

# Trans Realism, Psychoanalytic Practice, and the Rhetoric of Technique

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The reason which persuades me that the soul cannot have any other seat in all the body than this gland wherein to exercise its functions immediately, is that I reflect that the other parts of our brain are all of them double, just as we have two eyes, two hands, two ears, and finally all the organs of our outside senses are double; and inasmuch as we have but one solitary and simple thought of one particular thing at one and the same moment, it must necessarily be the case that there must somewhere be a place where the two images which come to us by the two eyes, where the two other impressions which proceed from a single object by means of the double organs of the other senses, can unite before arriving at the soul, in order that they may not represent to it two objects instead of one. And it is easy to apprehend how these images or other impressions might unite in this gland by the intermission of the spirits which fill the cavities of the brain; but there is no place in the body where they can be thus united unless they are so in this gland.

—René Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*<sup>1</sup>

Woman's genital organs arouse an inseparable blend of horror and pleasure; they at once awaken and appease castration anxiety.

—Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*<sup>2</sup>

Whatever else literary realism has in common with psychoanalysis, they share at least this: they are too often assessed purely on the basis of their depictions of objects and too rarely understood as practices of self-care.<sup>3</sup> Within realism, the objects that detain readers consist of individual characters or character types, historical situations or themes, and poignant little details. Within psychoanalysis, they can include luridly contrived pathologies, theories of psychological development, and vivid symptoms. Yet for their creators, realism and psychoanalysis were both also techniques to be evaluated not just on the basis of their elegance but on the basis of their

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1. René Descartes, "From *Passions of the Soul*," in *The Philosophy of Mind: Classical Problems/Contemporary Issues*, ed. Brian Beakley and Peter Ludlow (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), pp. 111–12.

2. Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), p. 85.

3. A move in this direction is achieved by Summer J. Star in her recent essay "Feeling Real in *Middlemarch*," *ELH* 80 (Fall 2013). Star argues that Eliot's realism is "not so much an empirical

efficacy. George Eliot and Sigmund Freud both claimed for their writing a therapeutic power that could help readers and patients lead happier and more fulfilling lives. These descriptive and normative goals sometimes conflicted.<sup>4</sup> But the therapeutic impulse was never fully subordinated to the abstract in either Freud's or Eliot's career, so that as late as his "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" in 1932, Freud could privilege the "practical" task of psychoanalysis (which called for a "technique") over the "theoretical task," which "can only be a theory."<sup>5</sup> Likewise, it was not merely the young Eliot of *Adam Bede* that extolled the power of fiction to moderate unrealistic expectations; the narrator of *Middlemarch* laid down a truth for all that novel's grateful readers when concluding that "things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been."<sup>6</sup> These techniques, of realism and psychoanalysis, work to deprive readers and patients of the pleasure that beautiful but damaging fantasies provide and to supplant that pleasure with the deeper sense of wellbeing that comes from having grown into the ugly world. That, in short, is the premise for this essay, which

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but a phenomenological approach to narrative," and therefore lived experiences and perceptions of the world (p. 840). Star's argument, then, focuses attention on realism as an attempt to represent cognitive phenomena, but does not, as I do, treat Eliot's subjectivism as the motor of a fundamentally normative project designed to produce therapeutic effects in readers.

4. "No doubt the twin aims of psychoanalysis—to provide therapy and to generate theory—are usually compatible and interdependent. But at times they clash: the rights of the patient to privacy may conflict with the demands of science for public discussion. It was a difficulty Freud would confront again, and not with his patients alone; as his own most revealing analysis, he found self-disclosure at once painful and necessary" (Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Times* [New York, 1988], p. 74; hereafter abbreviated *F*).

5. Sigmund Freud, "Lecture XXIX: Revision of the Theory of Dreams" in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933 [1932]), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey et al., ed. Strachey, 24 vols. (London, 1953–74), 22:10.

6. George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (New York, 2015) p. 785; hereafter abbreviated *M*. Of course this is not literally what the narrator means, which is that the uncompensated and invisible labor of quiet, good people has, throughout history, moderated the worst effects of time's passage and amplified the best. But the experience that *Middlemarch* has itself helped readers overcome something or other is surely latent in Eliot's expression—as readers like Rebecca Mead, who takes the novel as therapy almost literally, have amply demonstrated; see Rebecca Mead, *My Life in Middlemarch* (New York, 2014).

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attempts to describe the rhetoric of “realness,” that Eliot and Freud, perhaps surprisingly, share: an address designed to persuade their patients and readers to relinquish a beautiful fantasy and face a discomfiting truth about the inadequacy of their own material existence. Against the Romantics’ attempt to make the desirable possible, realism and psychoanalysis persuaded their addressees that the possible was, after all, desirable.

Of course, as soon as we have accepted that premise, we realize it cannot possibly be so simple—that the relation of self to self encompasses the regime of objects in crucial ways. Our problem derives from the complexity of the word *real*, which means a number of different (and contradictory) things, including: theoretically plausible (*realistic*); mimetically reproductive of the material world (*naively realist*); actually existing; praiseworthy on the basis of honesty or authenticity. To take an important recent addition to this sequence: in *Redefining Realness*, Janet Mock reframes the transgender coming-out narrative to place realness not as a type of socialization (that is, realness as passing) but as a theory of subjectivation (that is, realness as accepting an apparently impossible truth about oneself).<sup>7</sup> The titular definition that Mock contests derives from the vocabulary of the documentary *Paris Is Burning* (dir. Jennie Livingston, 1991), and specifically from the film’s “sage” (Mock’s term), who defines realness as, again in Mock’s words, “the ability to be seen as heteronormative, to assimilate, to not be read as other or deviate from the norm” (*R*, p. 116). Yet although it is an “ability,” or a complex of abilities, Mock argues that trans women and femmes do not understand realness as a kind of performance but as a kind of embodiment: “a trans woman or femme queen embodies ‘realness’ and femininity beyond performance by existing in the daylight” (*R*, p. 116). This realness is not ratified by the outside world—“a world that told me daily that who I was would never be ‘real’ or compare to the ‘real’ thing”—so, accordingly, it is felt as a relinquishing of both social interpellation and egoistic control of a trans woman’s personhood; it is felt as *surrender* (*R*, p. 173). The last sentence of *Redefining Realness* is: “Eventually, I emerged, and surrendered to the brilliance, discovering truth, beauty, and peace that was already mine” (*R*, p. 258).

In literary historical terms, we might say that Mock’s account of realness dislodges the term from the domain of romantic irony and reconstructs it as a realist psychology. Defending *Paris Is Burning* against the antitrans feminists for whom MTF trans expression is necessarily “an imitation based on ridicule and degradation,” Judith Butler argues that “identification is always an ambivalent process . . . [that] involves identifying with a set of norms that

7. See Janet Mock, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (New York, 2014); hereafter abbreviated *R*.

are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications by which they are insistently approximated.”<sup>8</sup> Not so for Mock, whose narrative indicates that the very instability of social regimes of identification and introjection necessitates the grounding of the sexed subject in a psychic terrain reducible neither to socialization nor embodiment. What Mock calls here “the brilliance” is often casually referred to in less glorious terms as *gender dysphoria*, and I shall refer to here as *trans realism*. By using this term, I mean to introduce into trans theoretical writing a term responsive to the ontologies of trans life absent the categories of parody and drag and to orient us away from the descriptions of trans as instability, fuckery, or interstitiality that reduce such ontologies to intellectual or aesthetic patterns. The realism on which Mock’s redefinition turns may be characterized as the overwhelming feeling that one’s body is not sexed adequately and that one’s claim on the world depends on a self-shattering acknowledgement of that fact; the method by which it is accessed is not experimentation but submission; not appropriation but surrender.<sup>9</sup>

The notion that realness, the only realness worth the name, derives from a rejection of the social coding of the sexed body is, I will argue, surprisingly consistent with the realist rhetoric of Eliot and Freud, both of whom took the reversal of an apparently unassailable premise about the sexed body as the most *real* aspect of their projects. Indeed, I will argue that our understanding of Eliot’s literary realism and Freud’s psychoanalysis is merely hypothetical and formal, until we have reckoned with the account of transsexuality that underpins both these projects. Trans realism appears in Eliot as the ethical injunction to re-sex the body, an injunction that, in startlingly literal terms, the author formerly known as Mary Ann Evans materialized in the masculine figure of Eliot, a figure for whom the term *masculine pseudonym* has never proven persuasive. In Freud, it appears as the bedrock fact of sexed subjectivity but a subjectivity only partially or tentatively grafted onto the biological matter of the body and returning to consciousness as the two perennial truths of neurotic experience—penis envy and castration complex—whose literally fundamental presence within proprioceptive

8. Judith Butler, “Gender Is Burning: Questions of Approximation and Subversion,” *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York, 1993), p. 126.

9. Deanna Kreisel uses this phrase, without direct reference to its usage in trans discourse, in her excellent 2003 essay on Eliot’s fiction. Kreisel’s reading of *Daniel Deronda* and especially *Adam Bede* suggests that Eliot’s attempt to produce an “androgynous incognito” as an attempt to synthesize as narrative form a “feminine sympathetic realism” with a “masculine narratorial intervention” (Deanne K. Kreisel, “Incognito, Intervention, and Dismemberment in *Adam Bede*,” *ELH* 70, no. 2 [Summer 2003]: 570, 543). My own position is less nuanced, I think: the realism towards which Eliot’s thinking asymptotically strives is, or would be if it were achievable, the breach of sexual difference.

consciousness prove to the neurotic subject, at any moment, that sex can be and is subject to change. The second step of this essay's argument, then, is to demonstrate not merely that realism operates as a technique for these two writers but that they both, somewhere near to the center of their intellectual projects, sought to reorient *through* technique the subject's relation to the sexed body. For Eliot, realism will not have been achieved before the reader has fully grasped the clumsy, ugly truth of the human body that therefore he or she is, a truth that must be imparted through novelistic craftwork, and indeed comes to define the novelist's craft in such moments as Eliot reaches to account for it. For Freud, castration complex and penis envy form, on the one hand, the bedrock of neurosis, and therefore the asymptote that psychoanalytic psychotherapy continually approaches; on the other hand (or rather, by virtue of that asymptotic relation), the utopian possibility of overcoming or thwarting penis envy/castration complex suffuses Freud's writing on technique, an apparently inert metadiscourse by which the physician can prove the practical utility of the psychoanalytic method.

The type of realism that comes into view when one foregrounds the question of technique, then, is not necessarily mimetic; nor does it in any necessary sense enjoy a privileged relation to history, as György Lukács argues.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, a negation of the actually existing world's conventional pieties is the foundational gesture of both Eliotic and Freudian rhetoric. But this is not to deny that the normative element of realism is intimately connected with the descriptive or aesthetic element. The *Oxford English Dictionary* treats these meanings of realism separately, as "characterized by faithfulness of representation" (which it dates to 1829) and "concerned with, or characterized by, a practical view of life" (which it dates to 1869), but as Raymond Williams points out in his genealogy of realism, the two are hardly so separate.<sup>11</sup> The "practical view of life" is, after all, the view from the boardroom, and accordingly "realistic" is "an immensely popular word among businessmen and politicians."<sup>12</sup> That realist novels have plots, and that the success in those plots is usually figured simply as commercial gain or heterosexual world-building, might incline us to think that realism has established the contract of self-care in what Fredric Jameson describes as

10. This necessarily truncated account of Lukács's theory of realism as a kind of historical reference was nonetheless a constant in his otherwise laudably inconsistent engagement with the term; its definitive formulation appears in György Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," trans. Rodney Livingston, in *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism*, trans. Livingstont et al. (New York, 2007), pp. 29–59.

11. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "realistic."

12. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, 1976), p. 259.

“bad faith”: it simply wished, after all, to hollow out some desires that might have been troubling to the bourgeois class that produced and circulated novels and, using a complex network of stylistic trickery, rewire their husks with less ambitious fantasies.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, the realness of Eliot’s realism does not depend on any judgment about the ontology of the worlds it calls into being. “Better knowledge is ultimately hidden knowledge,” the psychoanalytic critic Jacqueline Rose observes of *Middlemarch*: true and hidden within the subject supposed to know.<sup>14</sup>

Consider the following passage of *Middlemarch*, which has some claim on being the single realest moment in the whole novel and whose “awful fidelity” was picked up by Eliot’s reviewer in the *Edinburgh Review*.<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Bulstrode, publicly shamed and ruined for his financial misdeeds and his part in the death of the alcoholic Raffles, sits awaiting his wife Harriet’s return, not knowing how she will respond to his disgrace:

It was eight o’clock in the evening before the door opened and his wife entered. He dared not look up at her. He sat with his eyes bent down, and as she went towards him she thought he looked smaller—he seemed so withered and shrunken. A movement of new compassion and old tenderness went through her like a great wave, and putting one hand on his which rested on the arm of the chair, and the other on his shoulder, she said, solemnly but kindly, “Look up, Nicholas.”

He raised his eyes with a little start and looked at her half amazed for a moment: her pale face, her changed, mourning dress, the trembling about her mouth, all said, “I know”; and her hands and eyes rested gently on him. He burst out crying and they cried together, she sitting at his side. They could not yet speak to each other of the shame which she was bearing with him or of the acts which had brought it down on them. His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent. Open-minded as she was, she nevertheless shrank from the words which would have expressed their mutual consciousness as she would have shrunk from flakes of fire. She could

13. Fredric Jameson, “George Eliot and *Mauvaise Foi*,” *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York, 2013), p. 129. Bruce Robbins summarizes Jameson’s position as such: “The *style indirect libre* [Eliot] favors may look like moral judgment, but is all the more effective because the reader is left uncertain, sentence by sentence, as to whether judgment is happening at all” (Bruce Robbins, “Fredric Jameson on the Taking of Sides,” review of *The Anatomies of Realism* by Jameson, *Victorian Studies* 57 [Autumn 2014]: 92).

14. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (New York, 1986), p. 107

15. Anonymous, Review of *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, *Edinburgh Review* 137 (Jan. 1873): 255.

not say, "How much is only slander and false suspicion?" And he did not say, "I am innocent." [*M*, pp. 705–06]

The goal of this passage is to make even the experience of being shamed desirable, and that goal is achieved with brutal efficiency: the recitation of oddly zeugmatic phrases ("his eyes bent down"; "her changed, mourning dress") disorient the reader enough to find the conspicuous plainspokenness profoundly reassuring, as though we were ourselves undergoing the experience of grace Harriet confers upon Nicholas. Especially the pacifying repetitions, which resonate with an almost maternal sleepiness: "was silent . . . was silent"; "she could not say . . . he did not say." The passage risks a kind of pedantic literalism—"putting one hand on his which rested on the arm of the chair, and the other on his shoulder"—in order to produce a powerful aesthetic of straightforwardness. Although the novel's narrator articulates this climactic state of intimate incapacitation between spouses, for the most part, as a series of negatives, nonetheless the "mutual consciousness" that obtains between the two characters is tender and even utopian; Harriet's "promise of faithfulness," after all, indicates to the reader (though not, explicitly, to Nicholas) that the condition that exists between them at this moment has some chance of enduring. But nonetheless, the encounter between the Bulstrodes is not *epiphanic*, if that word implies discovery and heroic breakthrough. Nobody learns anything, and Harriet's "new compassion" is tempered by an "old tenderness." Rather, in this powerful moment, *Middlemarch* demarcates an aesthetic realness predicated on *acceptance* of a shared condition; of two people beginning to recover from their despair, to heal the shame of one and the suspicion of the other. To describe this moment as realism is to ascribe that aesthetic not to objective but to subjective phenomena and, in this sense, is one of any number of moments in the novel where the same happens: when Dorothea finally confronts her feelings about Casaubon; when she and Will are finally honest with each other.

Nor, obviously, does psychoanalysis primarily represent objective phenomena; just as the vehicle for Eliot's realism was fiction, Freud's stock-in-trade mostly consisted of fantasy on both sides of the ledger: his patients' dreams and stories for his own grand mythopoetic narratives. The name Freud gives to the cognitive experience of the real world—the *reality principle*—is one of the richest and most contradictory ideas in his oeuvre: the reality principle entails an exchange of fantasy for reality, where what one loses (fantasy) is both *present* and *false*; what one gains (reality) is both *absent* and *true*. The psychological difficulties of that implied quadratic detain Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis in their brief gloss on Freud's reality principle, in which from multiple angles they strive to demonstrate that the

mental experience of reality does not supersede but in fact *precedes* fantasy, just as the instinct to self-preservation must have preceded the sexual instinct.<sup>16</sup> So readjusted, reality within psychoanalysis is not the sole authority against which instincts and desires are tested but a *felt* dimension of psychic life itself. Not merely one fantasy among many, but not the singular antithesis of fantasy either, reality can only enter into psychic space, as it were, obliquely.

In short, it was the remit of both Eliotic realism and Freudian psychoanalysis, then, to subsume both the realm of objects and the entire business of getting to know them and talk about them, within the domain of what Michel Foucault calls the “*epimeleia heautou*,” or the care of the self; glossing Marcus Aurelius, Foucault describes self-care as “a sustained effort in which general principles are reactivated and arguments are adduced that persuade one not to let oneself become angry at others, at providence, or at things.”<sup>17</sup> As Foucault’s mixture of passive construction (“are adduced”) and middle voice (“persuade one not to let oneself become”) suggests, however, self-care is not as simple as it sounds and involves a nuanced rhetorical positioning in which the analyst/novelist’s task is to persuade the patient/analyst to give up a satisfying hallucination in favor of a less satisfying, but realer, self-relation.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the rhetoric of ugliness is an attempt to answer the most serious objection to a self-relation of realism, that Freud himself articulates in his 1917 paper *Mourning and Melancholia*:

It is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis.<sup>19</sup>

16. See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, “Reality Principle,” in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London, 1988), pp. 379–82. Laplanche and Pontalis derive their reading of the reality principle in part from D. W. Winnicott’s work on the topic (formulated most succinctly in “The Use of an Object and Relating Through Identifications”) and partly through an analogy between Freud’s distinction between pleasure and reality in “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning” and his distinction between the self-preserving from the self-eroticizing impulses in his paper “On Narcissism”; see D. W. Winnicott, “The Use of an Object” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 50, no. 4 (1969): 711–16, and Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction” in *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* (1914), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 14:73–102 and “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” in *Papers on Technique* (1911–1915 [1914]), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 12:218–26.

17. Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1986), pp. 45, 51.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

19. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *Papers on Metapsychology* [1915], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 14:244.



Not only does Freud appear to contradict the possibility of realism in the sense outlined above, he does so in a pair of sentences that could almost, were it not for the words “libidinal” and “psychosis,” be taken for Eliotic—ascribing a hard truth to “general observation,” before illustrating it with the authority of personal experience.<sup>20</sup> And this problem, concerning the relation between the pedagogical and erotic dimensions of the realist project, has been at the center of a number of recent major essays on Eliot. Catherine Gallagher’s essay “George Eliot: Immanent Victorian” concludes with the claim that Eliot “is the greatest English realist because she not only makes us curious about the quotidian, not only convinces us that knowing its particularity is our ultimate ethical duty, but also, and supremely, makes us want it.”<sup>21</sup> David Kurnick, perceiving in Gallagher’s formulation an echo of a nineteenth century debate over “whether the novel reader was (erotically) entranced or (intellectually) edified,” and answers: “always both . . . implicit in Eliot’s method of making characters is the idea that novel reading offers access to a kind of insight through submission.”<sup>22</sup> And a formulation similar to Gallagher’s opens a recent essay by Mary Ann O’Farrell: the admission that “George Eliot makes me want to be bad.”<sup>23</sup> Though Gallagher and O’Farrell surely have different objects in mind, yet how suggestive their common formulation “to make [one] to want,” a formulation that resolves Freud’s doubt regarding the abandonment of a libidinal position by synthesizing an external injunction (exhorting the patient to accept an ethical norm) with an internal decompression (permitting the patient to acknowledge what they already want).

We can already see that self-care is a complex procedure, glimpsed only intermittently throughout these two oeuvres that must to some degree efface their technique. James Strachey, the editor of the English translation, remarks “the relative paucity of Freud’s writings on technique, as well as his

20. This is a characteristic element of Eliot’s and idiosyncratic mode of omniscient narration. Here, for example, is the introduction of Fred Vincy in *Middlemarch*:

You will hardly demand that his confidence should have a basis in external facts; such confidence, we know, is something less coarse and materialistic: it is a comfortable disposition leading us to expect that the wisdom of providence or the folly of our friends, the mysteries of luck or the still greater mystery of our high individual value in the universe, will bring about agreeable issues such as are consistent with our good taste in costume and our general preference for the best style of thing. [*M*, p. 219]

21. Catherine Gallagher, “George Eliot: Immanent Victorian,” *Representations* 90 (Spring 2005): 73.

22. David Kurnick, “Abstraction and the Subject of Novel Reading: Drifting Through *Romola*,” *Novel* 42 (Fall 2009): 491.

23. Mary Ann O’Farrell, “Provoking George Eliot” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York, 2004), p. 145.

hesitations and delays over their production, suggests that there was some feeling of reluctance on his part to publishing this kind of material” and attributes that reluctance to Freud’s dislike of “the notion of future patients knowing too much about his technique,” as well as his insistence that “a proper mastery of the subject [of psychoanalysis] could only be acquired from clinical experience and not from books.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in the *Papers on Technique* themselves, Freud expresses his awareness that his understandable anxiety that patients’ access to psychoanalytic technique would ruin the magic (specifically, would drive the patient’s resistance to treatment further into the unconscious, and distort their dreams) was, profoundly, a question concerning the *elegance* of psychoanalysis that required a vocabulary drawn from the discourse of aesthetics:

I submit, therefore, that dream-interpretation should not be pursued in analytic treatment as an art for its own sake, but that its handling should be subject to those technical rules that govern the conduct of the treatment as a whole. Occasionally, of course, one can act otherwise and allow a little free play to one’s theoretical interest; but one should always be aware of what one is doing.<sup>25</sup>

The rhetoric of psychoanalytic technique therefore accomplishes two quite divergent ends: first, it protects the patient from knowledge that will inhibit their progress; second, it protects the analyst from the embarrassment of having been caught up in their own aesthetic experience. If one therapeutic purpose of psychoanalysis is the strategic disenchantment of aesthetic phenomena—the draining of the fantasy of the beautiful—then the rhetoric of technique appears both as a pure discursivity deprived of any aesthetic illusion and as capturing the rhetoric of aesthetics (“art for its own sake”; “a little free play”) and ascribing it to the analyst’s experience of the treatment.<sup>26</sup> In order to maintain the ruse, however, Freud notoriously foreclosed that very aesthetic (and erotic) dimension of the analyst’s own experience in the same

24. Strachey, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Papers on Technique*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 12:87.

25. Freud, “The Handling of Dream-Interpretation,” in *Papers on Technique* (1911–1915 [1914]), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 12:94.

26. Given that it is in his discourses on technique that Freud feels, more conspicuously than anywhere else, the fear of being overheard, it is interesting that, in Peter Brooks’s influential alignment of Eliot and the psychoanalytic tradition, the novelist’s critique of the practice of knowing “woman’s body” through the “phallic field of vision” was surpassed by the analyst’s attempt “to supplant seeing by listening to the body” (Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* [Cambridge, Mass., 1993], p. 199).

*Papers*, offering nothing more than a “warning against any tendency to a counter-transference which may be present in [the analyst’s] own mind.”<sup>27</sup>

The repudiation of countertransference expression comports, clearly enough, with Freud’s general injunction in the *Papers on Technique* that “the doctor should be opaque to his patients and, like a mirror, should show them nothing but what is shown to him.”<sup>28</sup> The impassive word “doctor,” moreover, replaces the more labile young and eager psychoanalysts whose understandable but callow impulses towards individualizing themselves for their patients, Freud seeks to redress. On the other hand, the *Papers on Technique* offer an account of psychoanalytic practice notable for its flexibility and frank emphasis on the analyst’s spontaneity. There is only, Freud announces, “a single precept” to be borne in mind, which is that “the doctor must put himself in a position to make use of everything he is told for the purposes of interpretation” (“R,” pp. 111, 115). This rule is merely the “counterpart to the ‘fundamental rule of psycho-analysis’ which is laid down for the patient,” that is, to the principle of letting one’s speech be governed by free association that Freud outlines in “On Beginning the Treatment”: “you must say [the unimportant or nonsensical thing] precisely *because* you feel an aversion to doing so. Later on you will find out and learn to understand the reason for this injunction, which is really the only one you have to follow.”<sup>29</sup> Lest the new analyst suspect Freud of overstating the case, he also clarifies his position that technique is useful to the extent that it enables the free play of the interpretive faculty (which alone will ensure the success of the treatment) and unhelpful to the extent that it displaces the metapsychological research merely to become another metadiscourse constricting the flow of language and interpretation between patient and doctor:

One of the claims of psycho-analysis to distinction is, no doubt, that in its execution research and treatment coincide; nevertheless, after a certain point, the technique required for the one opposes that required

27. Freud, “Observations on Transference-Love (Further Recommendations on Technique of Psycho-Analysis III),” in *Papers on Technique* (1911–1915 [1914]), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 12:160. Of course, it is on the grounds of his denial of countertransference that Freud’s writings on technique have been all but abandoned by the institution of professional psychoanalysis at present; in the various Kleinian and post-Kleinian schools that have pushed back against that occlusion, countertransference is understood as a foundational, even primary, dimension of the therapeutic transference.

28. Freud, “Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis (1912),” in *Papers on Technique* (1911–1915 [1914]), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 12:118; hereafter abbreviated “R.”

29. Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment: (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I) (1913),” in *Papers on Technique* (1911–1915 [1914]), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 12:135.

for the other. It is not a good thing to work on a case scientifically while treatment is still proceeding—to piece together its structure, to try to foretell its further progress, and to get a picture from time to time of the current state of affairs, as scientific interest would demand. Cases which are devoted from the first to scientific purposes and are treated accordingly suffer in their outcome; while the most successful cases are those in which one proceeds, as it were, without any purpose in view, allows oneself to be taken by surprise by any new turn in them, and always meets them with an open mind, free from any pre-suppositions. [“R,” p. 114]

The desire for an iterable protocol by which symptoms might reliably be alleviated encounters its formal opposite: the free play of the faculties in an aesthetic state of contemplation. The result is a technique of zero technique—or, rather, a technique that subtends the discourse only as rhetoric, as the insistence that doing nothing, “without any purpose in view,” is the most technically astute technique of all.

The first idea for the text that became the *Papers on Technique* was “a little memorandum of maxims and rules of technique,” supposed to circulate among a very limited readership of practicing analysts when the idea came to Freud in 1909.<sup>30</sup> The six papers themselves were written and published separately between 1911 and 1913, and, despite the sequence of their publication being interrupted by other papers—crucially, for these purposes, by “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning” (1911), the first major articulation of the “reality principle”—they were republished together in 1918 and are still treated as a single text in the *Standard Edition*. The *Papers on Technique*, that is to say, exist in an unusual relation to the rest of Freud’s oeuvre; we read them in a breach of professional protocol quite unlike the breach of privacy in which we read, for example, the dreams of Freud’s unnamed patients or the detailed diagnoses of the more celebrated ones. A similar breach, or “pause” is the precondition for the self-theorizing of realism in Eliot’s first novel proper, *Adam Bede*, which breaks off a third of the way through for “Chapter XVII: In Which the Story Pauses a Little.”<sup>31</sup> Or rather, the narrative is interrupted by a voice ascribed to the reader:

30. Strachey, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Papers on Technique*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 12:85.

31. As Caroline Levine points out, the pause works metadiegetically (the story is put on pause while something else happens) and diegetically (the story is, for the purposes of this chapter, that a pause is taking place; specifically that Arthur Donnithorne has been interrupted leaving Reverend Irwine’s company). Levine extrapolates from this observation the principle

‘This Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!’ I hear one of my readers exclaim. ‘How much more edifying it would have been if you had made him give Arthur some truly spiritual advice. You might have put into his mouth the most beautiful things – quite as good as reading a sermon.’<sup>32</sup>

This chapter has been examined in more or less everything theoretical framing of Eliot’s realist aesthetics to date—understandably, since it is so uniquely positioned as an argument for realism and therefore invitingly orthogonal *to* realism. Readers of novels were, and are, of course, used to being addressed. Indeed, Eliot has already done so the second sentence of the *Adam Bede*, in a tone closer to a contract than an intimate disclosure: “This is what I undertake to do for you, reader” (*A*, p. 9).<sup>33</sup> But to be the object of a narrator’s prosopopeia is an altogether more unusual affair—no less because, introduced now as “one of my readers” rather than the singular “you,” any intimacy conveyed by narrative apostrophe has been decisively violated. Rather than a confidant or even a conegotiator, the reader is cast as merely one among a mob of dullards—indeed, put in the curious position of *not* being the addressed reader but another reader over whose shoulder somebody else is heckling the narrator, who responds:

Certainly I could, if I held it the highest vocation of the novelist to represent things as they never have been and never will be. Then, of course, I might refashion life and character entirely after my own liking; I might select the most unexceptionable type of clergyman, and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions. But it happens, on the contrary, that my strongest effort is to avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless

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that the discursive otherness of the pause models an ethical relation to otherness in general—an encounter with the real world as irremediably distinct from the reader’s inner life. But to the extent that the pause brings the reader out of the story, the reader experiences the kind of shock Freud feared his patients would experience if they read the *Papers on Technique*: by being pulled further into Eliot’s narrator’s world, we are thereby expelled from it. See Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville, Va., 2003), p. 104.

32. Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York, 2008), p. 193; hereafter abbreviated *A*.

33. Indeed, for Garrett Stewart, the contract is the stereotype of all novelistic apostrophe: “the reader I have in mind, the reader I am in my mind while moving through a text, is there to establish, without ever stabilizing, a contact that grows increasingly contractual. Readers do more than underwrite the act of textual communication; they are conscribed, in short, by narrative’s own economy as silent partners” (Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth Century British Fiction* [Baltimore, 1996], p. 10).

defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath. [A, p. 193]

The narrator's response revises one model for realist narration, the mirror, and replaces it with another, the "oath." As we have seen with Freud's injunction that analysts behave like mirrors, the mirror metaphor was not as simple as he, or indeed Eliot, might have wanted. In *Adam Bede's* first sentence, the narrator had conjured an image of mimetic reproduction supervened not only by an Orientalist idiolect but by an image contrived to conjoin opacity with reflectiveness: "With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past" (A, p. 9). J. Hillis Miller has synthesized this image elegantly: "The mirror mirrors itself, not an external world which corresponds point for point to the sequence of the narrative."<sup>34</sup> But the "as if" clause conjoining narrative art to legal testimony is surely no less complicated, in the context of a novel whose narrative resolution depends on a religious confessor's capacity to obtain a truth that the witness-box had been unable to supply. The witnesses in the trial of Hetty Sorrel for infanticide are not depicted but described to Adam (who waits outside the courtroom) by Bartle Massey, in gently cynical terms: "the counsel they've got for her puts a spoke in the wheel whenever he can, and makes a deal to do with cross-examining the witness, and quarrelling with the other lawyers. That's all he can do for the money they give him" (A, p. 465). When the novel's central event (Hetty's murder of her child) is finally narrated, it is not in the witness-box but "In the Prison" (the name of the chapter)—and not to a courtroom weighing evidence, and therefore sensitive to rhetorical construction, but to the confessor Dinah Morris whose only role is "to be with you, Hetty – not to leave you – to stay with you – to be your sister to the last" (A, p. 487). Indeed, the realness that Hetty's confession approaches, like the realness of the encounter between the Bulstrodes, is conditioned upon the verdict already having been passed—a species of honesty not positioned as an alternative to the witness-box but as a type of narrative dependent on the functioning, and then departure, of the social apparatus of judgment. The difference between the style of Hetty's confession and that of the narrator of *Adam Bede* is more than that the character's speech is spoken ("subsumed to her own story as orally remembered and renewed," as Garrett Stewart puts it) and

34. J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy* (Cleveland, 1979), p. 81.

the narrator's written.<sup>35</sup> Rather, the prison scene captures a version of realism whose telos is not persuasive but purgative, the effect being a story that is both profoundly inconsistent (“I did do it, Dinah”; “I didn’t kill it”; “I didn’t kill it myself”; “I couldn’t kill it any other way”; “I put it down there and covered it up”; “I *couldn’t* cover it quite up” [A, pp. 491, 492, 493]) and, obviously, true.

To return to chapter 17: the mirror and the witness-box having been raised and, the first explicitly and the second ironically, complicated as defenses of realism, the narrator sets up a third possibility, that of readerly self-interest. The reader’s objection describes a first-order pleasure that might be obtained from the broad-brush caricatures Eliot is eschewing—or at least claiming to eschew:

Perhaps you will say, ‘Do improve the facts a little, then; make them more accordant with those correct views which it is our privilege to possess. The world is not just what we like; do touch it up with a tasteful pencil, and make believe it is not quite such a mixed entangled affair. Let all people who hold unexceptionable opinions act unexceptionably. Let your most faulty characters always be on the wrong side, and your virtuous ones on the right. Then we shall see at a glance whom we are to condemn, and whom we are to approve. Then we shall be able to admire, without the slightest disturbance of our prepossessions: we shall hate and despise with that true ruminant relish which belongs to undoubting confidence.’ [A, pp. 193–94]

Before describing the narrator’s response, let me note in passing that the first interlocutor—“one of my readers”—appears to have been swapped out for another character, “Perhaps you.” The styles of the passages are a little different too: the first, the reader that was, so to speak, addressing the narrator from over your shoulder, was impetuous and enthusiastic; “perhaps you” is pompous, cruel, and very clearly a satirical personification. The narrator’s response, however, does not register that switch, and turns instead to appeal to the reader’s self-interest:

But, my good friend, what will you do then with your fellow-parishioner who opposes your husband in the vestry?—with your newly-appointed vicar, whose style of preaching you find painfully below that of his regretted predecessor?—with the honest servant who worries your soul with her one failing? —with your neighbour, Mrs Green, who was really kind to you in your last illness, but has said

35. Stewart, *Dear Reader*, p. 306.

several ill-natured things about you since your convalescence? —nay, with your excellent husband himself, who has other irritating habits besides that of not wiping his shoes? These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people—amongst whom your life is passed—that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people, whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire—for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience.

[A, p. 194]

This second, more satirically constructed interlocutor is now furnished possessed of an ostentatious set of predicates, whose conspicuous features the reader is, paradoxically, invited to adopt for herself: you have been sick but have recovered; you are a propertied and married woman whose husband holds some ecclesiastical position; you have no realistic hope of escaping a living situation that, evidently, brings you little joy. This is the same procedure in reverse, I think, as the characterization of Mary Garth that Gallagher details. There, a rhetorical construction ostensibly designed to render Mary representative of a type (“ten to one you will see a face like hers in the crowded street tomorrow”) proceeds instead by superadding characterizing details such as “perfect little teeth” that render Mary *less* of a type, but *more* of a character. Leading, Gallagher observes, to this remarkable effect: “the progression the reader is asked to follow from sighting a Mary to tasting one, from distanced viewing to more intimate sensation, figures the movement from type to fictional particularity as, paradoxically, a process of increasing embodiment.”<sup>36</sup> Here, that fictional embodiment is, even more paradoxically, the reader’s own: if, stuck in romantic fantasies about human beings, we find ourselves unable to accept the necessary problems of everyday life, the proposed solution is to cultivate a love for the “ugly, stupid, inconsistent” people that, implicitly, we have allowed ourselves to become.

Over a few more paragraphs, Eliot’s narrator illustrates the proposition that ugly people are to be not merely accepted but desired, in order that readers learn to accept the inevitable disenchantment of the world. The bodies in question are always sexed and exhibited with sadistic, satirical precision.<sup>37</sup> The major theme that emerge from their descriptions is erotic desire, the type of which is introduced through “an awkward bridegroom”

36. Gallagher, “George Eliot,” p. 65.

37. “Above all Eliot seems drawn to the unpleasant color and texture of the human complexion” (Aaron Matz, *Satire in an Age of Realism* [New York, 2010], p. 6).



and “a high-shouldered, broad-faced bride” are surrounded by “elderly and middle-aged friends . . . with very irregular noses and lips”—an entire social confection of heterosexual defectiveness, which she attaches to other stock characters: a “friend or two” of the narrator on whom “the Apollo curl . . . would be decidedly trying” and the “motherly lips” of the women who admire them; the “young heroes of middle stature and feeble beards” and the “wife who waddles” with whom they permit themselves to be “happily settled” (*A*, pp. 195, 196). What might feel like an oversupply of examples of the same thing drives towards a payoff whose effect is, likewise, dependent on the quantitative difference between beautiful and ugly people: “There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can’t afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feelings for my everyday fellow-men” (*A*, p. 197). That is to say, although “ugly” here is the underprivileged side of a binary construction, that construction is not merely reversed—this is not merely “an inverted romance,” as Ian Watt calls the mistaken view of realism as simply “life from the seamy side.”<sup>38</sup> Rather, the ubiquity of bodily dysphoria works to break a primal link between beauty and desire, and like Bulstrode, erotically drawn to his own moral failings, we are drawn to confront our physical inadequacies without euphemism—our fatness, our unevenness, the inadequacy of our facial hair—and to encounter ourselves as degraded, and desiring, bodies.

So, this “perhaps you” is no less ugly than the others. But why must “you” be endowed with that especially demeaning characteristic, an attribute that, after all, belongs firmly within the domain of aesthetics, rather than ethics? Some readers have been tempted by a peculiarly tenacious (and, it need hardly be said, deeply misogynist) biographeme that has resurfaced recently in, for example, Mead’s *New Yorker* article “George Eliot’s Ugly Beauty” and by Lena Dunham’s 2013 tweet offering the “thesis” that Eliot was “ugly AND horny!”<sup>39</sup> In thrall to a barely disguised (and fairly Eliotic) eroticization of the ugly, Henry James panted that she was “magnificently ugly, deliciously hideous”; in a more maudlin mood, Eliot’s early

38. “If the novel were realistic merely because it saw life from the seamy side, it would only be an inverted romance; but in fact it surely attempts to portray all the varieties of human existence, and not merely those suited to one particular perspective: the novel’s realism does not reside in the life it presents, but in the way it presents it” (Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* [Berkeley, 1957], p. 11).

39. See Mead, “George Eliot’s Ugly Beauty,” *New Yorker*, 19 Sept. 2013, [www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/george-eliot-ugly-beauty](http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/george-eliot-ugly-beauty), and Lena Dunham (@lenadunham), “FYI George Eliot’s Wikipedia page is the soapiest most scandalous thing you’ll read this month. Thesis: she was ugly AND horny!” Twitter, 15 Sept. 2013, [twitter.com/lenadunham/status/379293041892134912?lang=en](https://twitter.com/lenadunham/status/379293041892134912?lang=en)

twentieth-century biographer Anne Fremantle reflected that “it must be a terrible sorrow to be young and unattractive: to look in the mirror and see a sallow unhealthy face, with a yellowish skin, straight nose, and mouse-colored hair.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, though Eliot’s letters and personal writings disclose some self-consciousness when it came to looks, ones finds nothing to justify either James’s panting or Fremantle’s concern-trolling. Eliot self-describes as an “anxious, fidgety wretch” and rues that “I had never been good and attractive enough to win any little share of the honest, disinterested friendship there is in the world.”<sup>41</sup>

One word with which Eliot *never* self-describes, however, is the word that the narrator of *Adam Bede* is especially to foist upon the novel’s reader, and the world at large: *ugly*. That word—which does indeed occur frequently in Eliot’s correspondence—is reserved primarily for architecture—and, more specifically, for the type of Continental European buildings that smack of Catholicism. The streets around the Trinità di Monte in Rome; St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome; *Rome itself*; Prague Castle; the theater in Dresden; the effect of marble statues on the otherwise *splendid chapel in San Lorenzo*; the leaning towers of Bologna; the Council Chamber in Florence; closer to home, the Welsh seaside town of Llandudno; and, most puzzlingly and ambiguously of all, the effect on a view of the Alps of one’s needing to look at them sideways because the sun is in one’s eyes.<sup>42</sup> In other words, Eliot reserves for fiction this particular phenomenology of physical displeasure; in the letters, ugliness is not merely unfleshed; it is associated with the very tropes—ornamentation, fashionableness, filigree—against which it is euphemistically contrasted in *Adam Bede*.

### The May-Beetle Dream

She called to mind that she had two may-beetles in a box and that she must set them free or they would suffocate. She opened the box and the may-beetles were in an exhausted state. One of them flew out of the open window; but the other was crushed by the casement while she was shutting it at someone’s request.<sup>43</sup>

This dream is one of the three with which Freud illustrates “the work of condensation,” perhaps the most important technique by which, he held,

40. For these and other assessments of Eliot’s appearance, see Mead, “George Eliot’s Ugly Beauty.”

41. Eliot, letter to Mrs. Bray, 24 Feb. 1859, *The Life of George Eliot: As Related in Her Letters and Journals*, ed. John Walter Cross (New York, 1884), p. 289.

42. See Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven, Conn., 1954).

43. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 4:289; hereafter abbreviated *I*.

the mind transforms fantasies beyond the reach of consciousness into the content of dreams (see *I*, pp. 279–304). The most important because, as many of Freud's readers have emphasized, the condensation of multiple elements of fantasy into a single image—that a beetle may simultaneously represent disgust, compassion, and sexual desire—is a procedure without fixed limits. Condensation respects no economy of scarcity; more and more meanings may always be discovered to have been condensed within a single image, and consequently, not merely is the interpretation of an dream an interminable procedure, as Freud has acknowledged from the start, but even the interpretation of any particular *element* of a dream is inexhaustible. This account of interpretation showcases Freud at his most broadminded and the project of psychoanalysis at its most utopian: the unconscious mind he depicts is limitless in its resources and capacity for creativity. A claustrophobic narrative about two fragile junebugs, meanwhile, has violated the no-less-fragile sense of infinite possibility even before one of them has been killed. Indeed, the stupefied cruelty of the may-beetle dream possesses a bathetic force that seems to push Freud onto the defensive; uncharacteristically, he remarks that he will offer only “part of the analysis” of this particular dream; that he will “not be able to pursue the interpretation of the dream to the end” and that consequently “its material will appear to fall into several groups without any visible connection” (*I*, p. 289).

So it does. In most respects, the thematics of the dream turn out to be epiphenomena of bourgeois heterosexuality's stock repertoire: the concern for an animal derives from two sources: (1) the dreamer's having read a book in which “some boys had thrown a cat into boiling water, and had described the animal's convulsions” (*I*, p. 289); and (2) the action of her fourteen-year-old daughter, with whom she was in bed and who had observed, but not remedied, a moth having fallen into her glass of water just as they was falling asleep, so both dreamer and, perhaps, daughter lay in guilty anticipation of a bug's death. Her unhappy marriage had taken place in May and was beset, in a tedious sort of way, by her husband's “aerophobic” sleeping habits, which chafed with her own “aerophilic,” which tension appears in her dream as the ambivalent outcome of closing the window (*I*, p. 292). The closest thing Freud offers to an explanation of the whole, however—“the wishful thought concealed by her present dream”—is rather strange, since it interprets the slamming window as a peculiar presentation of penis envy (*I*, p. 291). Crushed beetles, like that mechanically produced by the slamming of the casement (in line with her husband's aerophobia), are the primary ingredient of the aphrodisiac known as Spanish fly, and so what might otherwise have appeared as a castration image has been transformed into its formal opposite: “the wish for an erection” (*I*, p. 291). Strachey retains the German construction “may beetle” as a translation of *Maikäfer*

in order to maintain the connection to the diurnal rhythms of the dream; nonetheless, the Anglophone reader learns from his footnote that the “commoner English equivalent . . . is ‘cockchafer’” (I, p. 291). A footnote of Freud’s own, meanwhile, refers to Heinrich von Kleist’s play *Penthesilea*, about the sexually insatiable Amazon queen who devours her discarded lovers—the only moment in the entire *Interpretation of Dreams*, according to Didier Anzieu, where the association between oral sadism (biting) and castration anxiety converges on a woman, rather than a man.<sup>44</sup>

The interchangeability of fear (of castration) and desire (for a penis) is a well worn psychoanalytic theme; indeed, in Sarah Kofman’s influential reading of these phenomena, the female patient’s desire for a penis serves the theoretical purpose of assuaging or deferring the fear of castration. Reading between Freud’s papers on “Fetishism” and “Medusa,” Kofman observes “Woman’s penis envy thus . . . provides man with reassurance against his castration anxiety; the horror inspired by Medusa’s head is always accompanied by a sudden stiffening (*Starrwerden*), which signifies erection.”<sup>45</sup> Yet the possibility of literally switching one of these complexes for another, a possibility latent in Freud’s interpretation of the may-beetle dream, is unusual not just in Freud’s own work but among the many trenchant critiques of psychoanalysis that have focused on penis envy as mere male wishful thinking. This idea returns forcefully, however, as a rhetorical pairing of castration complex and penis envy in the final paragraphs of Freud’s final technical paper, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” published in 1937, many years after the *Papers on Technique* were first assembled and published.

At no other point in one’s own analytic work does one suffer more from an oppressive feeling that all one’s repeated efforts have been . . . ‘preaching to the winds’, than when one is trying to persuade a woman to abandon her wish for a penis on the ground of its being unrealizable or when one is seeking to convince a man that a passive attitude to men does not always signify castration and that it is indispensable in many relationships in life.<sup>46</sup>

“These two themes,” Freud holds, comprise “some general principle”; accordingly, “in spite of the dissimilarity of their content, there is an obvious correspondence between the two. Something which both sexes have

44. See Didier Anzieu, *Freud’s Self-Analysis*, trans. Peter Graham (London, 1986), pp. 449–50.

45. Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman*, p. 85.

46. Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 23:252; hereafter abbreviated “A.”

in common has been forced, by the difference between them, into different forms of expression" ("A," p. 250). Sure that the fear of castration and penis envy constitute the "bedrock . . . the rock-bottom" of analytic, Freud morbidly concludes that the bedrock is, after all, natural and occluded from the ambit of technique and that consequently "the repudiation of femininity can be nothing else than a biological fact, a part of the great riddle of sex" ("A," p. 252). It is not that these particular mythopoetic framings (castration complex and penis envy) are, exactly, true; rather, they have become names for the asymptote of sexual difference towards which analysis of both men and women grind interminably on.

Yet Freud's explicitly melancholic assessment obscures a complexity in his response; the admission of a sense of defeat in the face of sexual difference ("the oppressive feeling that one is "talking to the winds") was in one sense remarkably performative, specifically in his decision to adopt Alfred Adler's term "masculine protest" to describe men's "struggle against [their] passive or feminine attitude towards [an]other [male]" ("A," p. 268). Adler had developed that term in 1910 to describe the "ramified feminine traits carefully hidden by hypertrophied masculine wishes and efforts" that he had observed among male neurotic patients.<sup>47</sup> Since which time, Freud loathed Adler and this "reactionary and retrograde" theory: "one has the impression that somehow repression is concealed under 'masculine protest'" (quoted in *F*, pp. 221–22). Adler died in the same month that "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" was published, prompting Freud to write cruelly to Arnold Zweig: "For a Jewish boy from a Viennese suburb . . . a death in Aberdeen, Scotland is an unprecedented career and a proof of how far he had come. Truly, his contemporaries have richly rewarded him for his service in having contradicted psychoanalysis" (quoted in *F*, p. 615). In the paper itself, Freud had allowed himself to produce a more evenhanded assessment of both the value and the limitation of his old colleague's nomenclature: "It fits the case of males perfectly; but I think that, from the first, 'repudiation of femininity' would have been the correct description of this remarkable feature in the psychical life of human beings" ("A," p. 250).

47. Alfred Adler, "Inferiority Feeling and Masculine Protest," in *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler: A Systematic Presentation in Selections From His Writings*, ed. Heinz L. Ansbacher and Rowena R. Ansbacher (New York, 1956), p. 48. Adler acknowledged that the masculine protest existed for women too—"very frequently one finds during analysis the wish to become transformed into a man"—but female masculinity, like any other type of masculinity, posed less of a problem, since the tendency can "comprise all sorts of human excellencies and shortcomings"; that is, the woman-that-wishes-to-be-a-man, not being *really* a man, can at least become a human being (p. 49).

Freud wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams*, of course, before the castration complex and penis envy were fully articulated theories, although, after rearranging the manuscript of *The Interpretation of Dreams* into the chronological order of its composition, Anzieu is able to date the discovery of castration anxiety to autumn 1898, “almost certainly” the period in which Freud heard the may-beetle dream.<sup>48</sup> But in one sense, the dream *does* seem to precipitate the fuller articulation of the theory in the *Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and the *Analysis of a Case of Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy* (1909); the image of the window crushing the bug subsumes both the desire for a penis and the fear of *losing* one, in a cycle as infinite as, though far less cheerful than, condensation itself. To be possessed of a penis is to be permanently in fear of losing it, which (if it happened) would assuage the fear but create anew the unquenchable desire to possess one. To lack a penis, likewise, is to organize one’s desire around gaining a penis, which, if achieved, would immediately create the urgent problem of defending it against the threat of castration. We are accustomed to seeing the system of sexual difference that structures Freud’s thinking about fear/desire as a binary division, demarcated by a firm line. But the line in the may-beetle dream—the window—is an agential object possessed of its own force. The dream analysis stumbles into the queer polysyndeton of sexual difference, imagining a fear of castration stemming from the nonpossession of a penis, or a desire for the penis of which one is already possessed.

So much for the crushed beetle: both sloughed-off penis and germ of an erection to come. But what of the beetle that escapes? It is surely the relation between the two ostensibly *like* objects (beetle beetle) that prompts the irruption into the analytic scene of, who else but, the Victorian novelist Eliot. It is difficult to track exactly how that irruption takes place:

The patient reflected over this contradiction. It reminded her of another contradiction, between appearance and character, as George Eliot displays it in *Adam Bede*: one girl who was pretty, but vain and stupid, and another who was ugly, but of high character; a nobleman who seduced the silly girl, and a working man who felt and acted with true nobility. How impossible it was, she remarked, to recognize that sort of thing in people! Who would have guessed, to look at *her*, that she was tormented by sensual desires?<sup>49</sup>

The patient is struck by the “contradiction between appearance and character.” But is the *Adam Bede* association the dreamer’s or Freud’s? That is, it

48. Anzieu, *Freud’s Self-Analysis*, p. 474.

49. Freud, “The May-Beetle Dream,” 4:290.

isn't clear whether the dreamer has *herself* associated that second contradiction with Eliot's novel or whether Freud is riffing/glossing her initial association, either for the reader's benefit or for the dreamer's. The same ambiguity exists in the German: "Er erinnert an einen anderen Widerspruch, den zwischen Aussehen und Gesinnung, wie er in *Adam Bede* von der *Eliot* dargestellt ist"<sup>50</sup>—in which Anglophone readers encounter another complexity, the parapractical interpellation of an additional L, about which there is no reason not to observe that the interpolated letter sounds the same as the principle syllable, "El[l]," nor that it is formed by a single, straight stroke of the pen, endowing thereby a name, already notoriously unstable with respect to the phallus, with an additional, albeit ornamental, appendage. Freud, we know from his correspondence with Martha Bernays, did read two of Eliot's other novels and took both to heart: *Middlemarch* as a guide to their developing romance, and *Daniel Deronda* as a strange and possibly suspicious repository of knowledge about the things Jewish people "speak of only among ourselves."<sup>51</sup>

I can put off no longer the inevitable admission that I have been trying to bring out, or at least to imagine worlds in which have been brought out, two authors: one, an Austrian doctor obsessed with the possibility of his own castration; the other, a Victorian novelist whose masculine pseudonym has, unlike "Currer Bell," stuck around—though nobody really bothers to explain the difference.<sup>52</sup> There is perhaps no need to

50. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Berlin, 2018), p. 186.

51. Quoted in Ernest Jones, *The Formative Years and the Great Discoveries: 1856–1900*, vol. 1 of *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, 3 vols. (New York, 1953), p. 174. Notice here again the theme of being *overheard* that Freud raises in the *Papers on Technique*.

52. On 18 January 1858, Charles Dickens posted a letter thanking the author of a promising debut entitled *Scenes of Clerical Life* for having sent along, via the book's publisher William Blackwood, the first two stories from that book. Dickens, however, treated the author's identity somewhat quizzically:

In addressing these few words of thankfulness, to the creator of the sad fortunes of Mr. Amos Barton, and the sad love-story of Mr. Gilfil, I am (I presume) bound to adopt the name that it pleases that excellent writer to assume. I can suggest no better one; but I should have been strongly disposed, if I had been left to my own devices, to address the said writer as a woman. I have observed what seem to me to be such womanly touches, in those moving fictions, that the assurance on the title-page is insufficient to satisfy me, even now. If they originated with no woman, I believe that no man ever before had the art of making himself, mentally, so like a woman, since the world began (Charles Dickens, letter to George Eliot, 18 Jan. 1858, *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Jenny Hartley [New York, 2012], p. 331).

He was not exactly misgendering Eliot, but he came close: it is difficult not to hear, under the letter's suasive treble, the menacing bass tone of Raffles the blackmailer. "My own devices": as though Dickens bore responsibility not merely for interpreting but singularly for *generating* the

do so.<sup>53</sup> Eve Sedgwick describes the queer theoretical position as oscillating between the poles of universalism and minoritization; trans criticism seems likewise to find itself pulled between a claim about interior identity (“this is who I am, underneath”) and a theatrical negation of gendered convention (“I want to be irreferable, for language to slip off me as rain off a window”). Yet there is, I think, a certain pleasure one senses in Eliot, especially, contemplating the incognito of pseudonomized authorship, albeit a pleasure that Eliot sought to regulate among the book’s readers who believed they could identify the author of *Scenes of Clerical Life*. To one such, Charles Bray, Eliot wrote “There is no undertaking more fruitful of absurd mistakes than that of ‘guessing’ at authorship; and as I have never communicated to any one so much as an *intention* of a literary kind there can be none but imaginary data for such guesses.”<sup>54</sup> Yet Eliot annotated such guesses, both general (“a clergyman, a Cambridge man,” a party at Helps’s) and specific (“Eliot Warburton’s brother,” William Blackwood) in detailed journals, in which it is impossible

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terms of address. Far from censorious, however, the letter is underpinned by an antiessentialist understanding of gendered address as an arbitrary relation; it remains possible, unsatisfied as Dickens is “even now,” that the “feminine touches” of the author’s *style* are not merely creative gestures but signs of his *having been touched*—that is, as feminine textual features emerging from a more primary, but no more natural, stylistic feminization. The stories have conjured, for Dickens, a world in which a man can make himself—“mentally”—like a woman. Eliot did not seem to see Dickens’s response as any kind of threat but *did* decline to respond to it directly, asking Blackwood to thank Dickens for it himself, adding “I am so deeply moved by the finely-felt and finely-expressed sympathy of the letter, that the iron mask of my incognito seems quite painful in forbidding me to tell Dickens how thoroughly his generous impulse has been appreciated” (Eliot, letter to John Blackwood, 21 Jan. 1858, *The Writings of George Eliot: George Eliot’s Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals*, ed. J. W. Cross, 25 vols. [Boston, 1908], 24:76). It was the identity of the *man* in the iron mask, a famously anonymous French prisoner, we might remind ourselves, that was a matter of occasional speculation in the nineteenth century.

We should not, then, conclude from the response to Dickens (as several of Eliot’s biographers have done) that the masculine posture of the Eliot author was an affectively inert performance. Eliot’s journals and letters reveal a broad set of feelings about the “incognito,” by no means restricted to painfulness or repression. In a sense, Eliot’s ambivalence is endemic to the modern construction of authorship itself. Gallagher argues at length in *Nobody’s Story*, the slipperiness of the identity of the author of fiction as such—a slice of mechanically-reproduced selfhood routed through several copying machines and circulating, at last, at several ontological and material removes from any living person—was profoundly shaped by mutating constructions of femininity in the century before Eliot took up writing. The modern author of fiction is, for Gallagher, the feminine author of fiction—in so far as public articulations of authorliness depended, from the eighteenth century onwards, on the articulation of gendered ideas of textual incompleteness that had been incorporated *into* the emerging figure of the professional author of novels.

53. After all, in 1978 U. C. Knoepfelmacher could already write: “Today, we may still debate whether to call her narrator a ‘he’ or a ‘she’ or to view her/him as an ‘androgynous’ speaker, but the fact remains that we have learned from [W. J.] Harvey to regard this narrative voice as integral to the formal aspects of George Eliot’s art” (U. C. Knoepfelmacher, “George Eliot,” in *Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research*, ed. George H. Ford [New York, 1978]), p. 235).

54. Eliot, letter to Charles Bray, 31 Mar. 1858, *The Writings of George Eliot*, 24:83.



not to sense, a livelier feeling when Eliot had been thought to be a man than when thought to be a woman:

[Blackwood] came on the following Friday and chatted very pleasantly — told us that Thackeray spoke highly of the ‘Scenes,’ and said *they were not written by a woman*. Mrs. Blackwood is *sure* they are not written by a woman. Mrs. Oliphant, the novelist, too, is confident on the same side. . . . [the novelist, too, is confident on the same side. . . . Mrs. Owen Jones and her husband—two very different people—are equally enthusiastic about the book. But both have detected the woman.]. . . . Mrs. Owen Jones and her husband—two very different people—are equally enthusiastic about the book. But both have detected the woman.<sup>55</sup>

Eliot’s glee when passing, and mild concern when not, have countless pragmatic explanations: the fear that a conservative publisher would jettison a writer living in sin; the impropriety of women writing about clerical matters; that patriarchy, in all places and at all times, organizes itself to the benefit of the creatures it designates as men. One might respond that Eliot simply did not like female authors and did not want to be associated with them. That would be a reasonable assessment of the author of an essay entitled “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” which, while it elicits a good degree of butchy delight in what it calls “feminine fatuity,” is nonetheless steeped in antifemme contempt—or, indeed, of the author of an essay on Madame de Sablé that takes biological difference between the sexes as the root of differences between masculine and feminine literary styles.<sup>56</sup> On the feminine side of that equation are more or less the same femmy qualities that, in “Silly Novels,” comprise “the most trashy and rotten kind of feminine literature.”<sup>57</sup> But there is also the pleasure and the radical encounter with the dysphorically sexed body that underpins their formulation of their aesthetics.

By way of concluding, I will simply observe that it is unusual to align a literary writer with an analyst; psychoanalytic literary criticism invariably places *itself* in that position and the author (or, in the post-structuralist revisions of psychoanalysis, the text) as the patient.<sup>58</sup> My decision to do so

55. *Ibid.* pp. 81–82.

56. Eliot, “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” in *George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (New York, 1990), p. 140.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

58. In a footnote surveying examples of this gesture, Zachary Samalin finds only two: Roland Barthes’s *Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers* and John Brenkman’s *Culture and Domination*; see Zachary Samalin, “Plumbing the Depths, Scouring the Surface: Henry Mayhew’s Scavenger Hermeneutics,” *New Literary History* 48 (Spring 2017): 408.

here does not derive from, or gesture towards, a new theory of psychoanalytic criticism. It simply extends from my own acceptance, after a couple of decades of reading, teaching, and trying to write about Eliot, of a truth that I cannot put any less vulgarly than this: one cannot top Eliot any more than one can fail to top James.