Primitive Minds

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SUSPENDED ANIMATION AND SECOND SIGHT

Daniel Deronda and *Silas Marner*

In identifying the hallucinatory quality of Dickens's realism, Lewes indirectly links his style with George Eliot's. In her mature novels, Eliot largely abandons her empiricist confidence in "the humble and faithful study of nature" to a narrative form that respects the microscopic or invisible coordinates of external reality;[1] such form equates narrative perspicacity with an intuitive and imaginative power of vision rather than with the keenness of the common eye. Where dreamy minds in Dickens's novels discover the broad web of connections or the forces of disintegration that escape ordinary sense perception, Eliot's fiction animates the scientific eye to uncover the minute influences beneath observable forms.[2] For Dickens, the narrators and focal characters that communicate this extraordinary reality are nervous subjects, where for Eliot, ostensibly at least, they are higher-order thinkers who open the sensible world to its imperceptible elements. In so doing, they advance positive knowledge even as they aim to activate the

sympathetic fibers of a vast social organism. Sympathy is a form of second sight because in addition to registering the unseen, it requires the intuitive selection of the highest and most affecting forms from a vast assembly of stories and events. This is a form of imaginative vision, or prophecy, rooted in the social whole.

Yet in the strain to discern and order those microscopic truths, her fictions also explore the limits of narrative acuity. In *Daniel Deronda*—a novel that depicts the loosening of thought from the narrow portal of the ego into imaginative vision, or prophecy—there are also episodes of nervous arrest. Here the mind becomes overwhelmed by the minutiae that have no place in a fantasy of self. Such episodes tie the novel to Eliot's study of nervous states in earlier works, particularly *Silas Marner,* which focuses on the little understood disorder of catalepsy. For Eliot, catalepsy is the inverse of sympathy: In its radical arrest of all but the most automatic nervous functions, it also suspends social potential as it interrupts virtually all interaction between an organism and its environment. Although it is the nemesis of Eliot's visionary realism, catalepsy can be seen as a reaction to a shocked, sudden awareness of the larger stories in which the single life participates.

This interpretation engages some of what critics have already said about the dismantled identities at the heart of Eliot's narratives. Sally Shuttleworth has compared the loss of order and meaning in the life of the cataleptic Silas Marner to the dissolution of the shaping will in *Daniel Deronda,*[3] while more recently, Leona Toker has described *Deronda*'s "dialectics of self-loss and self-transcendence" as the ethical space for spiritual vocation.[4] Focused on the consolations of textuality, deconstructionist accounts of Eliot's novels have shown how the self's encounters with the sublime objects of world history or social whole engenders a destabilization or near-destruction of the self, whose "recovery" occurs as a scene or allegory of writing.[5] This chapter investigates the traumatized identities in Eliot's novels in terms of what David Carroll has described as a "prevision[ary] . . . primitive, superstitious self"—a self that pulls the novel in the direction of the unknown "unmapped country" of the mind's relationship to the world as much as it disperses the once confident, egoistic self into the immensity of its milieu.[6] As it reduces the human nervous system to an evolutionarily primitive organization, catalepsy marks the precarious quality of the visionary mind, which threatens not just the integrity of a willful, shaping ego, but the most fundamental motions of the inner life. In Eliot's sophisticated realism, as Levine has put it, "reality is inaccessible to mere common sense" and "the ideal becomes an essential component of [that] reality."[7] A true understanding of the intricate relations among things is made possible through "positivist idealism."[8] Yet even *Daniel*

Deronda, whose incisive narrative vision draws together a myriad of events from multiple lives and disparate social worlds, carries an undertow of nervous retreat. Like *Silas Marner,* it also depicts mental episodes in which there is little-to-no capacity for imaginative reach and the penetrating forces of science and second sight shrink into unfathomable facts and superstition.

I. GREATER AND LESSER MINDS

In a chapter of *Phantoms in the Brain,* V. S. Ramachandran and Susan Blakeslee put one of the yet unsolved mysteries of neuroscience back into the context of a two-century-old debate about religiosity, creativity, and evolution.[9] Having described how electrical storms in the limbic system provoke emotional charges that might be experienced as religious rapture, they then look at a case history in which mystical experience coincided with an extraordinary expansion of memory, speculating on the possibility of a neural correlation between spiritual transcendence and certain savant phenomena. Such miracles of the mind, they propose, should be interpreted within an evolutionary framework that can explain the development of compensatory mechanisms and specialized talents. They conclude, however, with an observation about creative genius, pointing out that this represents expanded areas of general intelligence, rather than extraordinary, isolated acts of mental brilliance. The source of this intense creative activity remains as obscure to scientists in the twenty-first century as it did to Darwin's colleague, Alfred Russell Wallace, who attributed it finally to God. In an odd way, the noncommittal nature of Ramachandran and Blakeslee's closing remarks are in keeping with the broad intellectual contours of Victorian debate about evolution. Their surrendering of scientific ground to the unknown, heightened by a tip of the hat to William Shakespeare and the mystery of his unrivaled gift for metaphor, implicitly invites other disciplinary modes of investigation, including art and literary criticism, to help make sense of some of the most obscure and extraordinary products of the mind.

Ramachandran and Blakeslee's cluster of speculations about mysticism, creativity, and mental strength revisits not just Victorian discussion of the relationship between art and science but also inquiry into the mental processes that produce these different forms of knowledge. Like Ramachandran and Blakeslee's investigation of the savant, George Eliot's novels explore connections between the exceptional and the primitive mind, tracing where recessed mental talents are realized through the expanding web of human social lives and where they point, in reverse, to the diminishing of social

experience. The contrast between greater and lesser minds is partly what structures the plots of *Daniel Deronda* and *Silas Marner,* yet in both texts the opposition is repeatedly tested. Both scientific and artistic imagination, the capacity to see larger connections, predict likely outcomes and distinguish key events, express the intellectual progress of the species as it is driven by sympathy. Yet these gifts, which belong to Eliot's narrators as well as to many of her principal characters, can also draw the mind away from the social world that nourishes it. At such moments, even narrative realism, which in Eliot's terms represents the most developed form of artistic expression, becomes vulnerable to a kind of sympathetic arrest or paralysis. The physiological counterpart of this suspended narrative animation is catalepsy, a condition that inflicts some of the most "evolved" as well as the most primitive characters in her novels.

In his literary criticism, G. H. Lewes identifies "vision" as the source of both scientific aptitude and artistic greatness. Vision originates in the general capacity of mind to transform sense perceptions, via the agency of inference, reasoning, and imagination, into knowledge about that which lies beyond the senses. In science, this projection moves across much greater distances than ordinary inference can travel. The rigorous interrogation of nature "requires intense and sustained effort of imagination" ("Vision," 573). Similarly, the artist "renders the invisible visible by imagination" (576), and unites what sense observes as two isolated objects into two related objects. The artist has the power to gather the "numerous relations of things present to the mind" (575) and form images beyond the promptings of the sense while nonetheless remaining true to the originating force of their impressions. Like science, great literature supplies "the energy of sense where sense cannot reach" (576) but is restrained by its duty to the accurate representation of experience. Literature's configuration of relations among objects and invention of new objects from the raw material of memory must be both distinct enough and true enough to human experience so as to arouse memories and kindle powerful emotions in a reader, "paint[ing] pictures which shall withstand the silent criticism of general experience" and "fram[ing] hypotheses which shall withstand the confrontation with facts" (579). Idealism is thus not opposed to realism but rather a "vision of realities in their highest and most affecting forms" (588); conversely, the capacity of great artists and exact scientists to see beyond immediate relations and reason beyond local experience, to work through "selection, abstraction, and recombination" (586) rather than memory, is a vital part of coming to know and communicate things as they really are.

This perspicacious, if not to some degree mystical,[10] realism therefore demands that the art object is embedded in social experience:

> [T]he fine selective instinct of the artist, which makes him fasten upon the details which will most powerfully affect us, without any disturbance of the harmony of the general impression, does not depend solely upon the vividness of his memory and the clearness with which the objects are seen, but depends also upon very complex and peculiar conditions of sympathy which we call genius. Hence we find one man remembering a multitude of details with a memory so vivid that it almost amounts at times to hallucination, yet without any artistic power; and we may find men—Blake was one—with an imagination of unusual activity, who are nevertheless incapable, from deficient sympathy, of seizing upon those symbols which will most affect us. (586)

Artistic genius is rooted in sympathy: the capacity to distinguish the most affecting elements from a "multitude of details." Unlike the realism that "confounds truth with familiarity and predominance of unessential details" (589), true artistic vision is in accord, not with the simple "gatherings of sense" (576) but with the imaginative experience of ordinary men of whom all but the most mentally sluggish exercise the power of forming images or bringing objects and ideas into existence that are not present to the senses. The poet's remarkable powers of selection, in other words, may demonstrate a special distinctness in the objects, relations, and emotions they bring to life, yet they remain true to the imaginative conceptions as well as the sense-based experiences of the whole body of sensitive, creative, and visionary social beings to whom they must appeal.

Lewes joins this confidence in the creative power of mind to give shape to the unknowable with Lamarckian principles of adaptive improvement.[11] His account of realism, which echoes Comte's claim for the progress of human thought from theology and metaphysics toward positivism, rests implicitly on a developmentalist argument that ranks human beings from the most sense-bound and mentally primitive to those most capable of profound sympathy and exquisite imaginative vision. "A man of genius is one whose sympathies are unusually wide." He embraces the thoughts and feelings of all those around him and out of these "greets the dawning of a new idea upon his soul."[12] In *Problems of Life and Mind,* Lewes makes this relationship between sympathy and human development explicit. Arguing that psychology must investigate not simply the organic or physiological conditions of

subjective experience but also the "modifications which arise from experience and history," he emphasizes that mental states and talents can be properly understood only with reference to the "social medium" that informs them (*Study of Psychology,* 25). What he calls the "spiritual" conditions (25) or the results of experience that frame all mental events are in turn shaped by social influences. It is through these influences, he argues, "that the highest powers are evolved" (26). Hence the difference between "a Goethe and a Carib" (27) is not one of organic structure but of faculties developed in a social medium that allows for "wide-sweeping intelligence with a sympathetic conscience" (27). Mental maladies, he then claims, are not, as the alienists have mistakenly and narrowly assumed, simply a matter of brain disease. If the patient is considered as a spiritual as much as an organic being and "the product of former generations," then the psychologist will recognize both the biological influence of ancestral abnormalities and the "sociological" influence of "the General Mind"(37). Psychology "must study man as a social animal," taking into account his "stages of development from the simple emotions and conceptions of rude, barbaric social states to the ever-increasing complexities of civilized states" (38).

For Eliot too, the imaginative creation of true relations among objects has an evolutionary history.[13] In a notebook essay on the principles of artistic form, she argues that the selection of images and rhythms that depict mental states in, especially, poetic form represents a higher or conscious version of the spontaneous grouping and selection that constitutes the natural growth of the mind itself.[14] Moreover, even as the invention of such form demonstrates a higher order replication of a fundamental organic process, this superior consciousness is nourished by the living emotions and sympathies, past and present, of the social organism it represents, just as "the beautiful expanding curves of a bivalve shell are not first made for the reception of the unstable inhabitant, but grow and are limited by the simple rhythmic conditions of its growing life."[15] Artistic form, in other words, is not created by near-divine fiat as a fixed frame for holding emotional content but is rather a dynamic response to the emotional rhythms of human organisms as they in turn adjust to the conditions of their environment. In place of the preposterous dualism that Eliot ridicules in her essay on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," which declares that the gifted lady artist can see more in the "soul of man" than merely the urgings of an advanced polypus, she identifies an organic interdependence between the creations of the gifted mind and the evolved social feelings out of which these forms emerge.[16]

However, as for Lewes, such artistic creation for Eliot involves selection and combination. The artist discriminates tones, rhythms, and sequences

that best express the myriad human passions she seeks to represent.[17] This act of discrimination is like those of empirical science, "knowledge [that] continues to grow by its alternating processes of distinction and combination, seeing smaller and smaller unlikenesses and then grouping or associating these under a common likeness."[18] The highest form is therefore an organism that binds the most varied constituents into a whole that in turn assumes multiplex relations with all the phenomena in its environment. Thus, even while the exquisite form of the ballad points back to the primitive huntsman's "rhythmic shouts" and "clash of metal," it also points forward to the formal expression of increasingly complex relations that in turn unlocks higher ranges of moral feeling.

In this respect, Eliot's organicist aesthetics reflect Spencer's Lamarckian evolutionism more than they do the principles of natural selection in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species.* Gillian Beer and Michael Davis have both shown that Eliot's fiction echoes key Darwinian themes, especially complexity and variety in the evolutionary process and the disruptive influence of chance on the idea of inevitable progress.[19] At the same time, Davis points out, her emphasis on the influence of habit on inherited forms, on the adjustment of the inner relations in an organism to the pressure of its environment, and the increasing tendency to "heterogeneity" and thus adaptive flexibility as that organism develops out of its primitive, more "homogenous" existence point to the influence of Spencer even as she critiques his rather rigid progressivism.[20] In her review of R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect,* Eliot argues that civilization advances by infusing "living ideas" into the "lifeless barbarisms" that we inherit from the past.[21] Such development, which promises to produce Comte's "positive truth," reflects an increasing complexity in human knowledge, drawing sustenance from each and every event in the history of human experience as "an experiment of which we may reap the benefit."[22] Eliot approvingly cites Mackay's account of religious development, which argues that science and true faith are inseparable; while credulity rests on unquestioning submission to religious authorities, genuine mystical faith depends on "evidence of things unseen," evidence that in turn depends on the "data of experience."[23] The exceptional mind, which can combine minute knowledge with expansive vision, is the instrument of both intellectual and spiritual progress.

Lewes too demonstrates a closer affiliation with Spencer than Darwin. His four complimentary articles in *The Fortnightly Review* on "Mr. Darwin's Hypotheses" downplay the arbitrary elements in selection that Darwin recognized. Rather than focusing on the latter's contention that evolutionary change is the product of random mutations on which the pressures of selec-

tion act to determine survival and reproductive success or failure, Lewes emphasizes that the theory of natural selection provides a powerful articulation of what Spencer christened the "Development Hypothesis": namely, that when a species discovers new environmental conditions, it will immediately undergo changes that fit it for those new conditions and that these changes are then communicated in permanent form to the next generation.[24] Lewes does criticize Spencer's sloppy reasoning that organic structure *follows* from function, arguing instead that an organ changes shape in tandem with increased activity, just as when a person's ability to walk great distances improves not because the muscle has been enlarged by extra activity but because it has enlarged *with* such activity.[25] Yet despite this correction, he broadly echoes Spencer in stressing the relationship of function to structure and remarks that Darwin focuses "somewhat too exclusively on the adaptations which arise during the struggle for existence," thus neglecting the laws of organic growth, just as Lamarck fixed his attention exclusively on the influence of external conditions and wants.[26]

Developmentalism provides Eliot with the framework for character. Despite her recognition of the chance occurrences that may determine the trajectory of an individual life, her narratives are frequently organized around the difference between primitive forms of existence, whose internal motions are instinctive and narrow and whose relations with external phenomena are few, and intellectually animated beings whose internal impulses are directed by the higher, conscious regions of the mind and a complex and expansive sympathy. The sluggish, automatic character of simpler minds, which her narrators often figure as insectlike, contrasts with the active sympathy of social beings who "make all knowledge alive" (*DD,* 533). As Nicholas Royle has pointed out, however, Eliot allows the insect to represent a "telepathology of everyday life"—its mysterious powers of communication suggest spiritual forms of connection that remain as dark to us as they do to it.[27] Even where this superior mental state transforms inert ideas into living social forms, it is shadowed by the primitive mind, whose narrow understanding expresses nervous disorganization strangely similar to that which may attend the highest grasp of reality. At its most acute, this disorganization manifests as a peculiar state of arrest.

II. VISION AND DEANIMATION IN *DANIEL DERONDA*

In her earlier novels, Eliot positions "spiritual" phenomena in the evolved capacity for sympathy. Thus, rather than the "divine beauty" of "prophets,

sibyls and heroic warriors," the narrator of *Adam Bede* declares, the novel should show "that other beauty . . . which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy" with its "faithful representing of commonplace things."[28] Taking her inspiration from the subjects of Dutch realist art, the narrator who aspires to represent this commonplace world "should have a fibre of sympathy connecting [her] with that vulgar citizen who weighs out sugar in a vilely assorted cravat and waistcoat," with the "common labourer" and the "perhaps too corpulent" clergyman of her own parish.[29] The narrator's attention to the "monotonous homely existence" of ordinary lives is faithful because both she and they belong to the same social whole whose progress rests on minute interactions among manifold human actors.[30] Despite the novel's tenderness toward its Methodist heroine, Dinah, this narrator's sympathy, which recognizes her own place in the same evolving social orbit as her characters, contrasts with Dinah's revealed religion, whose passive voice separates world, mind, and soul from a remote agent of change: "I felt a great movement in my soul, and I trembled as if I was shaken by a strong spirit entering into my weak body. And . . . I spoke the words that were given to me abundantly. . . . And many wept over their sins and have since been joined to the Lord."[31]

In *Daniel Deronda,* prophecy or second sight replaces *Adam Bede*'s respect for the common eye. Exploring the "disputed ground" of second sight, the narrator suggests that there may be persons

> whose yearnings, conceptions—nay, travelled conclusions—continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power: the deed they would do starts up before them in complete shape, making a coercive type; the event they hunger for or dread rises into vision with a seed-like growth, feeding itself fast on unnumbered impressions. They are not always the less capable of the argumentative process, nor less sane than the commonplace calculators of the market: sometimes it may be that their natures have manifold openings, like the hundred-gated Thebes, where there may naturally be a greater and more miscellaneous inrush than through a narrow beadle-watched portal. (471)

This power of prophetic vision, like the narrative recognition of and selection among myriad relations of characters and events, represents what Lewes identifies as the work of an exceptional mind. Describing Mordecai's visionary belief in Deronda; the narrator uses the same word again—"inrush"—to describe the belief that "possesse[s]" Mordecai following his early impressions of Daniel, suggesting that such belief is formed out of the manifold histories

and imaginings of the General Mind of his people and that it transforms this host of mental experiences into a more transcendent image or a revelation. "Prophetic consciousness" (529) is thus mystical only in the sense that it can perceive historical sequences with extraordinary perspicacity.

At the same time, the vision itself becomes part of a living thing. Superstition, Mordecai declares, gives way to "the illumination of great facts which widen feeling, and make all knowledge alive as the youngest offspring of beloved memories" (533). In his passionate search for the ideal face, he searches the collective memory of the scattered people whose nation is an "inheritance that has never ceased to quiver in millions of human frames" (536), embodied in "the experience our greatest sons have gathered from the life of the ages" (537). Responding to the English-Jewish "philosopher" Gideon, who insists that enlightened reason will eventually extinguish religious prejudices, Mordecai answers:

> But what is it to be rational—what is it to feel the light of the divine reason growing stronger within and without? It is to see more and more of the hidden bonds that bind and consecrate change as a dependent growth—yea, consecrate it with kinship: the past becomes my parent, and the future stretches towards me the appealing arms of children. (528)

Second sight, like evolutionary science, traces the organic origins of the great events of history to the small events of biological descent and sympathetic fusions among minds. As the inlayer Goodwin puts it, ideas "work themselves into life and go on growing with it, but they can't go apart from the material that set them to work and makes a medium for them" (524). As the ideas of national identity and destiny are transmitted across generations and enlivened by sympathy, ideas take root and become feelings. In Deronda, Mordecai recognizes the "hidden bond" both in the sense of a biological inheritance that will be revealed in the former's birth and in that of the sympathetic kinship through which the idea of the nation is realized in feeling.

Yet at the same time as it refuses to separate the visionary from the ordinary minds from which he draws sustenance, the novel's account of second sight evokes a developmental history of the human race that does distinguish rudimentary from more fully evolved elements of consciousness. Mordecai turns from "superstition" to "growth, completion, [and] development" (534); visionaries, the narrator announces, are "the creators and feeders of the world, molding and feeding the more passive life which without them

would dwindle and shrivel into the narrow tenacity of insects unshaken by thoughts beyond the reaches of their antennae" (685), suggesting, as Deronda does, that Mordecai's religious enthusiasm represents "the highest order of minds" (567). At the same time, greater and lesser forms of the visionary can be found, just as greater and lesser forms of mammalian life are bound together by evolutionary ties or "great mental or social types" are related to "specimens whose insignificance is both ugly and noxious" (471). As Pamela Thurschwell has argued, the links between second sight and scientific knowledge in the novel are double edged, rendering the former "on the one hand prophetic, elevated, nation- and vocation-forming, and on the other hand uncontrollable and unwanted, or banal and mundane."[32] From Eliot's evolutionary perspective, the gifts of a Mordecai find their lower analogue in the narrow mind of a Gwendolen, with her susceptibility to fits of spiritual horror. These occur at moments when her egotistic consciousness is penetrated by an unwelcome recognition of the larger stories in which she plays so insignificant a part. Dread, which Deronda urges should be her moral guide, is the diminutive form of prophecy, endowing her with horrified premonition about future events (Grandcourt's death) or the effects of her past sins (the "ghastly vision" of Mrs. Glasher's life [152]) even as these are diminished by a conscience that refers all external events to her own private suffering. In a feeble replication of Mordecai's mental powers, her feelings of social triumph are haunted by "some dim forecast, the insistent penetration of suppressed experience" (357).

In this respect, Gwendolen has a more pronounced affinity with Mordecai than with Deronda. In his early life, Deronda has a "subdued fervour of sympathy" that yearns after "wide knowledge" (178) and that habitually puts his imagination to work for others, while his social privilege in combination with his uncertain identity stand between him and the focus or purpose. Later, his bond with Mordecai and meeting with his mother enable him to bend this knowledge and sympathy to a purpose, turning his "inherited yearning—the effect of brooding, passionate thoughts in many ancestors" to the task through which he becomes "the heart and brain of a multitude" (750). Yet Deronda is often more like the *creation* of an exceptional mind than he is himself an artist-creator. In the animation golem tales of Jewish mysticism, the creature is the vessel for accumulated wisdom or the idea that the creator wants to transmit.[33] Deronda will carry the "sacred inheritance" beyond Mordecai's "narrow life" on which "the generations are crowding" (500). Mordecai selects his face out of the crowd of faces, identifying in Daniel the object of physical beauty that he believes will embody the greater

future of his people; as art object, Deronda becomes the expression of Mordecai's marvelous vision—the creature who emerges from the collective mystical yearnings of that vision, literalizing, as it were, what Lewes describes as the "spiritual conditions" of social life.

> Tracing reasons in [him]self for the rebuffs he has met with and the hindrances that beset him, [Mordecai] imagined a man who would have all the elements necessary for sympathy with him, but in an embodiment unlike his own: he must be a Jew, intellectually cultured, morally fervid—in all this a nature ready to be plenished from Mordecai's; but his face and frame must be beautiful and strong, he must have been used to all the refinements of social life his voice must flow with a full and easy current, his circumstances must be free from sordid need: he must glorify the possibilities of the Jew, not sit and wander as Mordecai did. (472)

Such vision emerges less from a conflation of principles of biological descent with Romantic idealism than in the specific figure of metempsychosis, the longing to transmit the spirit of Judaic restoration and "complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship" (512) that absorbs his entire being into some other body through which it will be truly realized. This passion is therefore "something more than a grandiose transfiguration of . . . parental love" (533). Ironically, then, it is Deronda's *lack* of second sight that makes him, rather than Mordecai, the messianic figure. He longs for "some ideal task" in which "[he] might feel himself part of some great movement, but this can be realized only through Mordecai's inspiration, without which "the ancestral life would lie . . . as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations" (750). Such unfocused sympathy clearly contrasts with Mordecai's recognition of the precise human form in which those histories will be realized as national destiny.

Although the closest plot connection Gwendolen has to Mordecai is her sexual rivalry with Mirah, she is taxonomically linked to him as an inferior specimen of the same mental type.[34] In the first half of the novel, Gwendolen is "little penetrated by feelings of wider relations"(149), yet her mind is such that it draws all the minute events of her social experience toward the object of her passion, so that "everything is porous to it; bows, smiles, conversation, repartee, are mere honeycombs where such thought rushes freely" (602). Later, in the days leading up to Grandcourt's death, the images of her past wrongdoing surface to forecast "some fiercely impulsive deed, committed as in a dream" (674), her prescient dread and ensuing mortification providing the antithesis to Mordecai's visionary anticipation and subsequent

exultation. What she describes to Deronda later is a realization of her vision at the moment of her husband's drowning, when "I saw my wish outside me" (696). Where Mordecai has the power to realize new spiritual truths through his capacity for mental imaging, Gwendolen, it seems, will bring crimes to pass through the agency of her own horrified imagination.

This pairing of Mordecai and Gwendolen is most pronounced in the effect each has on Deronda. Where Gwendolen's influence on the latter is to paralyze him with compassion because he cannot save her, Mordecai animates him, transforming his "yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion" (365) into "a definite. . . . action" (180). Again in keeping with the myth of the golem, an indefinite, amorphous, deanimated substance assumes definition and active power. Mordecai's vision delivers Deronda, like the awakening mortal in the epigraph from Browning's *Paracelsus* that opens Book VII, from his frozen state (617). Yet despite the dubious associations with this Frankensteinlike animation (oddly reminiscent of Charles Meunier's marvelous revivification of the villainous Mrs. Archer in *The Lifted Veil*), Mordecai's gift is analogous to the methods of true science: "His exultation was not widely different from that of the experimenter, bending over the first stirrings of change that correspond to what in the fervour of concentrated prevision his thought had foreshadowed" (493).[35] He animates Deronda with the spirit of the Jewish nation, assembled from the great storehouse of sufferings and hopes that make up the history of his people, and transforming manifold experience into idea as the scientist's imagination transforms innumerable facts into laws and projections.

This affiliation between seer and scientist parallels that between the deductions of science and the clairvoyance of narrative itself. This analogy is established in the first chapter of the novel: the epigraph reflects on the shared disingenuousness of science and storytelling, both of which really begin *in medias res,* despite their pretensions to beginnings; the narrator describes the characters' mutual scrutiny through the language of scientific observation and classification, as the novel's opening aesthetic question about the form and nature of Gwendolen's beauty rapidly shifts to one about her rank in the animal kingdom and Daniel looks at her as though she were "a specimen of a lower order" (10).[36] Explicitly linking herself with the figure of the seer, the narrator directly boasts of an expansive vision that "connect[s] the course of individual lives within the historic stream" (88).

Yet this is not always possible. At other moments, her confidence in the artist's capacity to navigate unknown regions of the physical world with the same precise observational tools as science, or to synthesize the minute events of history, is less certain. The epigraph to chapter 16 begins:

> The astronomer threads the darkness with strict deduction, accounting so for every visible arc in the wanderer's orbit; and the narrator of human actions, if he did his work with the same completeness, would have to thread the hidden pathways of feeling and thought which lead up to every moment of action, and to those moments of intense suffering which take the quality of action. (164)

To illuminate the innumerable sensible and mental events that lead to an action or its equivalent in feeling would be like "hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat" that describes the impossibly "keen vision" in *Middlemarch,* or Latimer's wearying clairvoyance in *The Lifted Veil,* which intrudes the "frivolous ideas and emotions" of others onto his consciousness like "the loud activity of an imprisoned insect."[37] These are the "unessential details" that Lewes claims crowd works of false realism. They are the minutiae that Deronda himself is able to subdue so that they assume their proper place as diminutive phenomena: "an insect-murmur amidst the sum of current noises" (187). Yet they threaten to encroach upon the narrative consciousness, just as, at times, the obtrusive external world presses upon and threatens to crowd Mordecai's inner vision. Thus, even as the creative mind draws from the multitude of details that make up history and that arrive at thought and sensation, it must also, to some extent, shut out the external world and narrow its portals. In both Mordecai and Gwendolen this process takes the form of near-complete physiological arrest, or catalepsy.

Locked into his passionate search for a spiritual successor, Mordecai is frequently unaware of the way ordinary events unfold around him: Deronda's appearance at the Cohen's has no meaning for him beyond the realization of his vision; he has trouble going to unfamiliar places where "the outer world . . . narrows the inward vision" (521). The club of philosophers is the only public place where he feels truly comfortable since its familiarity enables him to resist the pressures of his mundane environment and gives free rein to his enthusiastic spirit. Here, even as he argues with his skeptical fellow Jews about tradition, prophecy, and racial destiny, he becomes less and less aware of what is immediately around him, until finally he is thrown into a cataleptic fit by the force of his spiritual vision: He becomes insensible to the movements and farewells of his companions, his head sinks upon this breast as his mind wanders through past events that have brought about this moment, and he becomes "rapt and motionless" (539). This state prefigures the hours before his death, when, having announced that he has transmitted his soul into Deronda's he neither speaks nor moves for several hours before he ceases to breathe. As Toker argues, his spirit "consumes his fragile body,"

putting him in need of an "executive self," whom he finds in the healthier body of Deronda.[38]

Mordecai's cataleptic withdrawal from the living environment is strangely doubled in Gwendolen's episodes of paralyzing fear. Despite her toxic vanity and social snobbery, and notwithstanding her indifference toward institutionalized religion, she is nonetheless subject to "fits of spiritual dread" (63), during which the narrow world that she governs through her will dissolves into a wider horizon over which she has no influence and in which her petty ambitions are swallowed up in a sudden overwhelming awareness of an "immeasurable existence aloof from her" (64). The Shelleyean awe that she feels when alone in a landscape where the light makes a sudden dramatic shift, is one kind of prompt to this feeling of dread; the discovery of her insignificance to the larger destinies of humankind through her contact with Deronda, is another. At such moments, she has a visionary grasp like Mordecai's of the manifold histories that collectively announce the future, although in Gwendolen's case, the vision is horrifying and apocalyptic:

> There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind, which have lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading, enter like an earthquake into their own lives—when the slow urgency of growing generations turn into the tread of an invading army or the dire clash of civil war. . . . Then it is as if the Invisible Power that has been the object of lip-worship and lip-resignation became visible, according to the imagery of the Hebrew poet, making the flames his chariot, and riding on the wings of the wind, till the mountains smoke and the plains shudder under the rolling fiery visitation. (803)

Here her nervous tendencies become charged with Protestant revelation. Convinced that she is responsible for Grandcourt's death, Gwendolen confesses to Deronda a terrible ecstatic awakening to her own sin, declaring "it was not my own knowledge, it was God's that had entered into me" (692) and that "[i]t was all like a writing of fire within me" (695). Yet it is not through submission to the spirit alone that Gwendolen is humbled. Having always been afraid of anything aloof to her own petty ambitions, she experiences the discovery of Deronda's mission to the East as a shrinking of her own life before the enormity of national destinies. At this moment, Gwendolen's still-egotistic assumption that confession of her sin will somehow bind Deronda to her is overwhelmed as the force of "growing generations" enters her consciousness. This is the "sort of crisis," the narrator tells us, in which apocalyptic vision, a "rolling, fiery visitation," takes form as "something else

than a private consolation" (804). For Gwendolen, as for Mordecai, the private spiritual ecstasy that arrests all other activity in the mind is tied to the large-scale processes of organic change whose indifference to the individual ego is as dreadful to her as it is inspiring to Deronda.

Critics who focus on Gwendolen's nervous condition have suggested a subterranean, hysterical counternarrative in the larger story of her moral and spiritual reformation.[39] Yet although often identified as a hysteric symptom, the rigid and unresponsive state of catalepsy does not suggest a subversive body speak because it represents extreme nervous retreat.[40] When Gwendolen learns of Deronda's plans, her diminished sense of self expresses itself in mental and physical arrest, as she sits "like a statue with her wrists lying over each other and her eyes fixed—the intensity of her mental action arresting all other excitation" (804). This scene directly echoes an earlier episode in the novel when her performance as the awakening statue of Hermione is interrupted by the accidental opening of a moving panel to reveal a painting of a dead and a fleeing figure, and she resembles a statue "into which a soul of fear had entered: her pallid lips were parted; her eyes, usually narrowed under their long lashes, were dilated and fixed" (61). When Deronda hints at his pending marriage to Mirah, Gwendolen is able to fuse the narrative threads of a greater plot in which she (and for some early time we too as readers) previously imagined she was central. "A great wave of remembrance" (804) passes over her, and Mirah, who had formerly appeared to her as an inconsequential figure in Deronda's life, suddenly assumes her rightful place in the larger story. After this revelation, Gwendolen, "dull[ed to] all other consciousness" (806) becomes insensible of the movements that she had once been in the habit of executing with calculating self-awareness. Her stupor thus records her discovery of the weaving of multiple events into a series of interlocked outcomes rather than, as the early sections of the novel seem to promise, a story in which she remains firmly at the center. Unable to select meaning from these events without her own fortune as a point of reference, she is frozen by them.

Gwendolen's cataleptic episodes are initially a response to the dreadful premonition of her own spiritual despair, but increasingly they express her horrified recognition of the greater landscapes in which she appears so insignificant and the broader web of lives over which she exercises no mastery. At such moments it is as though she were being pulled out of the narrative frame to address the questions about stories, characters, and destinies that preoccupy the narrator and that drive Eliot's epigraph selections. The narrative voice itself, linking single histories to one another and to the larger evolutionary story of the human mind's overcoming of selfish passions,

inhabits both the minor divinatory and the fully clairvoyant states that both inflict and enlarge the minds of its major characters. This is the voice that can describe the evolution of second sight; that links poetic fervor with "a mind . . . which thrills from the near to the distant, and back again from the distant to the near" (205) and that can both discern the way its characters experience dread in relation to the unknown and anticipate how they will grow in their efforts to embrace it. In addition to present-tense omniscience, in other words, it supplies the voice and vision of evolution and prophecy. It manifests the strength of the superior mind that Lewes identified in the capacity to intuit beyond the local, the immediate, and the sensible. Yet even this clairvoyant voice is sometimes silenced by the too-intricate threads of connection that it cannot ever make fully visible. It can no more describe the origins of Gwendolen's "fits of timidity," than the scientist can use a word like "heat" to override the web of differences that constitute the universe (64). Such moments of narrative self-awareness about the potential of higher minds to retreat from the too-thick and pressing phenomena of the outer world are rare in *Daniel Deronda.* They are more prominent in an earlier and, for this reason perhaps, much shorter novel.

III. CATALEPSY IN *SILAS MARNER*

Silas Marner might be read as a story about the problem of representing a consciousness with little-to-no capacity for the imaginative reach that Lewes calls "vision." Not only the cataleptic Silas but indeed all the characters that belong to his world are limited to the "perpetual, urgent, companionship of their own griefs and discontents," and "the ever trodden round of their own petty histor[ies]."[41] A mind that encounters the world through such a narrow window will, as Eliot describes it elsewhere, "exalt feeling above intellect" and will have, in religious life especially, a "sense of truthfulness [that] is misty and confused."[42] The difficulty, then, for this story is how to represent its primitive subject matter—the undeveloped regions of consciousness—and yet allow the telling of it to do the work of sympathy that *Daniel Deronda* does for Gwendolen and her kind, illuminating and expanding darkened and narrow mental or social landscapes. Here, narrative deanimation is not triggered by the overwhelming capacity for vision but instead represents a response to the evolutionary gulf between minds.

Silas Marner, Eliot wrote to her publisher, was "a story which came *across* my other plans by a sudden inspiration."[43] This acknowledgment of a debt to the mysterious workings of the creative mind might be said to find its

negative imprint in the strange vacuity of mind that characterizes catalepsy. In what seems, at least provisionally, like a formal endorsement of this bond between the miraculous and the vacuous, the plot of the novel is driven by the sudden, inexplicable appearances and disappearances of people as well as precious objects. These are mysteries whose natural cause is only sometimes apparent to the narrator and a few skeptical characters on the periphery of the narrative. Thus, while this story describes social life in thoroughly organic terms, its very narrative structure respects the force of the mystical, reflecting what the narrator identifies as a primitive mental state, in which "vagueness and mystery" (9) or simply a "fearful blank" deliver incomplete or fantastic meaning (22). Again, for Eliot, art is high or low, depending, like the form of an organism, on the level of complexity of parts that are bound into an "indissoluble whole."[44] This narrative's focus on the retreat of an extremely complex organism—a human being—to its most primitive structure, undergoes a reverse process. The narrative voice itself falls back into what Shuttleworth has recognized in Silas's condition as Comte's first period of social evolution: the fetishistic, polytheistic stage in which order and meaning belong only to divine beings and individuals take "no far-sighted responsibility for their action."[45] Such organic and narrative dissolution occurs in the withdrawal of the mind from its social environment and in the shriveling of sympathy, scientific knowledge, and intuitive foresight that follows.

Silas's catalepsy seems to befuddle both narrative realism and medical science. We are offered no rational explanation for the attacks that render him as incapable of psychological as of physical movement. The possibility that they are the result of divine inspiration, however, is immediately removed by Silas's honest testimony that he had no vision from God; indeed, there was no mental content to the episodes whatsoever. The story apparently sides neither with scientific enlightenment nor with Protestant awakening. Instead, it provides a bare-bones depiction of a sudden, inexplicable suspension of the inner life, "a mysterious rigidity and suspension of consciousness" (9) that only the rudest-minded of its characters interpret as signifying either divine or demonic influence. We cannot credit these primitive interpreters—neither the fiercely judgmental members of the isolated Lantern Yard community nor the benignly superstitious Raveloe villagers—with any special knowledge of the condition. And yet with no Tertius Lydgate in the novel to speculate on the minute behavior of nervous pathways and so begin to explain this strange condition of emotional and physiological arrest, it is hard to see how catalepsy can have any currency in the narrative economies of psychological and social realism either. In Eliot's longer novels, the

growth and flexibility of minds as well as the subtle interactions among them bring the subjective state into relationship with its larger environments, creating new social possibilities through what the narrator of *Middlemarch* calls "unhistoric acts."[46] *Silas Marner,* on the other hand, puts the blank mind of catalepsy at the heart of a world unchangingly shaped by tradition, superstition, and the tendency to describe that which is unknown as "dark to the last" (169).

The narrator's reticence about the physiological circumstances of Silas's condition is especially striking given how long trance phenomena have featured in the dialogue between faith and medical science. Both in Catholic mysticism and in Protestant revivalism, the deathlike trance testifies to a direct intuitional experience of God, where the soul is so absorbed in the divine that it fails to animate the body. For Protestant reformers, catalepsy, along with epileptic seizures, speaking in tongues, trance, visions, and clairvoyance, signified the "indwelling" or "witness" of the Spirit, in the language of eighteenth-century Protestant evangelism. Numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century published accounts of deep trance or apparent death, in which the subject was shown the horrors of hell and the glories of heaven, provided textual support for this experience of Spirit. In *Memoirs of the Reverend William Tennent,* for example, an apparently dead man revived after several days, and reported that, in what seemed like a much briefer period of "unspeakable rapture," he found himself "in another state of existence, under the direction of a superior being."[47] In the account given of her experience during a five-hour trance, Sarah Alley recalled that she was led by a heavenly guide to see the burning lake and then to heaven, where she saw Christ surrounded by angels. In another episode, she was commanded by Christ to return to the world and teach sinners to repent.[48] A poem called *The Prodigal Daughter,* depicts a young woman guilty of swearing, whoring, Sabbath breaking, and attempted murder who falls into a swoon from which she apparently cannot be revived, and only a cry from her coffin frees her from the fate of being buried alive. When she is restored to life, she reports on the flight her soul took through heaven and hell, and she is restored to grace and repentance.[49] In each of these episodes, the cataleptic attack marks the moment of spiritual transformation as that in which the mind withdraws from its physical environment and finds union with God.

Such testimonies to immediate religious experience were supposed to contrast with the spiritual lethargy of High Church formalism. They were also scrutinized by naturalizing discourses that identified ecstatic states as symptoms of physiological disorder. From Richard Burton's *Anatomy of*

Melancholy (1620), which interpreted such states as symptoms of religious melancholy, to scientific skepticism about animal magnetism and the trance medium in the 1850s, medical philosophy and later physiological psychology endeavored to naturalize religious experience and to strip trance phenomena of their supernatural content. Even within the revivalist movements themselves, such phenomena might be explained naturalistically, if only to point more indirectly to the presence of Spirit. Ann Taves has shown that moderate reformists like Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitefield, and James Robe drew upon the naturalistic explanations made by anti-enthusiasts in order to distinguish true religious experience from its enthusiastic counterfeit.[50] Along with scientific skepticism and religious naturalism, some revivalist movements themselves advocated a measured interpretation of spiritual ecstasies. Rapture, in itself, was no guarantee of divine influence. It might be merely a symptom of physiological disorders or a naturally enhanced state of mind. John Wesley, for instance, cautioned that the Witness of the Spirit should be complemented by the fruits of experience.[51] Prophetic episodes might well signify divine inspiration, but they were also indicative of a condition of mind physiologically triggered by the saturation of consciousness with an *idea* of transcendence.

The relationship between natural and supernatural explanations for the visions and insights that often accompany trance states receives what is probably its first thorough exploration in Meric Casaubon's *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (1655). Casaubon suggests that natural causes can be identified for ecstatic experience without denying the truth and reality of supernatural influences or their possible manifestation in the prophetic content of that experience.[52] Yet he distinguishes the sudden alienation of mind and the strange raptures it provokes from the "true divination," and the "highest gift of God . . . [in] sound reason" (62). God's immediate presence is less probably felt in the strange phenomena generated by most varieties of enthusiasm than in that "sound reason and discerning spirit [that] is a perpetual kind of divination" (63). Hence the likely explanation for divinatory experience lies in those natural causes, ordinary or extraordinary, that remain obscure to us. We can conjecture, however, that "[m]any natural things, by some natural foregoing signes, may be known, felt or discerned by [such] men or creatures, that have a natural disposition or sympathy, whether constant or temporary, to those things or their signes, though unknown unto others that have not they be altogether unknown" (55–56). Casaubon proposes that ecstatic prophecy, in its natural form, is of the same class of phenomena as the sensitivity of animals who can anticipate storms well in advance of the human senses. Prophecy can be attributed to

the power of an exaggerated natural sense, or sympathy. In this way, apparently supernatural phenomena are subjected to both known and unknown natural laws, both of which are of God's making.

Casaubon identified enthusiastic "divinatory fits" as "incidental" to the natural diseases of, among others, melancholy, mania, and hysteria (36). Such conditions, however, render the patients especially vulnerable to demonic possession, and natural causes are "not wholly sufficient to produce this effect" (42). Nearly two centuries later, Macnish's *Philosophy of Sleep* identifies almost exactly the same physiological origins for divinatory trance, adding that medical science has not been able to fully account for all manifestations of trance phenomena:

> The remote causes of trance are hidden in much obscurity; and generally we are unable to trace the affection to any external circumstance. It has been known to follow a fit of terror. Sometimes it ensues after hysteria, epilepsy, or other spasmodic diseases. . . . Nervous and hypochondriac patients are the most subject of its attacks; but sometimes it occurs when there is no disposition of the kind, and when the person is in a state of the most seeming good health. (202–3)

The possibility of malign supernatural influence that Casaubon concedes has disappeared, but medical knowledge remains unable to trace the etiology of the disease. Since, he argues, the apparently suspended activity of the heart and lungs during the trance must be "more apparent than real," continuing to support life at a level below that which our senses can detect, the causes of such trance cannot be uncovered by current technologies of observation (202). In keeping with the larger theme of his study, Macnish does suggest that the clairvoyant content of some trance experiences might be attributed to the same mental cause as that of apparently prophetic dreams. If the mind is not in a state of torpor, as it usually is during a trance, it might be in a condition analogous to the state of dreaming, and thus call up memories of impressions that the conscious mind has long since forgotten. Yet most of the accounts of catalepsy—stories of people who apparently return to life moments before burial or others who can fall into a trance at will—while they might be related to prior conditions, like hysteria, remain for the most part "astonishing and inexplicable" (205).

In his *Observations on Trance or Human Hibernation* (1850), James Braid is more ambitious than Macnish about discovering the natural origins of suspended animation. He recommends that scientific men suspend their skepticism about the extraordinary accounts of the fakirs who survive voluntary

burial for days or weeks and, rather than dismissing such accounts as fraudulent, "endeavour to arrive at a satisfactory solution of the phenomena on physiological principles."[53] Like both Casaubon and Macnish, Braid suggests that catalepsy is linked to hysteria, and thus that it can be brought about by shock or terror as well as by religious enthusiasm. More specifically, however, and in part so as to distance his own study and practice of hypnotism from the occult strains of mesmerism, he suggests that by a combination of suppressed respiration and fixing the mind on a single object, the human body can reduce all its vital functions to the same condition as that of hibernating animals. "The unfortunate extravagance of the Mesmerists," who claim gifts of clairvoyance, thus making "a mockery of the human understanding and all the known laws of physical science," has compromised that genuine study of the remarkable phenomena of trance, including catalepsy.[54] The "wonderful exaltation of the natural faculties" that can occur in the trance state—the suspension of vital activity, the remarkable heightening of memory, the extreme vividness of imagination, and even the intensification of reasoning power—are "only exaggerations or exaltations of functions or faculties which are possessed by all of us in a less degree in the ordinary or waking condition."[55] Such states and the phenomena that sometimes accompany them are particularly likely to be triggered by powerful religious experiences, as in the case of the Hindu fakirs, because the subject is so isolated from the external world and so intensely concentrated on the internal world that the senses barely respond to external stimuli.

Braid insists that "unlimited skepticism" about the remarkable instances of human hibernation is as "equally the child of imbecility as implicit credulity."[56] Neither superstitious nor narrow-mindedly skeptical, science should make incomplete knowledge about the human mind and body valid to the investigation and treatment of disease. Yet the problem remains of what exactly to do with phenomena that remain so far outside the orbit of current medical knowledge that, if they do not point to the influence of the supernatural, they do seem to highlight science's feeble grasp of the operations of nature. Even as late as 1896, an account of some instances of premature burial declares that "of all the various forms of suspended animation, trance and catalepsy" are described as "the least understood. . . . the laws which control them . . . appear to be as insoluble as those which govern life itself."[57] The radical differences of opinion over modern instances of catalepsy even within medical academies, its authors go on to say, "are sufficient to show that all the culture and the scientific instincts of the present age have not quite inaugurated the 'reign of law' nor established finally that 'miracles do not happen.'"[58]

This argument might be seen less to authenticate religious experience at the expense of scientific inquiry than to gesture to the "visionary" elements of evolutionary science itself. Our interpretation of nature, our imposition of laws upon all its vagaries, William Carpenter insists, must in turn be understood in terms of the "mental processes, by which are formed those fundamental conceptions of matter and force, cause and effect, law and order."[59] These conceptions are representations framed by the mind, and as such they are formed out of a combination of the impressions made upon the senses by external objects and commonsense views that are "the generalized experiences of the human race."[60] Such cultural banking of knowledge is what enables inquiry to proceed beyond the gathering of empirical data. Common sense, "one of our most valuable instruments of scientific inquiry; affording in many instances the best, and sometimes the only, basis for a rational conclusion,"[61] is thus at the core of scientific knowledge and, like Lewes's conception of "vision," a fundamental, cultural-evolutionary mechanism: "The intellectual intuitions of any one generation are the embodied experiences of the previous race."[62] According to this reasoning, catalepsy will be understood by a future generation of educated men who are able to grasp the as yet impenetrable natural laws that encompass its strange manifestations. At present, it is accessible to science only through the more strictly empirical agency of an "*un*common sense."[63] Citing Braid's study of the fakirs, Carpenter observes that those who have some special medical knowledge of self-hypnosis, or of the experiments that have been conducted on mammals underwater, or of how an organism might survive in the soil temperature of certain regions of India, can observe Braid's Hindu devotees surrender voluntarily to a deathlike torpor and survival burial for days or weeks on end without either offending that acquired intuition that refuses to believe such a feat is possible or resorting to supernatural explanation.[64]

Yet even as scientific method, "that trained and organized common sense,"[65] is transforming the basis of belief in religious inquiry, substituting the principle of continuity for supernatural cataclysms and interruptions, Carpenter's psychology points out that the mind can tend to self-deception. Under the influence of a mental prepossession, a subject may actually produce sensations, as the higher mental states exercise a downward influence on the sensorium. The prepossessed mind thus "dwell[s] on [its] own imaginings,"[66] producing hallucinations and revelations, which as long as common sense is suspended, seem unquestionably real. Contemporary testimony to the supernatural phenomena of table turning and other miracles of the séance as well as the ancient faith in dreams, visions, and trances can be attributed to this tendency of the mind to "prepossession" or "ideational

states."[67] Even the mind of the scientific observer, he suggests, is vulnerable to the seduction of its own ideations: "We are liable to be affected by our prepossessions at every stage of our mental activity from our primary reception of impressions from without to the highest exercise of our reasoning powers."[68]

Carpenter's warning echoes Francis Bacon's: We should be wary of the idols of the mind in both the objects and the subject of scientific inquiry. Even as the mind evolves under the influence of common sense, it might also come under the equally powerful influence of ancestral idols; it might, in other words, become more superstitious rather than more scientific. This possibility in turn suspends the conjectural history that puts "primitive" societies at one end of the human evolutionary chain and "civilized" nations at the other, suggesting that the primitive is a condition of mind whose features appear in the very evolutionary pathways that should overcome them. As a manifestation of such mental dissolution, catalepsy pulls the figure of the primitive out of the remote past and into the present tense of scientific modernity.

Silas Marner's turn to the primitive occurs at the level of narrative form, where mind is incapable of discerning the intricate forms it encounters. The novel is therefore not quite "a secular fable demythologizing . . . puritan allegory," for it finds no more answers in science than it does in religion.[69] Rather, it might be said to confound both allegorical and realist forms, as Silas's mind, entirely disconnected from the surrounding world and unmoored from all external references, remains impenetrable to the psychologically savvy narrator. In the pathology of catalepsy, the organism retreats to its most primitive condition as only the automatic elements of the nervous system are able to function, enabling just the minimal interaction with the environment necessary to immediate survival. This evacuation of mind, including the functions of memory, thought, and will, from the physical body results in a state of social as well as physiological arrest, since there are no longer any available channels of sympathy through which human subjects can interact. Unable to find movement or shape in Silas's consciousness, the narrator is consequently incapable of bringing subjective and social realities into sympathetic connection, and her characters are correspondingly incapable of the kind of emotional growth achieved by Dorothea or Gwendolen.

There is *some* such growth in the novel. The Raveloe community becomes kinder and more accepting, in step with the emotional development of its central characters: An outsider becomes gradually more open to his neighbors and a self-absorbed member of the gentry learns to appreciate how his

decisions affect the emotional lives of all those around him. On the other hand, the village characters are never reformed in their belief in the agency of the supernatural; their faith that Silas's condition consists of a marvelous wandering of the soul from the body is paired at the end of the story with their confidence that his "strange history" is infused with "blessing" (171). Silas assumes he has witnessed a miracle when his lost gold apparently returns in the form of a little girl. Even when the thief is discovered and the gold restored, he attributes its reappearance to a "wonderful" (157) divine agency. Each instance demonstrates the kind of perceptual error that, in *Daniel Deronda,* the narrator attributes to an ignorance of the scale of organic growth: "[T]he true bond between events and false conceit of means whereby sequences may be compelled—like that falsity of eyesight which overlooks the gradations of distance, seeing that which is afar off as if it were within a step or a grasp" (*DD,* 227). The narrator of *Silas Marner,* who remains steadily skeptical of miracles, does not commit this error. She understands and brings to narrative light the multitude of psychological and circumstantial events that deliver Eppie to Silas's door, as well as the power of sympathetic love to restore an all but dead man to active social life. Yet she has no explanation for Silas's catalepsy that can substitute for that of divine or satanic agency. Whatever it is that causes Silas's catalepsy remains a mystery, and that mystery is as arresting of narrative realism and the evolutionary progress it projects as it is of physical and mental activity.

The novel describes a human being who is forced to live without either the nourishing influence of sympathy or any more autocratic guide. Unlike Dinah, Silas is not called away by God to village life from the intensely isolated religious community of Lantern Yard, but rather banished from the latter by the apparent evidence of God's disfavor. Once his fellow members, directed by the deceitful William Dane, interpret his cataleptic attacks as a "visitation of Satan" rather than a sign of God's favor, Silas loses what little capacity he had for independent thought and spontaneous sympathy (11). His "old narrow pathway" (17) of thought is unable to distinguish human passions from divine action, so that instead of blaming Dane for his misfortunes, objecting to the archaic system of drawing lots as an instrument of justice, or speculating more generally that the forms of religion might be manipulated to human advantage, he loses trust in both God and man and blames an "unpropitious deity" even as he withdraws from society altogether (16). Unable to sever religious form from feeling by "an act of reflection" (13), he is as empty of the evolved capacities for reason and independent judgment as the "spinning insect" whose unquestioning life his resembles (17). The primitive condition of his mind before his exile, shaped as it was

by the primitive life of an isolated community, is now further reduced to "utter bewilderment" (17).

Silas's cataleptic attacks bear no particular relationship to this change. They are apparently as frequent at Lantern Yard as they are at Raveloe, and so they cannot be identified as a natural consequence of increased isolation any more than they can be attributed to supernatural agency. The effect of this almost complete severance of sympathetic attachment to any other living being does, however, create another kind of deanimation, as solitude makes Silas increasingly less like a human being and more like a thing. His "face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube, which has no meaning standing apart" (20). What seems like fetishism is in fact reduction to an even more primitive state: to the nonorganic thing itself. In the love of objects, on the other hand, the fetishistic investing of them with animate qualities, he shows "that the sap of affection was not all gone." He sees in the favorite pot that he breaks "an expression of willing helpfulness" (20) and in the coins that he is yet to earn "the unborn children" that he longs for (21). Yet excepting these expressions of primitive feeling, Silas is at the very lowest place in hierarchy of sensibilities that the novel sets up, from "the subtle and varied pains" (29) of the highly cultured, to the simple egotistic preoccupations of ruder minds, to the "unresenting" dog who will bear its masters blows because it sees no alternative, to the unquestioning insect, and finally to the inanimate object itself (31). Once his human affection is reduced to its smallest dimensions in fetishism, he himself becomes deanimated and his gold, "gather[s] his power of loving together into a hard isolation like its own" (40).

This metaphorical link to catalepsy is perhaps the closest the narrative gets to an explanation of the latter's strange manifestations. The almost total arrest of the nervous system and the reduction of mental activity to the point that even the breath is virtually undetectable are like the way that isolation and the disappearance of the affections cause the organism to shrivel into something that is barely alive. The story itself refuses to provide an adequate source for the attacks. The grown Eppie continues to be on the watch in case "one of her father's strange attacks should come on," the only clue being that emotional strain may be a precipitating factor (169). Other than providing William Dane with an opportunity to betray Silas at the beginning of the novel, the attacks do little to serve the plot, which could easily substitute Silas's near-sightedness as the cause of his obliviousness to Eppie's arrival. If, on the other hand, Silas's catalepsy is a physiological metaphor for arrested social growth, then the mental dissolution that characterizes it has leaked

into narrative as another kind of deanimation. Catalepsy is not, in this case, an organic metaphor; it is not a figure that advances readerly understanding of the relationship between psychological and social phenomena. The cataleptic trance does not appear to have any formal relationship to those conditions of mind and social states shaped either by compassion, in the case of Silas's integration into the Raveloe community, or by moral cowardice, as in the case of Cass. The best function it can serve in the novel is in the much older literary mode of allegory. Yet allegory is what elsewhere the novel gently dismisses along with revealed religion, as the narrator observes that it is only in the "old days [that] there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction" (123). The novel is no more a *Pilgrims' Progress* for modern times than it is a positivist account of the origins of unusual mental or spiritual phenomena. In Eliot's understanding of realism, it might be said that this story about catalepsy is itself barely a living thing.

Catalepsy thus represents the same anomaly for realist narrative that it does for medical science. This is particularly striking given the naturalization of miracle and mystery that the novel otherwise achieves. Even in the opening paragraph, we anticipate an intellectual gap between narrator and characters as we learn the story is to be set in "old times" and in a world limited to the contrast between direct experience and "a region of vagueness and mystery" (*S,* 5). The fairy-tale frame could not be more different from the opening narrative plunge into the complex psychologies of *Daniel Deronda,* where the question "was she beautiful or not beautiful?" (*DD,* 3), with all that it suggests about the relationship of form to the activity of the mind, belongs to both Daniel's and the narrator's consciousness. In *Silas Marner,* on the other hand, the narrator knows what most of the characters do not, namely, that natural causes can be assigned to extraordinary events. She knows that Silas's confusion of Eppie's hair with the lost gold is an effect of his lingering mental bent toward the objects of his miserly passion and that the miraculous transformation of inanimate object into living child is only the effect of a mind so disinherited from reason that it is capable of only the most primitive thoughts and feelings. And she sides with the skeptical farrier, who refuses to accept the existence of ghostly phenomena, as she ironically describes the apparition of Silas at the Rainbow. In addition, spectral phenomena are psychologically naturalized in Godfrey, as the sudden appearance of Silas and Eppie at the Red House, again described as an "apparition from the dead" (108), to the audience of dancers who witness it becomes for Godfrey "an apparition from that hidden life which lies, like a dark by-street, behind the goodly ornamented façade" (108). Godfrey's

willed forgetting and Silas's involuntary disconnection from his past provide tangible psychological causes for the apparent mysteries in the Raveloe world. However much the causes of strange events may be dark to the characters, the property of the mind's vagueness and mystery, to the narrator they can be explained in the context of natural laws, for they demonstrate the "orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its own kind" (70).

In *Daniel Deronda,* suspended animation can be seen as a physiological expression of prophetic vision that has collapsed back into the manifold—the mind is frozen by the force of impressions it must contain. In *Silas Marner,* on the other hand, nervous arrest is tied to a loss of historical consciousness, a confidence that "the world's the same as it used to be," and the assigning of difference to the dark and unknown (171). The ordering consciousness of the narrative does not penetrate the mind of the cataleptic Silas or record in his character what Richard Menke, describing how Lewes's physiological psychology influences Eliot's prose, has described as "the hidden flows and pulses of the body . . . [and] subtle possibilities of feeling."[70] Yet it is not just that psychological narrative balks at the anomaly of catalepsy and its dissolving of the interior state. For indeed no characters represent "the subtle and varied pains springing from the higher sensibility that accompanies higher culture" (29). Instead, the narrator describes "ruder minds" (29) condemned to absorption in their own private suffering. Among these characters, even those who experience remorse do not do so with Gwendolen's intensity. Nor do they experience, as she does, a sudden awareness of an evolving universe of events indifferent to her needs and the resulting near-destruction of the organizing relationship of self to world. Godfrey Cass is so dulled by the monotony of his environment that his potential for finer thoughts is reduced to self-absorbed reflections on his own petty history. Such stagnancy then seems to be reinforced by the narrator herself who resists invading the "privacy of Godfrey's bitter memory" (29). To do this would be to dissect the fluid emotions of entrapment and guilt that are so important to the psychological development of characters like Gwendolen or Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede.*

For both Lewes and Eliot, the distinction between higher and ruder minds is nowhere more pronounced than in the history of religion. In a discussion of the developmental conditions under which supernatural causes are invoked to explain the unknown, Lewes uses the term "primitive mental state" to describe the refusal to admit scientific methodology into inquiry about the world or to set aside the authority of sacred texts in favor of verification through experience.[71] Such ignorance, he argues, also perpetu-

ates an imperfect Christian ethics, since the latter continues to be rooted in superstition and tradition.[72] In Eliot's 1855 essay "Evangelical Teaching," which asserts the moral dangers of both ecclesiastical dogma and a belief in direct inspiration, she asserts a hierarchy of mental processes and an alliance between intellect and feeling that is central to her moral philosophy: We must allow religious impulses to be guided by intellect rather than an enthusiastic exaltation of feeling. Hence the "highest moral habit, the constant preference of truth, both theoretically and practically, pre-eminently demands the co-operation of the intellect with the impulses . . . [something which] is indicated by the fact that it is only found in anything like completeness in the highest class of minds."[73] This concept of moral "completeness" matches the broader developmental prediction Lewes makes about the eventual triumph of science over theology and superstition:

> Nowadays, among the cultivated minds of Europe, it is only in the less-explored regions of research, where argument is made to do duty for observation that the supernatural and metempirical explanations hold their ground. When science has fairly mastered the principles of moral relations as it has mastered the principles of physical relations, all Knowledge will be incorporated in a homogenous doctrine rivaling that of the old theologies in its comprehensiveness, and surpassing it in the authority of its credentials.[74]

Lewes's Comtean dream of universal scientific knowledge expanding into all realms of human experience, moral as well as physical, relies on both the exhaustion of unexplored phenomena and the extinction of uncultivated minds. In *Problems of Life and Mind,* this historicized and teleological model of knowledge is more aggressively united with imperialist ideology as "the intellect of the explorer distinguishes and classifies" where the "axe of the colonist clears the way."[75] Together they illuminate the ancestral landscape inhabited by the superstitious, idolatrous "savages and semi-cultivated nations" of the current day.[76] Yet Lewes's primitive is also figured in the excessively religious or fanciful minds of those who fail to test the intuitions and conclusions that the rational and abstracting mind always generates beyond the data of sense perception. Once again linking the work of the scientific observer with that of the artist and critic, he uses the example of a spectator at the theater who should properly recognize at once the idealizing nature of the play and its capacity to avoid falsifications that are inconsistent with that ideal. This critic figure thus recognizes that reality is partly reflected through and partly symbolized in the mind. The test of true knowl-

edge is to verify symbolic and abstract thought by testing its correspondence to the presentation of feeling, which is all that the mind directly experiences of external reality. Hence, despite the physical basis of mind, which exists in reality, the work of that mind, and the symbolic power that it must muster in order to grasp any piece of reality larger than the fragments delivered by the senses, suggests that any knowledge of it can be acquired only through the higher processes of the intellect and the symbolic forms it produces. This is also the relationship between art and reality. Art promises access to the real, but only through a representative, not an actual, world. The veracity of the representation is then tested aesthetically in the emotions it is capable of stimulating.[77]

In *Silas Marner,* this higher capacity of the mind to unite thought and feeling is everywhere lost: Evidence for its disappearance shows in the superstition of the Raveloe villagers, in Silas's catalepsy and analogous social withdrawal, and in Godfrey's excessive attention to his own needs and subsequent suffering. In other early writings, Eliot identifies genuine sympathy, like genuine mysticism, as an expression of an advanced state in which truth is discernible through forms that demonstrate piety "towards the present and the visible" rather than in "the remote, the vague, and the unknown."[78] Not only are the characters in *Silas Marner* incapable of such sympathy, but the narrator too finds herself so intellectually remote from her subjects that she cannot provide them with a future true to human potential in the way that other parts of the story are true to human suffering. Gwendolen's nervous collapse is offset by her probable reformation under the influence of the greater narratives she has resisted, suggesting that present and visible sympathy can be linked to national spiritual destiny and the prophesied future. Where there is contraction rather than growth of the organism, however, there is less to be seen and said. In *Silas Marner,* the narrator's sympathetic access to the conscious and unconscious minds of her characters and their possible futures is so reduced that she is effectively drawn back into the primitive world from which she seemed at first so removed. And there she wanders through the territory of the unknown, where she encounters only the shrinking of human nature and the cavities of a primitive mind.

Daniel Deronda exempts neither the scientist's eye nor the raw gatherings of the imagination from the influences that can bring about cataleptic arrest. Loosened from the guiding forces of ego or vision, consciousness recoils from recognizing the vast organic and historical networks within which it is implicated. The way that Eliot's realism recognizes the proximity of narrow to visionary minds ties it to the subject of the next chapter: the otherwise very different genre of the detective novel. Victorian detective fiction,

whose generic roots are in the sensation novel, combines nervously generated insight with the patient documentation of observable facts. Where the prophetic gifts of Eliot's characters grasp the fortunes of nations, the dreamy talents of Wilkie Collins's and Arthur Conan Doyle's detectives allow them to discern the sequence of events behind a crime. Doyle, in particular, is interesting to read after Eliot because his stories overcome the awkward kinship between dreamy discernment and nervous degeneration by invoking the figure of atavism. In his fiction, the primitive mind becomes the source of ancestral talents obscured in intervening generations and in this way offers a sort of evolutionary-scientific prelude to his subsequent spiritualist conversion.