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## MR BROOKE'S THINKING ORGAN

By Kate Osborne

A scene in *Middlemarch*'s thirtieth chapter describes how the creative process can slip out of a writer's control.<sup>1</sup> A letter has arrived from Mr Casaubon's estranged cousin, Will Ladislaw, asking whether Will may visit Casaubon and Dorothea at their home at Lowick. But Casaubon is gravely ill and Dorothea is so overwhelmed by her husband's illness and also by the thought of seeing Will that she cannot even read the letter. She asks her uncle, Mr. Brooke, to reply in her stead, 'to let Will know that Casaubon had been ill, and that his health would not allow the reception of any visitors' (291). She is unwise to trust him with the task.

No one more ready than Mr. Brooke to write a letter: his only difficulty was to write a short one, and his ideas in this case expanded over the three large pages and the inward foldings. He had simply said to Dorothea –

'To be sure, I will write, my dear. He's a very clever young fellow – this young Ladislaw – I dare say will be a rising young man. It's a good letter – marks his sense of things, you know. However, I will tell him about Casaubon.'

But the end of Mr. Brooke's pen was a thinking organ, evolving sentences, especially of a benevolent kind, before the rest of his mind could well overtake them. It expressed regrets and proposed remedies, which, when Mr. Brooke read them, seemed felicitously worded – surprisingly the right thing, and determined a sequel which he had never before thought of. In this case, his pen found it such a pity young Ladislaw should not have come into the neighbourhood just at that time, in order that Mr. Brooke might make his acquaintance more fully, and that they might go over the long-neglected Italian drawings together – it also felt such an interest in a young man who was starting in life with a stock of ideas – that by the end of the second page it had persuaded Mr. Brooke to invite young Ladislaw, since he could not be received at Lowick, to come to Tipton Grange. Why not? They could find a great many things to do together, and this was a period of peculiar growth – the political horizon was expanding, and – in short, Mr. Brooke's pen went off into a little speech which it had lately reported for that imperfectly edited organ the 'Middlemarch Pioneer'.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Brooke's letter is a turning point for the most central of the novel's several marriage plots. Will is encouraged rather than deterred by Mr Brooke's pen's speechifying, and he takes up Mr Brooke's offer to stay with him at Tipton Grange, remaining in Middlemarch when Mr Brooke offers him the editorship of the *Middlemarch Pioneer*. Will and Dorothea are now in close enough proximity to fall in love properly.

This passage has largely escaped critical attention. Barbara Hardy's discussion of the passage is an exception. Hardy convincingly identifies a biographical source for Mr Brooke in a Mr Bracebridge. Eliot mentioned in a letter to a friend 'some slip of the pen – the extremely slippery pen – of that muddle-headed magistrate Mr Bracebridge'.<sup>3</sup> (In light of Mr Brooke's enthusiasm for dashes, I wonder if the dashes here simply communicate an aside or whether Eliot is momentarily impersonating the literary style of Mr Bracebridge.) Hardy calls attention to the way in which Mr Brooke's pen dramatizes Eliot's creative process. Mr Brooke and the novel are both looking for an excuse to invite Ladislaw to Middlemarch. This is not the only time his pen takes matters into its own hands. At the end of the novel, Mr Brooke, along with Dorothea's sister Celia and her husband, Sir James Chettam, is estranged from Dorothea and

### Will. Mr Brooke's public stand does not put off his pen:

Mr. Brooke could not resist the pleasure of corresponding with Will and Dorothea; and one morning when his pen had been remarkably fluent on the prospects of Municipal Reform, it ran off into an invitation to the Grange, which, once written, could not be done away with at less cost than the sacrifice (hardly to be conceived) of the whole valuable letter. (836)

This letter reunites Dorothea and Will with Mr Brooke, as well as Dorothea with her estranged sister Cecilia. Mr Brooke's mouthy pen draws the novel's characters together, encapsulating Eliot's pen in miniature. It is, in Hardy's words, 'a sly intricate image of reflexive art' (156). But given the suggestiveness of the passage's central metaphor, the conscious pen, as well as the scientific bent of the terms in which it is articulated – 'organ', 'evolving' – it is surprising that critics have not explored this moment more fully in relation to Eliot's interest in the workings of the mind.

Mr Brooke's thinking organ is part of an inquiry into writing's effect on thought that recurs across Eliot's novels. It is the second of a series of three scenes; in each, the writer sits down with pen and paper intending to write one thing, and finds himself, or herself, writing another. The first such moment is in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). Maggie has broken off her relationship with Stephen, her cousin's fiancé. She is anguished but her commitment to asceticism demands that she renounce him. He sends her a letter, pleading with her to relent: 'Write me one word; say "Come!" In two days I should be with you. Maggie, have you forgotten what it was to be together, – to be within reach of a look, to be within hearing of each other's voice?' For hours she struggles to respond appropriately, and then her resolve cracks:

It was Stephen's tone of misery, it was the doubt in the justice of her own resolve, that made the balance tremble, and made her once start from her seat to reach the pen and paper, and write 'Come!' (461)

The last of these moments is in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Gwendolen composes a letter to Henleigh Grandcourt, agreeing to the private interview for which he has asked. Her mother gently remonstrates with her once it has been sent. Clearly, Grandcourt is going to propose marriage, and he will consider Gwendolen's assent to the interview tantamount to an acceptance of his proposal. Gwendolen tells her mother, and herself, that her letter has committed her to nothing, that she has left 'as many issues open as possible'.<sup>4</sup> She imagines the triumph of rejecting Grandcourt in person and drawing their battle of wills to a satisfying close. But her mother is right. She has written a letter of consent. Her letter reveals, even crystallizes, her intention to marry him.

These scenes reveal Eliot's preoccupation with the way in which the act of writing engages the unconscious mind, and consequently writing's potential to produce content that the writer wouldn't have predicted. Each writer inscribes something that fulfils a desire about which they are conflicted. Maggie longs for Stephen even as she imposes upon herself a relentless regime of self-denial. Gwendolen is drawn to Grandcourt by his offer of financial security even as he repels her.<sup>5</sup> Mr Brooke wants Will Ladislaw to come to Middlemarch because he enjoys male companionship, and because he wants Ladislaw to edit the newspaper he has purchased, the *Middlemarch Pioneer*. But he must have an inkling that Dorothea will not be pleased with his compromise of inviting Will to his own home; that is why he breezily

elects not to mention it to her. It is the same desire to avoid confrontation that prompts his later decision to tell Sir James Chettam that he will have nothing to do with Will and Dorothea, and might even cut off the entail that would give them his estate upon his death. In fact:

the day on which his pen gave the daring invitation, he went to Freshitt expressly to intimate that he had a stronger sense than ever of the reasons for taking that energetic step as a precaution against any mixture of low blood in the heir of the Brookes. (836)

The metaphor of the ‘thinking organ’ absolves Mr Brooke from a large part of the responsibility for decisions that will in both cases prove controversial to his immediate family, shunting it onto the pen instead, but he is, of course, really getting what he wants. Of all three passages, the writer is most removed in this one, in which the act of writing is conspicuously generative. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie’s grip on herself slips the instant before she reaches for pen and paper. Reaching for her pen and writing confirms that impulse and makes it tangible. Gwendolen’s letter in *Daniel Deronda* reveals her intentions to her mother, to Grandcourt and to the reader but she does not acknowledge them consciously. For Mr Brooke, the movement of the pen across the page is so integral to drawing out his thoughts that the passage’s central metaphor, the pen as brain or ‘thinking organ’, displaces Mr Brooke’s subconscious onto his pen.

The pen traces the leaps and the stumblings of Mr Brooke’s mind. The narrator’s rendition of the letter reveals longwinded sentences and frenetically inserted dashes that don’t bridge the jumps from one subject to another. As Laura Otis has suggested, Mr Brooke’s letter demonstrates that the associations made by his mind are ‘arbitrary’ and ‘contiguous’; certainly, they are haphazard.<sup>6</sup> Although the scene gestures towards Eliot’s creative process, Mr Brooke’s letter is a crude and bastardized version of it. Mr Brooke thinks he has done a fantastic job with the letter, but this is not the case by the narrator’s estimation (nor, one imagines, by Dorothea’s). The phrases that strike Mr Brooke as ‘felicitously worded’ are longwinded, even portentous (we can speculate that they may well be filched from the prescriptive templates found in letter-writing manuals, filled with letters for all social situations). ‘Silly Novels by Lady Novelists’ (1856), Eliot’s essay-cum-creative manifesto that she wrote just before she began *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), mocks novels that put unrealistically sophisticated ideas into the mouths of their heroines in order to display the erudition of the author.<sup>7</sup> Mr Brooke’s letter is a reversal of that. The narrator delineates and expertly dissects Mr Brooke’s muddle of thoughts and feelings. The meandering Mr Brooke shows no restraint but the narrator, more sensitive to her reader, cuts in with a brutal ‘in short’. But while Mr Brooke’s thoughts are scattered, the gist of the letter expresses a deeply felt, only half-acknowledged wish of his. Will’s visit and the potential to make a success of the *Pioneer* mean a great deal to him.

The clarity that can come during the moment of inscription is one way that writing reveals meaning in *Middlemarch*. The second occurs not at the moment of writing but the moment of reading. Sealing the envelope, Mr Brooke wonders summarily ‘ – who knew what might come of it all?’ (292) and then dismisses it from his mind. But writing leaves a material trace. Despite Mr Brooke’s return to blithe empty-headedness (perhaps, after Mr Bracebridge, muddle-headedness), the letter has been sent and its consequences are set in motion. The classification of the pen as an ‘organ’ is a clue as to how writing and texts function within the narrative. Elsewhere in the novel, Dr Tertius Lydgate is fascinated by the work of anatomist Marie François Xavier Bichat (1771–1802) because it ‘show[s] new connections and hitherto

### hidden facts of structure'. Bodies

must be regarded as consisting of certain primary webs or tissues, out of which the various organs—brain, heart, lungs, and so on—are compacted, [...] No man, one sees, can understand and estimate the entire structure or its parts—what are its frailties and what its repairs, without knowing the nature of the materials. (147)

The thinking organ might seem marooned from a larger body, transplanted as it is from Mr Brooke's head to his pen, but Bichat has shown us that an organ is always working as a constituent part of a larger whole. Most immediately, the thinking organ embodies the unconscious part of Mr Brooke's mind and operates in a dialogue with the (relatively) conscious part. The pen is also an organ embedded within the narrative. The passage I have quoted at length begins with an organ, but it ends with one too. At the end of the passage, Mr Brooke's thinking organ launches into a speech that it has recently made for another 'organ' – 'that imperfectly edited organ the "Middlemarch Pioneer"' (292). Mr Brooke's thinking organ forms the larger organ of the newspaper (with the mediation of a printing press), but both are organs in the larger body of the novel, pumping information between characters to further the plot.

Other documents fulfil the same purpose of disseminating information, but not through any intention of the writer. Documents have a semi-permanent form and so they can be stolen, appropriated and circulated – or simply turn up at a highly inconvenient moment. The consequences of a great deal of our actions are unforeseeable, but *Middlemarch* holds the consequences of writing to be particularly unpredictable. This is what the novel means when it asks:

Who shall tell what may be the effect of writing? If it happens to have been cut in stone, though it lie face down-most for ages on a forsaken beach, or 'rest quietly under the drums and trappings of many conquests', it may end by letting us into the secret of usurpations and other scandals gossiped about long empires ago: – this world being apparently a huge whispering-gallery. Such conditions are often minutely represented in our petty lifetimes. As the stone which has been kicked by generations of clowns may come by curious little links of effect under the eyes of a scholar, through whose labours it may at last fix the date of invasions and unlock religions, so a bit of ink and paper which has long been an innocent wrapping or stop-gap may at last be laid open under the one pair of eyes which have knowledge enough to turn it into the opening of a catastrophe. To Uriel watching the progress of planetary history from the sun, the one result would be just as much of a coincidence as the other. (412)

The 'bit of ink and paper' the novel has foremost in mind is a signed letter from Nicholas Bulstrode that a previous acquaintance, John Raffles, comes upon entirely by chance. The letter is, according to the smug Raffles, 'what you may call a providential thing' (522). It gives away Bulstrode's whereabouts and sizeable wealth, all the information needed for Raffles to blackmail him. This (to cut a long story short) leads to Raffles's hastened death, Bulstrode's disgrace and Will's discovery of a new relation. Although writing's material form is necessary if it is to endure, it is the writing on the paper that is crucial here. As Andrew H. Miller has pointed out, it's the legibility rather than the physical form of writing that makes it vulnerable to being reread in ways the author could not have imagined. The resurfacing of Bulstrode's letter is a meditation on what lasts of us, and also the impossibility of knowing what will that

be or to what it might lead; as Miller puts it, ‘a more general understanding of the wayward consequences of writing and the reconstruction of the past’.<sup>9</sup> Mr Brooke’s letters outlast his momentary courage and insight, which soon fades; they commit him to the stance that he has taken in them. His letter inviting Will to Tipton Grange also has consequences for Will that Mr Brooke cannot anticipate. Perhaps it is a wise move on Maggie’s part, if a little melodramatic, when she burns the note she has written against her better judgement in *The Mill on the Floss*. One way to read the novel’s interest in the durability of texts, and the impossibility of knowing how they will be read, is that it is a reflection on the rewards and frustrations of authorship heavily influenced by Eliot’s own experience. The novel presents authorship as what distinguishes those who achieve posterity from those who lie in ‘unvisited tombs’ – sorting the Saint Therasas from the non-Saint Therasas. Casaubon imagines his *Key to all Mythologies* as ‘a tomb with his name upon it’ (he means this in the sense that it will be a monument to him rather than that it will separate him from the living, which is what it ends up doing). Lydgate explains his lofty ambitions to transform the medical world to his wife Rosamond, by quoting Samuel Daniel’s poem *Musophilus* (1599):

Why should our pride make such a stir to be  
And be forgot? What good is like to this,  
To do worthy the writing, and to write  
Worthy the reading and the worlds delight? (437)

Lydgate will never live up to the words of his ‘favourite bit from an old poet’. *Middlemarch* is full of failed authors.<sup>10</sup> The failure of the would-be scholars and poets in *Middlemarch* (including the Reverend Casaubon, Dorothea, Lydgate and Dr Sprague) is not that they produce bad or indifferent work but that they do not produce much of anything. Casaubon and Dorothea symbolically embody the texts they fail to write. Mrs Cadwallader remarks of Casaubon’s blood that ‘Somebody put a drop under a magnifying-glass and it was all semicolons and parentheses’ (71). When Dorothea discusses her unshakeable feeling that she has nothing to contribute with Ladislaw, he tells her ‘You are a poem’ (as Susan Gubar has asked, ‘how much of a comfort’ is this?)<sup>11</sup>. Saint Theresa of Avila, to whom Dorothea is compared, wrote two books and an autobiography. At the beginning of the novel Dorothea is described as ‘a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centring in some long-recognizable deed’; at the end, ‘the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive’ (838). The problem with being a poem rather than writing one is that most actions are ephemeral, and bodies decay. Dorothea’s effect she has on the world around her is real and meaningful, as the Finale affirms, but it does not last.<sup>12</sup>

*Middlemarch*’s fixation with failed writing is self-conscious; a nervous twitch that betrays the fear that words might not materialize or co-operate.<sup>13</sup> The proficiency of Mr Brooke’s pen mirrors the bold promise to the reader that opens *Adam Bede* (1859):

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 [...].<sup>14</sup>

Here, writing is smooth and certain, a conjuring trick. The narrator will create an image that

has the integrity of a mirror's reflection, spun effortlessly from a 'single drop of ink'. By contrast, the struggle and mostly failure of the inhabitants of Middlemarch to write suggests a worry about the capriciousness of the creative process. By the time she came to *Middlemarch*, Eliot had struggled extensively with writer's block, particularly with *Romola* (1862-3). That she wrote the second half of *Middlemarch* as the first instalments were being published added to the pressure.<sup>15</sup> *Middlemarch's* preoccupation with a document that surfaces suddenly suggests another kind of authorial anxiety. Carol A. Martin has shown that although Eliot didn't read her reviews, she was aware of and responded to the reception of her work.<sup>16</sup> *Middlemarch* acknowledges the uncertain reception that awaits a text once it is published, implicitly and explicitly. The Bulstrode-Raffles-Will strand of *Middlemarch's* plot hinges on a document finding an unanticipated audience, and being read in an unanticipated way. Mary Garth and Fred Vincy each publish a book with a local press (a book of children's tales and a work on farming respectively) but the inhabitants of Middlemarch respond perversely, assuming that Fred has written Mary's book, and Mary Fred's. 'In this way', the novel notes, 'it was made clear that Middlemarch had never been deceived, and that there was no need to praise anybody for writing a book, since it was always done by somebody else' (833).

But, turning away from what the moment of inscription can't offer and looking at what it can suggest a broader reading of writing in the novel, to do with the nature of representation rather than concerns specific to Eliot. Neil Hertz suggests that *Middlemarch* faces a conundrum in reconciling the scale of its vision with the limits of what it can portray.<sup>17</sup> In this much-quoted passage from Chapter Twenty, the novel claims that the capacity of humans to comprehend the ubiquity and the normality of human suffering (in this case, a young woman beginning to regret her marriage) is necessarily limited, for our own psychological survival.

If we had a keen vision of all that is ordinary in human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow or the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity. (194)

The narrator might as well be discussing the limits of what a novel can incorporate. The novel is committed to articulating the delicate ecosystem within which we all exist, composed of innumerable interconnecting networks. But although one can gesture towards the breadth of all that is encompassed within these networks – of 'all that is ordinary in human life' – articulating it in its full scope is impossible. It is 'that roar which lies on the other side of silence', which is to say, it is momentous but unintelligible. Hertz suggests that Casaubon's doomed project is a neat illustration of the limits of how much can be represented. I have said earlier that authors in *Middlemarch* do not produce any work but in Casaubon's case it is more accurate to say that he does not produce any meaningful work. He scribbles away endlessly, refusing to consider consolidating and writing up his notes, always alighting upon another 'subject for annotation' (199). Rome's 'stupendous fragmentariness', and the 'glut of confused ideas' (193) that this produces, are paralleled in Casaubon's inability to sift through information and identify what is important. Instead, he attempts to incorporate everything, which results only in 'rows of notebooks'. In his view on the function of writing, Casaubon differs from Caleb Garth, who exasperatedly reminds Fred Vincy of his handwriting: 'What's the use of writing at all if nobody can understand it?' (566). Casaubon can't make sense of the mass of information available to him any more than he can make it make sense to a reader. One of the reasons that

Casaubon can't finish his project is that he cannot read German, and so cannot address the most recent scholarship on his subject.

Mr Brooke's pen is a clearer thinker than Casaubon's. As Barbara Hardy says, Mr Brooke's thinking organ is a sly joke about Eliot's authorship. It describes how, when inspiration hits, words can seem to the writer to arrive and arrange themselves of their own accord. (This is the case even when the writer possesses such limited talents as Mr Brooke and the text is in reality unimpressive.) I think that the passage has something to say not just about the creative moment but also about the building blocks of narrative, by which I mean the choices that have to be made regarding its focus. If Casaubon's pen demonstrates how narrative cannot work, Mr Brooke's pen shows how it can. Mr Brooke's pen identifies one strand from a disorderly jumble of thoughts – the desire to make a success of his pet project, the *Middlemarch Pioneer* – and gives it a material form. And Mr Brooke hopes for a similar course of winnowing and substantiation from Will Ladislav's pen:

While Mr. Brooke was sealing this letter, he felt elated with an influx of dim projects: – a young man capable of putting ideas into form [...] – who knew what might come of it all? (292)

The 'influx of dim projects' that floods into Mr Brooke's mind mirrors the haziness of Casaubon's 'glut of confused ideas'. What is needed is an insightful writer and editor to make sense of them. In the first instance, this is his pen – but the pen, of course, isn't really up to the job full-time. Will is the one who can make sense of Mr Brooke's opinions and his whims, turning 'ideas into form'. In its uncanny ability to pick out what is significant from a larger confusion, the thinking organ demonstrates how *Middlemarch* functions on a larger scale, following selected subjects at selected times and not others. We can't understand a 'roar', only examples within it, such as the blade of grass and the squirrel's heartbeat. In order to march on with the narrative, the novel must swathe itself 'with stupidity', which is to say, turn away from the staggering breadth of existence and choose a single path to follow instead. The moment of writing pins down decisively which small squeaks within the roar of humanity will be given a lasting form on the page, and which ones will fade away without trace.

#### Notes

- 1 This article is a version of a paper, also entitled 'Mr Brooke's Thinking Organ', given at the *Middlemarch* Conference at the Institute of English Studies, Senate House, University of London, 22 November 2014. I am grateful to Louise Lee for inviting me to speak there, to those who commented on that paper (I am thinking particularly of the suggestion that 'felicitously-worded sentences' might be cribbed from letter-writing manuals), and especially to Barbara Hardy for her comments and suggestions in correspondence.
- 2 *Middlemarch*, ed. by Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin Classics, 1994, repr. 2003), pp. 291-2. All further references are cited in the text.
- 3 *George Eliot: A Critic's Biography* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 156. Discussion of Mr Brooke's pen, 155-8. *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-78), vol. 3, p. 47.

- 4 *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. by R. T. Jones (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), p. 460. All further references are cited in the text.
- 5 *Daniel Deronda*, ed. by K. M. Newton and Graham Handley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 246-7.
- 6 There might be a reason beyond distaste for Gwendolen's repressing the inevitable implications of her letter. Louise Penner argues that Gwendolen shrinks away from men because she is the victim of sexual abuse by her stepfather. Rex Gascoigne's advances 'ma[ke] her curl up and harden like a sea-anemone at the touch of a finger' (67). "Unmapped Country": Uncovering Hidden Wounds in *Daniel Deronda*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2002), pp. 77-97. Judith Wilt first suggests that this as a possible reading, although she takes the view that it is more likely that Gwendolen has a fraught relationship with her stepfather in which she deeply resents his control over the household. "He Would Come Back": The Fathers of Daughters in *Daniel Deronda*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Dec., 1987), pp. 313-38.
- 7 *Networking: Communicating With Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 109.
- 8 Eliot pokes fun at how easily heroines of 'silly novels' acquire esoteric learning: 'we may conclude that she can pick up the Oriental tongues, to say nothing of their dialects, with the same aërial facility that the butterfly sips nectar. Besides, there can be no difficulty in conceiving the depth of the heroine's erudition when that of the authoress is so evident'. 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' in *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. by A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), pp. 140-63 (p. 143).
- 9 On the significance of written documents, Miller quotes Elizabeth Ermarth's observation on objects more generally that 'the objects [in Eliot's fiction] with which human beings must contend are intentional objects: not inert objects like rocks and stones and trees, but ones informed by consciousness'. Andrew H. Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 215; Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, quoted in Miller, originally in *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space and Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 225.
- 10 Linda K. Hughes has explored this theme in the novel in relation to Eliot's love of the novels of Walter Scott. She also writes persuasively about how *Middlemarch*'s first edition interspersed Eliot's text with advertisements for the kind of goods that Rosamund Vincy would love, embodying the constrictions that everyday life (including but not limited to financial concerns) places on artistic endeavours. 'Constructing Fictions of Authorship in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Volume 38, Number 2, Summer 2005.
- 11 Dorothea in this way resembles Romola, a woman who can't quite emerge from her

father's shadow as long as he is alive. Romola is given an ending in which the possibility of her fulfilling her ambitions is left wide open, whereas Dorothea is not. Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Writing and Sexual Difference (Winter, 1981) pp. 243-63 (p. 245). For more, see the now canonical *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New Haven, Conn., London: Yale University Press, 2000).

- 12 Elsewhere in the novel, the mastery of writing is a measure of success in a different way. Fred Vincy must learn, as Tom Tulliver did before him in *The Mill on the Floss*, to write legibly in his letters and bookkeeping if he is to be worthy of his preferred wife, Mary Garth. This requires discipline over the hands rather than a conjuring of words, but this plot line does hint that the virtues of dedication and focus are to some degree what is missing from the failed authors.
- 13 Many critics have identified the ways that Eliot's anxieties around authorship work their way into her fiction. For example, Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues that *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* is a simultaneous confessional and renouncement of professional anxieties. *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (Cornell University Press, 1996). For the most recent scholarship on this, see Fionnuala Dillane, *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2013) and Dermot Coleman, *George Eliot and Money: Economics, Ethics and Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- 14 *Adam Bede*, ed. Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [2001], repr. 2008), p. 5.
- 15 The first instalment of *Middlemarch* was published 1 December 1871, as Eliot was halfway through writing Book 4. Eliot found writing as her work was being serialized very difficult. She had made outlines, some of them highly detailed – but nevertheless she described the process afterwards as 'a sort of nightmare in which I have been scrambling on the slippery bank of a pool, just keeping my head above water'. *Letters*, vol. 5, p. 301.
- 16 *George Eliot's Serial Fiction* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1994).
- 17 *George Eliot's Pulse* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003). See the chapter on 'Recognizing Casaubon', pp. 20-41.