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RIDING HORSES IN MIDDLEMARCH

By Beryl Gray

‘George Eliot’s Peculiar Passion’, the title of an article by Sarah Wintle, refers to the belief expressed by Katherine Mansfield in a letter to her husband, John Middleton Murry, that George Eliot had a ‘peculiar passion for horses’. At the beginning of the article, Wintle quotes the part of Mansfield’s letter which asks Murry to

think of some of [George Eliot’s] pictures of country life – the breadth – the sense of sun lying on warm barns – great warm kitchens at twilight when the men came home from the fields – the feeling of beasts horses and cows – the peculiar passion she has for horses (when Maggie Tullivers lover walks with her up & down the lane & asks her to marry, he leads his great red horse and the beast is foaming – it has been hard ridden and there are dark streaks of sweat on its flanks – the beast is the man one feels SHE feels in some queer inarticulate way)

George Eliot describes Stephen’s horse, Tancred, as ‘a tall bay’. It’s true that the animal is therefore reddish brown, but in Mansfield’s heightened context the blatancy of the ‘red’ that she substitutes affects both the horse’s image and the perception of its rider’s ardour. Mansfield not only recognizes the ‘subtly coded eroticism’ or ‘passionate effect’ of the horse in this scene, but is also moved to intensify it. Between them, rider and horse (who is not described by Eliot as ‘foaming’, and who is only one among many bays in her fiction) do transmit a sense of great urgency, and the condition of the beast undoubtedly testifies to the man’s agitation; but that testimony hardly equates to a passion for horses on the author’s part.

On the other hand, the passion with which Katherine Mansfield commends George Eliot to Murry is palpable and – given the nature of the article to which she is responding – justifiable. That article, ‘George Eliot, 1819-80’, had appeared in The Athenaeum, the weekly magazine now edited by Murry (and for which Mansfield regularly provided reviews) on 21 November 1919, the day after The Times Literary Supplement published Virginia Woolf’s much cited appraisal of the author. The Athenaeum piece was the work of Mansfield’s cousin, Sydney Waterlow, although she had written to Bogey (as she addressed her husband) from Ospedaletti on 24 October asking

is there any life of George Eliot so that I can write an article for November 22nd. Less than a month to do it in – or if you could send me one or two of her novels – Romola, Adam Bede – whichever are best. I feel I’d love to do something, but if there are other people on the spot more competent & with more material – c’est entendu. At any rate we mustn’t pass her by.

It would have been fascinating to place Mansfield’s and Woolf’s virtually simultaneously published centenary assessments side by side, but instead of taking Mansfield up on her offer Murry wrote on 13 November informing her that ‘Sydney W. has been working hard on an article on George Eliot, which he thinks is going to be good’ However, the question he then asks – ‘I was wise to get him to do it, wasn’t I?’ – suggests he was a little uneasy about having done so. ‘I felt from your letters that I had given you quite enough to do’, he explains. ‘And I was frightened of the state of anxiety I knew you would get into if you once thought I was reckoning on you for George Eliot also.’
Four days after the article’s publication Mansfield wrote the letter from which Wintle takes her citation. But Mansfield’s appeal to Murry to ‘think of some of [Eliot’s] pictures of country life’ and so on isn’t simply a spontaneous outpouring. It’s developed from her prefatory denunciation of what Waterlow had produced; and that denunciation – which gives a hint of the article that might have been – responds to Murry’s tentative question as to whether he had been wise to get him to do it:

I don’t think S.W. brought it off with George Eliot. He never gets under way. The cartwheels want oiling. I think, too, he is ungenerous. She was a deal more than that. Her English, warm, ruddy quality is hardly mentioned. She was big, even though she was ‘heavy’ too.9

These words are followed by the passage Wintle cites.

What Mansfield is reacting to in Waterlow’s piece are claims such as ‘[George Eliot’s] natural bent was towards reproduction rather than towards inventive creation’; that she ‘braced herself to explore the world of intellectual abstractions which is properly reserved for males, and [...] plunged ever deeper into moral and cosmic speculations, into botany, divinity, phrenology, psychology and what not!’ While Middlemarch is ‘her best book’ in which ‘the three interwoven dramas [...] are alive and solid indeed’, he finds that ‘they move heavily, clogged with moralizing and damped with melancholy’. Her work is full of ‘mere schemata’, he thinks, ‘formed by reflection on preconceived ideas, not created by emotional vision’. And so forth. Mansfield’s response to these judgements is therefore first objection and then correction: the one puts the other into perspective by indicating some of the ways in which Eliot is ‘a deal more than’ the ‘that’ Waterlow makes of her. Wintle’s excision from Mansfield’s comments of the seven short incisive statements which precede her contrastingly and erratically – even breathlessly – punctuated appeal means that the balance and momentum of her defence of George Eliot (and of ‘my SEX’10) are lost, which allows her excited perception of her subject’s feeling for horses to preponderate.

Claiming that ‘Eliot’s lifelong “peculiar passion” had its roots in childhood’, Wintle summarizes and conflates certain reminiscences Eliot had communicated to her husband, J. W. Cross, who in turn recorded them in his George Eliot’s Life. His wife had told him, says Wintle,

how as a young child she used to travel with her father round the Warwickshire countryside, standing between his knees as he held the reins. She was deeply affected when her adored older brother Isaac was given a pony because his subsequent absorption in riding deprived her of his companionship.12

What Cross writes is:

From a very early age [her father] has been in the habit of taking her with him in his drives about the neighbourhood, ‘standing between [his] knees as he drove leisurely,’ so that she has drunk in the knowledge of the country and of country folk at all her pores.13

The words between Cross’s inverted commas are taken from chapter 12 of Middlemarch, in which Rosamond and Fred Vincy ride to Stone Court. Nostalgically surveying the features of the countryside through which the siblings ride (and in which they don’t themselves seem remotely interested), their author says: ‘These are the things that make the gamut of joy in landscape to midland-bred souls – the things they toddled among, or perhaps learned by heart
standing between their father’s knees while he drove leisurely’. Two pages later in Cross we read that, when George Eliot was about seven, ‘a deeply felt crisis occurred in her life, as her brother had a pony given to him, to which he became passionately attached. He developed an absorbing interest in riding, and cared less and less to play with his sister’.

As summarized by Wintle, the first given part of Eliot’s reminiscences suggests that the knowledge she had imbibed standing between her father’s knees ‘as he held the reins’ (to which there’s no reference in either Cross or the Middlemarch passage) related to the horse rather than to everything and everyone the future novelist saw about her. The nature of the brother’s attachment to his pony is omitted altogether, which in effect transfers to her sister the very passion that led him to neglect her, though there is no suggestion in Cross that she was so much as drawn to the pony. Its actual significance was that it displaced her. It’s true that Eliot was an astute judge of horses, as an October 1876 entry in G.H. Lewes’s Diary testifies. When he and ‘Polly’ visited the stables at Six Mile Bottom, near Newmarket, the trainer (‘a refined Bambridge’) was ‘much struck by her having pointed out a defect in the build of Kisber’. (Kisber, or Kísbeir, trained by Joseph Hayhoe, was that year’s winner of both the Derby and the Grand Prix de Paris.) As Wintle observes, ‘The country girl had lost neither her eye nor her interest’. But that characteristically keen vision and that attentiveness were comprehensive; they were the foundation of her art.

Horses were ubiquitous in the rural world in which Eliot grew up. Observant of and sympathetic to them (as she was to all kinds of creatures), and appreciative of their beauty and points she surely was. But essentially her feeling for them is encompassed by the feeling – or ‘peculiar passion’ – she manifestly retained for the Warwickshire she had left, and which inspired the ‘pictures of country life’ that Mansfield strongly believed Waterlow should have celebrated. Horses are significant figures in those pictures, which would be incomplete without them; but they are seldom their chief subject. Even the waggoner’s beautifully-drawn ‘strong, submissive, meek-eyed beasts’, with ‘their grand shaggy feet’ and ‘patient strength’ on which the dreamer’s fond gaze dwells at the beginning of The Mill on the Floss, enter and move through the rural setting as part of the authorial process of sensuously imagined reclamation of it.

Until her last novel, Daniel Deronda, the principal function of the horses mustered by George Eliot is to be ridden, driven, and led through her narratives, in which they are also liable to be bought, sold, exchanged, or even killed. Ranging from the ‘fine’ and the serviceable to the lamed, broken winded, broken kneed, or simply ruined, their traits and qualities (or shortcomings) might (or might not) be registered. Sometimes they are expressive and sensitively responsive: Tancred, for example, tosses his head ‘impatiently’ as his master pulls at it, and makes ‘spirited remonstrances against [the] frequent change of direction’ (Mill, Bk VI ch. 11) when Maggie and Stephen walk up and down the lane; in Adam Bede (1859), Mr Poyser’s ‘sober’ carthorse ‘Old Brown’ pricks up his ears on hearing the Benefit Club band celebrating Arthur Donnithorne’s coming of age (ch. 22). Occasionally we are treated to an equine vignette. The day after Arthur falsely assures Adam that he hasn’t seduced Hetty, for instance, his mare, Meg, quiveringly betrays her utter susceptibility to his demonstrations of affection. ‘The pretty creature arched her bay neck in the sunshine, and pawed the gravel, and trembled with pleasure when her master stroked her nose, and patted her, and talked to her even in a more caressing tone than usual’ (Bede, ch. 29). This superb little study symbolically re-enacts Hetty’s seduction, and that is its point. The focus is indeed on the mare, but Arthur
remains the subject; for whenever Eliot presents a human character in association with a horse it is our knowledge of the rider that is advanced.

Nowhere is this more evident than in *Middlemarch*. Four years after its publication, horses (both physical and figurative), and the riding, mastering, and visual appreciation of them, will feature purposefully and prominently in *Daniel Deronda*, specifically in relation to the presentation of Gwendolen and to the stages of her story. In *Middlemarch*, set some forty years before the action of *Deronda*, horses are everywhere — sentient commodities unremarkably distributed among the greater part of the novel’s population. While they are crucial to the movement and weaving of the narrative, we are never invited to feast our eyes upon them; descriptions of individual beasts are quite perfunctory. The composite image of an equine figure is often brought before us, but it is the human character’s interior life that primarily engages Eliot. The shifts of feeling and resolve of Lydgate, Fred, Rosamond, and others as they ride and ruminate and make future-determining decisions are reflected in the ways in which they command, and control the movements of, their mounts. The reader’s mind keeps pace with the respective rider’s.

As well as those just named, the *Middlemarch* riders include Dorothea (briefly), Sir James Chettam, Bulstrode, Camden Farebrother, Caleb Garth (who also uses a gig), Bambridge (the disreputable horse-dealer), Horrock (the inscrutable vet), and Solomon Featherstone. Mrs Cadwallader drives her pony phaeton with elan; Casaubon, Celia, Dorothea (in due course), and Mr Brooke are conveyed from place to place in horse-drawn vehicles — though Mr Brooke’s glorious riding metaphors reveal that he knew what it was to be in the saddle. ‘The fact is, human reason may carry you a little too far — over the hedge, in fact’, he announces in chapter 2. ‘It carried me a good way at one time; but I saw it would not do. I pulled up; I pulled up in time. But not too hard.’ And as he tells Dorothea in Chapter 39, ‘Hobbies are apt to run away with us, you know; it doesn’t do to be run away with. We must keep the reins. I have never let myself be run away with; I always pulled up’ (348). Ladislaw is notably a walker. Mary Garth is found in a variety of settings, but we don’t accompany her on her journeys to and from them.

However briefly their appear, the dogs in *Middlemarch* — Monk, the St Bemard who resides at Tipton; Fag the sheepdog belonging to the Dagleys; the terrier Fly and the mongrel Brownie, who are part of the Garth household — are individualized, socially interested characters. Even the ‘grizzled Newfoundland lying in the sun look[ing] on with the dull-eyed neutrality of extreme old age’ (511) with the family group pictured in the Garths’ orchard in chapter 57 is established as a particular Newfoundland, with his own perspective. The novel’s horses, far more numerous than its dogs, are, with two exceptions, unnamed, differentiated instead by type (carriage horse, saddle horse, draught horse, hunter, hack, and so forth), colour (bay, roan, etc.), general disposition, or monetary worth. The first of the two exceptions is Corydon, the chestnut horse that Sir James wishes to have his groom bring to Dorothea for her to ride ‘every day’ (17) if she would like it. We of course never do see Corydon because, while it’s the bewitching image of Dorothea ‘cantering over the hill’ (17) — though on a ‘nag’ he considers unworthy of her — that prompts Sir James to offer the horse (expressly trained for a lady), the offer is precisely what goads Dorothea to announce that she means to give up riding.

Corydon is the shepherd in the second of Virgil’s *Eclogues* who is sick with love for the boy Alexis, and who woos the unyielding boy by describing the delights he wishes to bestow on him. Sir James’s Corydon can therefore be said to represent Sir James himself, with
his offer, and Dorothea’s refusal of it, symbolizing his wooing and rejection. Indeed, when Dorothea dismisses her suitor’s assertion that ‘Every lady ought to be a perfect horsewoman, that she may accompany her husband’ with ‘I have made up my mind that I ought not to be a perfect horsewoman, and so I should never correspond to your pattern of a lady’, ‘she spoke’, says her creator, ‘with cold brusquerie, very much with the air of a handsome boy’ (20). All this happens before the end of chapter 2.

The second named horse is bought in chapter 23 by Fred Vincy, whose career and moral development are inextricably associated with the species. The chapter, which opens Book III, ‘Waiting for Death’, carries this epigraph:

‘Your horses are of the Sun,’ he said,
‘And first-rate whip Apollo!
Whate’er they be, I’ll eat my head,
But I will beat them hollow.’ (205)

The boast is also a bet with impossible odds, and it prepares the reader for what follows. We learn immediately that Fred has ‘a debt on his mind’, incurred in double connection with horses. He owes £160 to Bambridge, who ‘had been accommodating enough not only to trust him for the hire of horses and the accidental expense of ruining a fine hunter, but also to make a small advance by which he might be able to meet some losses at billiards’ (205). Thus, while Fred’s debts aren’t related to racing horses in quite the way hinted at in the epigraph, riding horses is related to the judgement of horses and to ‘swapping’ (205, 213) them in the hope of making money in order to pay off gambling debts, though we are told that

Fred was not a gambler: he had not that specific disease […]; he had only the tendency to that diffusive form of gambling which has no alcoholic intensity, but is carried on with the healthiest chyle-fed blood, keeping up a joyous imaginative activity which fashions events according to desire, and having no fears about its own weather, only sees the advantage there must be to others in going aboard with it. […] Fred liked play, especially billiards, as he liked hunting or riding a steeplechase; and he only liked it the better because he wanted money and hoped to win. (210)

Now Fred desperately needs to settle his debt, for he is ‘close upon the term of payment’ (210), and Caleb Garth is his guarantor. But he has only £80, having received a mere £100 (of which £20 has already slipped through his fingers) from his uncle Featherstone when he was banking on considerably more than the sum he owed. Therefore, ‘with a sense of heroism’ (211), he has decided to sell his own broken-winded but respectable bay (which he realizes isn’t worth more than about £30), and rides to Houndsley horse-fair in the company of Bambridge and Horrock. In the evening, before the fair has ‘set in’ (214), the three are joined in the spittoon-adorned Red Lion by a young farmer who happens to be an acquaintance of Bambridge, and who wishes to sell ‘a hunter, which he introduced at once as Diamond, implying that it was a public character’ (214). Since Fred can’t resist inspecting the animal, his purchase of it is a foregone conclusion. But the particular point here is less the purchase itself than the ways in which George Eliot establishes the fact that it is inevitable, and charts the consequences of it; for the encounter in the Red Lion marks a significant stage in Fred’s story. The tests to which he is put – all that he is willing to do, to learn, and to forego – before Mary, who loves him, can accept him – all refer to horses; that is, to those he rides and the ways in which he rides them; to their
types and conditions; to assessing them, and using them as a kind of currency; and – crucially – to having to do without one.

In his eagerness to see Diamond, installed ‘at some little distance’ (214), Fred rides in the dusk through a Dickensian ‘back street where you might as easily have been poisoned without expense of drugs as in any grim street of that unsanitary period’ (214). Sure that he’d be able to re-sell the beast for at least £80, and convinced that he’d better strike a bargain before Bambridge gets the chance to, Fred retraces the journey in the morning and takes possession of the dappled grey hunter in exchange for his own horse – plus £30. But Diamond turns out to be a vicious kicker, and therefore unsaleable; and so the next day Fred has to ride his father’s ‘nag’ first to the Garths’ house to confess to them, and then to Stone Court, where Mary is employed, to confess to her. He sees that in letting Caleb down he has both deprived the Garths’ son, Alfred, of his apprenticeship (for which there is now insufficient money), and forfeited Mrs Garth’s esteem; Mary regards him as ‘an idle frivolous creature’ (228); ‘a man who must always be hanging on others’ (229). But as he rides home, still clinging to the idea that Mary’s attitude will change when he comes into the Featherstone property, he begins ‘to be more conscious of being ill, than of being melancholy’ (229). For he had brought back from ‘those visits to unsanitary Houndsley streets in search of Diamond [...] not only a bad bargain in horse-flesh, but the further misfortune of some ailment which for a day or two had seemed mere depression and headache’ (232), but which of course proves to be typhoid fever. Wrench, the Vincys’ doctor, unforgettably makes a misdiagnosis: Fred’s condition worsens, and Lydgate, who happens to be outside the house, at Rosamond’s suggestion is called in by Mrs Vincy, and takes over. Despite Lydgate’s diplomacy Wrench is ousted, and the rest is history, as it were. But it’s a ramified history, because while Fred’s illness allows the Lydgate-Rosamond story to progress, it establishes the circumstances in which professional suspicion and resentment of Lydgate are to flourish.

Fred’s lowest point comes after the reading of Featherstone’s two wills, the later one of which is the document that Mary had refused to burn, despite Featherstone’s deathbed command. Unpersuaded by her view that he’s better off without the £10,000 his uncle had meant to leave him, the contrast between expectation and actuality morally falls Fred. Moreover, his father has ordered him to take his degree (in effect, to prepare for entering the Church).

Twenty-four hours ago he had thought that instead of needing to know what he should do, he should by this time know that he needed to do nothing: that he should hunt in pink, have a first-rate hunter, ride to cover on a fine hack, and be generally respected for doing so; moreover, that he should be able at once to pay Mr Garth, and that Mary could no longer have any reason for not marrying him. And all this was to have come about without study or other inconvenience, purely by the favour of providence in the shape of an old gentleman’s caprice. (306-7)

Fred achieves his degree, but – as he tells Mr Farebrother in chapter 52 – he doesn’t want to go into the Church because he dislikes ‘divinity, and preaching, and feeling obliged to look serious’; he likes ‘riding across country, and doing as other men do’ (459).

Four chapters later salvation comes to him as he is passing a piece of land belonging to Lowick Manor. Caleb, who hopes to sell the land advantageously to a railroad company on behalf of Dorothea, is there with his young assistant, Tom, to measure it, despite the fact that
the inhabitants of the nearby hamlet of Frick are ‘against’ railways, and are hostile towards anyone connected to them. Fred is unaware of this circumstance as he rides by the hedgerows on a delicious, sweet-scented morning.

The scent would have been sweeter to Fred Vincy [...] if his mind had not been worried by unsuccessful efforts to imagine what he was to do, with his father on one side expecting him straightway to enter the church, with Mary on the other threatening to forsake him if he did enter it, and with the working-day world showing no eager need whatever of a young gentleman without capital and generally unskilled. It was the harder to Fred’s disposition because his father [...] was in good humour with him, and had sent him on this pleasant ride to see after some greyhounds. [...] Riding along the lanes by Frick in this mood, and slackening his pace while he reflected whether he should [...] call on Mary, he could see over the hedges from one field to another. (497-8)

And what he suddenly sees are some men in smock-frocks carrying hay-forks and advancing threateningly on four railway agents (to whom Caleb has been chatting), and that Tom has been knocked down and is lying helpless on the ground. Fred’s expert horsemanship enables him to cover the retreat of the railway agents by charging the smock-frocks and driving them into their hayfield, before helping Tom onto the horse he’d himself been riding, and sending him to nearby Yodrell’s farm to be taken care of, and where the horse can be stabled.

The act of sending the boy away on the horse that had been at his own disposal prepares for the fact that Fred is about to ground himself by working for Mr Garth and learning his ‘business’. It is understood that he’ll retrieve the horse, but we don’t witness his doing so – and his father is so bitterly disappointed in his decision that he will no longer keep a horse for him. So when we see him at the beginning of the next chapter on his way to Lowick Parsonage, where Mary is now staying, he is walking; ‘he had begun to see that this was a world in which even a spirited young man must sometimes walk for want of a horse to carry him’ (510).

The final stage in his horse-centred education occurs in the novel’s penultimate Book, ‘Two Temptations’. The epigraph for chapter 66 is a quotation from Measure for Measure: ‘’Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus; Another thing to fall’, and in this chapter Fred succumbs to the temptation to

[turn] into the Green Dragon, partly to play at billiards, partly to taste the old flavour of discourse about horses [...] He had not been out hunting once this season, had had no horse of his own to ride, and had gone from place to place chiefly with Mr Garth in his gig, or on the sober cob which Mr Garth could lend him. It was a little too bad, Fred began to think, that he should be kept in the traces with more severity than if he had been a clergyman. (602)

But although he’s on the brink of backsliding, the effect of entering his old haunt turns out to be beneficent; for he is appalled to witness his brother-in-law betting feverishly on his own strokes as he plays billiards.

Like Fred’s, the trajectory of Lydgate’s career is associated with horses, though in his case the association is more figuratively, though specifically and tellingly, with the subjugation of them. Having left London and come to Middlemarch in order to avoid ‘wearing harness’ (157), by chapter 58 – the chapter in which Rosamond, who likes the idea of being seen on a fine horse as much as she likes the exercise, contravenes her husband’s wishes by riding the ‘gentle grey’ (523) provided by Captain Lydgate, and loses her baby after a fright taken by the
horse, frightens her – he has become not only ‘galled with his harness’ (528), but also close to ‘getting his neck beneath [the] vile yoke’ of ‘money-craving’ (581). Desperate not ‘to sink into the hideous fettering of domestic hate’ (598) after Rosamond’s disastrous letter-writing manoeuvre, but nevertheless ‘mastered’ (599) by her, he has already resorted to taking opium to alleviate his perception that his marriage is potentially a condition of ‘yoked loneliness’ (599). Now he feels obliged to sell his last good horse, and has therefore come to the Green Dragon to see Bambridge. Initially playing merely to pass the time while waiting for the horse-dealer, he begins to bet for money. Success engenders a vision of winning enough – now and in the future – to gamble his way out of his pecuniary troubles; losing only intensifies his excited fixation on the game. But he is saved from himself by Fred who, told that Mr Farebrother has arrived and wishes to speak to him, is inspired to pretend to need him as a shield in case Farebrother, Mary’s champion, berates him for being there. In thus rescuing Lydgate from himself, he is helped towards stiffening his own resolve.

While the error of judgement Lydgate’s marriage represents results in the brutal reining in of his aspirations, Fred is of course rewarded for ‘pull[ing] up in time’ with marriage to Mary. But Ladislaw, who is never seen on horseback, resists being yoked or otherwise controlled as a horse might be controlled, for he identifies himself with the mythological winged horse-god – ‘calling himself Pegasus, and every form of prescribed work “harness”’ (73), as Mr Casaubon informs the Brookes. We recall the association in chapter 37, when Dorothea suggests that her husband had probably failed to make him his secretary because he wasn’t ‘a steady enough worker’. Ladislaw concurs, ‘shaking his head backward somewhat after the manner of a spirited horse’ in verification of the notion that, to him, such ‘prescribed work’ would indeed unacceptably ‘harness’ him. He then gives ‘another good pinch at the moth-wings of poor Mr Casaubon’s glory’– feeble wings indeed when compared with those of the immortal stallion – by diagnosing Casaubon’s self-doubt, adding ‘he dislikes me because I disagree with him’ (327). But before the end of the chapter he has decided that he will ‘settle’ to something by conducting the newspaper (the Pioneer) that Mr Brooke has bought, even though it might ‘be a sacrifice of higher prospects’ (329) for him, as Dorothea points out. While her declaration that she should very much like him to stay in Middlemarch liberates him, because it answers his own inclination – ‘Then I will stay’, he says, ‘shaking his head backward, rising and going towards the window’ (330) – staying means that, conversely, he has after all ‘harnessed himself’ (420). But he has done so of his own volition. The subjugation will reverse itself, as Mr Cadwallader prophesies in chapter 38: ‘After a month or two Brooke and this Master Ladislaw will get tired of each other; Ladislaw will take wing; Brooke will sell the “Pioneer”, and everything will settle down again as usual’ (341). Ladislaw does take wing, but even as the image continues to hover over him, it becomes necessarily modified. After he has said farewell to Dorothea at Lowick, in Sir James’s presence, she takes the miniature of his grandmother down from the wall, makes a bed for it in the palm of her hand, and leans her cheek on it.

She did not know then that it was Love who had come to her briefly as in a dream before waking, with the hues of morning on his wings – that it was Love to whom she was sobbing her farewell as his image was banished by the blameless rigour of the irresistible day. (490)

Personified Love and Ladislaw have become indivisible. Those wings – Love’s wings – recall
and displace, or replace, Pegasus’ wings.

The fact that Ladislaw is never seen on horseback is one of the ways in which his author sets him apart from his male contemporaries: Lydgate, Fred, and Sir James. But though the ways in which those, and other, individuals ride in the novel, and think as they ride, reveal much about them, no one expresses affection for a horse, or regret at parting with one as from a companion. No particular bond between rider and mount is anywhere indicated, nor is an authorial light shone on any equine creature in the way that it had been on Meg and Tancred. Yet, just as Middlemarchers are dependent on horses for the functioning of their society, so are horses inextricable from the art of Middlemarch.

Notes

This article evolved from a paper given at the Middlemarch conference at the Institute of English Studies, Senate House, University of London, 22 November 2014.


2 Katherine Mansfield to John Middleton Murry [25 November 1919], The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, ed. Vincent O’Sullivan and Margaret Scott, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984-2008), III, p. 118. The punctuation in Wintle’s source, [The] Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield: A Selection, ed. C. K. Stead (1977), varies significantly from that reproduced in The Collected Letters: Stead replaces some dashes with commas and/or supplies commas or full stops and an inverted comma where there is no punctuation at all. I’m most grateful to Delia da Sousa Correa for alerting me to Mansfield’s comment, and for subsequently sending me the quotation.

3 The Mill on the Floss (1860), Bk VI, ch. 11: ‘In the Lane’. As portrayed in Torquato Tasso’s Jerusalem Delivered (1581), the Crusader hero Tancred is loved by two women: the warrior-maiden Clorinda, and Princess Erminia of Antioch.


6 Collected Letters, III, p. 46.


Wintle, p. 23.


Cross, I, p. 17


Wintle, p. 23

Hall reported that it had 'more than once' been his 'privilege to conduct "George Eliot" over farmyards and farm buildings, where she showed as intense a sympathy and intimate acquaintance with animal as with human nature. Little pigs, in their very earliest life-career, never failed to attract her minute attention, and in every litter she would pick out one as an especial favourite'. (*George Eliot Letters*, VI, p. 292 n.).

In 'George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and Tolstoy's Conception of *Anna Karenina*’ (*Modern Languages Review*, 61 [1966], 473-481), W. G. Jones persuasively argues that *Adam Bede* 'profoundly influenced Tolstoy's conception of his novel [...] in the critical initial stages of its creation' (p. 473). Jones considers the possibility that 'in Eliot's sketch of Meg is the image from which Tolstoy's magnificent picture of [Vronsky’s] Frou-Frou grew' (p. 477). The correspondences between Donnithorne and Vronsky that Jones illustrates include the 'special tenderness [they feel] towards their animals' (p. 477). Arthur’s tenderness doesn’t prevent him from venting his self-accusatory feelings by riding the compliant Meg ‘fit to split the mare i’two’ (ch. 29).

This treatment is prefigured in *The Mill on the Floss*, Bk I ch. 8, when Mr Tulliver rides to and from Basset in a failed attempt to harden his heart sufficiently to insist on the return of money he has loaned his brother-in-law. For a detailed discussion of this passage see my "Animated Nature": *The Mill on the Floss* in *George Eliot and Europe*, ed. John Rignall (Aldershot and Vermont: Scolar Press, 1997), pp. 138-155 (pp. 151-2).


See *Middlemarch*, Notes, p. 751.

In classical mythology the sun god Apollo drives his four-horse-drawn chariot across the sky daily.

'a milky fluid composed of lymph and emulsified fat globules, formed in the small intestine during digestion' (*OED*).