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P. E. Easterling
GEORGE ELIOT AND GREEK TRAGEDY

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A quotation from *Romola* in S. H. Butcher's essay on Sophocles (1891)¹ first led me to George Eliot as a reader of Greek tragedy:

Our deeds are like children that are born to us; they live and act apart from our will: nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never; they have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness. (Ch. 16)

The intensity of the language used here matches that of the Aeschylean contexts that must have been Eliot's ultimate model;² it implies a close imaginative contact which can perhaps help to enrich our own reading of the plays. And it finds many echoes in the whole range of the novels: even the much less allusive and less self-consciously learned *Silas Marner* contains a striking passage which also meditates on the theme of action and responsibility and similarly seems to draw some of its power from Aeschylus. This occurs in the account of Godfrey Cass's past:

A movement of compunction, helped by those small indefinable influences which every personal relation exerts on a pliant nature, had urged him into a secret marriage, which was a blight on his life. It was an ugly story of low passion, delusion, and waking from delusion, which needs not to be dragged from the privacy of Godfrey's bitter memory. He had long known that the delusion was partly due to a trap laid for him by Dunstan, who saw in his brother's degrading marriage the means of gratifying at once his jealous hate and his cupidity. And if Godfrey could have felt himself simply a victim, the iron bit that destiny had put into his mouth would have chafed him less intolerably.... But he had something else [i.e., as well as Dunstan's cunning] to curse—his own vicious folly, which now seemed as mad and unaccountable to him as almost all our follies and vices do when their promptings have long passed away. (Ch. 3)

This looks unmistakably reminiscent of Agamemnon, both in its use of the image of the iron bit and in the reference to vicious folly,³ but it is extremely discreet: the bit, after all, is a very suitable metaphor to use in relation to the son of a country squire, and when the imagery is developed in a later paragraph there is nothing Aeschylean about it:

Instead of keeping fast hold of the strong silken rope by which Nancy would have drawn him safe to the green banks where it was easy to step firmly, he had let himself be dragged back into mud and slime, in which it was useless to struggle.

But the Aeschylean echo gives extra weight to the whole passage.

It is worth taking a more extensive range of samples, to test what seems to be the clear implication that for George Eliot Greek tragedy offered a deep, rich, and varied source of inspiration. This is not a new idea, of course, but the particular nature of her response deserves closer attention than writers have tended to give it. There is plenty of evidence that she made a serious study of the texts: from the mid-1850s onward there are notes in her journal and references in letters and the Notebooks to her reading of particular plays and of Aristotle's *Poetics*, and she published an article on the *Antigone* in 1855.⁴

But even without this explicit external evidence we should be in no doubt, merely from a reading of the novels themselves, that her knowledge and interest were considerable.⁵ For a start, there are specific quotations, which draw the reader's attention inescapably to the ancient texts. In *Romola*, for example, chapter 11 ('Tito's Dilemma') includes the following sentence:

'It is good', sing the old Eumenides, in Aeschylus, 'that fear should sit as the guardian of the soul, forcing it into wisdom—good that men should carry a threatening shadow in their hearts under the full sunshine; else, how should they learn to revere the right?'

This is an interesting passage which deserves more comment, but for the moment all I want to note is that the translation is very free, more of a paraphrase than a close rendering of *Eumenides* 517-25, and most likely to be Eliot's own work. In *Felix Holt*, the chapter (48) in which Harold asks his mother if Jermyn is his father has a motto from *Agamemnon* (1563-4):

'Tis law as stedfast as the throne of Zeus—
Our days are heritors of days gone by.

Again a very free rendering, like the versions in chapter 42 of two passages from Sophocles, which stand as mottoes at the head of the crucial scene in which Jermyn announces to Mrs. Transome that Harold must be told his identity. The longer of the two is a quotation from *Ajax* (520-4) on the importance of gratitude, which Eliot refers to in a later letter as 'those words of Ajax which I put into English'.⁶ This habit of quotation is by no means a feature just of the later novels: *Adam Bede* even has a couple of words from Aeschylus in the original Greek, ἀπέρωτος ἔρωζ from *Choephoroi* 599-600, which Mr. Irwine translates for Arthur as, 'unloving love' (ch. 22), a significant phrase for our understanding of the whole novel.⁷

Besides the quotations there are many other kinds of authorial hints, suggesting in a hardly less pointed way that the stories and characters are serious and significant enough to stand comparison with the Greek tragic paradigms. There is a well-known and often quoted example in the Author's Introduction to *Felix Holt*:

For there is seldom any wrong-doing which does not carry with it some downfall of blindly-climbing hopes, some hard entail of suffering, some

quickly-satiated desire that survives, with the life in death of old paralytic vice, to see itself cursed by its woeful progeny—some tragic mark of kinship in one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before, and to the life that is to come after, such as has raised the pity and terror of men ever since they began to discern between will and destiny.⁸

This is solemn and explicit, but the hints are often lighter and more ironic, though in their contexts just as telling, as in chapter 43 of *Felix Holt* when Harold is playfully describing himself to Esther:

‘A woman would not find me a tragic hero.’

‘O, no! She must dress for genteel comedy—such as your mother once described to me—where the most thrilling event is the drawing of a handsome cheque.’

Sometimes the use of names will clinch the allusion, though this is very far from suggesting a simple one-to-one correspondence between the character in the novel and a tragic prototype. So in *Felix Holt*, where Mrs. Transome has been seen by critics as a Clytemnestra,⁹ there are suggestions in the text of other figures: in chapter 39 she is a ‘Hecuba-like woman’, and in chapter 42 she is by implication Medea to Jermyn’s Jason:

The fortunate Jason, as we know from Euripides, piously thanked the goddess [Aphrodite], and saw clearly that he was not at all obliged to Medea: Jermyn was perhaps not aware of the precedent, but thought out his own freedom from obligation and the indebtedness of others towards him with a native faculty not inferior to Jason’s.

The Medea story has other manifestations: as J. Wiesenfarth has shown, the episode of Lydia Glasher and the diamonds in *Daniel Deronda* has echoes of Euripides’ play.¹⁰ Lydia sends the diamonds to Gwendolen on her wedding day as Medea sent the poisoned robe and crown to Creon’s daughter; Grandcourt is killed by a blow from the boom of his yacht as Jason, according to Medea’s prophecy, would be hit by a beam from the *Argo* (chs. 30 and 44).

In *Adam Bede* there is a more oblique reference to the stricken princess:

It is too painful to think that she [Hetty] is a woman, with a woman’s destiny before her—a woman spinning in young ignorance a light web of folly and vain hopes which may one day close round her and press upon her, a rancorous poisoned garment, changing all at once her fluttering, trivial butterfly sensations into a life of deep human anguish. (Ch. 22)

But the notion of the creator being destroyed by her own creation is closer to Deianira in *Trachiniae* than to the princess in *Medea*, and there is already a hint of Sophocles’ play in chapter 13 (‘Evening in the wood’), when Hetty’s feelings about her encounter with

Arthur are described:

It was as if she had been wooed by a river-god, who might at any time take her to his wondrous halls below a watery heaven. There was no knowing what would come since the strange entrancing delight had come. If a chest full of lace and satin and jewels had been sent her from some unknown source, how could she but have thought that her whole lot was going to change, and that tomorrow some still more bewildering joy would befall her? Hetty had never read a novel . . .

The dangerous encounter of Deianira and Achelous is only fleetingly suggested, and a different tone is introduced by the reference to novel-reading and by the faint hint of Cupid and Psyche in the image of the 'wondrous halls', which is picked up a few paragraphs further on ('He may be a shepherd in Arcadia for aught he knows, he may be the first youth kissing the first maiden, he may be Eros himself, sipping the lips of Psyche—it is all one'), but the tragic allusion gives a darker background to the pastoral seduction scene.

In *Romola* there is a particularly rich interplay of references, by no means all of them relating to tragedy. The picture that Piero di Cosimo is going to paint in Book I, chapter 18, is of Antigone and the blind Oedipus: 'I have a fancy for the subject, and I want Bardo and his daughter to sit for it.' For Tito, Romola/Antigone is to be transformed into Ariadne in company with the triumphant Bacchus, for whom Piero already has Tito's own likeness, one that (ominously) shows him looking afraid: 'I must take the fright out of it for Bacchus,' says the artist (Book I, ch. 18). If Bardo is Oedipus for Piero, he is Tiresias for Romola, and for the reader, as Jennifer Uglow suggests, he is a truly blind Tiresias who fails to see Romola's value.¹¹

The invocation of tragic characters and stories is thus a highly complex procedure, and we should be wary of interpretations that treat the allusions as a privileged hermeneutic device. A recent discussion of *Felix Holt*, for example, suggests that the whole novel is designed on the analogy of the *Oresteia*, with Mrs. Transome as Clytemnestra, Jermyn as Aegisthus, and Esther as Athena: Esther's testimony on behalf of Felix is like Athena's for Orestes, and she reconciles Harold and his mother in the same way as the goddess gives 'rest and reverence' to the Furies at Athens.¹² This kind of reading is in danger of imposing an overmechanical and reductive pattern on the novel: it finds too little place for the serious moral and political significance of Felix and Mr. Lyon, sets Esther too far above the action, and hardly does justice to the other tragic analogies that the text suggests: Hecuba, Jason and Medea, and (by implication) the Oedipus story. The evocations of Aeschylus are best seen as contributing to the novel's 'free-ranging lateral world of meaning'¹³—a phrase used of *Middlemarch* but equally applicable here.

Perhaps we can most usefully approach George Eliot's tragic reminiscences by looking for the themes and subjects, irrespective of the particular details of setting and plot, with which she regularly associates them. The obvious starting point is the idea that actions have their inescapable consequences, a notion which Eliot, in harmony with the usage of

her time, though not with that of the Greek tragedians themselves, calls Nemesis. She evidently responded with keen appreciation to the subtlety with which texts like the *Oresteia* or *Oedipus Tyrannus* explore the idea that the inevitable shaping of human lives in a particular pattern is intimately related to what human beings themselves do. She was untroubled by the differences between ancient Greek culture and her own, seeing the tragedians' apprehension of the interplay between freedom and necessity as something that applied just as well to her own world as to theirs. She could combine an intellectual point of view that was strongly influenced by such writers as Comte and Spinoza with an imaginative use of the Greek texts, whose characteristic language repeatedly occurs when the theme of action and consequence is explored:

Under every guilty secret there is hidden a brood of guilty wishes, whose unwholesome infecting life is cherished by the darkness. The contaminating effect of deeds often lies less in the commission than in the consequent adjustment of our desires . . . (*Romola*, ch. 9)

Here as in the passage from chapter 16 quoted above (p. 56) there are strong Aeschylean echoes, and examples could be multiplied.¹⁴

The image of the 'brood', like the notion that our deeds are like children (children 'who may be strangled'), suggests the importance—for good or ill—of family ties, a theme fundamental to Greek tragedy and strongly emphasized by Aristotle (*Poetics*, ch. 14). The profound significance of kinship in all the novels needs no illustration; nor is there any doubt that for George Eliot it was very explicitly linked with Greek tragic models. Thus the 'brood of guilty wishes' comes from a context in which Tito 'had made it impossible that he should not from henceforth desire it to be the truth that his father was dead', and in *Adam Bede* the famous remark 'Nature, that great tragic dramatist, knits us together by bone and muscle' (n. 8 above) comes in a chapter entitled 'The sorrows of home'.

Another leading theme, sexual relations and the particularly nineteenth-century concern with women's frustrated sexuality and desire for freedom, is strengthened by many echoes of tragic situations. The use, however oblique or ironic, of Clytemnestra, Medea, Hecuba and Antigone, shows the value of these models to George Eliot, who may have been attracted by their combination of surface restraint and extraordinary inner violence.

But she never restricts herself to the detached analysis of the processes of guilt, responsibility, and compulsive action; she is always intensely concerned to engage her readers with the feelings of her characters, as indeed were the tragedians (and she was quoted by Jebb as admiring Sophocles for his portrayal of 'the great primitive emotions').¹⁵ The pity and fear evoked by what her characters feel, say, and do are closely related to those more meditative passages that reflect on the workings of 'Nemesis' or the inescapability of family ties. In *Felix Holt* the language of dread, first expressed in terms of a 'parable' at the end of the Author's Introduction ('the warm red blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams') and repeatedly associated with Mrs. Transome, finds its climax in the scene where Harold discovers his true identi-

ty and where the tragic emotions are seen to be appropriate to both mother and son equally. The combination of meditative intensity and evocation of feeling is too familiar a mark of Eliot's writing to need discussion; but the point that perhaps needs emphasis is how often it explicitly or implicitly owes something to the tragedians and Aristotle.

First, as an understated example (like the earlier passage from *Silas Marner*), is a well-known piece from *Middlemarch* (ch. 20) which deals in an ironic but profoundly serious way with the definition of tragedy:

Nor can I suppose that when Mrs. Casaubon is discovered in a fit of weeping six weeks after her wedding, the situation will be regarded as tragic. Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.

Adam Bede offers a different sort of illustration: a whole character, Mr. Irwine, who represents and articulates the effect that the reading of Greek tragedy can have on the reflective individual—and by implication on the author and her readers.

Mr. Irwine, 'a pluralist at whom the severest Church-reformer would have found it difficult to look sour', is described with very careful and sympathetic attention in chapter 5. He is contrasted favorably with his mother, who is impatient toward her sickly daughter and ready to judge people by outward appearances. He has denied himself marriage and a family in order to be able to support his mother and two unmarried sisters, and his home, though gracious, is marked by signs of relative poverty, while the idea that he is an 'idle shepherd' (alleged by some members of his flock) or as he puts it himself 'a lazy fellow' (ch. 5, ch. 16), is specifically contradicted by his active and knowledgeable concern for individual parishioners and the trouble he takes to visit his sick sister:

He lingered a moment, looking at her, and then turned away and left the room, treading very gently—he had taken off his boots and put on his slippers before he came upstairs. Whoever remembers how many things he has declined to do even for himself rather than have the trouble of putting on or taking off his boots, will not think this last detail insignificant.

The Rector's moral and spiritual position is in fact discussed quite elaborately, with a friendly irony that is designed to make the reader warm to him: the stereotype of the worldly parson is evoked only to be shown not to suit him, and his tolerance and refusal to 'frown at irremediable faults' are implicitly approved. In many ways—physical and

social as well as theological—he is a great contrast with the other spiritual authority in the novel, the young Methodist preacher Dinah, who emerges as having the stronger religious force, but these two pastoral figures turn out to have much in common,¹⁶ and both are treated with great seriousness. What is interesting for our purposes is the fact that Mr. Irwine's insight into human affairs is grounded in his reading of classical authors, a source of inspiration which is not discredited by the events of the novel.

The theme of his reading is first introduced in chapter 5:

Clearly, the Rector was not what is called in these days an 'earnest' man; he was fonder of church history than of divinity, and had much more insight into men's characters than interest in their opinions; he was neither laborious, nor obviously self-denying, nor very copious in alms-giving, and his theology, you perceive, was lax. His mental palate, indeed, was rather pagan, and found a savouriness in a quotation from Sophocles or Theocritus that was quite absent from any text in Isaiah or Amos. But if you feed your setter on raw flesh, how can you wonder at its retaining a relish for uncooked partridge in after life? and Mr. Irwine's recollections of young enthusiasm and ambition were all associated with poetry and ethics that lay aloof from the Bible.

George Eliot was writing, of course, at a time when the classics constituted the normal formation of a gentleman, but there is nothing commonplace about Mr. Irwine's response to his education, despite the irony of the hunting-dog language.¹⁷ This becomes clear in the scene in chapter 16 when Arthur visits him at breakfast-time in his study: 'the first volume of the Foulis Aeschylus'¹⁸ which lies at Mr. Irwine's elbow is clearly his familiar reading, but Arthur, his pupil, merely knows it well 'by sight', and the two explicitly discuss the value of Arthur's studies, which Arthur himself rates low:

It's well if I can remember a little inapplicable Latin to adorn my maiden speech in Parliament six or seven years hence. 'Cras ingens iterabimus aequor',¹⁹ and a few shreds of that sort, will perhaps stick to me, and I shall arrange my opinions so as to introduce them. But I don't think a knowledge of the classics is a pressing want to a country gentleman; as far as I can see, he'd much better have a knowledge of manures . . .

We might compare the reluctant Tom in *The Mill on the Floss* and his tutor Mr. Stelling (Book Second, ch. 1), who is treated very differently from Mr. Irwine:

Mr. Stelling was so broad-chested and resolute that he felt equal to anything . . . he would by and by edit a Greek play, and invent several new readings. He had not yet selected the play, for having been married little more than two years, his leisure time had been much occupied with attentions to Mrs. Stelling; but he had told that fine woman what he meant to do some day, and she felt great confidence in her husband, as a man who

understood everything of that sort.

But the best contrast with Mr. Irwine is the amiable parson in *Felix Holt*, Mrs. Transome's brother 'honest Jack Lingon':

... his wide open eyes saw nothing but what his easy disposition inclined him to see. Harold was a good fellow; a clever chap; and Esther's peculiar fitness for him, under all the circumstances, was extraordinary: it reminded him of something in the classics, though he couldn't think exactly what—in fact, a memory was a nasty uneasy thing. (Ch. 43)

Thus Mr. Irwine's learning could have been treated satirically (just as the unpopular bishop in *Felix Holt* [ch. 2] is 'all Greek and greediness'), but it is precisely this learning that George Eliot uses to make him most memorably authoritative. In the scene at the breakfast-table, when Arthur has almost brought himself to tell the Rector about his encounter with Hetty, Mr. Irwine's warnings about the dangers of infatuation are first expressed in a playfully allusive way ('I daresay, now, even a man fortified with a knowledge of the classics might be lured into an imprudent marriage, in spite of the warning given him by the chorus in the *Prometheus*'—appropriately, this play appears in the first volume of the Foulis edition), and then when the conversation turns more serious he uses language which matches the intensity of the Greek models and is echoed again and again in Eliot's later novels, often in the authorial voice (cf pp. 56-60 above). In answer to an anxious question from Arthur about a man 'who struggles against a temptation into which he falls at last', Mr. Irwine says:

I pity him, in proportion to his struggles, for they fore-shadow the inward suffering which is the worst form of Nemesis. Consequences are un pitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences, quite apart from any fluctuations that went before—consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves. And it is best to fix our minds on that certainty, instead of considering what may be the elements of excuse for us.

The day of Arthur's birthday celebration (ch. 22) is the occasion for another conversation between pupil and mentor, a scene which gains in importance when considered as a continuation of the near-confessional in the Rector's study.²⁰ The setting, appropriately, is the library at Donnithorne Chase. Arthur describes his grandfather's apparent mixture of love and hatred toward him, to which Mr. Irwine replies, 'Ah, my boy, it is not only woman's love that is ἀπέρωτος ἔρωσ as old Æschylus calls it. There's plenty of "unloving love" in the world of a masculine kind'. For the reader there is a sombre irony here, in that the 'masculine kind' so aptly applies to Arthur's treatment of Hetty, and the force of the Aeschylean allusion—to a passage in *Choephoroi* which evokes the power of female passion—has not had time to be dispelled when Arthur describes 'a little drama I've got up in honour of my friend Adam'. This is to be a toast in celebration of Adam's appointment, through Arthur's good offices, as superintendent of his grandfather's woods, but Mr. Irwine sees, to Arthur's embarrassment, that it is 'a drama in which friend Arthur piques

himself on having a pretty part to play,' and we sense the same kind of irony as when Harold in *Felix Holt* says, 'A woman would not find me a tragic hero' (cf p. 63 above).²¹

As moral mentor, Mr. Irwine initially fails; but we should hesitate to see his failure as proof that he is really an 'idle shepherd'; the way the scenes between him and Arthur are presented read more like reflections on the theme of 'Nature as tragic dramatist' (n. 8). Later in the novel he has a powerful influence on Adam, deterring him from taking vengeance on Arthur (ch. 41), is active in his support for Hetty and her uncle (chs. 42 and 43), and takes all the responsibility for telling Arthur the news of Hetty's trial (ch. 44):

'I send this letter to meet you on your arrival, Arthur, because I may then be at Stoniton, whither I am called by the most painful duty it has ever been given me to perform, and it is right that you should know what I have to tell you with-out delay.

'I will not attempt to add by one word of reproach to the retribution that is now falling on you: any other words that I could write at this moment must be weak and unmeaning by the side of those in which I must tell you the simple fact.

'Hetty Sorrel is in prison, and will be tried on Friday for the crime of child-murder'. . .

When Arthur plans to go away he relies entirely on Mr. Irwine and leaves everything in his hands: he 'is to have the chief authority on the estate—he has consented to undertake that' (ch. 48).

The portrayal of Mr. Irwine seems to offer scope for reflection on the author's own role as reader, observer, and commentator, perhaps also on the relative powerlessness of the moralist to influence action, since life is a tragedy and not a morality play. What seems to be particularly important about Mr. Irwine is his combination of serious reading and reflection with the capacity to feel: the novel is full of examples of his compassionate humanity, and his attitude to his favorite Greek poets is tellingly expressed in terms of the savoriness of quotations to his mental palate and of the setter's taste for raw flesh. This suggests something very different from the imagery associated with other more learned figures in the novels, particularly Bardo and Mr. Casaubon, both passionately concerned with the ruin of the past rather than with its living meaning. The description in *Romola*, chapter 5, of the antiquities in Bardo's room prefigures the presentation of the man himself:

Here and there, on separate stands in front of the shelves, were placed a beautiful feminine torso; a headless statue, with an uplifted muscular arm wielding a bladeless sword; rounded, dimpled, infantine limbs severed from the trunk, inviting the lips to kiss the cold marble; some well-preserved Roman busts; and two or three vases from Magna Grecia. A large table in the centre was covered with antique bronze lamps and small vessels in dark pottery. The colour of these objects was chiefly pale or som-

bre: the vellum bindings, with their deep-ridged backs, gave little relief to the marble, livid with long burial . . .

For Romola, whose scholarly capacity her father cannot appreciate, these 'lifeless objects' inspire a 'sad dreariness': 'the parchment backs, the unchanging mutilated marble, the bits of obsolete bronze and clay'. Bardo is unequivocal: 'For me, Romola, even when I could see, it was with the great dead that I lived; while the living often seemed to me mere spectres—shadows dispossessed of true feeling and intelligence....' The same tone recurs in *Middlemarch*, chapter 2, when Mr. Casaubon says, 'I live too much with the dead. My mind is something like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to construct it as it used to be in spite of ruin and confusing changes.'

Unlike Bardo or Casaubon, Mr. Irwine is a humorous and modest man; his liking for Theocritus as well as Sophocles is perhaps one way of putting the point. It certainly aligns him closely with the author, who several times uses the idea of the pastoral idyll as an analogue for the world of *Adam Bede*.²² This should remind us not to separate tragedy too sharply from the much wider range of literature on which George Eliot feeds her imagination. Mr. Irwine's study illustrates the point nicely:

It was a small low room, belonging to the old part of the house—dark with the sombre covers of the books that lined the walls: yet it looked very cheery this morning as Arthur reached the open window.

In this room, by contrast with Bardo's, all the images alongside the dark covers of the books are images of life: sunlight, goldfish in a bowl, the breakfast-table ready-spread, the dogs playing, the steaming coffee-pot—and the Foulis Aeschylus.

Notes

- 1 In *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius*, London 1929, 117.
- 2 Especially *Agamemnon* 750-72.
- 3 Cf *Agamemnon* 218-23.
- 4 See Gordon. S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography*, Oxford 1968, 195 for references. The range of her learning made a profound impression on the American scholar John Fiske when he visited in 1873: George Eliot 'talked of Homer as simply as she would of flat-irons' *Letters of John Fiske*, ed. Ethel F. Fiske, New York 1940, 277-79.
- 5 See V. R[endall], 'George Eliot and the Classics', *Notes and Queries*, 192 (1947), 544-46, 564-65 and 193 (1948), 148-49, 272-74.
- 6 14 November 1872.

- 7 Cf. 'Janet's Repentance', ch. 13, for a more straightforward use of the same device: 'Mighty is the force of motherhood! says the great tragic poet to us across the ages, finding, as usual, the simplest words for the sublimest fact δεινὸν τὸ τίκτειν ἔσθ' ἴν' [Sophocles, *Electra* 770].
- 8 For other such programmatic statements cf. *Adam Bede*, ch. 4: 'Family likeness has often a deep sadness in it. Nature, that great tragic dramatist, knits us together by bone and muscle, and divides us by the subtler web of our brains....' *The Mill on the Floss*, Book Third, ch. 1: 'The pride and obstinacy of millers and other insignificant people, whom you pass unnoticingly on the road every day, have their tragedy too, but it is of that unwept, hidden sort that goes on from generation to generation and leaves no record....'
- 9 Especially: Florence Sandler, 'The Unity of *Felix Holt*' in, *George Eliot: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. Gordon S. Haight and R. T. van Arsdell, London 1982, 132-52.
- 10 *George Eliot's Mythmaking*, Heidelberg 1977, pp. 215-20.
- 11 *George Eliot*, London 1987, 162-64.
- 12 See Florence Sandler (n. 9 above), 149-50. The analysis by Fred Thomson ('*Felix Holt* as Classic Tragedy', *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 16 [1961-62], 47-58) is less rigid, but seems to lay too much stress on the idea of Aristotelian plot.
- 13 Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, London 1983, 179.
- 14 For the 'brood' cf. especially *Agamemnon* 750-72; but generation, disease, and darkness are dominant themes throughout the *Oresteia*. For Nemesis cf. Rendall, n. 5 above.
- 15 Caroline Jebb, *Life and Letters of Sir Richard Claverhouse Jebb*, Cambridge 1907, 155-56. Jebb records that he had already noted the influence of Sophocles on George Eliot 'in the outlining of the first emotions'.
- 16 Cf J. Uglow (n. 11 above), 101: 'Both are distinguished by their sense that religion makes them part of a community and does not set them apart or above. Their ability to love the ordinary people links them to the narrator and to the author's driving motive in writing the novel'
- 17 The irony is complicated by the fact that Mr. Irwine's own gun dog is a setter called Juno. Cf. J. Wiesenfarth (n. 10 above) 80-82.
- 18 Glasgow 1794. George Eliot and G. H. Lewes owned a copy of a reprint of this edition, published in 1806 (now in Dr. Williams's Library in London).

- 19 Arthur speaks more truly than he knows: like Teucer in Horace's poem (*Odes* 1.7), he will himself soon be 'crossing the great sea' as an exile (ch. 48).
- 20 Cf. Barbara Hardy, *Particularities*, London 1982, 154.
- 21 In *Adam Bede*, ch. 16, the Rector is described as trying to avoid any behaviour on Arthur's part toward Hetty that would 'perturb the rustic drama of her life'.
- 22 Ch. 13: 'He may be a shepherd in Arcadia for aught he knows'; ch. 53: 'When Tityrus and Meliboeus happen to be on the same farm they are not sentimentally polite to one another'. Cf. the references to the 'idle shepherd' in ch. 5 and to centaurs and nymphs in ch. 12.