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'Good Teaching': Adam Bede and Education

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George Eliot's commitment to teaching motivates her writing from the first. Like many of those whose thinking was shaped by early nineteenth-century evangelicalism, she saw education as a vital responsibility. In 1847, when she was twenty-eight years old, she remarked to Sara Hennell that she thought "Live and Teach" should be a proverb as well as "Live and Learn". Eliot's persistent interest in teaching and learning was a reason for her turning to fiction as her primary medium as a writer - not the only reason, but an important one. She had no inclination whatsoever to become a professional teacher, in a school or in any other formal context, and was often surprisingly suspicious of institutional channels for teaching. It was the practice of fiction that enabled her to reach a wide audience, and teach them in the way that she chose. In the years after her death the perception that she was primarily a didactic novelist hardly enhanced her critical reputation, for the impulse to teach was seen to reflect the heavy Victorian earnestness that writers of the fin-de-siécle and of modernism, and beyond, wanted to deflate. In fact her pedagogic thinking is more complex, and often more divided, than readers and critics have generally recognized. Her ambivalence has many sources, but its deepest roots lie in a fruitful dissonance between different cultures of learning in her work, and different definitions of competing economies of knowledge - intellectual definitions, and concepts associated with the exercise of emotion and imagination.

These complications lie at the heart of Adam Bede (1859), where George Eliot is closely concerned with the multiple identities of knowledge, and the disparate methods through which it might be taught. In a novel that directly addresses both religious experience and the influence of feeling, Adam Bede's growing maturity is marked by his becoming 'a teacher as well as a learner'. Dinah Morris, whose Methodism stands at the moral centre of Adam Bede, is repeatedly acknowledged as a teacher, and her work is contrasted with the formal teaching practice of Bartle Massey, who runs a school. The legacies of George Eliot's youthful evangelicalism are evident in her representation of the distinctive work of these two teachers. But she was a poet, as well as a novelist, and the influence of her wide reading in Romantic literature is as pervasive as that of her evangelical faith. This ambitious novel is designed to persuade its readers that the sympathetic imagination is the foundation of a morally potent education.

Victorian models for learning are grounded in the processes of reading and writing, and Adam Bede famously begins with the pen. In the opening words of the novel, however, the pen is magically generating images, not words: '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. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799' (p. 4). The emphasis here is telling. George Eliot promises that her writing will reveal fertile visions of the past, rather than ideas, lessons, or even characters. They are brought to life by sorcery rather than scholarship. The epigraph to the novel, taken from Wordsworth's magisterial The Excursion (1814), speaks of the poet's wish to delight his readers with images, rather than words:
So that ye may have
Clear images before your gladden'd eyes
Of nature's unambitious underwood
And flowers that prosper in the shade.

Adam Bede is George Eliot's first full-length novel, and she is conscious of the need to attract and entertain new readers with pleasing images of rural life. But the opening scene of the novel goes on to consider the purposes of writing in a more chastening way. Adam's brother Seth, lost as usual in his gentle dreams, has left the panels out of the door he has been making:

'Hooray!' shouted a small lithe fellow, called Wiry Ben, running forward and seizing the door. 'We'll hang up th' door at fur end o' th' shop an' write on't, "Seth Bede, the Methody, his work." Here, Jim, lend's hould o' th' red-pot'.

(p. 7).

Adam’s grave intervention puts a stop to the horseplay, but not before Ben had 'got the 'red-pot' in his hand and was about to begin writing his inscription, making, by way of preliminary, an imaginary ‘S’ in the air’ (p. 7). ‘Wiry Ben’ is evidently literate, but he doesn’t seem to have turned his ability to write to any great advantage. Here again writing comes down to an act of imagination – that ‘imaginary S’ – but it is a destructive rather than productive exercise of the imagination that we witness in Burge's workshop.

Ben's mischief-making might seem to confirm the suspicions of those who were reluctant to give the power of the pen to rustic labourers. In 1802, around the time at which Adam Bede is set, the evangelical Hannah More, describing the curricula of her controversial network of Sunday Schools in the pastoral West Country, noted that: ‘I allow of no writing for the poor.’

Five years later, in 1807, Davies Giddy, later to become President of the Royal Society, spoke in Parliament on the reckless folly of educating rural workers: ‘However specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring masses of the poor, it would, in effect, be found prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors, and in a few years the result would be that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power toward them.'

Giddy's speech was part of the successful campaign to defeat the proposed 1807 Parochial Schools Bill, intended to establish a national system of elementary schools. Few would have spoken in those terms in 1859, and certainly George Eliot would have had no hesitation in rejecting such reactionary and self-interested ideas. But hostility to education, of the kind that is to be heard in Giddy’s speech, lingered for many years, particularly in rural areas. As late as 1861 the parliamentary Newcastle Commission on popular education was reporting on the common reluctance among farmers to support the provision of education for labourers and their children, alongside widespread indifference among landowners.

Adam Bede is unequivocal in its support of the education of rural working people. Eliot has no time for callous complacencies like those of Giddy, and those who continued to think like Giddy. But Wiry
Ben’s malicious use of his skills as a writer is a reminder that George Eliot has not wholly abandoned the older evangelical belief that education is not necessarily a good in itself. It is a benefit according to the use to which it is put. The conviction that its transformative potential is finally a matter of inward and moral growth persists throughout the book.

Divergent concepts of teaching in *Adam Bede* are chiefly represented by the activities of Bartle Massey, and Dinah Morris. Bartle’s night school is seen as an admirable institution, and his unfaltering support of his pupil Adam is an expression of loyalty which the reader is asked to admire. But Bartle’s perspective is restricted by his bizarre or even comic misogyny; rooted, Eliot implies, in an unhappy love affair in his past. We are prompted to see him as another version of the maimed Mr Gilfil in ‘Mr Gilfil’s Love Story’, a tale published just months earlier in 1858, as the final story in *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Contemplating Gilfil’s eccentricities in age, Eliot suggests that ‘it is with men as with trees: if you lop off their finest branches, into which they were pouring their young life-juice, the wounds will be healed over with some rough boss, some odd excrescence: and what might have been a grand tree expanding into liberal shade, is but a whimsical misshapen trunk. Many an irritating fault, many an unlovely oddity, has come of a hard sorrow, which has crushed and maimed the nature just when it was expanding into plenteous beauty; and the trivial erring life which we visit with our harsh blame, may be but as the unsteady motion of a man whose best limb is withered.’ Massey’s physical lameness seems to reflect a deficiency akin to what Eliot describes here – some ‘hard sorrow’ in his past has stunted his proper development, leaving his essential generosity untouched, but restricting its full expression. Whatever it is that has made him Hayslope’s teacher has also made him less than a whole man. Nevertheless, his thinking on education carries weight in the novel. At its heart is the conviction that learning can never be a matter of the passive assimilation of facts and figures, or the simple acquisition of practically useful skills. It must be vigorous and personal, fully owned by the student. This is so at all social levels. Massey makes some sharp observations on the value of university education for cultivated young gentleman like Arthur Donnithorne. ‘He says college mostly makes people like bladders – just good for nothing but t’hold the stuff as is poured into them’ (p. 168). It is fundamentally the same point that he makes at the point in the novel where he speaks most directly for George Eliot, when he dismisses a couple of idle students from his school. ‘You think knowledge is to be got cheap—you’ll come and pay Bartle Massey sixpence a-week, and he’ll make you clever at figures without your taking any trouble. But knowledge isn’t to be got with paying sixpence, let me tell you: if you’re to know figures, you must turn ‘em over in your own heads and keep your thoughts fixed on ‘em. But the long and the short of it is—I’ll have nobody in my night-school that doesn’t strive to learn what he comes to learn, as hard as if he was striving to get out of a dark hole into broad daylight. I’ll send no man away because he’s stupid: if Billy Taft, the idiot, wanted to learn anything, I’d not refuse to teach him. But I’ll not throw away good knowledge on people who think they can get it by the sixpenn’orth, and carry it away with ‘em as they would an ounce of snuff. So never come to me again, if you can’t show that you’ve been working with your own heads, instead of thinking that you can pay for mine to work for you. That’s the last word I’ve got to say to you’ (p. 236).

Unsurprisingly, the woman-hating Massey teaches only boys and men in his night school, and there is no suggestion that either he or anyone else in Hayslope is in the least perturbed by the dismal ignorance of the working women of the parish. Adam’s mother Lisbeth Bede is ‘struck
with silent wonderment at the mystery of letters’ (p. 498). Nancy and Molly, the Poyser’s maids, are seen hastening home from church, ‘each holding, carefully wrapped in her pocket-handkerchief, a prayer-book, in which she could read little beyond the large letters and the Amens’ (p. 513). Hetty, who finds uses for her ‘pink silk handkerchief’ (p. 466) other than wrapping her prayer-book, was ‘quite uneducated’ (p. 100). We know that she is literate, for she is able to read the crushing letter from Arthur that leaves her hopes and then her life in ruins. But ‘Hetty had never read a novel: if she had ever seen one, I think the words would have been too hard for her’ (p. 136). Here George Eliot, in the course of writing the novel that would give her life a new purpose, suggests that fiction might have played as effective a role as fact in averting the catastrophe that is to overwhelm Hetty. Novels, like prayer-books and school texts, can provide young people with compelling lessons. Hetty’s untaught mind makes her vulnerable. But it is her undeveloped imagination, incapable of extending its boundaries beyond trivial fantasies of luxurious finery, that gives rise to her inability ‘to find a shape for her expectations’ (p. 136) and leads inexorably to disaster. This is of no concern to Bartle Massey, who tells Mr Irwine that ‘as for that bit o’ pink-and-white they’ve taken the trouble to put into jail, I don’t value her a rotten nut – not a rotten nut – only for the harm or good that may come out of her to an honest man’ (p. 416). Massey’s grotesque misogyny constrains his sympathies. He sees Hetty’s predicament entirely in terms of its consequences for Adam – and for himself, for there is a persistent taint of egotism in his devotion. Adam Bede is ‘a lad I’ve set such store by – trusted to that he’d make my bit o’ knowledge go a good way in the world. … Why, sir, he’s the only scholar I’ve had in this stupid country that ever had the will or the head-piece for mathematics. If he hadn’t had so much hard work to do, poor fellow, he might have gone into the higher branches, and then this might never have happened – might never have happened’ (pp. 416-7). Mr Irwine, who is a more reliable measure of moral perception in Adam Bede, delivers a mild reproach when he tells Bartle that ‘he is not the only one whose sufferings I care for in this affair’ (p. 417).

Feeling, here as elsewhere in the novel, is key. Massey despises himself for ‘running on in this way about my own feelings’ (p. 417), but they are feelings that reveal what is most essential to his damaged nature, rather as his tender compassion for the struggling pupils in his night school reflects his vocation as a teacher in the most appealing light. In fact Massey’s school is one of the very few educational institutions in Eliot’s fiction that is seen in positive terms. But even here she is dispassionately analytical, and a little sceptical, of the motives of its pupils. The two would-be mathematicians dismissed by Massey have only the most self-centred understanding of education. Those who are struggling to read are touchingly like ‘rough animals’ making ‘humble efforts to learn how they might be human’ (p. 235). This is one of the many moments in the novel where Eliot touches on the deep connection between the animal and the human, in a disarmingly affectionate tone that is designed to soften the apprehensions of those who might be disconcerted by the association, in the year in which Darwin’s work On the Origin of Species was to be published. But the humanity of these slow learners takes uncertain and mixed forms. Burly Bill is eager to read because he is annoyed that his diminutive friend Sam can do so. The ex-poacher ‘Brimstone’, newly converted to Methodism, wants to read the Bible, though the rigours of literacy make him wonder whether the letter might not after all be an obstruction to the spirit. A blue-handed dyer aspires to save ‘labour and expense’ (p. 235) by producing his dyes more cheaply. These are human motives, and they are not dishonourable.
Nevertheless, they are hardly, in George Eliot’s terms, a representative sample of what is highest in human nature. To witness a different and more consequential kind of teaching, we must turn to Dinah Morris.

Dinah is not a professional educationalist in the sense that Bartle Massey is. But Eliot makes it clear that her ardent Methodism has made her a teacher, and that the deepest origins of her work as a preacher lies in that impulse. ‘I’d been used from the time I was sixteen to talk to the little children, and teach them’ (p. 90). It is in this sense of a directly personal communication that God himself is a teacher, as Dinah understands his nature and tries to communicate it to Hetty in her condemned cell: ‘God enters our souls then, and teaches us, and brings us strength and peace’ (p. 450). This scene was intended by Eliot to be the high point of her novel, perhaps in emulation of the celebrated passages describing Fagin’s torment in the condemned-cell scenes in Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1838). Notoriously, the decision of Wesleyan Methodists in their conference of 1803 to forbid women from preaching in public meant the end of the work of Methodist women like Dinah as outdoor preachers. Seth is angered by her acceptance of the ruling, but Adam approves; and so, it seems, does George Eliot. It is a moment analogous with others in her fiction, where her strongest women – Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, Mirah in *Daniel Deronda*, or Romola – conclude their stories by abandoning their hopes of contributing to a wider community, and withdrawing into domestic virtue. Speaking of his wife’s renunciation of her work as a preacher, Adam remarks that ‘she’s not held from other sorts o’ teaching’ (p. 539). This is the point of Dinah’s continuing influence, as George Eliot sees it. Throughout her career, Eliot is oddly distrustful of a public, shared model for the processes of teaching. Her own experience had suggested to her that the learning that really matters is a solitary business, hard-won, often associated with suffering. The teachers who count in her fiction don’t operate in classrooms, but through ‘other sorts o’ teaching’. They work within the intimate relation between two human beings, defined by compassion and located in shared sorrow – Dorothea teaching Rosamond, Daniel Deronda teaching Gwendolen, the Reverend Tryan teaching Janet Dempster, Felix Holt teaching Esther. George Eliot’s fictions repeatedly carry the intensity of personal relations of this kind at their heart. And this is largely how she saw her own teaching. It would take place within the private, intimately solitary relation between reader and text, not in the socially controlled or even competitive context of school, or lecture room, or meeting room. And it would be a matter of feeling, not of knowledge, or even the dissemination of ideas. ‘It isn’t notions sets people doing the right thing – it’s feelings’ (p. 180), says Adam. He goes on to make the point that the education of feeling is analogous with other kinds of education, and that it is as closely bound up with the disciplined development of religion as it is of mathematical or practical knowledge: ‘It’s the same with the notions of religion as it is with math’matics, – a man may be able to work problems straight off in’s head as he sits by the fire and smokes his pipe, but if he has to make a machine or a building, he must have a will and a resolution, and love something else better than his own ease’ (p. 180).

George Eliot makes the education of feeling central to her definition of ‘good teaching’ (p. 259) in *Adam Bede*. The phrase comes from Bartle Massey, who assures his pupil Adam that he has had ‘good teaching’, of the practical and mathematical kind, when it seems that the carpenter is about to rise in the world. So he has, and George Eliot has no wish to dismiss its importance. Such teaching matters, and George Eliot is inclined to value it more highly than the
conventional classical education that goes into the making of young men like Arthur Donnithorne. It is the kind of teaching that equips honourable men like her father, the capable land-agent Robert Evans, to do the honest and useful work that represented a benchmark of solid masculine merit to his daughter throughout her life. But this is not the teaching that George Eliot, influenced by her early Romantic and evangelical values, asks us to value most. When Adam tries to persuade Dinah to marry him, he speaks of knowledge in different terms:

It seems to me it's the same with love and happiness as with sorrow – the more we know of it the better we can feel what other people’s lives are or might be, and so we shall only be more tender to 'em, and wishful to help 'em. The more knowledge a man has the better he’ll do’s work; and feeling’s a sort of knowledge (p. 509).

That is the sort of knowledge – the knowledge of feeling – that Eliot wants her fiction to disseminate. But I would want to draw a distinction here between this intention and what Sally Ledger describes in analysing ‘the affective mode’ in mid-Victorian fiction, particularly as it found expression in Charles Dickens’s writing. Sally Ledger speaks of Dickens’s construction of a ‘realism of affect’, rather than a representational realism. The affective mode, with its direct and immediate appeal to the emotions of the reader, became powerfully influential in domestic fiction of the 1850s, as it was developed in such works as Elizabeth Gaskell’s Cranford (1853), or, over the Atlantic, in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852) or in Charles Dickens’s phenomenally popular and successful novels. It was a development that was closely bound up with complex tensions produced by the changing gender politics of the novel in the 1840s and 1850s, as the rise of the domestic novel accentuated the feminine dimensions of fiction. George Eliot was certainly interested in the potential of the affective mode, and in Scenes of Clerical Life (1858) we see her trying out its strategies. This is particularly evident in ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, with its affecting account of Milly Barton’s decline and death. She was also interested in the associated techniques of melodrama, and in plots involving incidents like Caterina Sarti’s bearing a dagger while she stalks the unfeeling Captain Wybrow in ‘Mr Gilfil’s Love Story’ she experiments with the possibilities of shock and violence, tactics that were exploited so tellingly by Dickens.

Adam Bede might seem to fall into the same category. For all its claims to be a mundane and realistic story of pastoral life, this is after all a recognizably melodramatic plot, describing the seduction of a dairymaid by a dashing captain, and involving betrayal, illegitimate childbirth and murder, with a near-hanging, a last-minute rescue and a transportation for good measure. But in fact Adam Bede, preoccupied as it is with the power of feeling, does not want to teach through eliciting strong feeling – as Dickens does, in passages such as those describing the illness and death of Paul Dombey in Dombey and Son (1848), the suffering of Jo the crossing-sweeper in Bleak House (1853), or the fiendish plots of Uriah Heep in David Copperfield (1850). The emotional tone of Adam Bede is relatively cool. She is not inclined to emulate what Dickens would have made of Hetty’s desperate journey across England in search of Arthur. Dickens’s treatment of such a journey, in describing Little Nell’s flight with her grandfather in The Old Curiosity Shop (1841), sustains a dreamlike, febrile register that works directly on our emotional responses. Hetty’s suffering is described with sympathetic detachment. Readers are
asked to recognize the gravity of her baby’s death, and to some extent its pathos, but few have shed tears over it. The baby has been consistently distanced from the reader. We never see or hear the child, it has no name, we are not even told whether it was a boy or a girl. Again, it is not hard to imagine how Dickens might have treated the situation of Hetty and her baby – think, for instance, of the death of the brickmaker’s ‘poor little gasping’ baby in Bleak House:

‘Oh, Esther!’ cried Ada, sinking on her knees beside it. ‘Look here! Oh, Esther, my love, the little thing! The suffering, quiet, pretty little thing! I am so sorry for it. I am so sorry for the mother. I never saw a sight so pitiful as this before! Oh, baby, baby!’

Such compassion, such gentleness, as that with which she bent down weeping and put her hand upon the mother’s might have softened any mother’s heart that ever beat. The woman at first gazed at her in astonishment and then burst into tears.9

It is clear what Dickens is doing in moments like that – the lesson he wants to give, and his means of imparting it. Tears, not tracts, will teach the poor, and tears will also teach those who read about their distress. It is equally clear that George Eliot chooses not to do anything comparable with the death of Hetty’s baby – a terrible event, but described offstage, in retrospect, and at a carefully maintained distance. The use of an emotionally-charged word like ‘gasping’ would have changed the tenor of Eliot’s novel instantly, but she avoids such language. Indeed, it is important for her purposes that we should not greatly like the pebble-hearted Hetty, nor care with too much intensity for her lost baby. George Eliot wrote this novel around her fortieth year, as she reached the end of any possibility of a baby of her own. Perhaps it was in part her own vision of a child that is abandoned by that Wordsworthian pond, with its fecund and sexually attractive mother exiled for ever. The emotional austerity at the heart of Adam Bede, which is to be greatly softened in Silas Marner’s later story of the vulnerable child who is rescued to live and thrive, bears an oblique relation to the part that the novel played in Eliot’s own life.

What George Eliot chose to teach about feeling in Adam Bede centres on Dinah Morris’s quiet religious authority, not on the burden of Hetty’s suffering, or the bleak death of her child. Rachel Ablow, introducing the 2008 special issue of Victorian Studies on the emotions, notes that it was in the nineteenth century that ‘the public sphere came to be identified with a form of rationality to which the emotions stood opposed. This is the story most commonly told about the nineteenth century, the story the period tended to tell about itself.’10 It is a story that George Eliot accepted on one level, for she wanted the discourses of fiction to participate in the public sphere, and to share its claims to the masculine prestige of rationality. She wanted to keep her distance from ignorant silly novels by lady novelists; nor did she want to make her pages damp with the copious streams of tears of the kind that Dickens would often encourage. But on another level she sought to challenge that separation between the emotions and rationality, or at least to qualify and question it. The private and domestic force of feeling is, in her concept of social and political life, as necessary to the wider health of the community as the ‘good teaching’ of mathematics and measurement. The influence of Dinah Morris is there to prove it. After she leaves her vocation as a preacher, Dinah’s educational work is individual and domestic, but it has public consequences. It is an example that sturdily resists the pattern of

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thinking that Rachel Ablow refers to in describing ‘Jeremy Bentham’s claim that the “principle of sympathy and antipathy” is essentially a “principle of caprice”.’

Eliot’s complex position in Adam Bede and in subsequent novels is a reminder of the depth with which her fiction continues to be rooted in religious and also Romantic thought, for all its secularism, and its intellectualism. Why do thoughtful Dinah and sober Adam become forces for good in Hayslope, while pretty Hetty and shallow Arthur must come to grief? The difference between them is to be found in the examined strength of their inner lives, and the humility and integrity with which they are able to connect that inwardness with outward action. Even at the climax of Hetty’s confession of infanticide, the moment of her only sustained speech in the novel, she tells us that ‘I don’t know what I felt’ and that ‘My heart went like a stone’ (p. 454). As Adam explains, it is our own experience of sorrow, love or happiness, once it is fully felt, known and accepted, that allows us to sympathize with others, and help them. Stolid Adam is hardly a Shelleyan figure, and like George Eliot he is cautiously sceptical of the excesses of Methodist enthusiasm. Yet his thinking as he speaks of the inner life as ‘a sort of knowledge’ is that of both a Romantic and a dissenter. It is comparable with the thought of that contemporary Romantic dissenter Robert Browning, a poet whose work George Eliot admired. It is to be seen, for instance, in Browning’s fiercely Shelleyan and nonconformist anti-hero Paracelsus, Renaissance scientist, thinker and indomitable charlatan:

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Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate’er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fullness … and TO KNOW
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.12
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Bartle Massey, for all his ‘good teaching’ and his fundamentally benevolent nature, has only partly assimilated this understanding. In dismissing his idle students, he reproaches them for their failure to internalize knowledge, but he also thinks of that knowledge as an ‘outward thing’, to be dispensed by the teacher. ‘I’ll not throw away good knowledge’, he declares indignantly (p. 236). He teaches within a cognitive model, and ignores the significance of feeling. Dinah Morris chooses otherwise, so that her work becomes essential, while that of Bartle is simply useful. The sensible and sharp-tongued Mrs Poyser accuses Dinah of undisciplined and self-referential feeling, as ardent Methodists were often accused. ‘You feel! yes’, said Mrs Poyser … ‘that’s allays the reason I’m to sit down wi’, when you’ve a mind to do anything contrary’ (p. 475). But Mrs Poyser knows that Dinah’s feelings lead to patterns of action that can be depended on. The Poyzers base their own methods of teaching on a comparable scheme, when it comes to the much-indulged little Totty. Their response to Totty’s childish naughtiness is intended to be a playful moment in the novel, but it gestures towards the heart of its teaching: ‘Whereupon the father, shaking with silent laughter, set Totty on the white deal table, and desired her to kiss him. Mr and Mrs Poyser, you perceive, had no correct principles of education’ (pp. 481-2). What we are asked to understand at this moment of irony is that the Poyzers’ ‘principles of education’, grounded in affection and happiness, are perfectly
correct. No doubt Totty will be taught to read and write, and George Eliot wishes us to understand that this too is important and necessary. But she will also be taught to love, and that, in terms of what George Eliot wants us to learn in *Adam Bede*, will finally matter more.

Notes


11. Ablow, 375.