not a pure and self-sufficient element. It can only exist with reference to the non-presence which is its very constituent. The pairing of the antonyms 'health' and 'sickness', 'ease' and 'pain', and 'truth' and 'error', and the assertion that the meaning of the former can never be fully recognized without reference to its opposite clearly points to the Derridean notion that presence is haunted by non-presence, without which it cannot function as it is. This Derridean notion is further confirmed by the poet's statement that 'truths have been established the direct opposite of errours'. The desire for 'repose' and 'rest' indicates the haunting of toil and turmoil from which one wants

[35] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Working of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 138-76.

to escape. But more importantly, without it, the value of repose and rest can never be fully valued.

The concept of hauntology is helpful in our understanding of the role memory plays in present choices. The poet wants to convince his readers that the past is inherent in the present. Memory of the mistakes we make is the very constituent of our understanding of truth. Our wrong-doings haunt us, and it is this very haunting which directs our present choice, compelling us to seek virtue, like the search for harbour in the face of a stormy voyage of mistakes.

Nowhere is this hauntology more prominent than in ‘Ode to Duty’:

> Me this unchartered freedom tires;
> I feel the weight of chance desires:
> My hopes no more must change their name,
> I long for a repose which ever is the same. (OTD, ll. 37-40)

The haunting of unease is the very constituent of the desire for repose in duty. Behind the phrase ‘long for’ and the word ‘repose’ is the torment of changeable desires to which the poet falls prey. Only a person who has suffered long enough from it can cry out for a resting place in such a way. The memory of the unease of ‘unchartered freedom’ and ‘the weight of chance desires’ are the driving forces which prompt the poet to seek a regulated course in duty. ‘Ever’ and ‘the same’ counterbalance ‘change’. They reveal the poet’s yearning for an eternal law, a timeless truth which will guide him towards a fixed destination.

The quotations from 'Reply to "Mathetes"' and the Ode also show that moral duty is acquired through experience. The very suffering of wrong-doings will instil in an individual the sense of how important it is to settle on the right track. The experience of mistakes prompts him to yearn for the unwavering submission to duty. This proves the point I made earlier in this section: Wordsworthian duty is different from Kantian duty. Rather than being *a priori*, it cannot be developed without experience. The poet's desire to cling to duty comes from the experience of suffering from wandering off its track. It is a repose he 'longs for', an ultimate end of happiness he seeks after suffering from the unease of deviations from it (OTD, l. 40). As Chandler observes, Wordsworth is 'arguing against Kant's absolute rationalist distinction between will and inclination in favor of the concept of the "second Will" which coincides with inclination and derives from experience'.[36]

In this way we come to a better understanding of the poet's claim towards the end of 'Reply to "Mathetes"' that morality implies 'voluntary obedience'. When an individual reaches this stage, his time will be 'surrendered through an act of obedience to a moral law established by himself', and he can thus 'move […] along the orbit of perfect liberty' (RTM, p. 24). 'Voluntary' has a different meaning in the context of physiology from feelings or actions. In physiology, it means 'regulated or governed by the volitional faculty; subject to the will'. When used to describe feelings, it means 'arising or developing in the mind without external constraint' (*OED*). 'Voluntary' means, then, both regulated by the will and not constrained or dictated by an external force.

[36] James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 252.

These two meanings can both be found in Wordsworth's thinking about morality. On the one hand, submission to morality is subject to the control of the will, because it is a considered choice after deviations from the path of duty. This willing submission is also pronounced in the Ode, for the poet confesses that 'my submissiveness was choice'. It is reinforced by the exclamation at the end of the poem, 'in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live!' (OTD, l. 44; l. 64). On the other hand, moral actions are also involuntary. Once an individual has made the choice of submitting to moral duty, his actions are comparable to the movement of a celestial object, travelling along its 'orbit' freely and beyond any external control (RTM, p. 24). This suggests that for the poet, voluntary and involuntary obedience to moral duty are, on some level, fundamentally linked.

The word 'voluntary' also echoes Hartley's idea that 'all our voluntary powers are of the nature of memory' (Hartley, I, p. 381). Either through making mistakes, or through repeated practice, memory is so well registered in our consciousness that we know well how to act in accordance with the moral law. Here Wordsworth also puts forward his idea of liberty. Freedom does not mean doing whatever one likes, but knowing what the right course is and following it. In its ideal form, freedom is at one with duty.

To conclude, Wordsworth sees habit as a reliable means of developing in man a sense of duty—a universal law that governs the natural and the human world, but which man can only learn through experience. Two aspects of duty have been discussed: duty in poetic creation and moral duties in general. Both rely on habit to establish themselves. In poetic creation, habit, the accumulative force of the past, can help bring unruly instincts under control and enable the poet to devote himself to his poetic calling in a

better way. The adherence to moral duty is also the result of habit cultivation. Through the mistakes we make, we learn eventually to submit to duty voluntarily.

Eliot's Notion of Duty: The Habitual

In this section, I will discuss *Romola* and *Silas Marner*. Drawing on Lewes's theory on reflex-action, I will show that Eliot identifies duty with the habitual feeling of the body, which is the accumulative force of the past re-enacted in the present. Such a notion of duty was revolutionary in her time, because it challenged the Christian notion that duty comes from God and an individual has no choice but to submit unquestioningly to his will. Eliot's notion of duty also legitimizes rebellion against false duties, which are not an expression of inner needs. However, Eliot does not mean that an individual should enjoy absolute freedom. Human beings need to bind themselves to the collective. If old duties prove not to be trustworthy, they should cast them off and bind themselves to new groups and new duties. Such a radical revision of the traditional notion of duty is counterbalanced by Eliot's recognition that the false duty one struggles to cast off may also have some validity. By rebelling against it one also positions oneself against the good society has sanctioned in the past. This struggle shows that the desire to obtain individual freedom is by no means easy, and that it is not possible to totally abandon the past. The right thing to do, as the endings of *Romola* and *Silas Marner* show, is to devote oneself to new duties while maintaining a critical connection with the past.

As in my discussion of Wordsworth, I will discuss Eliot's relationship with Christianity first, as it registers a significant departure from the Wordsworthian duty which comes from God and is represented as a universal law. In March 1851, an official census was conducted of attendance at all places of religious worship. The result came

as a shock to many mid-Victorian believers. Only 'half the nation' was 'attending religious services'; only 'a quarter' was attending the services of the established national Church. The official report on the census concluded that '"a sadly formidable portion of the English people are habitual neglecters of the public ordinances of religion"'.[37]

One of these neglecters was George Eliot. In 1842 she broke with Christianity and refused to go to church. Writing to her father on 28 February 1842, she said that though she admired the moral teaching of Jesus, she considered the Christian doctrine the 'most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness', because it 'operates unfavourably on moral beauty by disturbing that spontaneity, that choice of the good, for its own sake, that answers my ideal'.[38] But something needs to fill the void left by the loss of faith. Recording a conversation with George Eliot at Cambridge in 1873, F. W. H. Myers writes that:

> [Eliot], stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men, — the words *God*, *Immortality*, *Duty*, —pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the *first*, how unbelievable the *second*, and yet how peremptory and absolute the *third*.[39]

As I discussed in Chapter One, the void was filled by Eliot's religion of humanity based on Feuerbach's religious humanism and August Comte's Religion of

[37] Philip Davis, *1830-1880: The Victorians*, The Oxford English Literary History, VIII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 98. The quotation, which is from the official report on the census, is also from this book.
[38] George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954, repr. 1975), I, 128, 144. All subsequent quotations from these books, abbreviated *Letters*, are from this edition.
[39] Quoted from Willey, *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, p. 214 (original emphasis).

Humanity. With the help of these strands of thought, she was able to replace duty to God with a secularized duty, duty to humanity.

It is still important to consider what became of Eliot's relationship with Christianity. Seventeen years after her abandonment of her religious faith, her antagonism towards Christianity became milder. Writing to François D'Albert-Durade on 6 December 1859, she said:

> I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves. […] I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity—to the acceptance of any set of doctrines as a creed, and a superhuman revelation of the Unseen—but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind.[40]

Eliot has certainly moved on, but without totally abandoning her Christian faith. She has absorbed its positive elements while discarding the dogmatic doctrines, maintaining the essence of Christian ethics without accepting its dogma.

The date of the letter is crucial. It slightly precedes the composition of *Romola* and *Silas Marner*. About half a year later, in June 1860, Eliot embarked on the writing of *Romola*, and between September 1860 and March 1861, she finished the composition of *Silas Marner*. It is fair to assume, therefore, that these two novels in some way reflect Eliot's treatment of her own past during that period of time. Like Eliot, Romola and Silas are betrayed by their past, the religious beliefs that are the anchorage of their early

[40] Eliot, *Letters*, III, 231.

life. They are left in a void in which devotion to the old duties has become impossible. But like Eliot, they eventually manage to move on and devote themselves to their duty to humanity. At the same time, they maintain a critical relationship with the past that has betrayed them. I am not attempting a biographical reading of the two novels here. What I would suggest, instead, is that Eliot's devotion to the service of humanity and her new relationship with Christianity shed light on our understanding of the quest for new duties and the relationship with the past in *Romola* and *Silas Marner*.

In recent years, moral duty in Eliot criticism has increasingly been seen to be connected to habitual and instinctive feelings rather than being based on reason and principle. Commenting on the idea of duty in *Daniel Deronda*, Horowitz contends that this 'involuntary agency' is tied to 'duty': 'Duty follows from feeling, and it makes choice possible'. The discovery of duty is more a 'recognition' than a 'decision', and is discovered at key moments in life.[41] Terence Cave remarks that Silas Marner's decision to keep Eppie 'comes about by reflex action in response to an unexpected challenge. Exactly the same psychological response will determine Daniel's sense of a mission'.[42] In a similar vein, Stefanie Markovits notices that duty in Eliot does not really 'mean much in the abstract'. It is defined by a 'habitual inclination'.[43] The example she gives is Romola's activity in the plague-stricken village, which I will discuss in this section. Though these critics have identified the instinctive nature of the recognition of duty, the mechanism itself has not been fully explored. In what follows, I will investigate the mechanism of habit and consider the way in which it constitutes Eliot's secular notion of duty.

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[41] Evan Horowitz, 'George Eliot: The Conservative', *Victorian Studies*, 49 (2006), 7-32 (p. 29). I think that the conclusion Horowitz draws from *Daniel Deronda* applies to Eliot's other novels as well.

[42] Editor's note in George Eliot, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*, ed. by Terence Cave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 188. All subsequent quotations from this novel, abbreviated *SM*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

[43] Stefanie Markovits, *The Crisis of Action in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p. 94.

The identification of duty with physical needs is no coincidence. Following the trend of Victorian materialism, most Victorian scientists take pains to give the workings of the mind a physiological explanation. Sally Shuttleworth studies its relationship with moral choice and contends that 'the physiological principles of reflex action, to which Lewes devoted much of his attention […], are used […] to sustain a moral theory of social progress'.[44] Michael Davis's comprehensive research shows how Victorian scientists see the human will as something physical rather than a transcendent force. Alexander Bain, John Stuart Mill, Lewes and Huxley follow Spinoza, whose *Ethics* Eliot translated, in maintaining that will is closely connected to reflex action, which belongs to the general relations of cause and effect in the universe.[45]

Eliot's explanation of duty in terms of physical necessity is part of this scheme. Duty is an action one is 'bound to do' (*OED*). This binding is depicted as an involuntary force, rather than a conscious choice or decision. In her novels, Eliot often uses a cluster of terms closely related with one another to depict the involuntary nature of the performance of moral duty: 'reflex action', 'instinct', 'impulse', 'habit'. Before discussing them in detail, I would like to explore Lewes's theory of the way moral instincts are developed and how these terms are related, as this will illuminate our understanding of Eliot's notion of duty.

For Lewes, 'reflex action' is the basic term used to describe the physical mechanism of muscular contraction which produces a sensation. In *The Physiology of Common Life*, he points out that '[i]n those parts of the organism which are so arranged

[44] Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 107.
[45] For a detailed discussion, please see Michael Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 122-3.

that the easiest, readiest path for the issue of a sensation is that of muscular contraction, we shall find that every stimulus produces Reflex-Action'. Some of these reflex-actions can cause reflex-feelings, which in turn, by reflex, cause another feeling.[46] There are, Lewes tells us, two kinds of reflex actions: connate and acquired. Connate reflex actions are the result of generations of habituation. Although in an individual they precede experience, they are inherited by the individual from his ancestors. Acquired reflex actions, by contrast, are the result of long-term, laborious training:

> Habits, Fixed Ideas, and what are called Automatic Actions, all depend on the tendency which a sensation has to discharge itself through the readiest channel. In learning to speak a new language, […] great difficulty is felt, because the channels through which each sensation has to pass have not become established; but no sooner has frequent repetition cut a pathway, than this difficulty vanishes; the actions become so automatic that they can be performed while the mind is otherwise engaged. (*PCL*, pp. 58-9)

An acquired reflex action is established through the creation of new channels through which a sensation has to discharge itself. 'Frequent repetition', which can be achieved through training and exercise, is important, because this paves the way for the creation of the new channels. In stressing the formation of 'Automatic Actions' through repetition, Lewes's view is surprisingly similar to that of Hartley, whose harpsichord player is slow and attentive in his performance at the beginning but can play while talking to someone else through adequate practice. This similarity is no coincidence. In *The History of Philosophy*, Lewes speaks highly of Hartley's ideas on voluntary and

[46] George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1859-60), II, 57. All subsequent quotations of this book, abbreviated *PCL*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

automatic actions, saying that they 'deserve to be read even at the present day'.[47] It is no wonder that Lewes's analysis of the process of habit acquisition bears a clear imprint of his predecessor.

From this passage, it is also evident that Lewes identifies 'habit' with 'reflex action' and 'reflex feeling'. Corresponding to the differentiation between connate and acquired reflex actions, there are connate and acquired habits. Both 'instinct' and 'impulse' are identified with connate reflex actions, which the organism inherits from its ancestors. 'Impulse' is slightly different from 'instinct' as the former is driven purely by physiological need while the other is guided by 'discernment of relations'. For example, the nutritive impulse urges an animal to search food, but the instinct causes it to 'select only one kind of food from out of several kinds accessible'.[48] Eliot's use of the two terms, however, is much looser than that of Lewes. In her novels, they are used rather interchangeably to refer to either inherited or acquired habits.

Having discussed 'reflex action' and its relationship with 'habit', 'instinct' and 'impulse', I would like to explore its relationship with memory. For Lewes, physiologically-speaking, memory is nothing but acquired reflex actions:

> What is Memory—on its physiological side—but an organized tendency to react on lines previously traversed? […] Indeed if, as we have seen, reflex actions are partly connate, and partly acquired, it is obvious that

[47] George Henry Lewes, *The History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1867), II, 354.
[48] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: First Series: The Foundation of a Creed*, 2 vols (London: Trübner, 1874-75), I, 227-8. All subsequent quotations of this book, abbreviated *FC*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

> the second class must involve that very reproduction of experience, which in the sphere of Intellect is called Memory.[49]

Acquired reflex actions involve the act of remembering because through the accumulative force of repetition, the body has remembered to discharge a sensation through a newly established channel without any difficulty.

Lewes goes on to explore the mechanism of moral habits. Like the acquisition of other habits which lead to the establishment of new reflexes, the development of moral habits involves the creation of new paths through which sensations can traverse easily: 'The habit of right action is the securest preparation for acting rightly under emergencies. […] All men are trained to act rightly on emergencies by what is a kind of moral instinct, organized in previous habit of acting rightly' (*FC*, p. 306). Since memory is what we call an acquired reflex action, the very process of the acquisition of moral habit involves the process of remembering. What we do in an emergency is the result of memory, the accumulated force of our past, habitual action. As the word 'instinct' suggests, it is independent of the conscious will.

Romola

Eliot's notion of duty is built upon Lewes's reflex theory. The recognition of moral duty is the result of habit. It is an involuntary force of the body, which the conscious self has no choice but to follow. When Romola rescues the people in the plague-stricken village:

[49] George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: Second Series: The Physical Basis of Mind* (London: Trübner, 1877), pp. 462-3.

> She had not even reflected, as she used to do in Florence, that she was glad to live because she could lighten sorrow—she had simply lived, with so energetic an impulse to share the life around her, to answer the call of need and do the work which cried aloud to be done, that the reasons for living, enduring, labouring, never took the form of argument.[50]

Stefanie Markovits has noticed the 'habitual nature of Romola's activity in the valley'.[51] Romola has changed from the time when she was in Florence. Her philanthropic action is now based on 'impulse' rather than on reflection. The phrases 'not even reflected', 'so energetic an impulse' and 'never took the form of argument' all point to the involuntary nature of Romola's recognition of duty. It is a habitual movement of the body, a blind impulse rather than a rational decision made by the conscious will.

This instinctive act of duty is the result of long-term training over two years, which leads to the occurrence of Romola's acting out in and of itself. We are told that Romola 'had no innate taste for tending the sick and clothing the ragged. […] Her early training had kept her aloof from such womanly labours' (*R*, p. 366). The habit of tending the sick is nurtured by her admiration for Savonarola's personality, her conscious effort to follow the road he has directed for her, and the numerous occasions on which she tended the sick in Florence during the two years of plague and famine. As a result, the habit of care, first new and laborious, gradually becomes automatic and self-generative. As a result, when Romola is filled with conflicting feelings when she

[50] George Eliot, *Romola*, ed. by Andrew Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 527. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated *R*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.
[51] Markovits, p. 94.

comes across Baldassarre, the escaped prisoner her husband tries to guard against, she still 'leaned towards him' and tries to help him in his illness: 'Her hands trembled, but their habit of soothing helpfulness would have served to guide them without the direction of her thought' (*R*, p. 353). In a similar vein, when Romola feels deeply upset upon discovering that Tessa is Tito's other wife and wants to be alone 'as soon as possible', she still, in spite of her wish, 'put her hand in a friendly way on Monna Lisa's shoulder' and made a farewell sign. The narrator tells us that this is the result of her 'habitual care for the least fortunate' (*R*, p. 441). Both cases are the result of the work of habit. The repeated practice of tending the sick in the past has developed in her a propensity of acting in the same way on similar occasions. Habit has become a guide by itself. Even though her conscious will is not disposed to perform benevolent acts, the habitual impulse to help has travelled alongside the well-worn path.

This is a good example of Lewes's idea that once a path of discharge has been established, 'along these paths the sensation must discharge itself' (*PCL*, pp. 58-9). The word 'must' highlights the fact that duty is a physical necessity. It is predetermined not by a metaphysical God, but by habit, under the effect of which we cannot but act in the same way in the present. This compels Romola instinctively to help the people in the plague-stricken village. Here Eliot clearly echoes Lewes in her suggestion that the way we act in an emergency is the result of the accumulative force of the past. As Sally Shuttleworth points out, for both Lewes and Eliot, moral instinct is based upon physiological channels established in the mind by previous actions. These channels, in turn, direct one's future behaviour independent of the conscious mind.[52]

[52] Shuttleworth, p. 108.

Like Wordsworth, in other words, Eliot highly values habit in the development of moral behaviour. The performance of virtuous acts upon conscious reflection is not enough. What the two writers value more is the unconscious following of habit, the blind but most reliable guide. However, habit works in both ways. Tito's abandonment of duty and his gradual downfall are also the work of habit. Eliot always situates the making of moral decision in an emergency, when her characters have no time to think and can only rely on impulse. When Tito disowns his foster father, 'he hardly knew how the words had come to his lips: there are moments when our passions speak and decide for us, and we seem to stand by and wonder' (*R*, p. 209). This impulsive and unselfconscious reaction, however, is by no means the random and unpredictable choice it might appear. Tito's reaction is gradually prepared by his moral decisions on similar occasions in the past. We are told that Tito has long been thinking of abandoning Baldassarre in spite of his conscience. But eventually, 'the little rills of selfishness had united and made a channel, so that they could never again meet with the same resistance' (*R*, p. 97). Tito's habit of thinking selfishly and acting for his own benefit has gradually created a pathway along which similar ways of thinking and behaving are bound to take place on similar occasions. Tito's disowning of Baldassarre, therefore, is simply this habitual past re-enacted in the present, independent of his conscious will.

The narrator further explores the impact of habitual behaviour on character formation: 'We prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil which gradually determines character' (*R*, p. 212). This physiological process is seen to be as inevitable as the laws of economics: '[Tito] had borrowed from the terrible usurer Falsehood, and the loan had mounted and mounted with the years, until he belonged to the usurer, body and soul' (*R*, p. 335). The two quotations, one literal and the other metaphorical, touch upon the key point of character building. As Markovits

comments, 'Romola's virtue and Tito's evil are both emphatically the product of habituation'.[53] Habit is such a powerful force that it not only prompts individuals to act in similar ways in an emergency, but can eventually change the person fundamentally. We become what we habitually are. The second quotation emphasizes rather the negative impact of habit. One does not need to be intrinsically evil to perform bad actions, as the word 'borrow' suggests. However, the repeated bad action has an accumulative force, like the loan that has 'mounted'. It eventually makes us evil. As the narrator tells us, Tito does not mean to be vicious but his repeated abandonment of duty ultimately makes him a villain.

Duty, as a reflex action of the body, is also closely tied up with the desire to remember. Romola's 'piety' towards her father's 'memory' makes her feel that 'the fulfilment of her father's life-long ambition about this library was a sacramental obligation' (*R*, p. 233). Her 'memories' of the duties she has performed to her fellow-citizens in Florence give her a feeling of 'gladness' (*R*, p. 366). The abandonment of memory, on the other hand, is parallel with the renouncement of duty. Tito's renouncement of duty towards his foster father goes hand-in-hand with the banishment of his memory of him. His parting with Baldassare's ring, which is the symbol of 'peculiar memories and predilections', implies his 'shrinking from what his fellow-men called obligations' (*R*, pp. 155-6). As Caroline Levine insightfully notes, 'Tito's rejection of duty and responsibility is […] intimately intertwined with the refusal to remember'.[54] Besides trying to free himself from his obligations, he also wants to dip Romola 'in the soft waters of forgetfulness' (*R*, p. 269), so that she will become less eager to fulfil the duty of realizing her father's wish and taking care of her godfather.

[53] Markovits, p. 93.
[54] Caroline Levine, 'The Prophetic Fallacy: Realism, Foreshadowing and Narrative Knowledge in *Romola*', in *From Author to Text: Re-reading George Eliot's* Romola, ed. by Caroline Levine and Mark Turner (Hampshire: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 135-63 (p. 154).

Tito's betrayal of the parties he serves is the result of his lack of collective memory for any of them. Collective memory, as I will show in Chapter Four, refers to a habitual way of thinking and acting, which bears the imprint of our ancestors and is a re-enactment of our collective past. It is also manifested in our habitual attachment and loyalty to the group into which we are born. Tito does not have any sense of duty towards the parties he serves and is ready to betray them for his own interest because his mind is void of the collective memory of any of these groups. Bernardo tells us that 'his mind is a little too nimble to be weighted with all the stuff we men carry about in our hearts' (*R*, p. 184). Such 'stuff' includes the love, care, faithfulness and sense of belonging that make up collective memory, which can only be developed through a long association with the place in which we are born and the group of which we have been part. Tito, who is 'of no particular country' (*R*, p. 184), never knows what such attachments really mean.

By identifying duty with the habitual, Eliot is giving priority to inner needs, and thus challenging the Christian notion of duty which comes from God and which an individual has no choice but to obey. The Christian duty in the novel is embodied in Savonarola's teaching, which advocates that we should 'renounce our own will to bow before a divine law' (*R*, p. 343). Man's lot is preordained by God. He has no choice but to be content with this allocated place and perform the duties related to that place. Romola's breaking of her marriage tie and her resolution to leave Florence, in Savonarola's eyes, are thus a religious offence. Her marriage pledge is made 'in the face of God' and her 'fellow-men' (*R*, p. 340). By breaking it, she is being disrespectful to God. By flying from Florence, the 'true place' in her life, she is 'escaping from the lot God has laid upon' her: helping with 'the great work by which God will purify Florence' (*R*, p. 338; p. 343).

Savonarola's teaching is reminiscent of Wordsworth's 'Stern Lawgiver' in 'Ode to Duty', though the two doctrines are very different. Wordsworth is a follower of eighteenth-century natural theology, whereas Savonarola preaches the ethic of medieval Christianity. However, they are similar in their emphasis on the fact that an individual should abandon his unruly instincts and submit to the divine law stipulated by God. Both give priority to the external, expecting an individual to strive to internalize the external through the work of habit. For Eliot, it is the other way round. The internal feeling is given priority. There is no authoritative law from God to which man has to submit unconditionally. Eliot's ideal is to externalize the internal. The duty stipulated by the external law should be an expression of the inner, habitual feelings between man and man: '[Romola] felt that the sanctity attached to all close relations, and, therefore, pre-eminently to the closest, was but the expression in outward law of that result towards which all human goodness and nobleness must spontaneously tend' (*R*, p. 442). 'Spontaneously' highlights the instinctive and habitual nature of duty. What makes a relationship sacred is not that it is stipulated by an outward law, but that it is an instinctive love and habitual desire to be true towards our close relations. This inner inclination is sacred in itself. It is our deep, ingrained memory, manifested in the spontaneity of the acts performed for the people we love. This instinctive feeling, as the narrator makes clear, 'that supremely hallowed motive which men call duty', should have the 'inward constraining existence' (*R*, p. 471).

Christian duties, which are imposed from the outside and are not an expression of inner needs, should be cast off. This is what prompts Romola to leave her husband twice. Instead of supporting Savonarola's teaching that she should renounce her own will in favour of a divine law, the narrator boldly announces, 'there had come one of

those moments in life when the soul must dare to act on its own warrant' (*R*, p. 442). This puts an individual's own will prior to the law stipulated by God. Divine law can be discarded when it is in conflict with inner feelings. When her love for Tito is gone, all Romola has to obey is 'the instinct to sever herself from the man she loved no longer' (*R*, p. 306). Her flying away from him is legitimized, because their external union has now become 'a set of false duties on her'. Under such circumstances, she is entitled to free herself from it. 'The law was sacred. […] But rebellion might be sacred too' (*R*, p. 528; p. 442).

By pointing out the sacredness of the rebellion against false duties, Eliot proves herself more radical than Wordsworth, who does not support rebellion against religious duties. For Wordsworth, an individual's ultimate goal is to move along the path God has preordained. He should 'fret not' with the social place he has been allocated and be content with his lot.[55]

Though she legitimizes rebellion against false duties, Eliot does not suggest that an individual should enjoy absolute freedom. Absolute freedom is not the road to happiness. In a letter to Charles Lee Lewes, commenting on his 'longing for more freedom', Eliot said 'happiness depends much more on "must do" than "may do"'.[56] Duties are not 'air-woven fetters', as Tito claims (*R*, p. 270). Tito's very downfall shows that duties are not mere fantasies of the mind. They are essential and effective forces at work that cannot be ignored without punishment. Neither are they fetters hindering the freedom of an individual. Duties consist of a web of social ties that provide anchorage for man's existence as a social being and ensure his mental health. As Durkheim's ground-breaking studies on suicide show us, social ties are essential for

[55] Wordsworth, 'Nuns Fret not at Their Convent's Narrow Room', in *The Major Works*, line 1.
[56] Eliot, *Letters*, V, 176-7 (original emphasis).

an individual's mental health. Durkheim owes a great debt to Comte. He shares Comte's view that an individual is closely dependent on the collective. He points out that the causes for suicide are more social than individual. One of the reasons that people kill themselves is because 'social bonds become weakened and ultimately break down in modern societies'.[57] In one of the lectures made between 1902 and 1903, later published as *L'Éducation Morale*, he further explores the reasons for suicide:

> Like everything which exists, man is a limited being: he is part of a whole. Physically, he is part of the universe; morally, he is part of society. […] Whenever the individual disassociates himself from collective goals in order to seek only his own interests, […] suicide increases. Man is the more vulnerable to self-destruction the more he is detached from any collectivity, that is to say, the more he lives as an egoist.[58]

Romola's suicidal intention is a good example of the danger of disassociating oneself from 'collective goals' in pursuit of one's own interest. After freeing herself from all her ties, she is preoccupied with the idea of drifting down the river and seeking death. And 'she had felt herself without bonds, without motive; sinking in mere egoistic complaining that life could bring her no content' (*R*, p. 527). Human beings are essentially social beings. Duty takes an individual out of his narrow self-interest and binds him to the collective. It makes life meaningful and worthwhile. In this respect Eliot supports Savonarola's teaching that absolute freedom is a state of 'lawlessness' (*R*, p. 343), which can bring nothing but absolute misery.

[57] Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim: His Life and Work* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), pp. 67-8; p. 205.
[58] Emile Durkheim, *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, ed. by Anthony Giddens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 111-3.

This disapproval of absolute freedom demonstrates Eliot's similarity with Wordsworth. Romola's aimless drifting down the river after having freed herself from all claims is a metaphor of the 'unchartered freedom' Wordsworth describes in 'Ode to Duty', which causes a great deal of unease and frustration. While Wordsworth laments, 'Me this unchartered freedom tires' (OTD, l. 37), Romola's state after being freed from old ties is even worse. If Wordsworth points out that absolute freedom will cause frustration, Eliot goes a step further by suggesting that it will increase suicidal instincts. The harm it does to man's mental health is even more severe than Wordsworth has shown.

If an individual should neither stick to false duties, nor seek absolute freedom, it is reasonable to wonder what alternative he should take. I would suggest that for Eliot, when old duties become questionable, individuals should bind themselves to new groups and new duties. The novel shows how Romola, after suffering from the frustration of fulfilling false duties and of absolute freedom, is redeemed by devoting herself to the rescue of the people in the plague-stricken village. Here the habit cultivated in Florence of taking care of the sick becomes self-regenerative. The narrator depicts the dramatic change Romola undergoes from being full of doubt to having all her doubt cleared away. She feels 'no burthen of choice on her' and life becomes meaningful again: 'This suffering that I can help is certain' (*R*, p. 523; p. 527). Before, she was overwhelmed by frustration, and life had come to a standstill. Now her strength comes back again, 'with so energetic an impulse' she is ready to 'share the life around her'. She has actually become a fountain of strength: 'While the strength is in my arm I will stretch it out to the fainting; while the light visits my eyes they shall seek the forsaken' (*R*, p. 527). The realization that where there is need, there is duty also paves the way for future redemption. Taking care of Tessa and her children is but the

continuation of the redemptive power of the pure, simple human relations that she enjoys in the plague-stricken village. Towards the end of the composition of *Silas Marner*, Eliot told John Blackwood that the story was intended to show 'the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations'.[59] This is also the case, I suggest, with *Romola*. In the end, with the help of this 'pure, natural human relation', the heroine is able to find not only a more authentic duty, but also a better way of coping with her relationship with her own community. In Chapter One, I contended that thick relations can enhance our thin relations. This chapter shows that when thick relations become problematic, thin relations are a worthwhile alternative.

Here memory's remedial power is different from the Wordsworthian spots of time, the revival of a particular event in the past which provides nourishing power for the present. While Wordsworth emphasizes the redemptive power of recollective memory, what Eliot shows is the nourishing power of habit-memory: how the mere repetition of a customary act enables an individual to re-evaluate himself and his relation with the past.

Though an individual should cling to new groups and rebel against old duties when the latter becomes problematic, old duties, nevertheless, still have a valid claim. In 'The *Antigone* and Its Moral', an essay often regarded by critics as an anticipation of *Romola*, Eliot points out the difficulty of rebellion:

> Reformers, martyrs, revolutionists, are never fighting against evil only; they are also placing themselves in opposition to a good—to a valid principle which cannot be infringed without harm. […] Wherever the

[59] Eliot, *Letters*, III, 382.

> strength of a man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, *there* is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon; such a man must not only dare to be right, he must also dare to be wrong—to shake faith, to wound friendship, perhaps, to hem in his own powers. […] He can never earn the name of a blameless martyr any more than the society […] can be branded as a hypocritical tyrant.[60]

Hegel's theory on tragedy is illuminating here. He contends that 'the original essence of tragedy consists then in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides if taken by itself, has *justifications*'.[61] And just as Eliot recognizes that through rebellion, reformers and martyrs are setting themselves against a 'valid principle', Romola in the novel comes to a similar recognition. This is not only because 'the rules which society has sanctioned' are the timeless truths and practices before which we as individuals should bow down with reverence, but also because they have a firm physiological basis. Old habits thus remain part of us. The narrator emphasizes many times that the physiological residue of the old ties still palpitates within Romola, resuming its well-worn paths in spite of her desire to rebel against it. After the rescue in the plague-stricken village is over, Romola's emotions 'rushed back into the old deep channels of use and affection'; 'Florence, and all her life there, had come back to her like hunger' (*R*, p. 528). 'Hunger' here describes a physical want, showing that life in Florence has become deeply rooted within her; it is as indispensable as food. Her deep concern for the well-being of Tito and the Florentine people proves the validity of Savonarola's teaching that she cannot turn her back on the duties that have been assigned to her:

[60] George Eliot, 'The Antigone and Its Moral', in *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 246 (original emphasis).
[61] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Hegel Reader*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 451 (original emphasis).

'Could anything utterly cease for her that had once mingled itself with the current of her heart's blood?' (*R*, p. 528). The conflict between rebellion and obedience remains problematic: 'the question where the duty of obedience ends, and the duty of resistance begins, could in no case be an easy one' (*R*, p. 431).

Such a difficulty leads to the controversial ending of the novel. Commenting on Romola's final return to Florence, Julian Corner holds that it is similar to Maggie Tulliver's return to St. Ogg's, which is 'impelled' by 'a sense of duty operating as the enforcer of continuity'.[62] I do not, however, see Romola and Maggie's homecomings as of the same nature. I agree that Maggie's return is motivated by duty to her past and her community, but Romola's case is far more complicated. Apparently, she has come back to her community, to her old ties and to her duty as a Florentine citizen. Yet she does not eventually submit unquestioningly to Savonarola's teaching, though she recognizes its validity. As George Levine has noticed, the book will 'not settle for the restraints that Savonarola imposes and Romola, for a while, accepts'. What makes her action revolutionary is her creation of new duties: taking care of Tessa and her children and living with them. By doing this, she 'creates […] new obligations that are […] more authentic and valuable than the merely legal ones she had been forced to flee'. [63] And this is what differentiates her from Maggie. Maggie goes back to St. Ogg's only to remain loyal to old duties and to die there. Romola's home-coming is the start of a new life. In returning to Florence, she manages both to keep old duties at work and to devote herself to new duties. She remains faithful to her duty as a Florentine citizen, to the past that has nurtured her, but at the same time, she does not bind herself uncritically to it. She also devotes herself to her duty to humanity. She takes care of Tessa and her

[62] Julian Corner, '"Telling the Whole": Trauma, Drifting and Reconciliation in *Romola*', in *From Author to Text: Re-reading George Eliot's* Romola, ed. by Caroline Levine and Mark Turner (Hampshire: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 67-88 (p. 70).
[63] George Levine, 'Introduction: George Eliot and the Art of Realism', in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1-19 (p. 15).

children not because Tessa was her late husband's mistress and thus closely related to her, but simply because of their humanity. They are in a miserable condition and need help. As Romola tells Monna Brigida, 'they are quite helpless' (*R*, p. 531). This is a continuation of what she does in the plague-stricken village: where there is need, there is duty.

Silas Marner

The composition of *Silas Marner* interrupted Eliot's thinking about the writing of *Romola*. Owing to the overlap in the composition of the two novels, it is no coincidence that they are both engaged with the issue of duty. As I have mentioned earlier in this section, *Silas Marner* details the same problem of betrayal and being left in a void where devotion to old duties becomes impossible, and the same outcome of redemption through devotion to one's duty to humanity.

Silas Marner resembles Romola in many ways. Like Romola, Silas's recognition of duty towards Eppie is the work of instinct, independent of conscious will. When asked to leave the child he has just found in his house, his decision to keep the child comes 'abruptly': 'The proposition to take the child from him had come to Silas quite unexpectedly, and his speech, uttered under a strong sudden impulse, was almost like a revelation to himself' (*SM*, p. 113). 'Abruptly', 'quite unexpectedly' and 'a strong sudden impulse' underline the involuntary nature of his reaction. Like Romola's decision to rescue the villagers in the valley, it is performed without reasoning and reflection. This philanthropic instinct, however, is not a random decision, but the accumulative force of the past. We are told that in Lantern Yard, Silas was in the habit of performing benevolent acts. He used to spend 'a large proportion' of his weekly earnings on 'objects of piety and charity'. His life before coming to Raveloe had been

filled with ‘close fellowship’ (*SM*, p. 16; p. 7). It is these repeated acts of benevolence which gradually prepare him for similar philanthropic acts in future. The old habit has created a well-worn path along which similar actions are bound to be taken in similar situations. The ‘impulse’ of keeping Eppie is nothing but the work of habit resuming its long-established path.

Eppie’s decision to stay with her foster-father when her real father comes to claim her is also an instinctive rather than a rational choice: ‘Not that these thoughts, […] determined her resolution—that was determined by the feelings which vibrated to every word Silas had uttered’ (*SM*, pp. 165-6). When Nancy tries to persuade her that the duty she owes to her lawful father is stronger than her duty to Silas, she answers ‘impetuously’, with ‘tears gathered’, that Silas is her only father (*SM*, p. 167).

Eppie’s instinctive decision, like Silas’s earlier decision to keep her, is an effect of the long, accumulative force of the past. For Eppie, Silas is a habitual part of her life while Godfrey is not. Silas is her ‘old long-loved’ father, whereas Godfrey is the ‘new unfamiliar father’ who is ‘newly revealed’ and who comes to her ‘suddenly’ (*SM*, pp. 165-6). The contrasts made here all point to the fact that Godfrey is not a part of the habitual past to which she belongs. She cannot go back to him because she was not ‘brought up to be a lady’, and therefore is not ‘used to’ the life he offers her. She cannot give up the people she has been ‘used to’ (*SM*, p. 168; p. 163). By saying so, Eppie is also telling Godfrey that she is not a part of his habitual life. The repetition of the phrase ‘used to’ reveals that habit is the sole force behind her decision. To stick to Marner is something she is bound to do because it has always been her way and she therefore cannot do otherwise. The long, accumulative force of the past has nurtured in her a strong attachment to him and the life to which she is accustomed. She cannot, as a result,

choose but to follow the old, well-worn way. Nothing can drive her from her long-traversed course. Argument and reasoning, whether Godfrey's offer of a promising future or Nancy's belief that it is the right thing to do to be restored to her birth right, are powerless in the face of this blind and predetermined force.

If *Romola* reflects Eliot's challenge to the Christian concept of duty, *Silas Marner* involves more of a negotiation between hereditary and customary duty. Eliot's point of view can be seen to differ from that of Mill, who holds that individuals should be brave enough to cast off the yoke of custom. Mill warns people against 'the despotism of custom'. It is a 'standing hindrance to human advancement' and the spirit of progress. When the mind is bowed to its yoke, 'human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own'.[64] While Mill argues for the necessity of deviating from custom in order to achieve personal fulfilment, Eliot pays more respect to customary duty when it is the expression of habitual feelings.

Eppie, unlike Mill, is willing to be restrained by the yoke of custom. For her, the sole determining element of duty is the inner, the habitual, not the legal. By assuming that Eppie's duty to Silas is more authentic than that to her natural father, Eliot again gives priority to the internal, rather than the external, which is stipulated by law but which is not an expression of an individual's inner feelings.

By suggesting that an individual should cast away false duties if they are not habitual, Eliot does not mean that people should embrace absolute freedom. As

[64] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 61-70.

Durkheim has shown, an individual is an inseparable part of the society in which he lives. Disassociation from it will make him more liable to self-destruction. If cutting herself from this whole can only breed suicidal instincts in Romola's case, it drives Silas into a solitary and numb life of fifteen years, which is equally destructive.

Absolute freedom is not for Eliot the only alternative to the abandonment of false duties. The best thing to do is to embrace new groups and new duties. Silas is rescued from his insect-like life by devoting himself to a new duty: the fostering of an orphan who is not a blood relation and who has no shared past with him. When Eppie expresses her gratitude towards Silas, he acknowledges that 'the blessing was mine' (*SM*, p. 160). It seems odd to say that in bringing up an orphan, the foster-father benefits more than the child, but this actually points towards the essence of the novel: duty to humanity can offer tremendous redemptive power when duty to the past, to the near and dear, becomes problematic. It reminds us of a similar situation in *Romola*: in taking care of Tessa and her children, what the narrator emphasizes is Romola's desperate need for them rather than their need for her.

Eliot's position in *Silas Marner* is that one should embrace new groups and new duties not because one can thus take refuge in the present and banish the past, but because a healthier relationship with the past can then be established. We are told that because of the traumatic experience in Lantern Yard, Silas's habitual practice of benevolence is blocked. The 'old narrow pathway was closed' and 'affection seemed to have died under the bruise' (*SM*, p. 15). His new devotion to the child is redemptive because it can reopen the blocked pathway and activate the old habit that has died out under the 'bruise'. Earlier in the novel, through tending to the cobbler's wife, Silas experiences 'a rush of pity at the mingled sight and remembrance' (*SM*, p. 16). 'A rush

of pity' describes the momentary reopening of the old channels of kindness and affection through an act of benevolence. Unfortunately, the momentary breakthrough does not last long because of the villagers' misunderstanding about the source of his healing powers. It is the bringing-up of Eppie which eventually enables Silas to resume his habitual benevolence to others and hence recover his habitual self. We are told that through tending Eppie, 'he began to look for the once familiar herbs' (*SM*, p. 124). More importantly, the old memories that have died out under the bruise are revived: 'As the child's mind was growing into knowledge, his mind was growing into memory'. Eventually, Silas is able to evaluate the traumatic event in a new light and 'recovered a consciousness of unity between his past and present' (*SM*, p. 124; p. 138).

At the end of the novel, Silas returns to his old community, only to find it has disappeared. This seems to suggest that the community did not deserve to survive but more importantly, perhaps, that one should not be bonded to the past uncritically, for it can be painful, and even traumatic. Silas has drawn positive elements from his past and integrated them into his new duty. This is probably the best way of treating a past that has betrayed him, but it is nevertheless an inseparable part of him.

Romola and *Silas Marner* are very different novels. One is set in Renaissance Italy and the other in nineteenth-century rural England. However, they both explore the nature of duty and how it is closely woven with habitual feelings. This force, which is not innate but acquired through repeated practice, enables Romola and Silas to rescue not only those in need of help, but also themselves. It further directs them to their duty towards their fellow creatures, a more authentic duty than any religious or legal ones imposed from the outside.

Coda

Having devoted a section each to Wordsworth and Eliot's understanding of duty, I would like to bring them together in this final section by discussing the extent to which they are similar as well as different from each other.

Both writers condemn 'unchartered freedom'. Far from being the road to happiness, absolute freedom can only leave man adrift with no purpose and therefore miserable. In 'Ode to Duty', 'unchartered freedom' is tiring. Paradoxically, freedom from all restraint provides no relief but is instead an unbearable heavy 'weight' (OTD, l. 37; l. 38). In the cases of Romola and Silas, freedom from duty turns out to be very destructive. Romola becomes suicidal after she is cut off from all her ties while Silas's self-alienation tragically reduces him to mere animal existence.

For both Wordsworth and Eliot, duty gives one a sense of purpose and peace of mind. Romola finds duty redemptive. Her discovery of duty is described as a 'resting-place of her mind' and 'a firm footing' (*R*, p. 366), which echoes the 'repose' in 'Ode to Duty'. Moreover, for both writers, duty offers relief from doubt and hesitation. The poet in the Ode is no longer prey to 'chance desires' (OTD, l. 40; l. 38). Likewise, Romola's doubt disperses when she tends the sick among her fellow-citizens. Her egoistic complaint about the course her life should take stops when she is able to deliver the plague-stricken villagers out of their difficulty. In *Silas Marner,* Silas is rescued from his insect-like life by bringing up Eppie, which makes him once more an active part of his community.

Though both Wordsworth and Eliot see the state of being duty-bound as far better than 'unchartered freedom', they understand duty in different ways. Eliot's conception of duty is secular. In contrast, Wordsworth's duty has a marked religious leaning. In the eighteenth century, science and religion were sometimes perceived as going hand in hand. Wordsworth, operating under the sway of the natural theology of the eighteenth century, sees duty as coming from God. It is the law which governs both the natural and the human world. In the nineteenth century, with the further development of natural science, especially the theory of evolution, the survival of the fittest through a process of natural selection, science and religion had entered into opposition. Eliot's duty is not to God, but to humanity. Though in her youth she was a devout evangelical, she soon abandoned Christian dogma, breaking with the religion which had been the anchorage of her earlier life. Her secular notion of duty developed alongside her alienation from Christianity. Romola and Silas Marner, who are betrayed by their past, but eventually move on and devote themselves to duties to humanity, can be seen as a reflection of this intellectual trajectory.

Eliot's notion of duty is thus more radical than that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth sees duty as a law coming from God, before which an individual has no choice but to bow down with reverence. One should bring his unruly instincts under control and submit to the course God has preordained. In other words, one should internalize the external. The priority given to the external leaves virtually no room for rebellion against religious duties and highlights the poet's emphasis on submission and docility. For Eliot, it is the other way round. Eliot identifies duty with an individual's habitual needs. An individual feels his duty as an inner, irresistible force. It is this force which motivates people to act philanthropically. The duty stipulated by law and religion should be an expression of this inner need. Thus Eliot suggests that the internal should be

externalized. This priority given to the inner is a drastic revision of the Christian concept of duty. By allowing her protagonists to throw away false duties and seek new ones, she gives them more freedom. If, for Wordsworth, freedom is the state of 'voluntary obedience' to duty (RTM, p. 24), a state of successful internalization of the moral law God preordains, for Eliot, freedom means something different. It means casting away religious and legal duties imposed on an individual from the outside that do not answer his inner needs.

What produces such a difference is partly that the two writers are writing at different historical moments. Wordsworth, on the whole, is concerned with self-discipline. Both the Ode and 'Reply to "Mathetes"' reflect his thinking about how to bring about self-control and gradually commit to an external authority. At a time when there was a breakdown of social order as a result of the Napoleonic Wars, advocating self-discipline was by no means personal. It helped maintain social order. Both the poem and the letter could be seen as anticipating Wordsworth's later work, *The Excursion*, in the last book of which the poet argues that moral excellence in individuals will be conducive to the welfare of the nation. By contrast, Eliot is engaged with totally different issues: the loss of faith, the reconnection with the Christian tradition and how to move on without total abandonment of the past. Thus rebellion is perhaps more important for Eliot, whereas submission is more important for Wordsworth, not only on a personal level but on a nationwide scale.

Though the two writers see duty differently as a result of their different beliefs and the different social contexts in which they write, both regard it as empirically based. In contrast with the Kantian *a priori* notion of duty, they see duty as something that is obtained through experience. For Wordsworth, though duty is a law coming from God,

we are not born with the capacity to act unswervingly according to this law. We only learn to abide by it through experience, particularly through the mistakes we make. Eliot's duty is also closely related to experience. As a form of habitual feeling, duty is not inborn but the result of long-term training. Romola's discovery of duty in the plague-stricken village is not a chance decision, and nor is Silas's decision to bring up Eppie. Both are gradually prepared by acting in similar ways on similar occasions in the past.

Both writers value this powerful and accumulative force. In it, we see the work of memory. Memory not only prepares us for similar acts upon similar occasions, but ultimately moulds us into what we are. Habit creates in Wordsworth a 'second will more wise' (OTD, l. 48). It creates in Eliot's novels characters like Romola and Silas, whose repeated acts of benevolence rescue not only others, but also enable them to save themselves from self-destruction. It also creates villains like Tito, who is not intentionally vicious in the beginning, but whose repeated abandonment of duty makes him degenerate into an evil person.

Moreover, both Wordsworth and Eliot recognize that habit cultivation is voluntary and conscious at first but automatic and spontaneous later on. This process is not only reflected in 'Ode to Duty', but in the change Romola goes through from Florence to the plague-stricken village. Interestingly, both writers value highly the automatic performance of duty. The motto of 'Ode to Duty' depicts a morally-upright man, who, under the sway of habit, 'cannot help acting rightly'.[65] Romola and Silas's instinctive recognition of duty in an emergency is also the work of this irresistible physical force.

[65]The epigraph added to the 1837 edition of the Ode, adapted from Seneca's *Moral Epistles* The translation is quoted from the editor's note in Wordsworth, *Poems in Two Volumes, and Other Poems: 1800-1807*, p. 407.

What makes Eliot different from Wordsworth is her emphasis on the recognition of duty in an emergency. This is perhaps because of the influence of Lewes, who emphasizes that the right action taken in an emergency is the result of habitualisation. Eliot often demonstrates the making of moral decisions in this way. It is on these occasions that we best see the work of habit, because we have no time to reflect and can only act upon instinct. This instinctive reaction is our habitual way of behaving in the past, which is re-enacted in the present.

Also, perhaps because of Eliot's engagement with Victorian science through Lewes and Spencer, she is more scientific than Wordsworth. She often probes the physiological process of the work of habit in great depth. Scientific terms such as 'channel', 'pathway' and 'reflex', which are no part of Wordsworth's vocabulary, are constantly seen in her novels.

Lastly, while Wordsworth is positive about habit and sees it as the surest means of approaching duty, Eliot can sometimes be more critical of it. She sees its powerful potential to convert her protagonists to humanitarian acts, but is also alert to its negative impact. The very force of habit which leads Romola to the discovery of her duty to humanity also leads Tito to his downfall. For her, habit itself is neither good nor bad. It is a double-edged sword which can work both ways. Where it heads depends upon where we direct it.

Chapter Three

Guilt and Recovery in Book X of *The Prelude*, *Adam Bede* and 'Janet's Repentance'

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I examined habit-memory and its relationship with universal humanity and duty. In this chapter, I will discuss the relationship between habit-memory and recollective memory. I will concentrate on one particular form of recollection—guilt over wrongdoings in the past—and explore its relationship with the development of moral habits.

Both Wordsworth and Eliot are interested in guilt. Many of Wordsworth's poems, including 'Salisbury Plain', *The Borderers*, 'Peter Bell' and some of the spots of time in *The Prelude*, explore not the external punishment of a wrong-doing, but rather the inner feeling of remorse and its effect upon the psyche. In a similar way, many of Eliot's characters, such as Janet, Mr. Tryan, Arthur, Hetty, Bulstrode and Gwendolen, are burdened with a heavy load of guilt. Like Wordsworth, Eliot is more interested in representing their internal contrite feelings, rather than the external punishment they endure.

That Eliot developed her notion of guilt partly in response to Wordsworth is evident from some of the comments she added while editing Lewes's posthumous work,

The Study of Psychology, which she saw through the press after his death.[1] These few touches highlight how her views on the origin of remorse differ from those of Lewes. For Lewes, conscience is not innate, but a social product. Remorse is thus internalized social disapprobation for doing wrong. Man's dread of punishment or social disapprobation 'soon grows into terror of their *own* disapprobation' (original emphasis). There is also another type of remorse which is more positive. It results from a sympathetic imagination of what others may suffer because of one's own action. Consequently, remorse can be the pain experienced 'in sympathetic & in egoistic vision of consequences'.[2]

Compared with Lewes, Eliot's emphasis is not on external punishment. In a warm affirmation of humanity, she observes that moral sense can arise 'without the idea of an uplifted rod'.[3] She deletes Lewes's original text on remorse, which states that man 'forever sees the Eumenides in pursuit', adding the comment: 'Remorse has no relation to an external source of punishment for the wrong committed: it is the agonised sense, the contrite contemplation, of the wound inflicted on another'.[4] She goes on to point out that "Wordsworth has depicted a remorse of this kind", quoting from Book III of *The Excursion*:

> Feebly must they have felt
> Who, in old time, attired with snakes and whips
> The vengeful Furies. *Beautiful* regards
> Were turned on me —the face of her I loved;
> The wife and mother, pitifully fixing

[1] Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 527.
[2] For a comparison between Lewes's unpublished version and Eliot's revision of it, see the appendix of K. K. Collins, 'G. H. Lewes Revised: George Eliot and the Moral Sense', *Victorian Studies*, 21 (1978), 463-92 (p. 485).
[3] Collins, 485.
[4] Collins, 489.

Tender reproaches, insupportable![5]

What Wordsworth emphasizes here is the change from external to internal punishment after one has made a transgression. A series of contrasts—ugly versus beautiful, hate versus pity—bring out the paradoxical insight that revenge through violent punishment is less terrible than tender reproach, especially when that reproach is mixed with pity from the wrongdoer's loved ones. The unbearable nature of this tenderness is emphasized by the word 'insupportable', through its position at the end of the line and its isolation from the other words by a comma. It can be argued that Eliot consciously follows Wordsworth in exploring the internal effect of guilt rather than the external punishment, not only in this passage but also in her fiction.

My focus in this chapter is on a special type of guilt which results from what Frances Ferguson terms 'circumstantial memory', a remorse that occurs when the unforeseen outcome of an action is interpreted in such a way that it seems, in retrospect, as though it were subliminally intended. Even though it is artificial and imaginary, the damage such remorse inflicts on the psyche is no less severe; in extreme cases, it can traumatize. This chapter will explore the similarities and differences between Wordsworth and Eliot with regard to this type of memory, which Ferguson claims that Wordsworth initiates and Eliot develops.[6] It will also look at the different recovery patterns proposed by the two writers as far as the psychic wound produced by circumstantial memory is concerned.

[5] The quotation Eliot cited is from *The Excursion* (III, ll. 850-5).
[6] Frances Ferguson, 'Romantic Memory', in *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment: Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading*, ed. by Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 71-93 (p. 90). All subsequent quotations of this article are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

Circumstantial Memory

According to Ferguson, John Locke marks a turning point in the conception of memory when he states that one no longer needs to repeat trademark actions to assert one's identity since memory suffices to ensure 'a sense of individual continuity over time' (Ferguson, p. 71). Memory as such is no longer simply a passive reproduction of the past, but becomes an active examination of what past actions could have developed into. It also involves a constant comparison between the present and the past. Such examination and comparison naturally lead to judgment about earlier actions—whether they are right or wrong—which characterizes what Ferguson terms 'Romantic Memory': '[T]he special pressure that romanticism brings to bear on memory is the pressure of an expanded moral obligation, an obligation to reexamine one's own past actions to see if their value has been altered by subsequent events'. Romantic memory is concerned not so much with the 'truthfulness or even accuracy' (Ferguson, p. 87) of memory as it is about the moral judgment of one's earlier actions in the light of later developments.

Anne Whitehead observes that memory since Locke has shifted 'from the stasis favoured by the classical mnemonic system to a more temporal, narrative conception'.[7] As far as Romantic memory is concerned, the revaluation of earlier actions means that some new narrative elements trigger a re-configuration of the original events. The result is a new story in which the original elements take on a new meaning. In other words, the meaning of an earlier action may not have been intended but may be the result of the structuring effect of the narrative. As 'a continual review of actions through the lenses of a variety of different sets of consequences', Romantic memory has the potential to wound, because it may cause individuals to hold themselves responsible for actions that result in negative, though unintended and unforeseen, consequences (Ferguson, p. 87).

[7] Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 51.

As Helen Regueiro Elam comments, 'responsibility inheres in the consequences', and 'we are responsible despite our blindness, as Oedipus is'.[8] Ferguson goes on to point out that this does not mean one should 'never feel retrospective grief over an action' (Ferguson, p. 85). Her point is that, '[w]ere this expansive memory to expand forever, it would produce a kind of anticipatory guilt of massive—indeed, paralyzing—proportions' (Ferguson, pp. 89-90). In other words, it has the potential to traumatize.

If Romantic memory has the potential to wound, it also has the ability to cure. Ferguson remarks that one's retrospective moral review is not an 'entirely undesirable state' (Ferguson, p. 88). Otherwise it would be difficult to explain the 'Waiting for the Horses' episode in *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth, through reflection, feels that his anxious waiting for the horses has somehow led to his father's death. After listing a series of detailed circumstances, Wordsworth tells us:

> All these were kindred spectacles and sounds
> To which I oft repaired, and thence would drink,
> As at a fountain… [9]

As Ferguson notes, this traumatic memory seems to be also a pleasurable one, which is puzzling. The answer lies in another characteristic of Romantic memory. Romanticism brings to memory not only the pressure of an obligation to re-examine past actions in the light of consequences, but also 'the increasing pressure' to 'provide convincing evidence *that one hasn't acted*, that one hasn't yet seen things that would make one regret one's past for the consequences that have attended it' (Ferguson, p. 89, original

[8] Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson, 'Introduction' in *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment, Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading*, pp. 1-25 (p. 10).
[9] These are lines 324-6 from Book XII of the 1850 edition of *The Prelude*, quoted in Ferguson, 'Romantic Memory', p. 88.

emphasis). The circumstances Wordsworth lists serve exactly this purpose in that they 'never sort themselves into a causal chain'. The result is the comforting knowledge that '*there is no news*, that nothing has happened' (Ferguson, p. 88; p. 89, original emphasis). There is no evidence therefore to implicate Wordsworth in his father's death.

It must be pointed out that there seems to be some ambiguity in Ferguson's conceptualization of Romantic memory, which she also calls circumstantial memory. According to Anne Whitehead, the two terms designate different types of memory. The former is a moral review of one's earlier actions and may be poisonous. The latter is an 'alternative form of remembering'. It cures by clustering around the description of an event a series of elements that disrupts a coherent narrative so that there is insufficient evidence to substantiate an accusation of guilt. However, the opposition between Romantic memory and circumstantial memory is not so clear-cut. It is true that Ferguson herself writes that circumstantial memory is 'an alternative history', which seems to justify Whitehead's interpretation (Ferguson, p. 89). However, Ferguson also writes:

> Thus, if Wordsworth's account of circumstantial memory enables him to accuse himself of having, perhaps, been at fault in the occurrence of events that he never meant to originate, it also seeks to cure such potentially illimitable self-accusation by producing a transcript of images that never cohere into a causal pattern. (Ferguson, p. 89)

The conditional clause makes it clear that circumstantial memory can lead to self-accusation. The word 'also' in the main clause further shows it can both wound and

cure. Ferguson further clarifies the self-incriminating tendency of circumstantial memory:

> The tricky thing about circumstantial guilt is that it activates memory in an unusual way, because it combines a consciousness that one did something with a revaluation in the light of the negative consequences that one's action seemed to have produced.[10]

The term Ferguson uses may be distinct here—'circumstantial guilt'—but it is still about the kind of memory that re-evaluates earlier actions. It is corrosive as well as curative. Romantic memory and circumstantial memory may well be two sides of the same coin.

Despite the ambiguity in Ferguson's conceptualization, circumstantial memory—in the sense of being both corrosive and curative, as I understand it—can help us to understand Wordsworth's memory of his involvement in the French Revolution and his guilt over his ardent support for it in Book X of *The Prelude*. In what follows, I will show how the poet overloads himself with a massive amount of guilt after the Revolution goes wrong, and how this guilt becomes less keen through the enlistment of circumstantial evidence which seeks to disrupt the self-incriminating narrative. Nevertheless, guilt is not undone. Instead, there is a tug-of-war in the poet's psyche.

[10] Frances Ferguson (ff1@jhu.edu). "Re: A Question from a Faithful Reader." E-mail to Yu Xiao (Yu.Xiao@newcastle.ac.uk). 2 November 2007.

Self-Incrimination

Critics have discussed Wordsworth's guilt about his initially ardent support of the French Revolution. Commenting on the poet's dream of the 'implements of death', and 'innocent victims sinking under fear' in Book X of *The Prelude*,[11] David Bromwich remarks that 'the self-accusation goes deeper than chagrin or mere regret. Only one who felt himself somehow implicated in the regime of terror would resort to this particular tone of confession'.[12] Duncan Wu also points out that 'in the wake of Robespierre's execution', the poet begins to 'question his fervent support for the execution of Louis XVI'. He may even have felt that 'he was in some way implicated in it'.[13] However, Bromwich and Wu do not proceed to explore the psychological process at work in Wordsworth's sense of guilt. Wordsworth's analysis of criminal psychology during the French Revolution, read with an understanding of Ferguson's conception of 'circumstantial memory', can help to explain this psychological process:

> The study of human nature suggests this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves. During my long residence in France, while the revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness, I had frequent opportunities of being an eye-witness of this process.[14]

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[11] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 1850, X, lines 403, 404. Though here I am quoting from Bromwich who discusses the 1850 edition of *The Prelude*, my own focus in this section is mainly the 1805 edition. All subsequent quotations of this poem are from this edition with book and line numbers given in parentheses unless otherwise noted.

[12] David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 86.

[13] Duncan Wu, 'Wordsworth's Poetry to 1798', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 22-37 (p. 31).

[14] Quoted from W. J. B. Owen and Jane Smyser, 'Introduction to "Preface to *The Borderers*"', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I, 69. This passage was written as Wordsworth traced the origin of *The Borderers*. This

If Wordsworth feels guilty because of his support for the French Revolution, then this passage, as strange as it seems, may also explain something about the poet himself. He is not merely an innocent witness to the process that turns a virtuous person into a demon; he himself has been through that process. When he looks back on his fervent support for the Revolution in the aftermath of the Reign of Terror, it takes on a sinister meaning. It has hardened his heart and perverted his understanding. Ferguson's circumstantial memory renders an innocent person guilty by holding him responsible for the 'unmeant' and 'unforeseen' consequences.[15] In Wordsworth's case, such memory is even more poisonous than neutral actions such as those explored in the 'Waiting for the Horses' episode. The consequences are not only 'unmeant' and 'unforeseen', they are initially meant to be the opposite, the pursuit of good. If Ferguson believes that circumstantial memory renders 'the experience of living in a world in which undesirable things happen [to] look like its own variant on the notion of original sin' (Ferguson, p. 87), Wordsworth gives a gloomier picture of human life, which suggests that even in the pursuit of good we cannot entirely free ourselves from original sin.

The likelihood of virtuous people committing crimes increases with the institutionalisation of a more advanced political system. During the French Revolution, for example, politics became a justification for violence. As Owen and Smyser suggest in the introduction to 'Preface to *The Borderers*', there is 'ample evidence' in French history for Wordsworth's statement that 'sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities', for the 'transformation of liberal thinkers into political tyrants'.[16]

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chapter is not an extended investigation of the play, as the nature of Mortimer's guilt is different from that of Wordsworth. Mortimer is responsible for Herbert's death because there is a causal link between his action and Herbert's death. Wordsworth is not actually responsible for the bloodshed in the French Revolution. He imposes the self-recrimination upon himself through circumstantial memory.

[15] Regueiro Elam and Ferguson, p. 10.

[16] Owen and Smyser, 'Introduction to "Preface to *The Borderers*"', in *Prose Works*, I, 71.

As Burke points out, 'by hating vices too much, they come to love men too little'[17]. This intolerance of vices can have serious political implications: 'Men of excessive virtue may take excessive measures to bring ordinary men into the path of virtue'.[18] Robespierre was, writes Slavoj Žižek, 'personally honest and sincere'. Everyone is ready to recognize 'his moral integrity and full devotion to the revolutionary cause'. The problem is his 'very purity', which is 'the cause of all trouble'.[19] Both his tyranny and his downfall originate from his excessive aspiration for virtue. Although the nature of Wordsworth's crime is vastly different from that of Robespierre, since Wordsworth does not actually implement the killing, their experiences seem to suggest a universal truth about human nature: in the pursuit of good, man cannot totally free himself from evil. As Wordsworth writes of the mistakes he made during this period of time, even though it was an erring 'on the better side', it was still an erring (X, l. 740).

Wordsworth's attitude towards the French Revolution was different before and after it descended into violence. Before the onset of the violence he believed that it was a noble cause, aiming to 'build liberty / On firm foundations' (IX, l. 368). His memory of this time in *The Prelude* is pleasant and optimistic. When he climbs the Alps in Book VI of *The Prelude*, the poet recalls 'France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again' (ll. 353-4). After the Revolution's descent into violence, Wordsworth's memory of it is different, focussing on the bloody ramifications and undesirable consequences, which he was not capable of understanding when the Revolution was at its peak. Circumstantial memory, I suggest, may explain the way Wordsworth sees the French Revolution after its disastrous turn: in retrospect, it is not

[17] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 283.
[18] Michael Freeman, *Edmund Burke and the Critique of Political Radicalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 41.
[19] For a detailed discussion, see Žižek, Slavoj, 'Introduction: Robespierre, or, the "Divine Violence" of Terror', in Maximilien Robespierre, *Virtue and Terror*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 2007), pp. vii-xxxix (p. xxxviii).

so much a noble cause as a well-planned murderous scheme. *The Borderers*, which is often seen by critics as a delineation of the psychology of the Revolution, shows that Wordsworth sees it as 'a damned plot against the soul of man'[20]:

> There is a kind of superstition which makes us shudder when we find moral sentiments to which we attach a sacred importance applied to vicious purposes. […] We are lulled asleep by its agency, and betrayed before we know that an attempt is made to betray us.[21]

'Superstition' is a deprecatory word. It is used by the French revolutionaries to describe belief in Christianity and the divine right of the monarchy, which they reject. It is striking that here Wordsworth bitterly turns this word against itself and mocks the belief in reason and atheism that the French revolutionaries advocate. He not only mocks them but paints an even more terrible picture of them finding excuses for massacre under the guise of the pursuit of liberty. 'Lulled asleep' gives full expression to his belief that they are cheating innocent people into participating in this murderous scheme.

Such an interpretation of the French Revolution is perhaps too harsh and unsparing. Historical accounts show that rather than being a pre-planned murderous scheme, the 'Reign of Terror' was a product of circumstance:

> 'Nobody', recalled one deputy later, 'had dreamed of establishing a system of terror. It established itself by force of circumstances.' But that meant that nobody had control of it either, even among those with a vested interest in its continuance. And nobody, above all, seemed to have

[20] William Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, ed. by Robert Osborn, (1797-99 text) (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), V, iii, 28-9.
[21] Wordsworth, 'Preface to *The Borderers*', in *Prose Works*, I, 79-80.

> the power to end it, even when its purpose and achievements came to seem less and less self-evident.[22]

This chapter, of course, cannot provide an in-depth study of the nature of the French Revolution. But from the above account, we can at least come to the conclusion that the violence of the Revolution was not a pre-planned murderous scheme under the guise of the pursuit of liberty. Its disastrous turn has many complicated reasons, one of them being the pressure of circumstances. And it is circumstantial memory, I suggest, which enables Wordsworth to see the violence in that way.

With his revaluation of the French Revolution, Wordsworth interprets his involvement in it in a different light. Before his change in thinking, he had identified himself as a supporter of this noble cause. In 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', written about half a year before the 'Reign of Terror', Wordsworth defends the execution of Louis XVI and revolutionary violence in general:

> A time of revolution is not the season of true Liberty. Alas! the obstinacy & perversion of men is such that she is too often obliged to borrow the very arms of despotism to overthrow him, and in order to reign in peace must establish herself by violence. She deplores such stern necessity, but the safety of the people, her supreme law, is her consolation.[23]

What the poet admits is the paradox of political revolution: violence is quite often the means to achieve liberty. 'Borrow' suggests that the violence is temporary, that it does not intrinsically belong to liberty. Being a 'stern necessity' which we have to bear, it

[22] William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 266.
[23] Wordsworth, 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', in *Prose Works*, I, 33-4.

proves worthwhile because the means will eventually be justified by the ends. By supporting the violence, Wordsworth indicates that he sees himself as one who fights for the 'government of equal rights / And individual worth' (IX, ll. 248-9).

After the Revolution goes wrong, the poet's memory not only includes this immediate experience, but also all that he has come to know about a revolution that has abandoned its ideal. This time he no longer sees himself as a guardian of liberty as is represented in 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff'. Instead, he identifies himself as an accomplice in this well-planned crime against society and human nature:

> I took the knife in hand,
> And, stopping not at parts less sensitive,
> Endeavoured with my best of skill to probe
> The living body of society
> Even to the heart. I pushed without remorse
> My speculations forward, yea, set foot
> On Nature's holiest places. (X, ll. 872-8)

These lines have often been interpreted as a critique of Godwinism. I would, however, agree with Dart, who sees the passage as an internalization of the Reign of Terror in the poet's psyche: 'in a radical internalisation of the executive practice of the Terror, the poet's mind has become transformed into a kind of court-room for the pursuit of philosophical truth'.[24]

[24] Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 197.

What is striking in this description of memory is that it extends beyond the capacity to retrieve events. Rather, it involves a moral obligation on the part of the poet to re-examine his past action in order to see whether its meaning has been altered by what has subsequently taken place. Wordsworth re-evaluates his former attitude—his ardent support for the violence of the Revolution—in the light of the woeful consequences of the Revolution. His memory is thus concerned not so much with what he was conscious of at the time when he supported the violence, but with its aftermath. This re-experience of the past through circumstantial memory is entirely different from the initial experience. The tone of confidence in 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', which suggested that the ends would justify the means, has disappeared. What we find instead is a monster applying his best skills to conduct vivisection. The phrase 'pushed without remorse' highlights the cruelty of his crime: he has committed an unforgivable religious offence. It is reminiscent of the lines quoted earlier from 'Preface to *The Borderers*': 'so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves'.[25] Wordsworth's revaluation of his involvement in the Revolution upon seeing its disastrous turn sees the birth of a heavy load of guilt, which Ferguson describes as 'massive' and 'paralyzing' (Ferguson, pp. 89-90).

Self-Exculpation

In recent years, critics have noticed that Book X of *The Prelude* is not merely a narrative of the poet's guilty confession of his involvement in the French Revolution. At many points it is a reaffirmation of his revolutionary ideal. Richard Gravil, for example, suggests that in describing the horror of the revolutionary violence, Wordsworth seems capable of 'finding images expressive of something which is not merely horror, but a

[25] Owen and Smyser, 'Introduction to "Preface to *The Borderers*"', in *Prose Works*, I, 69.

kind of dreadful fascination'. The poet appears to have become aware that 'the rage for destruction is something he had shared'.[26] In a similar way, Howard Erskine-Hill points out that the stanza beginning with 'Come now, ye golden times' (X, l. 541) might imply 'the lasting nature of his [Wordsworth's] early radicalism'.[27] Dart goes a step further by demonstrating that in *The Prelude*, the Revolution is represented 'simultaneously as a disastrous crime against nature *and* a paradigm for the acquisition of freedom and self-consciousness'.[28] I will follow this line of augment, particularly Dart's emphasis on the co-existence of the two strands of narrative at once for and against the Revolution. However, my focus is rather on how Wordsworth's reaffirmation of his revolutionary ideal is achieved through circumstantial memory, which has a self-healing mechanism, and which can thus cure the wound it has produced through self-incrimination.

Book X of *The Prelude* provides several examples of this self-healing process. Exceptionally vivid recollections constantly rise up to disrupt the self-incriminating narrative by providing an alternative narrative, reassuring the poet that he is not guilty of the crime for which he holds himself responsible. Wordsworth's self-blame never comes without immediate self-justification, which reassures him that he has been making the right choice throughout.

First, Wordsworth enlists circumstances to show that the Revolution is absolutely necessary. Just before the appearance of the 'knife' image which he uses to portray the crime he has committed against society, he interjects with the following lines:

[26] Richard Gravil, '"Some Other Being": Wordsworth in *The Prelude*', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 19 (1989), 127-43 (pp. 134-5).
[27] Howard Erskine-Hill, *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution: Dryden to Wordsworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 239.
[28] Dart, p. 178 (original emphasis).

the advocates themselves
Of ancient institutions had performed
To bring disgrace upon their very names;
Disgrace of which custom, and written law,
And sundry moral sentiments, as props
And emanations of these institutes,
Too justly bore a part. (X, ll. 849-55)

The Revolution is necessary because the 'ancient institutions', manifested in 'custom', 'written law' and 'sundry moral sentiments', have become corrupted. They are now the source of evil. The hunger-bitten girl and the tragic love story of Julia and Vaudracour which occupies more than one third of Book IX illustrate how human nature is abused under such a corrupted system. These lines are a refutation of the divinity of the time-honoured hereditary system advocated by Burke, making clear that contemporary society has become an abuse of human nature.

The Prelude provides additional evidence that revolution is necessary not only because it can sweep away social corruption, but also because it can restore man to a state of freedom and equality, a belief shared by both Wordsworth and Rousseau. The word 'revolution' comes from the Latin word *revolvere*, meaning a '**revolving** movement in space or time'.[29] Thus, it indicates a return to the starting point. Rousseau was seen in the eighteenth century as the foremost exponent of the view that human nature needs to be restored to its original purity, because it has been corrupted by civilization and culture. *The Prelude* may be seen to advocate this viewpoint in many ways. Though Rousseau himself never favours revolution, Wordsworth suggests that

[29] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1987), p. 270 (original emphasis).

revolution can restore the corrupted human nature back to a state of purity. He insists that his devotion to the Revolution is an extension of 'those affections' that 'from the cradle had grown up with me' (X, ll. 753-54). In Book VIII, he recollects how love of nature leads him on to love of man. In Book IX, he accounts how it further leads him to the love of 'mountain liberty' (IX, l. 242), a political ideal manifested by the Lake District people who enjoyed both freedom, '[m]an free, man working for himself' (VIII, l. 153), and virtue through their interaction with nature: 'which yet / Retaineth more of ancient homeliness, / Manners erect, and frank simplicity, / Than any other nook of English land' (IX, ll. 218-21). As Eugene Stelzig suggests, 'Love of nature may have led Wordsworth to the love of man, as he insists with the tendentious title of Book VIII, but in France it also led him to the love of revolution'.[30] Thus, revolution is legitimized because, in abandoning law and custom, it returns to nature, which ensures a better prospect for humankind.

As well as defending the necessity of the Revolution, *The Prelude* also justifies its violence. Not long after the depiction of the cruelty of the 'domestic carnage' and the condemnation of this 'lamentable time for man', the poet launches a full-scale defence of revolutionary violence (X, l. 329; l. 355). His justification of the violence in these lines can be seen as moving gradually from doubt to affirmation:

> But as the ancient prophets were enflamed,
> Nor wanted consolations of their own
> And majesty of mind, when they denounced
> On Towns and cities, wallowing in the abyss
> Of their offences, punishment to come;

[30] Eugene Stelzig, '"The Shield of Human Nature": Wordsworth's Reflections on the Revolution in France', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45 (1991), 415-31 (p. 421).

Or saw like other men with bodily eyes
Before them in some desolated place
The consummation of the wrath of Heaven;
So did some portion of that spirit fall
On me to uphold me through those evil times,
And in their rage and dog-day heat I found
Something to glory in, as just and fit,
And in the order of sublimest laws. (X, ll. 401-13)

The poet evokes vivid biblical images to disrupt his previous narrative, which suggested that the Revolution was a historical failure. The sudden identity shift from the previous criminal to the 'ancient prophet' forecasting the ruin of human beings for their corruption reveals the instability of the identity the poet has previously constructed. The word 'uphold' fully expresses the spiritual anchorage provided by these images. It works in a similar way as the word 'impelled' about forty lines later, at which point the poet reassures himself that the 'disastrous period' is not short of 'human excellence': he is 'impelled to think / Of the glad time when first I traversed France' (X, l. 442; l. 443; ll. 448-9). Both express the urge to resort to comforting images to disrupt the self-incrimination narrative Wordsworth has been weaving.

While deriving comfort for the mind unsettled by the bloody Revolution, the recourse to the violent imagery of the Bible also shows that Wordsworth is not advocating a peaceful approach to change. In this way, his psychology 'comes dangerously close to the very psychology of Terrorism itself'.[31] Wordsworth implies that the present disaster is the necessary evil, the righteous 'punishment' from 'Heaven',

[31] Dart, p. 195.

out of which a new social order will soon spring. The idea expressed here, in an oblique way, repeats what Wordsworth has in mind during his most radical years: that the violence is 'convulsion from which is to spring a fairer order of things', though the tone is more tentative at this later stage.[32] His belief is soon tempered by the modification, 'So did some portion of that spirit fall / On me'. Although it may serve as a justification of the revolutionary violence, it is at the most 'some portions', not powerful enough to legitimize the bloodshed.

Such a betrayal of the poet's diffidence is further confirmed by the concession he makes five lines down: 'even if that were not'. This suggests that the he is not totally certain about the validity of such an explanation. In this way, the sense of doubt is immediately followed by the poet's second attempt at justification:

> And even if that were not, amid the awe
> Of unintelligible chastisement
> I felt a kind of sympathy with power –
> Motions raised up within me, nevertheless,
> Which had relationship to highest things.
> Wild blasts of music thus did find their way
> Into the midst of terrible events,
> So that worst tempests might be listened to. (X, ll. 414-21)

The poet admits that the 'chastisement' is 'unintelligible'. By acknowledging this he is to some extent invalidating his previous justification for the revolutionary violence and admitting that he cannot quite make sense of it. However, in spite of its unintelligibility,

[32] Wordsworth, 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', *Prose Works*, I, 34.

he still believes in its legitimacy. ‘Music’ is normally used to describe something harmonious and pleasant to the ear. Here, however, it paradoxically modifies the ‘domestic carnage’ (X, l. 329), which the poet describes as the most woeful time of the year. It gives full expression to the beauty, the harmony the poet derives from the terrible bloodshed in spite of its discordance. Though discordance is converted into concordance, neither is this a fully valid justification of the violence, as the word ‘might’ in ‘worst tempests might be listened to’ suggests.

With the third attempt at justification made, the poet eventually moves from self-doubt to affirmation:

> Then was the truth received into my heart
> That under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
> Griefs bitterest of ourselves or of our kind,
> If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
> Honour which could not else have been—a faith,
> An elevation and a sanctity—
> If new strength be not given, or old restored,
> The blame is ours, not Nature’s. When a taunt
> Was […]
> Saying, ‘Behold the harvest which we reap
> From popular government and equality’,
> I saw that it was neither these nor aught
> Of wild belief engrafted on their names
> By false philosophy, that caused the woe,
> But that it was a reservoir of guilt

> And ignorance, filled up from age to age,
> That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,
> But burst and spread in deluge through the land. (X, ll. 422-39)

Like Rousseau's 'anxious concern to list all of the possible circumstances surrounding his false accusation of Marion' in *The Confessions* to disrupt the self-incrimination narrative,[33] Wordsworth lists all the possible circumstances surrounding his self-accusation to show that the violence of the Revolution does not mean that human nature is intrinsically bad, or that the revolutionary ideal and theories which aim at a better future of human nature are faulty. Instead, they are the result of the unfortunate way in which people have been governed. That is to say, the fault lies with the hereditary aristocratic system, which the Revolution aims to destroy. The analysis— evil comes from social corruption—echoes Rousseau's view that 'all our vices stem ultimately not from our nature but from the ways in which we have been badly governed'.[34] It is also reminiscent of Thomas Paine, who holds that 'these outrages were not the effect of the principles of the Revolution, but of the degraded mind that existed before the Revolution, and which the Revolution is calculated to reform'.[35] These arguments provide a sharp contrast to the pejorative words Wordsworth adopts to describe the Reign of Terror just about a hundred lines above: 'such a sound was ever heard / As Liberty upon earth – yet all beneath / Her innocent authority was wrought' (X, ll. 348-50). The violence can be seen as 'innocent' because it is in such a good cause.

These examples illustrate Wordsworth's preoccupation with listing all the possible circumstances surrounding his self-incrimination narrative. Their aim is to show that the crime for which Wordsworth holds himself responsible is not so evil, that

[33] Whitehead, p. 74.
[34] Robert Wokler, *Rousseau: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 34.
[35] Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 81.

'*there is no news*', 'nothing has happened' (Ferguson, p. 89, original emphasis). And indeed they serve his purpose well, as Dart argues, these passages stage 'such a striking interruption of the poetic narrative' which 'instantly serves to disturb that sense of the Revolution as a historical failure, […] and reintroduces it into the body of the text as a still-nourishing […] spot of time'.[36]

Tug-of-War

While Ferguson suggests that circumstantial memory can heal the wound it has produced by providing an 'alternative history' (Ferguson, p. 89), I would like to depart from her judgment that the poet's guilt is thus undone. Instead, his self-recrimination and self-justification are intertwined. There is a tug-of-war going on in his psyche even at the moment of writing *The Prelude*. It is hard to say which one triumphs over the other. The psyche, being in a state of 'oscillating dynamic of confession and self-exculpation', is forever an arena of contestation.[37]

This inner struggle can be seen in the general shape of Wordsworth's narrative. Neither his self-recrimination nor his self-justification is linear. They constantly shift from one to the other. Book X on the whole reads more like two strands of thought struggling with each other. Wordsworth recounts his experience during the French Revolution twice. In the first account, lines 1 to 380 are focused on the disastrous turn of the Revolution and Wordsworth's self-incrimination. From line 381 up to line 440, the narrative of self-incrimination suddenly stops and gives way to self-justification. With the start of line 657 begins the poet's second account of his involvement in the French Revolution. In contrast with the first account, which starts with the narrative of self-incrimination, the poet starts at line 657 with a full-scale self-defence which

[36] Dart, p. 199.
[37] Dart, p. 182.

culminates in his eulogy of the Revolution, ‘O pleasant exercise of hope and joy’ (X, l. 689). The tone of confidence continues up to line 728, after which he plunges into a lamentation that his mind is given to ‘false imagination, placed beyond / The limits of experience and of truth’ (X, ll. 847-8), and that the cause is an utter failure: ‘a land […] / Now without one memorial hope, not even / A hope to be deferred’ (X, ll. 960-4). But the sense of decline is not uniformly expressed. Amid the tone of utter disillusionment crop up now and then justifications of his starting point: ‘For howsoe’er unsettled, never once / Had I thought ill of human-kind, or been / Indifferent to its welfare’ (X, ll. 830-2). The repetition is very suggestive, implying that the poet has never fully escaped this chain of traumatic events. It keeps coming back, with both its honour and its shame. Only through the process of telling and retelling can Wordsworth make sense of it and find relief.

We can also look closely at the way Wordsworth’s memory works in a particular passage. Take lines 830-850 for example, where the narratives of self-justification and of self-incrimination struggle to gain the upper hand:

> For howsoe’er unsettled, never once
> Had I thought ill of human-kind, or been
> Indifferent to its welfare, but, enflamed
> With thirst of a secure intelligence,
> And sick of other passion, I pursued
> A higher nature […]
> A noble aspiration! – yet I feel
> The aspiration – but with other thoughts
> And happier: for I was perplexed and sought

To accomplish the transition by such means

As did not lie in nature. (X, ll. 830-43)

The poet is confessing how he was betrayed into committing a crime against nature. However, in the opening lines, 'For howsoe'er unsettled, never once / Had I thought ill of human-kind' (X, ll. 830-2), the negative 'never once' and the inversion that follows it read more like a man desperately exculpating himself from a false accusation. A few lines down, the poet describes his 'wrong' pursuit of revolutionary rationalism as 'a noble aspiration! - yet I feel / The aspiration' (X, ll. 839-40). Jonathan Wordsworth explains in his note on this passage that the line 'yet I feel' means 'to this day I feel'.[38] The 1850 version is even more straightforward: 'Nor shall ever cease / To feel it' (XI, ll. 257-8). Both suggest that the poet still clings to his revolutionary ideal in spite of its disastrous turn. He still cherishes the sweet memory even when he is writing this passage. He seems to take pains to counterbalance the sad memory of disillusionment by repairing to this spectacle as though he 'would drink / As at a fountain' (XI, ll. 383-4). However, after the momentary surge of joyful recollection, the tone goes back once more to a deep sense of failure; he sees himself as being misled by 'false imagination placed beyond / The limits of experience and of truth' (X, ll. 847-8).

There is also a moment when the narratives of self-incrimination and self-justification confront each other:

Most melancholy at that time, O Friend!

Were my day-thoughts, — my nights were miserable;

Through months, through years, long after the last beat

[38] Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1789, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 640.

Of those atrocities, the hour of sleep
To me came rarely charged with natural gifts,
Such ghastly visions had I of despair
And tyranny, and implements of death;
And innocent victims sinking under fear,
[…] Then suddenly the scene
Changed, and the unbroken dream entangled me
In long orations, which I strove to plead
Before unjust tribunals,—with a voice
Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense,
Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt
In the last place of refuge—my own soul. (1850, X, ll. 397-415)

I quote from the 1850 edition, which reveals more clearly Wordsworth's oscillation between self-incrimination and self-justification. Jonathan Wordsworth comments on these lines that 'Wordsworth in his nightmares is a victim of the Terror, and falsely accused, yet cannot wholly absolve himself from collusion in the violence. His heart has been given to the Revolution for better or for worse'.[39] This rightly points out the two sharply contradictory and yet paradoxically coexisting modes of self-representation. On the one hand, the lines portray an ardent supporter of the Revolution who, on seeing the implementation of the Terror, cannot wholly absolve himself of it and is tormented by guilt through days and nights. On the other hand, when actually charged with the crime, he labours desperately to exculpate himself, as the phrase 'strove to plead' suggests. Though Wordsworth does not specify the content of the 'long orations', they may well be the self-justifications made throughout Book X. 'Suddenly' denotes not only the

[39] Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1789, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, p. 633.

quickness with which the narratives of self-incrimination and self-exculpation shift from one to the other, but also the randomness of such a shift. The two contradictory narratives together produce a sense of betrayal deep within his heart.

In contrast to the psychological war in which the poet is engaged, the image of 'fireside' towards the end of the book carries a special connotation of calmness and cosiness: 'Thus I soothe / The pensive moments by this calm fireside' (X, ll. 1027-8). Obviously he is tormented by both the reflection itself and the unsettled tug-of-war between the conflicting memories. Hence he finds that the 'calm fireside' gives him great emotional tranquillity. It gives him all that he needs, appeasing his mental turmoil and providing him with comfort and quietude.

Circumstantial memory, in Wordsworth's handling of it, is a double-edged sword which can both wound and cure. In this section, I have explored how it appears to make him feel implicated in the bloodshed of the French Revolution, and thus overwhelms him with a massive amount of guilt. I have also demonstrated how it seeks to cure such an illimitable guilt by disrupting his self-incriminating narrative. However, the disruption is not powerful enough to free the poet entirely from the torment of guilt. What we see, as a result, is a tug-of-war in his psyche.

* * *

'[A] possibility that Wordsworth raises but that George Eliot continually engages' surrounds the way in which circumstantial guilt—a guilt that arises on seeing negative outcomes that one might have initiated, even without having intended to—works.[40] Eliot's treatment of guilt in *Adam Bede* and 'Janet's Repentance' may also be

[40] Ferguson, 'Re: A Question from a Faithful Reader'.

discussed in the light of Ferguson's circumstantial memory. In *Adam Bede*, Thias's death is not caused by Adam's harshness towards him. However, on retrospection Adam holds himself responsible for it as though it had been his full intention. In 'Janet's Repentance', Mr. Tryan's guilt over Lucy's death is of a similar nature. Mr. Tryan holds himself responsible for Lucy's death because of his flirtation with her, even though the consequence of his actions is unforeseen and unmeant. However, there is a fundamental difference between Wordsworth and Eliot. For Wordsworth, the unforeseen consequences derive from an individual's aspiration for virtue. For Eliot, the consequences are somehow related to each character's inherent flaw. Therefore, in spite of their lack of evil intention when performing the seemingly harmless action, Eliot still wants to hold her characters responsible for the unmeant consequences, because according to her determinism, to which both Christianity and Victorian science make a contribution, an individual's moral blemish causes irrevocable sufferings to others.

Eliot's Determinism

In Eliot's view, human nature is inherently flawed:

> Ships, certainly, are liable to casualties, which sometimes make terribly evident some flaw in their construction, that would never have been discoverable in smooth water; and many a 'good fellow,' through a disastrous combination of circumstances, has undergone a like betrayal.[41]

Casualties of ships are caused by the 'flaw in their construction'. Likewise, wrongdoings are caused by inherent flaws in character. What the narrator wants to emphasize in this passage is not simply that human nature, like ships, has its inherent

[41] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. by Valentine Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 126. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated *AB*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

flaws, but that these flaws are not 'discoverable' in 'smooth water'. We may never be able to recognize our flaws until they cause others to suffer, and we can only realize our mistakes through hindsight. Eliot uses the word 'betrayal' like Wordsworth in his analysis of the criminal psychology in *The Borderers*, but its meaning is different. For Eliot, it is not a real 'betrayal'. It originates from the flaw of one's character.

Although it is natural for an individual to have inherent flaws in his character, in a deterministic system such as Eliot's, it is by no means insignificant. It can cause terrible suffering to others. George Levine outlines the main components of Eliot's determinism: first, the universe is a 'marvelously complex unit', in which 'all parts are intricately related to each other'. Everybody's life is 'at the center of a vast and complex web of causes'. Secondly, every act is 'related in some way to every other'. 'The most apparently unimportant act may have important ramifications'. Finally, since man lives in a world in which 'every act, no matter how trivial, has a vast number of consequences, not all of them traceable', every human being should 'exercise the greatest care in his actions to avoid causing misery to others'.[42]

Eliot's determinism has its sources in both Christianity and Victorian science. In her early days she was a pious Calvinist, imbued with a strong sense of original sin, that flaw in human nature inherited from the fallen Adam. Calvinism 'instilled in her a belief in rigid laws exacted by a strict and implacable deity; it had stressed the irrevocable "consequences" of human behavior: every single act, gesture, or thought could lead to the salvation or damnation of the believer'.[43] Although she later abandoned Christianity,

[42] George Levine, 'Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot', *PMLA*, LXXVII (1962), 268-79 (pp. 270-2).
[43] U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel: George Eliot, Walter Pater, and Samuel Butler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 31.

Calvinism's emphasis on 'rigid laws' and their 'irrevocable "consequences"' remained influential in her thinking.

After her abandonment of Christianity, like many other Victorian intellectuals of her age, Eliot sought to use scientific laws to replace the old theological world. In science, she found 'an equally implacable but this-worldly power', whose 'grim emphasis on "consequences" was almost identical to that of the old religion'.[44] The emphasis on consequences is not only implicit in Newton's physics and the theory of the association of ideas, with which Eliot was well acquainted through Lewes and Spencer, but was also to be found in the scientific and intellectual works she translated or reviewed. Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*, which Eliot translated in 1846, clearly states the existence of 'the law of succession', which 'controls the course of events'. All occurrences, Strauss emphasizes, 'not excepting the most violent convulsions and the most rapid changes […] follow in a certain order of sequence of increase and decrease'.[45] The belief in scientific law can also be found in R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*, which Eliot reviewed in 1851. 'The undeviating law in the material and moral world', she argues, is 'invariability of sequence'. It is not only 'the basis of physical science', but also permeates 'our social organization, our ethics and our religion'. Unfortunately, however, the significance of the latter is 'still perversely ignored'.[46] As many critics have pointed out, Eliot is keen to show the workings of this law in the social sphere, especially in 'our ethics'.

Eliot's determinism is also clearly shown in her response to the second edition of Charles Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* on 15 November, 1857:

[44] Knoepflmacher, *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel*, p. 31.
[45] Eliot, 'Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*', in *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.
[46] Eliot, 'R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 21.

> In the fundamental doctrine of your book—that mind presents itself under the same condition of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena (the only difference being that the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex)—I think you know that I agree. And everyone who knows what science means must also agree with you that there can be no Social Science without the admission of that doctrine.[47]

The mind is subject to the same law of antecedence and consequence. Eliot agrees with Charles Bray on the difficulty of discovering the causal law in the human world, because, as she explains, 'the phenomena are more complex'. One might not be able to see it clearly until the damage is done.

An even more significant element of Eliot's deterministic morality is the conviction that negative consequences which one has initiated cannot be undone. Compensation is therefore of no use. This is characteristic of Calvinism: despite the individual's 'repentance or punishment', the consequences of the wrongs of the past 'remain'.[48] Writing to Cohn Chapman on 5 July 1856, Eliot remarks that she does not believe in the theory of 'compensation': 'I have long wanted to fire away at the doctrine of Compensation, which I detest, considered as a theory of life'.[49] A similar attitude is again found in a letter to Sara Sophia Hennell on 24 November 1856:

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[47] George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954, repr. 1975), II, 403. All subsequent quotations of these books, abbreviated *Letters*, are from this edition.
[48] Philip Davis, *1830-1880: The Victorians*, The Oxford English Literary History, VIII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 108.
[49] Eliot, *Letters*, II, 258.

> But now we are separated, and I shall never be able to make up for my past failures. There is so little we can make up for! We repent of our errors towards one friend, and that helps us to behave better to another, but rarely to the one on whom we have learnt our lesson'.[50]

Eliot's unconventional relationship with Lewes deeply offended her Coventry friends like Sara Hennell. Their friendship, as a result, suffered a heavy blow. Though later on Eliot resumed correspondence with them, 'the old *rapport* could never be quite restored'.[51] In this letter, Eliot expresses her guilt for having hurt her friend's feelings. She does not believe that what she has done is wrong but accepts that once the damage is done, there is little possibility of mending it.

The Reformation of Moral Habits

According to Eliot, the only positive thing someone can do after committing a wrongdoing is to reform and change the way he behaves towards others. In the deterministic world Eliot outlines, man's inherent evil will cause others irrevocable suffering. A recognition of the potential consequences of actions, however, 'helps us to behave better to another', Eliot suggests in her letter to Sara Hennell. Here, Eliot's opinion in many ways resembles Mill's idea of the formation of character. Mill holds that though an individual's character is the product of external and internal circumstances, he is not a prey to these circumstances. Rather, he has the 'power to alter his character' to a certain extent. Though his character is formed by 'his circumstances', his own desire to 'mould it in a particular way, is one of those circumstances, and by no means one of the least influential'.[52] If Eliot suggests that there is an inherent flaw in

[50] Eliot, *Letters*, II, 278.
[51] Haight, p. 225.
[52] John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963-91), VIII: *A System of Logic*, ed. by J. M. Robson (1974), p. 840. All subsequent quotations of this book are

the construction of a ship which renders it liable to accidents at sea, Mill provides the solution: the flaw is fixable through our own efforts. By identifying our own desire to 'mould it in a particular way' as an important circumstance, Mill is counterbalancing any notion of man as helplessly passive in a deterministic world, bringing man's own initiative into full play.

Mill further explores where this initiative comes from:

> Our character is formed by us as well as for us; but the wish which induces us to attempt to form it is formed for us; and how? Not, in general, by our organization, not wholly by our education, but by our experience; experience of the painful consequences of the character we previously had: or by some strong feeling of admiration or aspiration, accidentally aroused. (Mill, pp. 840-1)

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the way in which character is shown by Eliot to be formed through repeated, habitual behaviour. This chapter will discuss how her novels illustrate how to change wrong habits. The motive for change comes from two sources. According to Mill, one of them is the experience of being with people whom one greatly admires. Romola and Gwendolen's moral reformations under the inspiration of Savonarola and Deronda are of this kind. The other motive which prompts a reform in character is 'the painful consequences of the character we previously had'. In other words, it is through the mistakes we have made that we come to realize the urgent need for a reform of character. 'The painful consequences' can be actual consequences of wrongdoing, or, in the case of circumstantial memory, imaginary consequences which we assume that our actions have initiated.

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from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses. For a detailed discussion of Mill and Eliot's views on necessity and freedom, see Levine's article.

If Mill stresses that 'the painful consequences of the character we previously had' is a strong motive that instigates people to reform their characters (Mill, p. 480), Eliot identifies this motive as empathetic remorse: 'the agonised sense, the contrite contemplation, of the wound inflicted on another'.[53] As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, her notion of remorse differs slightly from that of Lewes in its emphasis on internal rather than external punishment.

The 'contrite contemplation' of 'the wound inflicted on another', Eliot suggests, is invaluable:

> It is this invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible. The divine yea and nay, the seal of prohibition and of sanction, are effectually impressed on human deeds and aspirations, […] by that inexorable law of consequences, […] and human duty is comprised in the earnest study of this law and patient obedience to its teaching.[54]

Though this passage refers to cause and effect in general, it is certainly consonant with Mill's idea about the 'painful consequences of the character we previously had'. One should bear in mind the consequences of actions, especially negative ones. 'Education' implies that the ill consequences initiated by an action will educate an individual about what he should do to prevent similar things from happening in future. Eliot's promotion of the 'earnest study of this law' and 'patient obedience to its teaching' also implies the enhancement of moral habit through the recollection of the wrongdoings one has initiated or one imagines to have initiated: 'Every mistake, every absurdity into which

[53] Collins, 489.
[54] Eliot, 'R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 21.

poor human nature has fallen, may be looked on as an experiment of which we may reap the benefit'.[55] Later in this section, I will show that both Adam Bede's and Mr. Tryan's stories illustrate how they study this law and correct their behaviour, learning from the past wrongs they have initiated.

Eliot's religious humanism also contributes to her idea of the reformation of character. In John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bible reading initiates the protagonists' realization of their sins, which include self-degradation and evils done to others. The recognition of God's love redeems them while Jesus's blood washes away the sins. In Eliot's novel, the protagonists begin in a Christian way by 'carrying some "mysterious burden"' on their back.[56] Yet Eliot reworks this Christian tradition by suggesting that the recognition of one's sin comes not through the reading of the Bible, but through the realization of the painful consequence one has initiated. Furthermore, the protagonists undergo a similar spiritual struggle between their good and bad selves as that in *Grace Abounding*. However, it is not God's voice that gives them strength but love and sympathy from a fellow human-being. Tim Dolin observes that this conversion pattern is 'typical' in Eliot's ethical humanism. Although she abandoned Christianity in her early twenties, the conversion experience which is central to evangelical Protestantism remains 'powerful' in her work. While Christian 'converts become conscious of their sin, are awakened to grace, and become committed to Christ', in Eliot's religious humanism Christ's role can be played by any other person. The essence of her conversion experience is the '"change of mental poise" which happens when another person touches us "with a peculiar influence, subduing [us] into receptiveness"'.[57]

[55] Eliot, 'R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 21.
[56] Barry Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 139.
[57] Tim Dolin, *George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 178.

***Adam Bede* and 'Janet's Repentance'**

Before discussing how Adam and Mr. Tryan come to realize the need of reforming their moral habits, I would like to explore the nature of their memory after the deaths of Thias and Lucy respectively. Like Wordsworth, Eliot's characters tend, through circumstantial memory, to hold themselves responsible for the unmeant and unforeseen consequences of their actions. On learning about his father's death, for example, Adam is haunted by the guilt for having treated him too harshly:

> [T]he grey-haired father, of whom he had thought with a sort of hardness a few hours ago, as certain to live to be a thorn in his side, was perhaps even then struggling with that watery death. This was the first thought that flashed through Adam's conscience. (*AB*, p. 52)

'The first thought that flashed through Adam's conscience' is what Ferguson terms 'circumstantial memory'. 'Flashed' denotes the speed with which circumstantial memory works to connect two events that have no relation except that they happen at roughly the same time. What is notable about Adam's memory is that it extends far beyond the capacity of recording events. On discovering his father's drowning, Adam realizes he has been too harsh towards him. His memory is thus not concerned so much with what he was conscious of at the time but with all his later resentment of his father. Such a re-experience of the past is entirely different from the one at the time of its occurrence. Although the effects that Adam supposes his harshness to have had are nothing to do with the tragic drowning of his father, he remains tortured as though they were. In an oblique way, it is conceivable that this curse might have hastened his father's death. The narrator's placing of the two events side by side—Adam's cursing of his father, who is at that very moment 'struggling with that watery death'—is

suggestive. Adam is also tortured because he thinks he might have been alert to the possible danger if he had treated his father differently: 'to Adam the conception of the future was so inseparable from the painful image of his father, that the fear of any fatal accident to him was excluded by the deeply-infixed fear of his continual degradation' (*AB*, p. 50). Adam regrets not being more alert to the possibility of such a 'fatal accident', habituated as he is to imagining a totally different eventuality.

In 'Janet's Repentance', Mr. Tryan's guilt over Lucy's death is of a similar nature. When flirting with Lucy, Mr. Tryan did not feel guilty about the careless life he led, nor did he blame himself for not being serious about her. However, upon learning of her career and tragic death, he starts to regard his behaviour in a new light. As he tells Janet painfully, 'it was then that my past life burst upon me in all its hideousness'.[58] The fact that the same past suddenly changes its value and forces Mr. Tryan to re-examine his past behaviour is because undesirable consequences resulted in him seeing the same past in a different way. Thus, although the effects that Mr. Tryan supposes his behaviour to have had were unmeant and unforeseen, he nevertheless suffers as if the consequence had been fully intended. He is overwhelmed by the feeling that Lucy's tragedy is of his own making and firmly believes that he has 'injured another irreparably in body and soul' (JR, p. 287).

Like Wordsworth's feeling of guilt over the bloodshed of the French Revolution, the problem with circumstantial memory in the two cases I analyse above is that it has the potential to expand the moral responsibility on the part of the agent endlessly. This in turn produces a massive and disproportionate amount of guilt. In other words, the punishment the characters receive is much more severe than they deserve. Such a heavy

[58] George Eliot, 'Janet's Repentance', in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. by Thomas Noble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 289. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated JR, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

burden of guilt can cause profound psychic wounds. In extreme cases, it can be traumatizing. Adam's pain is still acute long after the event takes place; as he tells Arthur towards the end of the novel, 'I feel it now, when I think of him' (*AB*, p. 469). Mr. Tryan too is traumatized by Lucy's death. He suffers from nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations. His guilt remains an alien force in his psyche that keeps coming back and haunting him: 'The image of the wrong I had done pursued me everywhere' (JR, p. 287). Traumatic guilt tortures him so much that his whole life is on the brink of ruin, as he confesses, 'I seemed on the brink of madness. […] With that sense of guilt on my soul, I felt that whatever state I entered on must be one of misery' (JR, p. 287).

Though the self-incriminating narrative constructed by circumstantial memory is imaginary and exaggerated, it carries considerable weight in the rigidly deterministic world Eliot outlines for us. As I mentioned earlier, Eliot believes that nothing happens by chance. Every event, no matter how trivial it is, has its causal antecedent. Within this framework, a man's inherent moral flaw will inevitably cause others to suffer. As Mr. Irwine shows us, 'Consequences are unpitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences, quite apart from any fluctuations that went before – consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves' (*AB*, p. 172). Earlier in the novel, when Arthur tells Mr. Irwine that he thinks a man should not be blamed if he is 'betrayed into' doing wrong, in spite of his 'resolutions' to make the right choice. Mr. Irwine answers that 'a man can never do anything at variance with his own nature' (*AB*, p. 172). What we do reflects our character. Wrong deeds expose the flaws in our nature. Correcting Arthur's notion that human beings are liable to whimsical moods beyond their control, Mr. Irwine points out that the motivation to do something wrong lies within oneself. Meanwhile, he also reveals a grim reality: our wrongdoings will not only be confined to ourselves. They make others suffer, too. This is because in a rigidly-determined world,

where nothing is isolated, men's lives are 'as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe'. Within such a vast, invisible network, 'evil spreads as necessarily as disease' (*AB*, p. 423). The cause and effect is so straightforward that nobody can escape from this law.

Although Mr. Irwine explains this scenario with merciless clarity, he also concedes that it is very difficult for someone to foresee the consequences of his misdeeds:

> [T]he problem how far a man is to be held responsible for the unforeseen consequences of his own deed, is one that might well make us tremble to look into it. The evil consequences that may lie folded in a single act of selfish indulgence, is a thought so awful that it ought surely to awaken some feeling less presumptuous than a rash desire to punish. (*AB*, pp. 422-3)

The main thrust of the passage is reminiscent of Eliot's agreement with Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* that in the social sphere 'the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover'.[59] It reveals that there is another side of Eliot's determinism which Levine fails to address. For Levine, Eliot's determinism has a moral bias. It is not contradictory to moral agency. Though living in a deterministic world, man is still free to choose a certain action and therefore has to take responsibility for its consequences. But from the above passage, it is evident that her views are not free from ambivalence. It is true that Eliot holds her characters responsible because their moral flaws cause others to suffer. On the other hand, she also wonders how far one can go in terms of inflicting punishment. If evil consequences lie hidden, or in other words, if the

[59] Eliot, *Letters*, II, 403.

causal links are hard to detect, one can only look back constantly to re-examine one's own past to see if there was anything wrong in one's earlier actions in the light of present circumstances.

Even though the consequences of wrongdoings are sometimes hard to foresee, and in Adam and Mr. Tryan's cases are somewhat exaggerated, Eliot still wants her characters to feel responsible for them. As a result, they are overloaded with a massive amount of guilt, which can only be alleviated through the correction of their moral flaws and their avoidance of similar mistakes in future. The guilt from which Adam and Mr. Tryan suffer provides an opportunity for their moral awakening. Gnawed by guilt over his father's death, Adam comes to realize that he is too intolerant toward other people's faults: 'It's a sore fault in me as I'm so hot and out o' patience with people when they do wrong, and my heart gets shut up against 'em, so as I can't bring myself to forgive 'em' (*AB*, p. 201). This impatience and harshness, as he further realizes, comes from his pride and lack of sympathy for his fellow creatures: 'I see clear enough there's more pride nor love in my soul'. The recognition of this flaw spurs him to change: 'The real tough job for me 'ud be to master my own will and temper, and go right against my own pride' (*AB*, p. 201).

Adam's experience is also an example of Mill's idea that the 'experience of the painful consequences of the character we previously had' is one of the circumstances which can prompt reform in our character. If Adam's habitual harshness towards others is a weakness in his character, his own desire to ameliorate is now exercising the strongest influence in him. Adam is deeply mortified by the tragic consequence of his harshness and lack of sympathy for his father, feelings which provide a strong momentum to change this habit.

Besides being an example of Mill's idea of the formation of character, Adam's conversion also reminds us of the interaction between recollective memory and habit-memory mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis. A. J. Ayer suggests that although the two types of memory are different, at times they can overlap with each other. The performance of a skill, for example, can be 'facilitated by the occurrence of a recollection of a particular instance of learning'.[60] In this light, Adam's determination to abandon his harsh and unsympathetic treatment of others is strengthened by the recollection of the painful consequence of his harshness to his father. This particular recollection, like a memory aid, prompts him to form a new mode of behaviour towards others.

These two aspects of memory can also be found in the reformation of Mr. Tryan's character. Lucy's death makes Mr. Tryan feel that his evil habits are the cause of ruin of Lucy's life: 'I only felt utterly wretched, under the power of habits and dispositions which had wrought hideous evil' (JR, p. 290). The evil consequences spur him to get rid of them. He is determined to stop 'swerving in search of pleasure either to the right hand or to the left' (JR, p. 291). This process also demonstrates the interaction between recollective memory and habit-memory. Mr. Tryan's recollection of the traumatic event of Lucy's death, along with his assumption that he is the sole cause of it, serves as a memory aid, prompting him to form new habits.

Bunyan's treatment of guilt is also illuminating in relation to Mr. Tryan's conversion process. While Bunyan's protagonists realize their guilt through reading the Bible, and thereby obtain the courage to reform their moral habits, Mr. Tryan shows a somewhat different trajectory, as his confession suggests: 'I went to hear celebrated preachers, and I read religious books. But I found nothing that fitted my own need. The

[60] William Brewer, 'What Is Recollective Memory?', in *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, ed. by David Robin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 31.

faith which puts the sinner in possession of salvation seemed […] to be quite out of my reach' (JR, p. 290). He does eventually, of course, find comfort in religion. But Eliot herself suggests that the only certain path to redemption is through human relations, the 'blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another' (JR, p. 293).

Trauma and Cure

As I mentioned earlier, circumstantial memory, because of its emphasis on an exaggerated responsibility and its potential of producing illimitable guilt, tends to wound or even traumatize the individual. The reformation of moral habits, however, often brings with it the healing of the psychic wound incurred by the self-incriminating narrative. Thus, Eliot reveals a different recovery pattern from that of Wordsworth, in whose case circumstantial memory automatically heals the wound it has produced by setting a limit to the potentially illimitable guilt.

Jill Matus points out that in representing psychic shock, Eliot is arguably 'a precursor of later theories of trauma'. In *Daniel Deronda,* for example, after the drowning of her husband, Gwendolen becomes 'a traumatized subject'. The symptoms from which she suffers—nightmares, dysfunctions of memory and a sense of the dislocation of time—are 'textbook symptoms of trauma'.[61] Indeed, Gwendolen's symptoms are typical of what Cathy Caruth describes as traumatic memory. Caruth maintains that trauma's difference from ordinary experience lies in the fact that 'in its unexpectedness or horror', it '*escapes* full consciousness as it occurs' and 'cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge'. Thus, it cannot become a 'narrative

[61] Jill Matus, 'Historicizing Trauma: The Genealogy of Psychic Shock in *Daniel Deronda*', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 36 (2008), 59-78 (p. 59).

memory', which has been 'integrated into a completed story of the past', and 'continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time'.[62]

Ferguson's notion of 'circumstantial memory' sheds new light onto the formation of traumatic memory. After Lucy's death, Mr. Tryan suffers from very similar traumatic symptoms to those of Gwendolen, such as nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations. However, they occur not because Mr. Tryan's trauma escapes full consciousness and fails to be placed within his narrative memory, but because, though it has been digested by his consciousness, it is wrongly placed within his narrative memory. The way in which it is integrated—through the interpretation of unforeseen and unmeant consequences as if they were subliminally intended—is damaging and traumatizing.

While Jill Matus sees Eliot description of traumatic symptoms as an anticipation of later trauma theory, I would suggest that the healing process she describes, particularly her emphasis on verbalization and action, also foreshadows the recovery process of later trauma theory. In Cathy Caruth's opinion, since trauma is something lying outside narrative memory, for the sake of cure, it 'requires integration' into 'a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own, and others', knowledge of the past'.[63] The meaning of 'integration' is explained by Pierre Janet, an early-twentieth-century French psychologist:

> The person must know […] how to associate the happening with the other events of his life, how to put it in its place in that life-history which

[62] Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 151-7 (p. 153).
[63] Caruth, p. 153.

> each one of us is perpetually building up and which for each of us is an essential element of his personality. A situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated, has not been fully assimilated, until we have achieved, not merely through our movements, but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organization of the recital of the event to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history.[64]

Pierre Janet here points out two important means of recovery from trauma: verbalization and action. However, his analysis is mainly in line with Caruth's definition of trauma, which lies outside narrative memory and relies on its integration into a 'life-history' for its recovery. As for the healing of trauma triggered by circumstantial memory, the wrongly integrated memory needs to be rearranged into a different and positive narrative. That is to say, the event needs to become a constructive, rather than a disruptive element in our personal history.

Mr. Tryan's recovery relies heavily on verbalization. This enables his self-incriminating narrative to be rearranged into his narrative memory and become a positive element in his personal history. What is interesting is that Eliot often borrows Christian vocabulary for this process of verbalization. Mr. Tryan is encouraged by a friend to see guilt as a positive thing in his life as it prepares him for coming to Christ: 'he made it clear to me that the only preparation for coming to Christ and partaking of His salvation, was that very sense of guilt and helplessness which was weighing me down'. Moreover, he is told that if he is united with God, he will be given new strength to wrestle with his sin: 'When once we feel our helplessness in that way, and go to

[64] Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 158-82 (p. 170).

Christ', we will no longer be 'left to our own strength' (JR, p. 290). In this way, rather than triggering endless self-blame and causing damage to the psyche, guilt gradually comes to play a positive part in Mr. Tryan's personal history. Though Christian language is employed here, Eliot encourages the reader to recognize the human element in this process, the 'blessed influence' of a 'human soul' (JR, p. 293).

Action is also important in rearranging Mr. Tryan's traumatic guilt into a positive narrative memory. For Eliot, action mainly refers to the active reaching out to help other people. Mr. Tryan's ardent involvement in helping others relieves him from the torment of guilt. The death of Lucy pursues him like the Furies. There is only one thing he can do to find relief and make his life tolerable: 'to spend all the rest of it in trying to save others from the ruin I had brought on one' (JR, p. 289).

Helping Janet out of her misery is a particular example of Mr. Tryan's own cure through action. One might wonder how this is possible. The answer is related to Eliot's notion of sympathy. In many of Eliot's novels, sympathy is involved mainly with the faculty of imagination. Deronda's sympathy is achieved through an imagined participation in other people's suffering. Dorothea's sympathy with Will's grandmother for the injustice done by the Casaubon family occurs as she imagines herself as 'being part of Casaubon family' and thus 'feeling as though she herself had played a part in the injustice'.[65] Quite distinctly, Mr. Tryan's sympathy is more involved with the faculty of memory. For him, sympathy involves 'but a living again through our own past in a new form, […] confession often prompts a response of confession' (JR, p. 288). Through confessing to Janet, Mr. Tryan revisits his own painful past. By talking through it and recalling how he recovered, he once again rearranges his self-incriminating memory

[65] Hao Li, *Memory and History in George Eliot: Transfiguring the Past* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 137.

into a positive narrative memory. In this case, action and verbalization work interactively to bring about Mr. Tryan's cure.

The emphasis on verbalization and action in the healing process of trauma applies not only to the trauma caused by circumstantial memory, but also to psychic wounds triggered by actual wrong-doings. Janet is depressed by her realization that she is degenerating into a drunkard. However, she is trapped in a vicious circle and is entirely unable to escape it: 'I shall always be doing wrong, and hating myself after – sinking lower and lower, and knowing that I am sinking' (JR, p. 287). Talking to Mr. Tryan is immensely curative: 'his words would fall on her like precious balm' (JR, p. 299). The similar Christian narrative which heals Mr. Tryan also enables Janet to integrate her traumatic past into her narrative memory, and she comes to see her sin as the starting point of reformation.

Action is also essential for Janet's recovery. Janet feels stronger in wrestling with her past sin after performing benevolent acts:

> Whenever the too well-known depression and craving threatened her, she would seek a refuge in what had always been her purest enjoyment – in visiting one of her poor neighbours, in carrying some food or comfort to a sick-bed, in cheering with her smile some of the familiar dwellings up the dingy back-lanes. (JR, p. 318)

Neighbourhood charity work does not simply help other people. It is also therapeutic for the worker. It provides a 'refuge' for Janet. Again, we see what is peculiar about Eliot's notion of sympathy as a humanist form of Christian charity. It is not only for the sake of

other people. It cures psychological wounds by giving pleasure and a sense of achievement. In fact, not only Janet, but many other characters such as Romola and Gwendolen also benefit from the therapeutic power of performing benevolent acts.

Although Eliot's description of trauma syndrome and its recovery process in many ways anticipates modern trauma theory, there is a fundamental difference between them. The difference lies 'perhaps most markedly in her emphasis on the responsibility and agency of the wounded subject'. Trauma theory today emphasizes a '"wound culture"', ascribing the cause of trauma to external factors. In contrast, Eliot's is 'less a "wound culture" than a conscience culture'—it explores more the reason inside the individual that has caused the trauma. Take Gwendolen's shock, for example: 'the shock and horror is more about discovering what transgressions we may commit; less about what is inflicted upon us from without'.[66] I have discussed Eliot's preoccupation with exploring the internal, rather than external factors that lead her characters to become traumatized subjects. Eliot's determinism tends to ascribe the ill consequences to the inherent flaws in her characters, even if they are initially unmeant and unforeseen.

Partial Recovery

Although Eliot's characters have largely recovered from their traumatic guilt by the end of the story, the recovery is not complete. Guilt still haunts their psyche and is hard to ward off. Mr. Tryan still suffers from the torment of guilt when he makes his confession to Janet. His wound is fresh and acute, as it has always been. As he tells Janet, his sin against Lucy 'has remained to this hour the sin which causes me the bitterest pang' (JR, p. 291). Adam Bede's recovery is not full, either. Instead of looking

[66] Matus, 73.

forward to a state of total relief from pain, he comes to realize that it will forever remain a habitual part of him:

> [W]e get accustomed to mental as well as bodily pain, without, for all that, losing our sensibility to it: it becomes a habit of our lives, and we cease to imagine a condition of perfect ease as possible for us. […] We are contented with our day when we have been able to bear our grief in silence, and act as if we were not suffering. For it is at such periods that the sense of our lives having visible and invisible relations beyond any of which either our present or prospective self is the centre, grows like a muscle that we are obliged to lean on and exert. (*AB*, pp. 487-8)

Though this passage refers mainly to Adam's suffering upon recollection of Hetty's tragedy, it is by no means confined to this. His guilt about the way he treats his father is an important part of his pain. The passage indicates that we gradually get used to our mental pain, but this does not mean such habitualisation will lessen the pain. It is still there and can be acutely felt. There is no such thing as 'perfect ease' in life. Suffering has become a habit. What we see here is the dynamic process of character building. Because of suffering and pain, the self can never be a stable entity but is full of tension and conflict. It is this tension which prompts people to move on and to grow. It prompts Mr. Tryan to 'rescue other weak and falling souls' (JR, p. 291), and Adam to do his work 'well' so that the world becomes 'a bit better place for them [the Poysers as well as others] as can enjoy it' (*AB*, p. 471).

In this section, I have argued that through circumstantial memory, Adam and Mr. Tryan hold themselves responsible for the death of the people they love and are thus

burdened by an unbearable amount of guilt. I further explored how they ascribe these wrongdoings to their moral flaws and manage to fix them by reforming the way they treat others. This process is also shown to bring about recovery from traumatic guilt.

Coda

Both Wordsworth and Eliot are more concerned with the internal, psychological consequences of actions rather than the external, physical punishment that occurs when a transgression is made. The transgression, in the cases I have discussed, is not real. It is self-incrimination through circumstantial memory on seeing the unforeseen consequences that an action seems to have initiated. The guilt over such a transgression, likewise, is artificial and imaginary. However, its effect upon the psyche is no less overwhelming than remorse over a real offence. Wordsworth holds himself responsible for having somehow become implicated in the bloodshed that followed the French Revolution, and it torments him. Adam's guilt over his involvement in his father's death through the harsh way he treats him is similarly acute, while Mr. Tryan's assumption that he has irrevocably ruined Lucy's life crushes him and turns him into a traumatized person.

Though similar in their exploration of the guilt triggered by circumstantial memory, the two writers differ in their opinions about the origin of wrongdoings. Wordsworth believes that sin and evil tend to start from their opposite: the pursuit of truth and virtue, the golden side of human nature. Therefore circumstantial memory in his case is particularly poignant, because the consequences are not only unintended, but meant to be the opposite. For Eliot, wrongdoings are connected with inherent flaws in character. If these can be mended and similar mistakes avoided in future, there will be less chance of inflicting pain on others. Thus Eliot outlines a more positive picture of

human life than Wordsworth, who holds that even if we behave well, we are not insulated from doing wrong.

While the two writers share their belief in the potential of circumstantial memory to wound, their characters follow different recovery patterns. For Wordsworth, circumstantial memory itself can heal the wound it has inflicted. It has a self-healing mechanism, which, by producing evidence that does not cohere into a causal pattern, disrupts the self-incriminating narrative. In Book X of *The Prelude*, while busy weaving a self-incriminating narrative, Wordsworth's memory is at the same time working rapidly to provide an alternative narrative amid his guilt-implication story. It destabilizes the latter and in this way reassures the poet that he has been making the right choice throughout. For Eliot, however, circumstantial memory does not provide such a self-healing mechanism. The psychic wound can only be cured through the reformation of moral habits. Mr. Tryan thus recovers once he has decided to get rid of his evil habits and devote himself to helping others to lead a better life.

This brings me back to the idea I raised in the introduction to this chapter. In the recovery pattern Eliot outlines, the interaction between recollective memory and habit-memory is apparent. Guilty recollections of the wrongdoings in the past prompt Adam and Mr. Tryan to develop new habits. Wordsworth's recovery pattern, however, does not quite fit in with this mode of recovery.

Another major difference is that Wordsworth himself is the fountain of strength in his recovery. Eliot's characters, on the other hand, rely heavily on the help of other people for the healing of their wounds. For Mr. Tryan, the two means of integrating psychic wounds into a positive narrative memory, verbalization and action, both require

other people's participation: verbalization involves talking through his painful past to others and being encouraged to see guilt as the starting point of a new life; action is mainly about devoting himself to rescuing others from misery. Arguably, such a recovery pattern anticipates later trauma theory.

Though the two writers follow different recovery patterns, for neither of them is the recovery complete. In Wordsworth's case, though circumstantial memory itself has the self-healing mechanism, it only results in a partial recovery. The images the poet conjures up and the circumstances he lists are not powerful enough to counter-balance the narrative of self-recrimination. He ends up suffering from a tug-of-war in his psyche, torn between self-recrimination and self-exculpation. Neither can Eliot's characters fully recover from their painful experience. Wound becomes a habitual part of Adam, while the traumatic past forever haunts Mr. Tryan prompting him to give help to others in order to alleviate his own pain.

Chapter Four

Collective Memory in 'Michael' and *The Mill on the Floss*

Introduction

In the previous chapters, drawing on a variety of theories from both the writers' own times and from the twentieth century, I have examined individual habit-memory and its relationship with universal humanity, duty and guilt. This chapter will shift to a discussion of collective habit-memory, which in my thesis refers to the attachment to habitual objects, habitual modes of thinking and behaving, loyalty to the group into which one was born, and adherence to traditional duties and to the faithful performance of local customs. These are, according to James Booth, 'the non-explicit, nearly invisible values, behaviors, and beliefs', which show clearly 'the persistence of the past' in the present.[1]

Both Wordsworth and Eliot place particular emphasis on the attachment nurtured through human beings' habitual contact and interaction with the spatial objects with which they are surrounded. In Book I of *The Prelude*, the poet points out the inseparable relation between repetition and affection: 'By pleasure and repeated happiness— / So frequently repeated', the 'same scenes' become 'habitually dear'.[2] The repetition of the word 'repeated' highlights the fact that regular contact is essential in the development of attachment. In 'To the Spade of a Friend', the poet speaks highly of the intimate relationship between the spade and its master, with which he 'hath tilled his Lands' for

[1] W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. xi-xii.
[2] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850, Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 1805, I, line 1; lines 632-40.

so long: 'His powerful Servant, his inspiring Mate!'.[3] Again we find the cultivation of affection through habituation.

Numerous examples can also be found in Eliot's novels, in which the attachments formed with objects of daily use are eulogized. More importantly, Eliot stresses the acute sense of unease that emerges when these habitual objects are gone. In *Felix Holt*, Mrs. Transome tries to persuade her son not to use his father's long-accustomed bedroom, otherwise he will feel confused and disoriented: 'Your father has slept there for years. He will be like a distracted insect, and never know where to go, if you alter the track he has to walk in'.[4] In 'Janet's Repentance', the narrator compares habitual life to 'a wall hung with pictures': 'Take one of the pictures away, and it leaves a definite blank space, to which our eyes can never turn without a sensation of discomfort'. This 'discomfort', the narrator suggests, is remarkably destructive: 'The involuntary loss of any familiar object almost always brings a chill as from an evil omen; it seems to be the first finger-shadow of advancing death'.[5]

In the texts discussed in this chapter, 'Michael' and *The Mill on the Floss*, I argue, the attachment to habitual objects is not a purely individual sentiment. It has a collective root, deriving from the community or social group to which the characters belong. Moreover, both Wordsworth and Eliot are keenly aware that their characters' collective memory is closely connected with the agrarian culture which coheres through habit, but which is being threatened by the encroachment of capitalism. This, then, leads to my discussion of how the two writers think social changes should be carried out. For Wordsworth as well as for Eliot, social change should be a gradual process, not an

[3] William Wordsworth, 'To the Spade of a Friend', in *Poems in Two Volumes, and Other Poems: 1800-1807*, edited by Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), line 1; line 26.
[4] George Eliot, *Felix Holt, The Radical*, ed. by Fred Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 20.
[5] George Eliot, 'Janet's Repentance', in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. by Thomas Noble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 1985), p. 254.

abrupt break from the past.

* * *

In this section, I will explore Michael's collective memory, which is manifested in his embodied understanding of and attachment to his patriarchal land and his resistance to its loss. The poem suggests that, in Wordsworth's view, social changes should be carried out without damaging society's collective roots.

My discussion will be divided into two parts. In the first part, through a phenomenological reading, I will contend that the habitual life Michael leads on his land is not a mechanical and clockwork experience but an embodied experience both of himself and of his family group. In the second part, through the discussion of how this collective memory is disrupted by the intrusion of capitalism, I will discuss how Wordsworth thinks social changes should be brought about.

A Phenomenological Approach to Habit

Several critics have noted the integrated relationship between Michael and the spatial objects which are his daily company. Michael Friedman points out that Michael is 'virtually interpenetrated with the land he works'.[6] David Bromwich remarks that Michael's consolation after his son is gone involves the freedom associated with his return to 'a loved and familiar place, which he knows as an extension of himself'.[7] However, most critics do not explore the reasons for this intimate relationship between Michael and his land.

[6] Michael Friedman, *The Making of a Tory Humanist: William Wordsworth and the Idea of Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 188.
[7] David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 5.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the relationship between habit and space may provide the best answer to this question. Before discussing Merleau-Ponty's theory, however, I would like to shift to the behaviourist idea of habit, which Merleau-Ponty sets out to critique.

In Chapter Two, I discussed the associationists' theory of habit, as exemplified by Hartley and Lewes, both of whom explain the mechanism of habit in terms of reflex action. These ideas anticipate modern behaviourists' idea of the formation of human behaviour. In the opinion of behaviourists, the body is modelled after Newton's clockwork universe, which abides by the law of physical causation. Following this mechanical view of the body, habit is understood in terms of a conditioned reflex, and habit acquisition is explained as the process of forming new reflexes on the basis of older ones.[8]

Merleau-Ponty finds this explanation of human behaviour inadequate, because by seeing habit in terms of mechanically caused responses, one finds that human behaviour is no different from that of animals and is thereby 'divorced from the world of meaning, purpose and agency' characteristic of human beings (Crossley, p. 63). Merleau-Ponty wants to overcome the body-mind dichotomy through a revision of the behaviourists' notions of the body. In his view, man is an embodied agent, or, as he insists, 'I am my body'.[9] Nick Crossley explains the notion of 'embodied agent': 'I have a pre-reflective sense or grasp on my environment, relative to my body, as is evidenced by my capacity to move around in and utilise that space without first having to think

[8] For a detailed discussion of behaviourists' views on human body and habit, see Nick Crossley, *The Social Body: Habit, Identity, Desire* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), pp. 63-5. All subsequent quotations of this book are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

[9] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 231. All subsequent quotations of this book are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

how to do so' (Crossley, p. 122). Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between the body's 'pre-reflective' grasp of the environment and the behaviourists' notion of 'involuntary action'. In an involuntary action, the body has no agency. It functions like a machine, passively responding to external stimuli. The channel through which a sensation is discharged is so entrenched through repeated practice that the action can be performed without the exercise of the will. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'pre-reflective' action, or the body's ability to perform an action 'without first having to think how to do so', emphasizes the body's capacity for feeling and knowledge. If one drives or parks a car, one has a 'pre-reflective' knowledge of its speed and size as though it were one's own body. In other words, one does not 'think *about* the car', but 'think *as* the car, *from the point of view of the car*' (Crossley, p. 123, original emphasis).

Merleau-Ponty also revises the traditional concept of 'understanding' as 'subsuming a sense-datum under an idea', suggesting that there is no understanding exclusively within the realm of the mind and detached from the body. He goes on to explain how the body understands significance by forming a habit. 'To understand', he tells us, 'is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance' (Merleau-Ponty, p. 167). A movement is learnt when the body has understood it. The better the body understands significance, the easier the movement becomes. The knowledge thus acquired is practical knowledge, a form of bodily know-how.

Merleau-Ponty further explores how such knowledge is understood by the body – that is to say, how a habit is formed. The body understands by incorporating the spatial objects it inhabits into itself, so that they become the body's extension. Within Merleau-Ponty's theoretical framework, therefore, space is not something objective, and

'we must therefore avoid saying that our body is *in* space, or *in* time. Rather, it *inhabits* space and time'. It 'combines with them and includes them' (Merleau-Ponty, p. 161; p. 162, original emphasis). To be more specific, habit 'expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments' (Merleau-Ponty, p. 166). Merleau-Ponty's use of the words 'dilating' and 'appropriating' enables him to deconstruct the subject-object dichotomy, and emphasizes that human beings are what they are in touch with on a daily basis; to live is to be one with the spatial framework with which one is surrounded.

A corollary of this new conception of habit formation is a new way of remembering. Refuting the associationists' and behaviourists' conception of remembering as the establishment of a reflex action, through which a sensation can be discharged more easily, Merleau-Ponty argues that we remember through incorporating spatial objects into the body itself.

The etymology of 'habit' and 'inhabit' also suggests that there can be no absolute division between the subject and space. Both 'habit' and 'inhabit' are derived from the Latin word *habitare*, which means 'to have possession of, dwell, abide' (*OED*). To have and to live permanently in a place are virtually one and the same thing. To be a human being means more than 'to dwell', as Heidegger proposes. It also means incorporating a place into one's own being.[10]

While Merleau-Ponty studies human behaviour more from an individual's point of view, Pierre Bourdieu situates the individual within the social group to which he belongs. In other words, his starting point is the collective aspect of an individual's

[10] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 349.

habit. Nick Crossley remarks that 'though the intellectual genealogy is unclear, it is commonly held that Bourdieu builds upon the work of Merleau-Ponty' and extends his insights into 'the sociological domain' (Crossley, p. 91). His concept of 'habitus', 'systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*',[11] is an appropriation of the Latin word *habitus*. In stressing 'habitus' as 'systems' and considering the individual habitus as but a 'variant' of its 'collective root', he goes a step further than Merleau-Ponty in emphasizing that such a body memory is a re-enactment of a collective past (Crossley, p. 94). In saying that 'habitus' is 'durable' and 'transposable', he also highlights its function in giving an individual and a community a sense of continuity.

Another theorist relevant to the discussion of collective memory is Maurice Halbwachs. Though not phenomenological in approach, his theory, like that of Bourdieu, is collectively oriented. He emphasizes the integrated relationship between man and the spatial framework in which he is surrounded, maintaining that 'when a group has lived a long time in a place adapted to its habits, its thoughts as well as its movements are in turn ordered by the succession of images from these external objects'.[12] Halbwachs describes vividly the integration between a group and its habitual surroundings, suggesting that after a long period of residence, the relationship between a group and its environment is that of 'life merged with things': 'The place a group occupies is not like a blackboard, where one may write and erase figures at will. […] Place and group have each received the imprint of the other' (Halbwachs, p. 130). As a result of such integration, the spatial framework has become a part of the group's collective identity, by which it makes sense of itself. Halbwachs maintains that 'our habitual images of the

[11] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 72. All subsequent quotations of this book are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.
[12] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 133. All subsequent quotations of this book are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

external world are inseparable from our self' (Halbwachs, p. 128). Such a relationship resists the force to change, because to lose these images would be to 'lose the support of the tradition that recommends them and gives them their unique reason for existence' (Halbwachs, pp. 135-6). That is why if the appearance and layout of the place where a group dwells are 'altered' or 'demolished', the group will 'object'. This 'resistance' arises not simply from the individual, but from the group (Halbwachs, p. 134).

The phenomenological approach is adopted in this chapter as I find the behaviourist approach to habit inadequate in understanding the relationship between habit and place in 'Michael' and *The Mill on the Floss*. The theories of Bourdieu and Halbwachs are also important as they shed light on our understanding of the collective nature of the habitual behaviour of Wordsworth's and Eliot's characters.

'Michael'

Michael leads a habitual life on his land. Many words and phrases indicating time are used to depict the constancy of his habit, such as 'daily', 'at all times', 'so oft', 'oftentimes', 'as before', 'from day to day', 'day by day', 'month followed month', 'from year to year'. The frequency with which they appear in the poem is striking. 'Daily' appears four times; 'oftentimes' comes up three times; 'from time to time' appears twice.[13]

The regularity of Michael's family routine is evidenced in the punctuality with which they light their lamp:

as duly as the light

[13] William Wordsworth, 'Michael', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). All subsequent quotations of this poem are from this edition with line numbers given in parentheses.

> Of day grew dim, the House-wife hung a lamp;
>
> […]
>
> And from this constant light so regular
>
> And so far seen, the House
>
> […] was named the Evening Star. (‘Michael’, ll. 115-6; ll. 143-6)

‘Duly’, ‘constant’ and ‘so regular’ point to the fact that this pattern hardly goes through any change. The metaphor is very suggestive, especially when the poet pairs it with the punctual occurrence of the natural phenomenon. It conveys the sense that the old couple’s fixed pattern of life is itself part of the natural world, comparable to the rising of the moon and the appearance of the star.

More importantly, their life pattern is not only repetitive, but also cyclic. ‘When / At length their time was come, they were not loth / To give their bodies to the family mold’ (‘Michael’, ll. 378-80). James Chandler has noticed the ‘rich Wordsworthian paronomasia’ of the word ‘mold’.[14] It indicates the earth of the grave, but it may also mean a pattern by which something is shaped. In this poem, Michael’s lifestyle is shaped by his forefathers, and he hopes that his son Luke’s life will be similar to his. The family mould is a force that shapes the lives of later generations. There may also be a third layer of meaning, as ‘mould’ also means ‘Rotting earth considered as the material of the human body’ (*OED*, mould/mold n^1 2.a.). As such, the mould is more than a synecdoche symbolizing death or a life-shaping force. It is the very substance of which life is made. When Michael dies, he becomes dust again and makes new life possible. From the dust he comes, to the dust he returns. The family mould is thus where the life of each generation both begins and ends. Life and death in the community

[14] James Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 165.

of Michael's family are not mutually exclusive, but part of a cycle of repetition.

The rhythmic and cyclic pattern of pastoral life depicted here is reminiscent of 'The Brothers', in which the priest describes the village life in a similar way: 'A wood is felled', 'A child is born or christened', 'a field ploughed', 'A daughter sent to service', 'a web spun', 'The old house clock is decked with a new face'.[15] Both poems draw a picture of the timeless practice that has been transmitted from previous generations and will carry on into the future.

Michael's habitual life is not a mechanical and clockwork experience. It shows Michael's embodied relationship with the spatial framework in which the shepherd is surrounded:

> An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb.
> His bodily frame had been from youth to age
> Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen
> Intense and frugal, apt for all affairs,
> And in his Shepherd's calling he was prompt
> And watchful more than ordinary men.
> Hence he had learned the meaning of all winds,
> Of blasts of every tone, and often-times
> When others heeded not, He heard the South
> Make subterraneous music, like the noise
> Of Bagpipers on distant Highland hills.
> […]

[15] Wordsworth, 'The Brothers', in *The Major Works*, lines 155-8.

And truly at all times the storm, that drives
The traveller to a shelter, summoned him
Up to the mountains. (‘Michael’, ll. 42-58)

One may argue that there is still a body-mind dichotomy in the lines quoted above. However, when the poet describes Michael’s mind, he uses such phrases as ‘apt for all affairs’, ‘prompt / And watchful’ in ‘Shepherd’s calling’. These phrases show that even though the word ‘mind’ is used, the emphasis is on its practical aspect: the dexterity and readiness in performing skills and solving problems. This echoes the core of Merleau-Ponty’s idea that there is no metaphysical or contemplative mind as such. The mind is practically engaged and oriented. Michael’s knowledge of ‘the meaning of all winds’ is a perfect example of this. It is not metaphysical knowledge, but practical know-how, quite similar to the typist’s knowledge of the keyboard, which Merleau-Ponty terms ‘knowledge in the hands’. ‘Music’ expresses the harmony achieved between Michael and the spatial objects that surrounds him, between Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘what we aim at and what is given’ (Merleau-Ponty, p. 166; p. 167).

The poet also emphasizes Michael’s extraordinary bodily strength: ‘stout of heart’, ‘strong of limb’, ‘unusual strength’. Indeed phrases like these appear altogether three times in the poem. In the light of Merleau-Ponty’s theory that ‘a movement is learned when the body has understood it’, the poet’s emphasis of Michael’s physical aptitude and fitness in performing these highly proficient shepherding skills show that his body has well understood its tasks.

Just as the habitual life Michael leads shows his embodied understanding of his environment, so the spatial framework within which he operates is not something

external to him. To borrow Merleau-Ponty's vocabulary, Michael is not 'in space'. Through the habits he develops there, he 'dilates' his 'being-in-the-world' by combining with and including the spatial framework around him. As a result, the hills and the fields and everything with which he has daily contact have become part of himself. As the poet tells us, 'These fields, these hills' are 'his living Being', a phrase reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's argument, 'the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself' (Merleau-Ponty, p. 474).

As a result of such incorporation, Michael is deeply attached to his land. The narrator emphasizes that it would be wrong to suppose that the valleys, the streams and rocks are 'things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts' ('Michael', l. 64):

> […] these fields, these hills
> […] had laid
> Strong hold on his affections, were to him
> A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
> The pleasure which there is in life itself. ('Michael', ll. 74-9)

To call this love 'blind' highlights the fact that the nature of the attachment is without the involvement of consciousness. It reminds us of the pre-reflective, bodily knowledge Michael has acquired through the long-term familiarity with his land. Such a love is further reaffirmed by the poet's insistence that Michael's love of his land is similar to his love for his son. When describing Michael's love for his son, the poet uses similar vocabulary to that in the passage above: 'This Son of his old age was yet more dear— / Effect which might perhaps have been produced / By that instinctive tenderness, the same / Blind Spirit, which is in the blood of all' ('Michael', ll. 150-3). The word 'blind'

appears again after being used to describe Michael's love of his land. The poet makes a direct connection between the two kinds of love by insisting that they are actually one and the same thing. That is to say, Michael's relationship with the fields and the hills is that of a blood-tie relation. The use of the words 'blind' and 'instinctive tenderness' suggests that the nature of such a relationship is not conscious but deeply habituated. In the lines 'even more / Than his own Blood' ('Michael', ll. 74-5), what the poet actually suggests is that Michael's love of his patrimonial field has surpassed the blood-tie relation. In an oblique way, this foreshadows his decision to keep his land and let go of his blood relation when it is in danger of being lost.

Michael's attachment to his land is not an individual sentiment, but a collective attachment shared by his family group. This is what Bourdieu means by saying that each individual's habitus is 'a structural variant' of that of his group or class (Bourdieu, p. 86). Such a collective attachment between farmers and their patriarchal land is emphasized by Wordsworth in his letter to Charles James Fox on 14 January 1801:

> But if they are proprietors of small estates, which have descended to them from their ancestors, the power which these affections will acquire amongst such men is inconceivable by those who have only had an opportunity of observing hired labourers, farmers, and the manufacturing Poor.[16]

'Hired' is set in sharp contrast with the phrase 'descended […] from their ancestors', indicating that in the former the relationship with the land is simply a product of economics. This kind of relationship can never nurture the powerful affections that

[16] William Wordsworth, *Letters of William Wordsworth: A New Selection,* ed. by Alan Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 42.

characterize the owners of landed properties. The fact that only owners of landed property have powerful domestic affections points to the fact that these affections are initiated by the family group, rather than simply originating from the individual. Michael's attachment to his land could hardly be so powerful if his relationship with the land was of short duration and without the feelings accumulated over generations.

Wordsworth's concern for the yeomen's attachment to their small inheritance was quite consistent. Forty-three years later, he mentioned this theme again when vigorously attacking the construction of a railway in Kendal and Windermere, saying that 'the degree and kind of attachment which many of the yeomanry feel to their small inheritances can scarcely be over-rated'.[17] If an individual's property is destroyed as a result of the building of the railway, Wordsworth argues, 'must he too the ruthless change bemoan / [...] Mid his paternal fields at random thrown?'.[18] The emphasis that the attachment to the land belongs to 'many of the yeomanry' reminds us again of Bourdieu's point that an individual's habit is deeply rooted in the collective.

Just as Michael's affection for the land grows out of the collective root, so too does his resistance to its loss. Michael laments that the land 'looks as if it never could endure / Another Master', as though these fields, as human beings, also had feelings ('Michael', ll. 389-90). Actually the resistance comes not from the land, but from the family group. Michael knows clearly that if the land is lost through him, he will be the betrayer of his family. As he explains, he has 'lived to be a fool […] / To my own family', and 'could not lie quiet in my grave' ('Michael', ll. 245-6; l. 242). The emphasis on the whole family highlights Halbwachs's idea of the collective nature of

[17] William Wordsworth, 'Kendal and Windermere Railway', in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), III, 339.
[18] Wordsworth, 'Sonnet on the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway', in *Prose Works*, III, 339, lines 9, 11.

such a resistance.

In fact, what is collectively rooted is not only Michael's attachment to the land and his resistance to its loss, but the whole of his habitual mode of life, a memory which James Booth claims pervades 'our lives-in-common'.[19] To borrow Pierre Bourdieu's vocabulary, it is 'an active residue' of the past experiences of Michael's forefathers which functions within the present, as is seen in their re-enactment in Michael's own life. Michael tells Luke that the land is a place his parents 'lived / As all their Forefathers had done' ('Michael', ll. 377-8). 'As' and 'all' point to the fact that the mode of life from one generation down to the next is characterized by sameness. From the way Michael teaches Luke shepherding skills, we can discern that Michael was taught in such a way by his father, who received similar instructions from his forefathers. This is what Bourdieu terms the transposability of habitus. If it were not for the loss of the land, the same habit would have woven a thread of continuity, which could extend itself into future generations.

The collective memory Michael has inherited from his forefathers is not confined to the similar lifestyle they lead, but extends to the value that belongs to the whole family group. When telling Luke how he has loved him, Michael says that 'I but repay a gift which I myself / Received at others hands' ('Michael', ll. 373-4). The love he gives to Luke is not something peculiar to him but a repetition of the way his parents behaved towards him, which is in turn the same way his grandparents loved his parents. What Michael hands down from his forefathers to Luke is not only love, but also a diligent, frugal and virtuous way of life. Michael's determination for Luke to join him in building the sheepfold demonstrates this point. He wants Luke to lead a life 'thy Fathers

[19] Booth, p. x.

lived', 'Who, being innocent, did for that cause / Bestir them in good deeds' ('Michael', ll. 420-2). Here the emphasis is on the collective values handed down from generation to generation.

The influence of collective past is strong in Michael. Though his parents never make an actual appearance, their influence is everywhere to be found. They are part of Michael's collective identity. Michael's profound distress when he is in danger of losing his land, his decision to keep the land by letting go of his son, and his idea of making a covenant with Luke and building the sheepfold with him – in all these we can feel their influence. This can also be recognized in Michael's vocabulary. When his direct speech is quoted, he frequently uses nouns and pronouns indicating the family as a group, such as 'we all', 'ours', 'our', 'them', 'both of them', 'they', 'their', 'my own family', 'all their Forefathers', 'thy Fathers', rather than referring to himself as an individual.

While the habitual life Michael leads is a collective mode of life shared by his family group, the land is also incorporated into the family's collective identity. When emphasizing 'these fields of ours', Michael means far more than that the family owns the land legally ('Michael', l. 240). Rather, he is saying that these fields are an integral part of them, through which they make sense of themselves. Halbwachs has emphasized the overwhelming significance of a residential place for a community, because 'the group's image of its external milieu and its stable relationships with this environment becomes paramount in the idea it forms of itself' (Halbwachs, p. 130). To lose them would be to lose 'the support of the tradition that recommends them and gives them their unique reason for existence' (Halbwachs, 135-6).

This is why Michael does everything he can to preserve his patrimonial land,

and therefore his collective memory, from being lost. The first thing he does is to send his son away to the city so that he can earn enough money to pay for the debt, and thus keep the land from being sold. He hopes that in this way he will be able to keep the land and the collective memory which it embodies.

Secondly, Michael tries to make his son remember the collective memory of his family group. He wants him to remember his own virtue and that of his forefathers, a sort of collective virtue, developed along with the habitual life they have all shared. The sheepfold can, as Michael hopes, serve as a shield against the potential threat from the dissolute city. ‘Should evil men / Be thy companions, let this Sheep-fold be / Thy anchor and thy shield’ (‘Michael’, ll. 416-8). The sheep-fold thus protects Luke from ‘all fear / And all temptation’ (‘Michael’, ll. 418-9). Michael clearly recognizes that the disruption of the blood-tie relationship with the land could result in relaxation of virtue. By preventing Luke’s collective memory from being impinged upon by commercial values, he hopes to keep both his family and his land intact.

After his son’s corruption, Michael takes refuge by staying in his land and sticking to his habitual life:

> There is a comfort in the strength of love;
> ’Twill make a thing endurable, which else
> Would break the heart:— Old Michael found it so.
> […]
>
> Among the rocks
> He went, and still looked up upon the sun,
> And listened to the wind; and as before

Performed all kinds of labour for his Sheep,
And for the land his small inheritance.
And to that hollow Dell from time to time
Did he repair, to build the Fold of which
His flock had need. (‘Michael’, ll. 457-71)

The reader is not told how heart-broken Michael is after hearing the ‘heavy news’. In fact, we are not given any description of how the news is received and how the family struggles to bear it. Instead, habit emerges with full force, counter-balancing the tragic episode that went before and giving the reader some sense of comfort. ‘Still’, ‘as before’ and ‘from time to time’ all speak of the old way of life to which Michael tightly clings. It seems that these are the only phrases in which he can take refuge. As David Bromwich points out, ‘Michael will find “a comfort in the strength of love”; but he does it by recurring to the worn tracks of his customary existence, the same life as before amid “those fields, those hills”’. [20] It is through returning to his habitual existence that Michael once more finds love, comfort and his identity. This ‘therapy of self-recovery’ shows how powerful tradition and custom can be.[21]

Critics have debated the cause of Michael’s tragedy. Some hold that it is the intrusion of capitalism which disrupts the harmony of agrarian life. Michael Friedman maintains that ‘the infiltration of the newer, more rationalized, more blatantly egotistical and calculating forms of capitalism […] into the natural economy’ can be ‘destructive of’ the rural community’s ‘affective ties’, which are ‘contingent upon the maintenance and prosperity of the natural economy’. The breaking of the bonds of affection between

[20] David Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance: Self and Community from Edmund Burke to Robert Frost* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 68.
[21] Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance*, p. 70.

Michael and his son serves as an example of this.[22] In a similar way, Roger Sales holds that it is an 'ill-defined and significantly distanced commercial ethos which destroys Michael's estate'.[23] Thomas Pfau suggests that what Michael experiences is a revolution which not only accounts for the 'transmutation of landed wealth into mobile capital', but also results in the disappearance of 'the older, feudal notions of inalienable property relations'. Pfau quotes from a contemporary historian who considers 'the declining price of basic food costs that had resulted from increased agricultural productivity' a 'major factor' in the 'growing rates of bankruptcy experienced by families that had farmed their lands for generations'.[24]

At the other end of the spectrum, David Collings sees Michael's tragedy as arising out of the inherent problem in agrarian society. 'Insofar as Michael's life is disrupted by obligations to his kinsman', he argues, 'the system constructed for the preservation of the local tradition proves to be the source of its undoing'.[25] But David Simpson sees that Wordsworth deliberately avoids the suggestion that the family's decline is the result of either the external force or the inherent problem of agrarian life. For him, Michael's tragedy is of his own making: the poet attributes Michael's affliction to 'self-incurred […] fraternal loyalty' and thus shifts his focus to human rather than social factors.[26]

My own view is that Wordsworth wants to invite his readers to recognize that the intrusion of capitalism has disturbed the family's harmonious life. As Roger Sales

[22] Friedman, p. 186.
[23] Roger Sales, *English Literature in History: 1780-1830, Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p. 57.
[24] Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 197-8.
[25] David Collings, 'Covenant in Hyperbole: The Disruption of Tradition in "Michael"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 32 (1993), 551-76 (p. 555).
[26] David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 142.

points out, the way in which Wordsworth constructs the past in the poem is problematic. He is 'unwilling to commit himself even to general propositions about economic agency in relation to the internal structure of rural society' because he wants to suggest that early eighteenth-century rural society was 'a pre-capitalist utopia'.[27] This utopia, as my earlier argument shows, is characterized by a regular and rhythmic pattern, which provides its residents with a sense of ease and security. The newly emerged capitalist world, by contrast, is full of change and unpredictability, as the words 'unforeseen', 'suddenly', and the phrase 'un-looked for claim' suggest ('Michael', l. 223; l. 227). The sharp contrast the poet makes between the two kinds of society and his obvious preference of the former over the latter is plain to see. Reading the poem, one feels the intrusion of this new external force at whose hand the old world is powerless.

Another piece of evidence which supports this argument is Wordsworth's 1836 assertion that the poem drew its source from a local story about a son becoming dissolute and running away from his parents.[28] In the poem, however, the poet deliberately twists the story by stating that the son's corruption happens after he leaves his parents. The purpose of this reconstruction, as Simpson suggests, reflects the poet's wish to present the image of 'perfect familial harmony in an ideal rural economy', even though such a depiction is 'out of tune' with the facts.[29]

Wordsworth's own account in *A Guide through the District of the Lakes* also shows negativity towards the impact of the industrial revolution upon the old agrarian world of self-sufficiency. Before the industrial revolution, 'the family of each man', says the poet, whether *estatesman* or farmer, had a 'twofold support'. The first was 'the

[27] Sales, p. 55.
[28] William Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by E. de Selincourt, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), II, 478.
[29] Simpson, p. 143.

produce of his lands and flocks', and the second the profit made by women and children through spinning wool. However, 'by the invention and universal application of machinery', the second support had been 'cut off'. As a result, proprietors and farmers were

> no longer able to maintain themselves upon small farms, several are united in one, and the buildings go to decay, or are destroyed; and that the lands of the *estatesmen* being mortgaged, and the owners constrained to part with them, they fall into the hands of wealthy purchasers, who […] erect new mansions out of the ruins of the ancient cottages, whose little enclosures, with all the wild graces that grew out of them, disappear.[30]

In these passages, the poet depicts a livelihood very similar to that of Michael and Isabel. *The Guide* shows Wordsworth's deep concern about the impact of the industrial revolution on the social system of rural England, and the life of *estatesmen* in particular.

In depicting Michael and his family group's collective habits, their integrated relationship with the land, and the intrusion of capitalism which causes the disruption of this collective past from being transmitted to the following generations, Wordsworth follows Burke in his opinion about the damage caused to society by revolution, and, like Burke, suggests that social change should not be effected too radically.

In Burke's opinion, we are the bearers of our collective memory. This inheritance comes in the forms of habit, custom, morality, prescription, and even prejudice. This whole body of collective memory is the treasure that the previous

[30] Wordsworth, *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, in *Prose Works*, II, 224 (original emphasis).

generation has passed down to us, which makes us what we are. 'All those habits, customs, and local superstitions' are 'human nature'. They are the physical embodiment of 'the gradual accretion of practices' of the past generations.[31] They give meaning to man's existence and purpose to his action, like a 'compass' which guides man to his destination. If they are abolished all at once, man will become disoriented, not knowing 'distinctly to what port we steer'.[32] Life will become meaningless and void of purpose and motivation.

Just as an individual is an embodiment of his collective past, the same holds true of society. It is, according to Burke, 'a partnership' between 'those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born' (Burke, pp. 194-5). Burke compares the organic image of society to an edifice, with the collective memory that weaves the society together serving as its 'models' and 'patterns':

> It is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society, or on building it up again, without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes. (Burke, p. 152)

If society is an edifice, the collective past which is made up of shared beliefs and practices is the foundation upon which it is built. An individual will feel disoriented if he abandons the collective past while society will go through similar chaos if its collective memories are abolished. Mankind will end up with 'no compass to govern us' (Burke, p. 172). As a result, it is necessary to be extremely cautious when bringing

[31] Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance*, p. 45; p. 47.
[32] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 172-3. All subsequent quotations of this book are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

about social change: 'Amelioration by degrees is all our condition may allow'.[33]

As Burke's 'interpreter to the nineteenth century', Wordsworth has a notion of habit strikingly similar to that of Burke.[34] I mentioned in Chapter One that Wordsworth explains all actions in terms of habit, which is inherited from the past, and over which reason has no power of control.[35] His play, *The Borderers*, is perhaps the best example of what an individual can become once he chooses to shake off this yoke of the past and allow reason to become his ruler.

Society follows a similar trajectory. Echoing the vocabulary in Burke's suggestion that society is a partnership between the living, the dead and those who are to be born, Wordsworth sees society as a 'spiritual community binding together the living and the dead', emphasizing the impact of the past over the present. Moreover, in a structure similar to Burke's metaphor of society as an edifice or a tree, Wordsworth visualizes society as a web, a 'concentric circle', with self as the centre, and benevolence as the 'outermost and all-embracing circle'.[36]

In *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland*, Wordsworth expresses a Burkean view that social changes should allow the collective root to remain undisturbed. The letter was written in 1818 in support of the election of the Lowthers, who were representative of the landed interest, and against an outsider, Henry Brougham. Though the letter was written about two decades after the composition of 'Michael', by which time Wordsworth's general political stance had become more conservative, the poet's attitude to property and land remained quite consistent throughout his life. Roger Sales

[33] Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance*, p. 46.
[34] Bromwich, *A Choice of Inheritance*, p. 48.
[35] Wordsworth, 'Essay on Morals', in *Prose Works*, I, 103.
[36] Wordsworth, *The Convention of Cintra*, in *Prose Works*, I, 339-40.

remarks that the two texts address virtually the same issue, with the only difference lying in their 'emphasis'. The Lowthers and yeomen like Michael, he remarks, 'handed down their estates from father to son'. The two texts illustrate that 'the great and small were inextricably connected'. If these small estates 'were allowed to be broken up', then it was only 'a matter of time before the aristocratic estates and the realm of the state itself crumbled away'.[37]

In the letter, Wordsworth warns that the reformers should respect habit and the values handed down from the past:

> Independence, according to the meaning of their interpretation, is the explosive energy of conceit – making blind havoc with expediency. It is a presumptuous spirit at war with all the passive worth of mankind. The independence which they boast of despises habit, and time-honoured forms of subordination; it consists in breaking old ties upon new temptations, in casting off the modest garb of private obligation to strut about in the glittering armour of public virtue; in sacrificing, with jacobinical infatuation, the near to the remote, and preferring to what has been known and tried, that which has no distinct existence, even in imagination.[38]

The phrase 'passive worth' is reminiscent of Michael's 'blind' attachment to his land and his faithful performance of the local customs throughout his life, especially after his son's corruption. 'All the passive worth of mankind', 'habit' and 'time-honoured forms of subordination', 'old ties' and 'the modest garb of private obligation' are the collective

[37] Sales, pp. 53-4.
[38] Wordsworth, *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland*, in *Prose Works*, III, 170.

heritage, sustaining the spiritual community which binds the living and the dead. Social reform should not be conducted with the aim of 'casting off' the collective heritage. Otherwise the reformers are merely 'making blind havoc with expediency'.

Though Wordsworth advocates a sense of universal humanity in the image of the concentric circle, it is not achieved at the expense of the attachment to the near and dear. There is a hierarchy within the concentric circle, which proceeds from the centre of self to the outmost circle of humanity, the near to the remote. Similarly, in the passage quoted above, the poet's hierarchical order is apparent. Pairing up a group of antonyms, 'old ties' versus 'new temptations', 'private obligation' versus 'public virtue', 'the near' versus 'the remote', 'what has been known and tried' versus 'that which has no distinct existence', he advises reformers not to achieve the latter at the expense of the former. Otherwise the result can be nothing but destructive.

If this letter is a warning to political reformers, 'Michael' is an example of what happens when collective memory is cast off. When the land stops providing a sense of deep-rootedness for Luke, his blood-tie relationship with his family is broken and the virtues which characterize the communal life also disappear.

It can be argued that Michael's blind attachment to his land is negative, as it is pitched against his familial love and ends in the loss of his son, a situation summarized by Bromwich as, 'the love of family and the love of property' pulled in 'irreconcilably opposite directions'.[39] In my view, Bromwich touches the essence of Michael's tragedy. In the old agrarian world, with the smooth transmission of collective memory from one generation to another, the two forms of love are in harmony with each other. With the

[39] Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory*, p. 158.

invasion of capitalism, however, they stop going hand-in-hand and begin to pull in opposite directions. This is where Wordsworth's anxiety lies and what he sets out to critique.

The Mill on the Floss

Tim Dolin remarks that the 'question of inheritance was a crucial one for the Victorians, for whom industrial modernity was both a liberation and an estrangement from the pre-modern past'.[40] In this section, I will address the conflict between social progress and the question of inheritance as manifested in *The Mill on the Floss*. I will argue that Mr. Tulliver's blind clinging to his habitual life on the mill, which leads to his own destruction, and Maggie's faithful and yet painful commitment to her collective past, reflect Eliot's conflicting views on the inheritance of the collective memory of agrarian culture against a background of capitalist development.

As is the case with 'Michael', Merleau-Ponty's and Bourdieu's theories on habit, I suggest, shed light on the way in which the Tullivers are all deeply attached to the customary life and the old, familiar objects and places they inhabit. Maggie loves the mill in which her habitual life is located. The 'din' and the 'stones' make it 'a little world apart from her outside everyday life'.[41] She even 'loves' the 'corn-hutch' which she is 'in the habit of' […] sit[ting] on and slid[ing] down continually' (*MF*, p. 29). For Tom, too, the mill is his 'old favourite spot' and always 'heightened' his 'good-humour' (*MF*, p. 40). After the loss of the mill, he is determined to buy it back again because 'he should prefer it to any smarter, newer place' (*MF*, p. 226).

[40] Tim Dolin, *Authors in Context: George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 115.
[41] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. by Gordon Haight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 29. All subsequent quotations of this novel, abbreviated *MF*, are from this edition with page numbers given in parentheses.

The narrator repeatedly eulogizes human beings' attachment to the things and places to which they are used:

> We could never have loved the earth so well […] if it were not the earth where the same flowers come up again every spring […]— the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows — the same redbreasts that we used to call "God's birds," […] What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known? (*MF*, p. 41, original emphasis)

The parallelism and the repetition of the words 'same' and 'known' in this passage highlight the sense that love is inseparable from the feeling that these are old, familiar objects to which the narrator is accustomed. The narrator's insistence that they are 'the same flowers', 'the same hips', the same birds, reinforces the sense of emotional security provided by these habitual objects. The oxymoron 'sweet monotony' suggests the sense of pleasure and reassurance derived from things of our daily company.

The preference for what is known over 'novelty' is suggestive of the narrator's anxiety in a rapidly changing world. People may find this world puzzling and disorienting, so they cling instead to what is old and familiar, which may turn out to be costly. Though a preference for the familiar is not new, it is important to note what is peculiarly striking about the way in which it is described. The narrator explains why these objects engender a pleasure of 'sweet monotony':

> There is no sense of ease like the ease we felt in those scenes where we were born, where objects became dear to us before we had known the

> labour of choice, and where the outer world seemed only an extension of our personality: we accepted and loved it as we accepted our own sense of existence and our limbs. (*MF*, p. 151)

The whole passage is surprisingly Merleau-Pontean, especially the idea of the external world as an extension of the body. The narrator suggests that memory of the familiar objects in the immediate environment is acquired 'before we had known the labour of choice'. In other words, it is 'pre-reflective knowledge', obtained not through the mind, but through the body. Through habituation, we develop a physical familiarity with these objects and incorporate them into our own bodies. The outer world becomes 'an extension of our personality', and we remember it as we remember 'our own sense of existence and our limbs'. The ease we feel as adults is simply a re-enactment of this embodied understanding of the home scene deeply rooted in past experience. One is reminded of the narrator's comment in the opening of chapter three of *Daniel Deronda*, 'a spot where the definiteness of early memories […] may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood'.[42] By emphasizing the nature of early memories as 'a sweet habit of the blood' — an echo of Michael's blind attachment to his land — the narrator stresses yet again that it is pre-reflective, within the realm not of the mind but of the body.

The opposite of this ease, of course, is the dis-ease that afflicts Mr Tulliver when he has to abandon the mill and the land:

> The Tullivers had lived on this spot for generations. […] It was when he [Mr. Tulliver] got able to walk about and look at all the old objects, that

[42] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. by Graham Handley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 18.

> he felt the strain of this clinging affection for the old home as part of his life, part of himself. He couldn't bear to think of himself living on any other spot than this, where he knew the sound of every gate and door, and felt that the shape and colour of every roof and weather-stain and broken hillock was good, because his growing senses had been fed on them. Our instructed vagrancy […] can hardly get a dim notion of what an old-fashioned man like Tulliver felt for this spot, where all his memories centred, and where life seemed like a familiar smooth-handled tool that the fingers clutch with loving ease. (*MF*, p. 263)

Here again is the Merleau-Pontean image of the familiar place as a bodily extension. Tulliver's old home is 'part of his life, part of himself'. Strikingly, his whole life is depicted as a 'smooth-handled tool', an object that has worn smooth with the passage of time and is therefore both reassuring and handy, effectively becoming an extension of his own body. The physical comfort he now feels is rooted in the 'making present' of his past, in his body's appropriation of the 'old home' and 'the old objects' through years of residence on the patrimonial land. Eliot's analysis of Tulliver's habitual ease in his surroundings is similar to Merleau-Ponty's example: a man 'in the habit of driving a car' is able to 'enter a narrow opening' and see that he 'can "get through" without comparing the width of the opening with that of the wings', because he feels its width and height as if they were his own limbs (Merleau-Ponty, p. 165, original emphasis). Tulliver's surroundings are part of his life in another sense: they are the source of the content of his mental life, as 'his growing senses had been fed on them'. The word 'fed' suggests that there is no dichotomy here between subject and object. Rather, the external world is appropriated, or more accurately, digested and absorbed into his life. To use the favourite image of Wordsworth and Eliot, it turns into his lifeblood.

As the result of such intense identification, Mr. Tulliver is deeply attached to his home, and cannot bear the thought of leaving it. Like Michael, who regards the hills and the fields as his 'living Being', 'more / Than his own Blood' ('Michael', ll. 75-6), Mr. Tulliver feels 'the strain of this clinging affection for the old home'. He cannot 'bear to think of himself living on any other spot than this'. If displaced, he will feel disoriented: 'I should go off my head in a new place'; 'I should be like as if I'd lost my way' (*MF*, p. 264).

Mr. Tulliver's habit-memory of the mill is a re-enactment not only of his individual past but also of his collective past. As Bourdieu explains, 'each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a structural variant of all the other group of class habitus' (Bourdieu, p. 86). It is a collective memory of his family, which can be seen from the family's resistance to the mill's changing hands. Like Michael, who feels that the land he and his forefathers possess 'looks as if it never could endure / Another Master' ('Michael', ll. 389-90), Mr. Tulliver feels a similar bitterness when he laments the loss of the mill. As Tulliver's father repeatedly tells him, 'when the mill changes hands, the river's angry' (*MF*, p. 263). Actually it is the Tullivers themselves who cannot bear to part from the mill, which has become an integral part of them. Such a strong resistance, as Halbwachs argues, 'can emanate only from a group' (Halbwachs, 134). The attachment is so strong that Mr. Tulliver would rather choose to 'stop in the old place' and swallow his pride serving under Wakem, the man who has ruined him, than leave it and go to a completely new place. As he puts it, 'I wanted to die in th' old place, where I was born and my father was born' (*MF*, p. 266; p. 267).

Hao Li points out that in Eliot's early novels, 'affinity with one's "land" and

"place" […] in which one moves about', is 'an experimental connection that contains an ineradicable claim from the past'.[43] I would suggest that for Mr. Tulliver this 'past' is not simply an individual past but one characteristic of the class to which he belongs. The German sociologist Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl, greatly admired by Eliot, gives an example similar to the description of Mr. Tulliver's attachment to his old house, saying that a man 'has the warmest piety towards the old tumbledown house which his grandfather built', where he feels so physically comfortable. Riehl suggests that such an attachment to the customary life is a collective habit of the rural proletariat in his country, who act 'more as one of a group', and that 'many thousands of men are as like each other in thoughts and habits as so many sheep or oysters, which constitutes the weight of the peasantry in the social and political scale'. [44] Mr. Tulliver is just one of such people; in Bourdieu's words, his is but a variant of the habitus of the rural people.

Such a collective memory, Bourdieu tells us, is 'transposable' (Bourdieu, p. 72). It has been transmitted from Mr. Tulliver's grandfather to himself, and to Tom, whose faithfulness to his family prompts him to buy the mill back, and to Maggie, whose reverence for home and the ties knit in her childhood make her renounce her love for Stephen. Thus, because it is deeply planted in the collective past and acts as 'a hinge between past and present' (Crossley, p. 95), collective memory gives Mr. Tulliver a sense of deep-rootedness and continuity, so that he would rather remain in his own community and serve the man who has ruined him than start a new life elsewhere.

Maggie's embodiment of her collective past is best expressed in her 'faithfulness to kindred', to be more specific, to the ties knit by 'trust and love' in the earlier part of

[43] Hao Li, *Memory and History in George Eliot: Transfiguring the Past* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 28 (original emphasis).
[44] George Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 271; p. 268.

her life. When Stephen claims that 'natural law surmounts every other' (*MF*, p. 274; p. 471; p. 475), that these ties are 'unnatural bonds' that prevent her from the legitimate pursuit of love (*MF*, p. 465), Maggie argues that 'love is natural, but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too' (*MF*, p. 450). These qualities are 'natural' in the Burkean sense that they are our 'second nature', a habitual and inherited part of us (Burke, p. 299). In the words of Montaigne, we 'suck them in with our mothers' milk', and are 'born with the property of continuing to act that way'.[45] For Maggie, these ties are 'the best organs of her soul'. To be cut off from them would be like 'enjoy[ing] walking by maiming her feet' (*MF*, p. 458), an apt Merleau-Pontean image implying that the ties have become a bodily extension. Consequently, the severance of such ties amounts to a physical wound and is traumatizing.

More importantly, as these ties have their roots in the past, they are hallowed. For Maggie, home, where her old ties lie, is a 'sanctuary' where 'sacred relics lay' (*MF*, p. 479):

> Where, then, would be all the memories of early striving – all the deep pity for another's pain, which had been nurtured in her through years of affection and hardship – all the divine presentiment of something higher than mere personal enjoyment, which had made the sacredness of life? (*MF*, p. 458)

> We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us – for the sake of being true to all the motives that

[45] Michael de Montaigne, 'On Habit: And on Never Easily Changing a Traditional Law', in *Michael de Montaigne: The Complete Essays*, ed. by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 130.

sanctify our lives. (*MF*, p. 477)

What is particularly striking about these passages is the religious language adopted by Maggie. Memory, pity, duty, faithfulness and feelings nurtured in the past are the 'divine voice' which guides her through 'the darkness of this life' towards the 'light', a higher form of existence. Without such a guide, there will be no law in her life but 'the inclination of the moment' and a warrant for 'all treachery and cruelty' (*MF*, p. 475). If she turns her back on it, it will be a 'sin', a 'fall' (*MF*, p. 471), which will not only cause misery to her loved ones, but also leave her haunted by guilt. Thus, Maggie would rather give up her own happiness than betray her past.

Though the narrator eulogizes such a reverence for the past, she does not feel that it necessarily leads to happiness. In some cases a 'strong tenacity' to 'conventional worldly notions and habits' has 'no standard beyond hereditary custom'. It contributes nothing to either individual happiness or the general good of mankind (*MF*, p. 272). On the contrary, it can be destructive. Mr. Tulliver's blind clinging to his family's past nurtures a 'vindictiveness' towards Wakem, which leads to their fatal confrontation and Mr. Tulliver's subsequent death (*MF*, p. 275). It can become an excuse for persecuting others. St. Ogg's judgement on Maggie, made through its 'emmet-like' perspective of 'hereditary custom', prevents its people from gaining an insight into her lot and showing her their 'fellow-feeling' (*MF*, p. 498). It even outweighs brotherly affection so that Tom disowns Maggie for having disgraced the family.

Such a 'strong tenacity', as the narrator says, also prevents the local people from pursuing 'something beautiful, great, or noble' and thus becomes an 'oppressive' force (*MF*, p. 272). This is exactly what Maggie comes to experience. The sacred ties, without

which she feels handicapped, hold her in a 'tightening clutch' (*MF*, p. 471). They prevent her from pursuing the 'fulness of existence', the fulfilment of her own happiness (*MF*, p. 458). Though she is momentarily fascinated by Stephen's idea of a drastic break away from her past, by what the narrator calls 'those wild, uncontrollable passions', and feels that her indulgence of them is legitimate, wondering 'when […] all that her nature craved – was brought within her reach, why was she to forego it?', her inherited nature always gets the upper hand (*MF*, p. 272; p. 458). But when she tries to obey the 'old voices', she foresees 'a lonely future', burdened by 'regret', 'upheld only by clinging faith'. It is as if she has given up 'the life-nourishing day' for 'the damp darkness' (*MF*, p. 514). Thus she is forever torn between the 'cruel charm' of the love she longs for and the irresistible power of the past (*MF*, p. 480).

Mr. Tulliver and Maggie's tragic endings, I want to suggest, reflect Eliot's conflicting views on the inheritance of collective memory in agrarian society. They reveal the dichotomy Eliot feels between her commitment to the agrarian past and her desire for liberation, for social change. On the one hand, she is keenly conscious that change and liberation from the past are necessary. As Nietzsche claims, an individual's ignorant clinging to his roots is harmful because it prevents him from searching for something he thinks 'more worth having'. Nietzsche's alternative, like Stephen's, is a radical break away from the past: 'the best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge', and to 'combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit'.[46]

However, Eliot is keenly conscious that such a break with the past should not be too radical because in her view, society is an organic growth out of the past, out of

[46] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 73; p. 76.

'customs and traditions rooted in the past and still vitally meaningful in the present, in the enduring affective ties of family and community'.[47] This image of society reminds one of St. Ogg's, which the narrator depicts as 'one of those old, old towns which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature', carrying the traces of its history like 'a millennial tree' (*MF*, p. 115). The emphasis on the town as an 'outgrowth of nature', like 'a millennial tree', highlights the point that it is an organic growth out of the past. This resonates with Burke's image of society as an edifice and his idea that society is 'the offspring of convention' (Burke, p. 150).

Eliot's organic notion of society also echoes the view of Riehl, who expresses a similar view to Burke about the inheritance of the collective past by an individual as well as a society, and who regards European society as an 'incarnate history'.[48] Eliot's review of his book, *The Natural History of German Life*, represents the best way of understanding Riehl's political stance and conservative view on social development. The book, Eliot tells us, is a study of the habitual life of the small shopkeepers, artisans, and peasantry of German rural society. Whereas Burke focuses his study on the community of the *ancien régime* to see an individual and a society's complicated relationship with their past, Riehl's focus is on the lower classes, so his work has a direct impact on George Eliot. His notion of 'incarnate history' suggests that both an individual and society physically embody the collective past:

> We all of us physically embody, and carry forward through the generations, the nature of our collective being — our racial memory — in our customary acts, emotional responses, and social relationships.[49]

[47] Dolin, pp. 111-2.
[48] Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 281.
[49] Dolin, p. 112.

This clearly resonates with Bourdieu's insistence on the collective aspect of habitual behaviour and the customary way of thinking, which are 'transposable', capable of being transmitted from one generation to the next.

For Riehl, the peasant is a good example of the extent to which an individual is part of 'incarnate history'. The embodiment of the past is manifested in his blind acceptance of habit and strong affections for custom, prejudice and local tradition. '*Custom with him holds the place of sentiment, of theory, and in many cases of affection*'. The peasant's attachment to local customs such as its dialect, its phraseology, its proverbs and its songs, is 'a remnant of history to which he clings with the utmost tenacity'. He has historical traditions 'fresh in his memory', and 'anything is easier to him than to move out of his habitual course'. He has an 'inveterate habit of litigation', which is 'his point of honour'. He 'never questions the obligation of family-ties — he questions *no custom*'. Like Burke, Riehl believes that an individual suffers mental chaos when he is deprived of his customary way of life. He describes a lad who 'having never in his life slept in a bed, when he had to get into one for the first time began to cry like a child'.[50]

Society also inherits a great deal from the past. Again like Burke, Riehl believes that a social structure is a complicated inheritance from the past, which proves the best choice of the previous generations. He praises the old institution, the feudal system, which 'made the peasant the bondman of his lord'. This is 'an immense benefit in a country', as it 'rescued the peasant from vagabondage, and laid the foundation of persistency and endurance in future generations'. For him, the current society has its roots 'intertwined with the past'. Any social changes should therefore proceed carefully,

[50] Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 272-3 (original emphasis).

'allowing those roots to remain undisturbed'. Otherwise it will be destructive: 'Any attempt to disengage it [European society] from its historical elements' must be 'simply destructive of social vitality'.[51]

Riehl also establishes a connection between individual and society in their deep-rootedness in the past:

> The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium. […] There is an analogous relation between the moral tendencies of men and the social conditions they have inherited.[52]

Development, as he sees it, can only take place by 'the gradual consentaneous development of both'.[53] That is, both individuals and society should develop while allowing their collective memory to remain undisturbed, so that they both carry with them the 'incarnate history' of the past.

George Eliot also emphasizes the embodiment of past in an individual as well as a social group's habitual behaviour, customary life and social relationship. Eliot shares Riehl's view that we inherit an invaluable treasure from the past, which is physically embodied in our habitual behaviour and customary belief. Mr. Tulliver's profound attachment to the mill where his family have lived for generations, his habitual ease in it and his obstinate refusal to leave it, because he wishes to die in the place where his

[51] Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 272; p. 281; p. 283.
[52] Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, pp. 281-3.
[53] Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 282.

forefathers have lived, reveal the extent to which an individual can 'physically embody, and carry forward through the generations, the nature of our collective being'.[54] Likewise, Maggie has inherited a loyalty to the collective memory of her community from her father. She would rather stick to the affectionate ties formed in the past and abide by the moral code of her community than shake them off and pursue her own personal happiness.

Like individuals, society is also a past incarnate. This idea pervades Eliot's essay 'Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt', which lays considerable emphasis on the responsibility of the 'newly enfranchised working classes' to preserve 'the English cultural tradition',[55] celebrating

> knowledge, science, poetry, refinement of thought, feeling, and manners, great memories and the interpretation of great records, which is carried on from the minds of one generation to the minds of another.[56]

These are termed by Eliot 'the common estate of society', which one generation hands down to another. Of course, the scope of English cultural tradition is broader than that of the collective memory discussed in this chapter. However, Eliot's emphasis on the 'thought', 'feeling' and 'manners' one generation passes down to another can be seen as an acknowledgement of some key elements of collective memory.

Society, according to Felix Holt, who serves as a mouthpiece for Eliot's own views, is just like an organic human body woven by these 'precious benefits':

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[54] Dolin, p. 112.
[55] Fred Thomson, Introduction to 'Address to Working Men, By Felix Holt', in *Felix Holt, The Radical*, ed. by Fred Thomson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 412.
[56] Eliot, 'Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p. 348.

> Society stands before us like that wonderful piece of life, the human body, with all its various parts depending on one another, and with a terrible liability to get wrong because of that delicate dependence. […] That is because the body is made up of so many various parts, all related to each other.[57]

The body image here is apt. It reminds us not only of Burke's metaphor of society as an edifice, but also of Wordsworth's image of the concentric circle. Because of such delicacy and interdependence, social changes should not be carried out too radically. Since we all physically embody our collective past, society too, which also grows out of it, is similarly rooted in the past. It is like a human body, organic, vulnerable, and liable to go wrong because of such a 'delicate dependence'. Social changes should not allow these collective roots to be too deeply disturbed. As a gradual reformist, Holt / Eliot insists that social progress should not come 'in a hurry', so that 'no fatal shock may be given to this society of ours, this living body in which our lives are bound up'.[58] Also, as the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* claims, if 'the striving after something better and better' does not use its 'trick of twining round those old inferior things' and 'deep immovable roots in memory', 'heaven knows where that striving might lead us' (*MF*, p. 152).

In *The Mill on the Floss* too, the intrusion of capitalism is seen to have caused a 'fatal shock' to the rural community of which the Tullivers are a part, which is 'an organic outgrowth of customs and traditions rooted in the past'. Critics have analyzed Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy in a similar way to that of Michael. Some see it as the result

[57] Eliot, 'Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p.342.
[58] Eliot, 'Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt', in *Selected Critical Writings*, p.347; p.345.

of the intrusion of capitalism, while others ascribe it to the inherent problem of the rural economy. There are also critics who hold that Mr. Tulliver's tragedy is of his own making. Joshua Esty points out that the novel's setting, Dorlcote Mill, constitutes 'a *locus classicus* of English yeomanry'. Mr. Tulliver's loss of Dorlcote Mill to lawyer Wakem is 'a paradigmatic instance of the yeoman fallen prey to modernization'.[59] In his early work, Terry Eagleton also maintains that an external force brings about Mr. Tulliver's ruin. The rural society of the *Mill*, he argues, is one of 'struggling tenant farmers becoming enmortgaged and forced to ruin by the pressures of urban banking and agricultural industry'.[60] However, Eagleton's view has changed in his recent work. Though external factors play a part, he now sees the internal aspects of the rural community as more important in bringing about Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy. The novel, he points out, 'is not a fable of the death of the old organic society at the hands of sharp commercial practitioners like Guest and Wakem'. The rural community's own defects play 'a vital role' in the collapse of Mr. Tulliver's small-scale rural capital.[61] Kathleen Blake, however, holds that Mr. Tulliver's ruin is caused by neither external nor internal factors, but is of his own making. It is brought about by the poor account he keeps. 'He doesn't know how much capital he has at his disposal, how much is saved compared to owned'. He suffers from 'misrecognition' and 'category confusion', as he confuses gifts with loans.[62]

Diverse as these views are, my opinion is that like Wordsworth's construction of the story of Michael and his nostalgia for a more natural and coherent agrarian world, Eliot is suggesting that it is the intrusion of capitalism which has destroyed Mr.

[59] Joshua Esty, 'Nationhood, Adulthood, and the Ruptures of Bildung: Arresting Development in *The Mill on the Floss*', in *The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner*, ed. by Nahem Yousaf and Andrew Maunder (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 101-21 (p. 102; p. 103 original emphasis).
[60] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 115.
[61] Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 177.
[62] Kathleen Blake, 'Between Economies in *The Mill on the Floss*: Loans Versus Gifts, or, Auditing Mr. Tulliver's Accounts', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 33 (2005), 219-37 (p. 222).

Tulliver's habitual life in his old home, which is set in St. Ogg's, a traditional and organic agrarian community cohering through custom and collective values.

When rural people are displaced from their patrimonial land, the intimacy between body and land is destroyed, leading to further disruption of their habitual life and the loss of their embodied memory deeply rooted in the past. Collective memory, the hinge between past, present and future, is substituted by a traumatic feeling of displacement, a casting adrift from traditional roots, for which the tragic deaths of Mr. Tulliver and Maggie serve as a powerful symbol.

Coda

'Michael' and *The Mill on the Floss* have a lot in common. Stephen Gill remarks that the latter has been considered as Eliot's '"most Wordsworthian novel"', and that 'critics have noted […] the similarity between Mr. Tulliver's attachment to the mill and Michael's to his fields'.[63] Both texts also emphasize the agency of the body, which does not respond to the external stimuli mechanically, but is capable of feeling and knowledge. Michael's understanding of 'the meaning of all winds' ('Michael', l. 48) and Mr. Tulliver's knowledge of 'the sound of every gate and door' (*MF*, p. 263) both highlight the body's capability of knowing and understanding. Michael's aptness for all sorts of affairs on his land and Mr. Tulliver's feeling that life is like 'a smooth-handled tool' that 'the fingers clutch with loving ease' reaffirm that the knowledge they develop about their spatial objects is a bodily know-how, practically engaged and oriented (*MF*, p. 263).

Based on the characters' embodied understanding of the environment, habit

[63] Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 157.

formation is represented not as the creation of new pathways through repeated exercises, which is the view generally held by the behaviourists, but as the body's incorporation of the spatial framework into its own framework. The land Michael tills is his 'living Being' ('Michael', l. 74). Likewise, the mill Mr. Tulliver has had for many years becomes 'part of his life' and 'part of himself' (*MF*, p. 263). Angus Easson remarks that for both Michael and Silas Marner, things are 'extensions of their personalities'.[64] I suggest that this applies to Mr. Tulliver as well.

The incorporation of habitual objects into the body explains the profound attachment developed by Wordsworth's and Eliot's characters for objects of their daily experience. Michael loves his land 'even more than his own blood' and feels that it can never 'endure / Another Master' when going into a stranger's hand ('Michael', ll. 389-90). Mr. Tulliver too has a 'clinging affection' for his home, and cannot bear the thought of 'living on any other spot than this' (*MF*, p. 263).

Wordsworth and Eliot also share the view that the habitual life led by their characters and the attachment they have developed for it are not simply their own, but collectively rooted. Michael's customary life on the land, his deep love for it and his resistance to its loss are a collective memory of his family group, and in a broader sense, one shared by the whole class of yeomanry. Similarly, the ease and affection Mr. Tulliver feels towards his mill and his mortification when it changes hands represent a re-enactment of the habit of his forefathers. This re-enactment is a collective memory of the class to which Mr. Tulliver belongs.

The two texts can also be seen to adopt a similar nostalgic tone. Both are set in

[64] Angus Easson, 'Statesman, Dwarf and Weaver: Wordsworth and Nineteenth-Century Narrative', in *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp. 17-30 (p. 26).

the past. The story of ‘Michael’ goes back to the eighteenth century; *The Mill on the Floss* is set in Eliot’s childhood, the early nineteenth century. In a way, both writers have in mind an old agrarian world which coheres through habit and custom and which is for them more natural, giving its people a sense of anchorage and continuity. This world, however, is disappearing fast. The intrusion of capitalism, by depriving the people of their patrimonial land which is the embodiment of their collective memory, is shown to have caused a rupture in the smooth transmission of this collective memory from one generation to another. Such a radical change inflicts not only psychological disorder upon the individual, but also family misfortune. This can be seen clearly in the tragedies of Michael, Luke and Mr. Tulliver.

Social changes, as Wordsworth and Eliot see it, should not be made too swiftly. For them, society is an organic growth out of the past. If social changes are brought about too drastically, the collective root will be damaged, and people will suffer a traumatic displacement.

Similar though the two writers’ opinions are, there are points on which they differ. On the whole, Eliot presents a more nuanced view on the inheritance of collective memory compared to her predecessor. Wordsworth is uniformly positive towards it, and the ending of ‘Michael’ suggests that it not only serves as the hinge between past, present and future, but is also therapeutic. Eliot’s view on collective memory, however, is not altogether positive. Though it provides one with a sense of deep-rootedness and continuity, collective memory is also shown to be oppressive, as Mr. Tulliver’s obstinate refusal to change and Maggie’s painful commitment to the past demonstrate.

Conclusion

Memory, Aristotle tells us, is 'of the past'.[1] This thesis has attempted to show that this past need not be confined to the recollection of a particular event, but can also refer to the accumulative force of past actions re-enacted in the present, in habitual behaviour and customary ways of thinking. I have shown both Wordsworth and Eliot to be preoccupied with this aspect of the past, especially its moral implications. As morality is an important aspect of habit-memory, they are both eager to cultivate in their characters as well as in their readers the right mode of conduct through the work of habit.

In spite of such a shared interest, the two writers have been shown to address different issues at different times. In the works examined in this thesis, Wordsworth's concept of habit is mainly in dialogue with Godwinian reason; or broadly speaking, with the belief of radicals such as Godwin, Paine and Wollstonecraft, who maintain that the way society is constructed needs to be rationally based. Moreover, habit is represented as a means of coming to terms with the poet's disillusionment with the French Revolution. In spite of putting his faith in revolution, which he once believed could sweep away social corruption and lead to equality, Wordsworth later turned to habit, an imperceptible but reliable guide, to cultivate moral virtue, ameliorate human relations, mend class divisions, and bind men into a commonwealth of Christian brotherhood.

[1] Aristotle, 'De Memoria et Reminiscentia', in *Aristotle on Memory*, ed. by Richard Sorabji (Providence: Brown University Press, 1972), 449a9.

Eliot, on the other hand, has been shown to have dealt mainly with the loss of religious faith characteristic of her time. What Arnold thought could be achieved by culture, she believed could be obtained by habit. In other words, habit, for Eliot, was a worthwhile alternative to religion in helping man to overcome his inborn selfishness, develop a sense of duty, transform wrong-doings into positive experiences, achieve moral redemption and bind his fellow men into a brotherhood without recourse to a religious authority. Despite dealing with different issues at different historical moments, both writers put their faith in habit, accepting it as a trustworthy alternative in combating the major disillusionments in their lives.

This thesis has drawn on the philosophical and scientific discourse of the two writers' own times to explore their shared belief that our memory of the needs of others could be enhanced through repeated, habitual practice. With the move from Hume, through Hartley, to Lewes, one sees not only an increasing emphasis on education, but also a shift in focus towards the physiological process of habit formation and the role played by inheritance. This development from Romantic to Victorian science also marks the shift in focus from Wordsworth to Eliot. Though the educational function of habit was a concern for both writers, Eliot was certainly more anxious than Wordsworth about probing the physiological process behind the work of habit. Moreover, she was engaged with a much wider range of scientific dialogue than her predecessor, exploring the role of inheritance and social medium in habit acquisition in addition to Wordsworth's areas of focus. Her treatment of habit is therefore more comprehensive and her vocabulary more scientific. For example, she goes a step further than Wordsworth in discussing the role of habit when moral choice has to be made in an emergency. When an individual has no time to reflect and can only act upon instinct, the accumulative force of the past is best displayed. This force acts by us and for us, but has

already been determined through the performance of the same actions on similar occasions in the past.

Habit has not only been explored in the light of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century associationism, but also twentieth-century continental philosophy, specifically phenomenology. For Wordsworth as well as Eliot, habit has been shown to be an embodied activity. The incorporation of the spatial framework into one's own body and the development of an embodied knowledge of one's surroundings are used to explain the profound attachment of Wordsworth and Eliot's characters to objects of their daily company.

Furthermore, both writers see habit not as a purely individual phenomenon, but as a re-enactment of the collective past. In an individual's deep attachment to his habitual objects, customary life, and faithful performance of traditional duties, the imprint of his forefathers and the 'ingrained', 'spontaneously actualizing' memory of the community is apparent.[2] The persistence of this collective past plays a significant role in the moral choice of Wordsworth and Eliot's characters, whether its impact is positive or negative.

This leads to the discussion of the political significance of habit-memory, which, in the views of the two writers, works both diachronically and synchronically. Diachronically, it cements a community and gives its individuals a sense of anchorage and a collective identity. Society, for both Wordsworth and Eliot, is an organic growth out of collective memory, shared beliefs, values, and habitual feelings. Political reform should therefore be conducted in a gradual way, without damaging the collective roots

[2] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', trans. by Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7-25 (p. 13; p. 8).

of society. Otherwise, chaos will befall individuals. Synchronically, through the amelioration of human relations and the removal of the boundary between thick and thin relations, habit can help man to achieve universal humanity, a political ideal shared by the two writers. It must be noted, however, that Wordsworth's humanitarianism is that of a Christian brotherhood while Eliot's is secular and deprived of religious connotations. In spite of such a difference, both Wordsworth's concentric circle and Eliot's web of human relations rely heavily on memory for their sustenance. For them, either diachronically or synchronically, habit brings an individual beyond the narrow scope of the self and into an ever-widening circle.

On the whole, Eliot's treatment of habit is more nuanced than that of her predecessor. Wordsworth acknowledges that habit can be negative as well as positive, particularly when he wants to reform his readers' habits in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and expresses his anxiety that the villagers might yield to the habit of apathy without the presence of the beggar in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'. However, generally speaking, he is more positive about the value of habit in terms of both the individual and the community. Eliot, on the other hand, is always alert to the double-sidedness of habit-memory. She shows that, in terms of the individual, it can mould one into either a virtuous person or a villain, while collectively speaking, it can be both a source of the feeling of deep-rootedness and an oppressive force, preventing groups of people from leading more worthwhile lives. Moreover, in Eliot's novels generally, the interaction between habit-memory and recollective memory in the enhancement of moral virtue is more obvious. Guilty recollections, for example, are seen to be the starting point of moral reformation.

Like any research project, this study cannot cover every aspect of memory in its chosen writers. More work, I think, needs to be done to address the issue of nationalism, which began to emerge in the eighteenth century, and with which both writers are engaged. Particular attention should be given to its relationship with collective memory, and how it fits within the framework of universal humanity which both writers advocate. Moreover, the role of habit in *The Excursion* in relation to the maintenance of social order and the welfare of the nation is also worthy of further exploration.

In the works of Wordsworth and Eliot, through habit-memory, a memory which is hardly perceptible but which is the best means of removing the distance between past and present, we see not only the connection between past, present and future, but also the binding force between self, community and humanity.

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