“Life Wants Padding”:

Food, Eating, and Bodies in George Eliot’s Novels

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ABSTRACT

Tess Stockslager

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This thesis uses six of the novels of George Eliot (those that take place entirely in rural England), works from the field of psychology, the concepts of realism and sympathy, and a metaphor of liquidity from Thomas Carlyle to explore several ways that body fat shapes identity and mediates relationships with others. Boundaries are the guiding concept: the chapters move from a demonstration of how boundaries between the self and others are created (padding), through a discussion of how sympathy can enable those boundaries to be broken (stuffing), to two case studies of characters whose boundaries of selfhood are in flux because of identity confusion. At the same time, the thesis demonstrates how Eliot pushes the boundaries of novelistic convention by portraying characters who do not fit into any easily defined role, and by refusing to create a tidy ending for all characters.

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Introduction: Fat Victorians and Their Ancestors

In public discourse today, obesity is a disease. Contestants on the NBC television program The Biggest Loser are there to be cured, under the supervision of dieticians, trainers, and other medical professionals. While the psychological aspect of the condition is occasionally given a marginal reference, the show places unmistakable emphasis on the physical dangers, and constantly stresses the practicality and almost universal applicability of the actions that can be taken to prevent or correct those dangers. The great assumption underlying the program is that obesity is an enemy, albeit a conquerable one, and nobody on the show entertains the possibility that weighing more than the standard considered healthy could enrich a person's life in any way. In particular, when contestants talk about the way that their body fat has affected their relationships with other people, the effects mentioned are invariably negative.

William Banting, a retired undertaker and author of the wildly popular 1863 Letter on Corpulence Addressed to the Public, sounds like a successful former contestant on The Biggest Loser. In his description of his old unhealthy self, he mentions the physical ailments (including "obnoxious boils," "a slight umbilical rupture," "acidity, indigestion, and heartburn") and, briefly, the mental pain of being a public spectacle. Then he narrates his search for a cure, which was unavailing for years until he consulted with a doctor about his hearing difficulties. The doctor, William Harvey, connected the problem with Banting's obesity and prescribed a low-carbohydrate diet. According to Banting's account, he began following that diet immediately, and without encountering any emotional obstacles or struggles with self-control, he soon reduced himself to a weight he considered normal and was cured of all of his health complaints. Banting repeatedly expresses his wonder at not having encountered this common-sense cure sooner, and though he tempers his enthusiasm by warning that the diet might not work for everyone, the

Letter gives the overwhelming impression that obesity is an illness that can be healed by practical means—not the result of a psychological trait or a sinful failure of self-control. Thus, the Victorian period, when so many old ideological icons were shattered and new ones shaped, saw the beginning of the Biggest Loser perspective on obesity.

The discourse of the NBC program is a bit more complicated, however. During several different episodes each season, the contestants face challenges called "temptations," a name that carries echoes of the Middle Ages, when gluttony was a sin. The physical discomforts resulting from gluttony were not ignored in those days, but the spiritual dangers were given equal weight, as in this catalog of horrors from the fourth-century ascetic Evagrius of Pontus:

> Gluttony is the mother of lust, the nourishment of evil thoughts, laziness in fasting, obstacle to asceticism, terror to moral purpose, the imagining of food, sketcher of seasonings, unrestrained colt, unbridled frenzy, receptacle of disease, envy of health, obstruction of the [bodily] passages, groaning of the bowels, the extreme of outrages, confederate of lust, pollution of the intellect, weakness of the body, difficult sleep, gloomy death. (qtd. in Prose 9-10)

Furthermore, gluttony, in the medieval mind, was inextricably intertwined with another of the seven deadly sins: lust. Francine Prose, author of a brief history of attitudes toward gluttony, offers a reason for this association: "Like lust, its sister transgression, the sin of gluttony reflects a constellation of complex attitudes toward the confluence of necessity and pleasure. Unlike the other deadly sins, lust and gluttony are allied with behaviors required for the survival of the individual and the species" (8). It is when these behaviors are practiced for sheer enjoyment that they begin to border on the immoral. The connection between lust and gluttony still appears today in the use of the word *appetite* to refer to each of these drives.

Gluttony and lust are also the two most physical of the deadly sins—even sloth can be mental. Though, as Christ taught, lust begins in the heart, it rarely stays there, and neither does gluttony. The consequences of these sins are also physical. As Prose points out, of all sins, gluttony is the one most unmistakably inscribed upon the body, and thus "the most excruciatingly public" (20). About the fourteenth century, a way to identify the consequences of sexual sin by looking at a body emerged. The identifying signs of syphilis appear in literary characters at least as early as Chaucer, and the sixteenth century scholar Girolamo Fracastoro gave the disease its name (Gilman 119). The sins of self-indulgence could now be personified in the degenerating body of a fat syphilitic. One of the roles of Shakespeare's Falstaff, that epitome of so many extremes, is that of the sick old man, his body literally falling apart because of overindulgence in sex, sack, and capons. The association of fat with dead, rotting flesh continued through the eighteenth century, particularly in the physically frank works of Jonathan Swift, and survived into the Victorian period, when pseudoscientific advice publications used terms like "superfluous adipose tissue" ("A Great Discovery" xiii). But by the time the Victorian weight-loss manuals appeared, the shift from the medieval identification of fat as evidence of sin to the primarily medical discourse of The Biggest Loser was almost complete.

As public perceptions of obesity and its treatment changed, portrayals of fat individuals in literature took on some characteristics that would remain static much longer. By the time the distasteful Parson Trulliber appeared in Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews in 1742, the figure of the comic fat man had a number of recognizable traits. Parson Trulliber has a loud, uncouth voice; he is short, which combined with his rotundity makes him look silly; he is assumed to have become fat through drinking ale; he takes care of hogs; he is insensitive, having no regard for others' pain or embarrassment; he verbally abuses his wife, and he is made to look even

sillier by appearing in his nightgown. The narrator compares him to Falstaff, but the parson's coarse practical joking and ineffectual ranting are far less dangerous than Falstaff's chaotic anarchy. In effect, the fat man has been castrated.

As the nineteenth century opened, the usual fat stereotypes remained at the disposal of the penny novelist and the popular journalist, as well as firmly lodged in the public mind. One of the first and greatest novelists of the century, Charles Dickens, transformed those stereotypes even as he employed them. In 1836 he achieved fame with The Pickwick Papers, essentially an escapist fantasy for the corpulent. The title character and his friends inhabit a magical version of England, where fat floats on air as well as on water, and where the larger the man, the more vast his capacity for wonder, adventure, enjoyment, and just indignation. Like Parson Trulliber, the fat men in Pickwick are harmless, but unlike him, they have kind intentions and are generally likable, though silly.

Dickens' next novel, however, offers an opposing picture. In Oliver Twist (1837), weight becomes a class issue as a whole society of well-off and well-fed adults manipulates the orphan's fate from above with an efficacy approaching omnipotence. Many of these adults, particularly the beadle Mr. Bumble, are more sinister versions of Parson Trulliber—the ridiculous, coarse, self-important fat man (or woman, more rarely). Most of the fat characters are seen working against Oliver's well-being, but one of the boy's benefactors, Mr. Losberne, "had grown fat: more from good humour than from good living" (182). In order to uphold his rigid binaries of rich and poor, good and evil, Dickens has to excuse Mr. Losberne from the charge of indulging too much in what the poor cannot have, by invoking the medically unsubstantiated stereotype, also surviving from Shakespeare's day, that pleasant spirits lead to a healthy plumpness. Mr. Losberne would fit more comfortably into Pickwick's world. Dickens'

two uneasily co-existing worlds, one where fat is fun and another where it is linked to an oppressive social regime, would be complicated as the century went on and the realist mindset entered the literary realm—in fact, Dickens himself would complicate them in his later novels. But these two worlds would shape the way obesity was viewed during the Victorian period, in fiction and non-fiction alike. The meaning of fat had come full circle, with a difference, from the medieval doctrines. Gluttony had shifted from a personal and serious sin, to a harmless and even comic character weakness, back to a sin. But in Dickens's interpretation, it was a social rather than a theological sin.

In 1857, twenty years after Pickwick and six years before Banting's remarkable corporeal conversion narrative, George Eliot published three stories in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. The stories were rereleased the following year as Scenes of Clerical Life, Eliot's first fictional work, in which she states most explicitly a theme that will reappear in each of her works and that constitutes one of her greatest gifts to the English novel: a redefinition of the term *hero* to refer to any prosaic person who makes small, daily sacrifices of self. The hero of a realist novel, according to Eliot, does not have to be handsome, high-born, or positioned at a crisis in history. In her first full novel, Adam Bede (1859), Eliot develops this theme further, having the narrator spend several pages in an apology for portraying the commonplace, ridiculous, and even distasteful elements of humanity, for "it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people, whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire" (239). The narrator's immediate reason for this lecture is an imagined readerly complaint about some uninspiring and doctrinally questionable advice given by Reverend Irwine, a "portly" (132) man who is kind but "neither laborious, nor obviously self-denying" (131). Throughout her career, Eliot established a body of characters like Irwine, good-natured, "inconsistent" (239) people whose love of personal peace

and comfort leads them to various kinds of compromise, more or less harmful to themselves and others.

Most of these are minor characters, but Harold Transome, who will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, is a prominent figure in Felix Holt: The Radical (1866). Harold's desire for mastery, coming into conflict with his good humor and sense of justice, tempts him to compromise. A subtle way in which Eliot displays Harold's struggle with compromise (as well as his compromised identity) is his overweight body. Eliot is not famous for creating fat characters like Dickens's, who are either unwitting innocents or crafty manipulators, and whose impression on readers is inseparable from their corpulence. Even a careful reader might not notice that in Eliot's novels, many of the prosaic heroes (and sometimes antiheroes, though never thorough-going villains) whose small choices shape their own and others' lives are either indulgently soft-bodied, respectably portly, or, occasionally, unmistakably fat.

Two concepts that characterize Eliot's writing provide some explanation for the presence of overweight individuals in her novels, and for the way they are portrayed: the concepts of realism and sympathy. George Levine defined nineteenth-century literary realism as the novelist's operational belief in an external reality, and his or her dedication to portraying, or at least attempting to find, that reality in fiction (6). Different writers' conceptions of that reality varied greatly, but the connecting link is that they were attempting to depict something that existed outside the mind. George Eliot was a self-conscious realist. In her early fiction, she explicitly defined her own work against the popular novels of the day, especially those written by women. A number of realist manifestos are interspersed throughout her first several works, all with the same general thrust as this one from Scenes of Clerical Life: "Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the

tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones" (37). In the previous paragraph, she claims to be writing about characters just like her readers' "adult male fellow-Britons" (36)—people who may as well actually exist, and this is what makes her a realist.

One evidence of Eliot's commitment to depicting an external reality is the fact that in general, aside from some inconsistencies, her characters have bodies. Unlike the abstractions who function as human beings in the works of many Victorian novelists, people in Eliot's novels bear children, become ill, eat, and exert themselves physically. In Oliver Twist, the Bumbles (one of whom is described in the text as fat and the other depicted that way in George Cruikshank's illustrations) ascend a ladder in a rickety tenement with graceful ease, without any shortness of breath, redness of face, or fear for anyone's safety—or so the reader can guess, since Dickens skips over the ascension entirely, moving them as if by magic from the bottom of the ladder to the top. Had Eliot's Bessy Cranage, a plump minor character in Adam Bede, climbed the same ladder, her exertions would have been clearly manifest. After she participates in a race at a birthday party, the narrator observes that her "large red cheeks and blowsy person had undergone an exaggeration of colour, which, if she had happened to be a heavenly body, would have made her sublime" (334). Fat people have no special powers in Eliot's world. Nobody's "adult male fellow-Britons" are quite like Pickwick, the man with the superhuman zest for life.

Many Victorian novelists can be classified as realists, but Eliot was arguably the most self-aware in her realism. Similarly, the concept of sympathy can be located in a number of literary works of the period, but no other novelist employs the concept as deliberately as Eliot. Her narrators, almost relentlessly, ask readers to imagine themselves in the same situation as a character. Again, the most explicit pleas for sympathy come in the early novels; in Adam Bede,

the presumably male narrator exhorts his male readers to examine themselves prior to judging: "Before you despise Adam as deficient in penetration, pray ask yourself if you were ever predisposed to believe evil of any pretty woman—if you ever *could*, without hard head-breaking demonstration, believe evil of the *one* supremely pretty woman who has bewitched you" (215). In the later novels, the narrator's touch becomes lighter, and the second-person admonitions turn into third-person, or sometimes first-person plural, generalities. The subject and object of sympathy sometimes shift as well. In the famous line from Middlemarch (1872), "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat" (124), the narrator is accounting for a potential *lack* of sympathy, on the reader's part, with a character who is crying.

As Audrey Jaffe defines the term throughout Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction, sympathy is not synonymous with pity; it may precede judgment. Eliot's narrators' pleas for sympathy usually do not ask for an immediate emotional response or decision from the reader. The essential quality of sympathy is that the subject mentally puts himself or herself in the same position as the object. Jaffe also demonstrates that in order for sympathy to take place, the subject must first identify himself or herself as essentially separate from, and in a different category from, the object (2-5). In order to sympathize with someone in poverty, one must define oneself as not poor. In order to sympathize with someone who is overweight, one must define oneself as not overweight. In this sense, sympathy and realism are complementary. If Eliot claims to be writing about the reader's fellow citizens, the reader and the character must be distinct, and this enables the reader to sympathize with the character.

Eliot's narrators never ask readers to imagine themselves as fat—not in so many words. But Eliot does provide insight into the minds of characters who are fat. This insight is invariably about some characteristic or state of mind not immediately related to that person's body weight—indecision, tolerance, envy, or impatience, for example. As with all of Eliot's psychological revelations, not just those of fat characters, the disclosed thoughts and feelings usually are not purely self-reflective; instead, they are in the context of that character's relationships with others. As Philip Fisher points out, "[n]ot every writer sets out to imagine society," but Eliot's novels are distinctly social (3-4). Though her characters often have definite (albeit skewed) feelings about themselves, their feelings about other people are just as revealing, and frequently even more revealing.

In this thesis I want to explore a particular metaphor for the way that body fat mediates interpersonal relationships in Eliot's novels. The original source of this metaphor is Thomas Carlyle, who wrote about the male self in terms that Herbert Sussman describes as "hydraulic" (19). Carlyle likens creative energy to clean water that rushes into the stagnant water of the passive self, "so the inner fountains of life may again begin, like eternal Light-fountains, to irradiate and purify your bloated, swollen, foul existence" (qtd. in Sussman 20). For Carlyle, the male self is always liquid (whether pure or contaminated), but Pamela K. Gilbert contends that in the writings of other Victorians, internal pulpiness is set in opposition to internal firmness, and that the imagery extends to the female self as well. She applies the metaphor to the contexts of disease and social revolt, arguing that a liquid, unformed body is a body that is out of control in some way and liable to overflow its boundaries (133-34). Neither Sussman nor Gilbert applies the metaphor to the overweight body, which by definition overflows the boundaries considered

natural, constantly spilling over into the space where the body comes into contact with other bodies.

I want to use several of George Eliot's novels to explore two different ways fat operates in that interpersonal space. First, fat can function as a wall, protecting the self from the danger of becoming too involved with other people—too much sympathy. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how characters in three of the novels—The Mill on the Floss (1860), Silas Marner (1861), and Middlemarch—create a sense of security for themselves using the "padding" (a term from Middlemarch) of body fat and food. Secondly, in a more socially productive function, fat can be analogous to sympathy, representing a point of connection between two discrete selves. The extra corporeality that the overweight body possesses can be shared with someone else who needs help becoming fully incarnate. In my third chapter, I will embody this concept in the Poysers from Adam Bede, whose large body size, I believe, directly relates to their actions of giving.

Besides the two hypotheses for how fat mediates the space between people, I want to use Carlyle's pulpiness language as a metaphor in relation to a particular character whose identity is unformed or in flux. My fourth chapter is a character study of Harold Transome, an overweight character in Felix Holt whose identity is suspended in the middle of several pairs of binaries. In the fifth chapter I will employ the same binaries to show that Harold is in many ways a reincarnation of a character from an earlier novel, Arthur Donnithorne in Adam Bede. Both men experience a sudden identity readjustment and are unable to reintegrate themselves into their respective communities. My argument in this chapter is that Arthur is a prime candidate for obesity in the near or distant post-novel future, and as with the other chapters, I will use both textual and psychological support.

Following the realist assumption that the world of a novel mirrors an external reality, I will apply principles and methodology from psychology and counseling to the characters in the novels, with the rationale that explanations that work for real people will, in many cases, also work for the characters. Eliot herself frequently employs the case study genre, sometimes spending an entire chapter detailing a character's life circumstances, sketching out a map of his or her psyche, and discussing the findings as they relate to the plot. Thus, many of my conclusions will be based on the narrator's interpretations rather than on an externally applied framework, but sometimes I will support my arguments with texts from the social sciences. The fourth and fifth chapters in particular will rely on terminology from the field of psychology to discuss Arthur Donnithorne and Harold Transome's identity adjustments. Throughout the thesis, my primary text in the psychology of obesity is Hilde Bruch's landmark 1973 work Eating Disorders: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Person Within.

In both the media and academia, discourse about bodies, and especially bodies with eating disorders, overwhelmingly focuses on female bodies, and thus to approach this topic from a feminist perspective would seem intuitive. The association between the topic and the critical bias results from a legitimate concern on the part of feminist critics to apply scrutiny to the reasons why the female body has always been an object of scrutiny. Nevertheless, I think the well-justified surge of attention to the history of the female body as spectacle has led to a neglect of inquiry into the equally prevalent (though, of course, with different implications) tradition of the male body as spectacle, in particular the obese male body. As Sander L. Gilman argues, "[I]n terms of the widest range of historical and cultural interest, it was the fat boy who claimed center stage in the obsession about fat bodies for most of Western history" (4). Most of the overweight bodies I will analyze in this thesis are male bodies. Furthermore, none of the objects

of analysis is from the lower classes, and they are all English (at least demographically—I hope to demonstrate that the class and ethnic identity of at least one character is far more complex than his surface designation). Despite their homogeneity, my goal is not to make general assumptions about a population of overweight, predominantly male, middle-to-upper class, nineteenth century English citizens, but to consider how individual characters illustrate the role of fat as social mediator and the metaphor of internal pulpiness. I am not working from a feminist, Marxist, or post-colonial perspective, because my primary purpose is not to analyze the characters as members of a category.

In defining whether a character is overweight, self-identification and identification by other characters will be given the greatest consideration. Eliot's physical descriptions of people are not photographic, so it is impossible to know if a particular character would be medically diagnosed as overweight or obese. If Martin Poyser's companions designate him the largest man at the table, then he is, for the purposes of this study. Harold Transome repeatedly identifies himself as either fat or getting to that point, and this evident preoccupation is much more important than whether or not his body mass index matches up with his self-description.

For the same basic reason, unless otherwise noted (as in the discussion of the binaries in chapters four and five), I will not distinguish among the degrees from marginally overweight to morbidly obese. Neither the characters nor the narrators use these gradations, so I will not attempt to assign them. The terms *corpulent*, *fat*, *obese*, *overweight*, and their related nouns will be used interchangeably. Because Eliot's narrators consistently take a tone of respect toward their characters, including fat characters, I have tried to follow that pattern by avoiding terms that sound trivializing or that are associated with children (except where children are being

discussed), animals, or caricatures in the tradition of Parson Trulliber (though occasionally I will use a word like *rotund* if the narrator uses it).

Unlike Dickens's, Eliot's work did not noticeably change the way fat people were imaged or discussed, because there is no single code for interpreting obesity in her novels. Nevertheless, I do not believe the overweight characters in her novels are that way by accident. Eliot's novels, as Philip Fisher demonstrates, are about how people relate to each other. As much as today's pseudo-medical dieting discourse attempts to ignore the fact, body fat shapes relationships. With the help of Eliot's novels and Carlyle's metaphor, I hope to offer a new perspective on how it does that.

Padding: How Boundaries Are Built

Hilde Bruch quotes an overweight adolescent whose concept of the way his body works sounds strikingly like Carlyle's metaphor of liquidity:

> I really am afraid of any injury. I thought my body was like a thin layer of skin full of jelly. If you got hurt, the jelly would come out. I thought if you got hurt, *all* of it would come tumbling out—that there would be just a puddle of jelly or pea soup and a balloon of skin left around my bones. I did not really believe in what we learned in biology about bones and muscle. I thought it was only jelly hardened. I thought everything would just flow out—that I would become empty. I was so afraid of this emptiness; that was what led to the real stuffing. (92)

This young man's physiological model contains a contradiction. He seems to identify his excess fat with an internal liquidity that could be released, no matter how great or small the volume of liquid, if the skin were punctured. At the same time he believes, as the last sentence indicates, that eating more will somehow protect him from the spilling out that he dreads. There seems to be a disjuncture in his mind between his body fat, which to him is a volatile and unreliable substance, and food, which means security.

Bruch also gives the case of an overweight woman who consciously used food to numb the pain of past hurts: "She was afraid that the hostility of others and their angry words would rattle around inside her and keep on wounding her. By stuffing herself with food she would cover her sore inside, like with a poultice, and she would not feel the hurt so much" (92). While this woman's imagery is less Carlylean than the teenage boy's, her use of food as a layer between the self and hurt is similar. Yet the woman's self-defense strategy takes on an added dimension: while the young man expresses his fear of abstract "injury," the woman states

explicitly that the source of the hurt that she has already internalized is other people. It can also be assumed that she would wish to protect herself against future hurt from other people, though she does not directly state such.

Both of Bruch's cases contain the word *stuffing*, a term that seems to imply that the subjects are using food deliberately to change their own shape, to make themselves bigger and softer and more able to absorb shocks. While Bruch elsewhere gives cases of people who believe that their large size makes them better able to cope with relationships and the vicissitudes of life (97), the individuals in the two cases above are not using food exactly in this way. Rather than stuffing, they seem to be padding themselves, whether from the inside or from the outside, to protect themselves from either past hurt or future danger. They do not see their body fat as part of their essential selves; rather, in the woman's case, it is a thick bandage to heal her emotional wounds, and in the young man's case, it is a liquid that fills him, preventing a frightening emptiness. This chapter will explore the ways in which characters in George Eliot's novels use padding to protect themselves from the cold indifference or harsh judgment of other individuals or society as a whole. Most of the characters discussed do this with food, but not necessarily with body fat. Several of them are not fat at all, as far as the narrator discloses. But it is impossible to talk about fat as a protective mechanism without talking about food as a protective mechanism, for the two are tightly intertwined both physiologically and in the minds and emotions of the people who use that mechanism—though, as the opening quotation from the young man demonstrates, the identification might be complicated.

Because eating is one of the first activities a baby participates in, it remains for adults a deep, ingrained part of existence that is attached to emotions much stronger than those a biological process would seem to evoke. And because the first food most babies eat is provided

by a person with whom the child has a strong bond of intimacy, eating becomes inscribed upon the psyche as an activity connected with security and affection. As literary critic and food writer Cristina Mazzoni puts it, "From the milk of her breasts to the nutritious fares that build our growing childish bodies, . . . mother's food is best: it is familiar, it is comforting, it is, above all perhaps, safe" (146). Many people try to preserve or reclaim a sense of security using food, whether or not that food is actually provided by or consciously associated with the mother. For the characters in George Eliot's novels, food represents material wealth, affection, a sense of normalcy, and protection against the realities of life—all forms of perceived security.

Eliot's fictional emotional eaters are products of their time. The nineteenth century was a time of great insecurity in England. Multitudes of agricultural and industrial laborers were inhabiting inadequate shelters and certainly were not eating well, due to conditions that were unfortunate (such as the Irish potato famine of the late 1840s) and unjust (such as the Corn Laws of 1815-1846, which inflated food prices). Furthermore, news early in the century of revolutions on the European continent and war across the Atlantic instilled a dread of similar uprisings in the minds of the English. A revolution might mean that the landowners and manufacturers would be put into the same food-insecure position as those who worked for them, a possibility which may have given those who were already eating well an impetus to eat as if they did not know where their next meal was coming from.

As the century went on, the threat of violence became overshadowed by philosophical and religious insecurity, as controversial writers such as Charles Darwin and the German biblical critics whose works George Eliot translated cast doubt upon the Victorians' deep-seated beliefs. Because of food's connection with childhood, the time when a person formulates concepts of

what is comfortable and safe, eating can be used to restore a sense of normalcy to a life—or a nation—that has been radically thrown off balance.

Though it would take extensive psychoanalytical criticism of a wide range of Victorian texts and cultural artifacts in order to show that the English of this time period used food as a means of security, it is certain that they thought and wrote voluminously about food, even as they were manifesting the beginnings of the medically rationalized horror of gaining weight that came to fruition in the twentieth century. The Victorian publication market, much like that of today, was flooded, on one hand, with cookbooks for all purposes and social classes and with literature that celebrated the pleasures of the table, and on the other hand, with medical treatises and advice manuals warning against the dangers of corpulence and recommending methods to keep the body in check. Again, the idea of equilibrium is prevalent: to eat well but to eat in moderation is to be normal. Many of the century's most popular cookbooks, even those written by celebrity chefs like Alexis Soyer (who cooked for a prestigious gentleman's club but entitled his highly practical cookbook The Modern Housewife), concentrated on simple, inexpensive, and nutritious fare. They also emphasized traditional English dishes over foreign imports and fashionable innovations. The cookbook industry was one layer of the great wall of health, nationalism, frugality and prudence that defined the limits of what it meant to be English in the nineteenth century. It was padding against external encroachment, and it disciplined the tastes of English citizens, providing a check on internal deviation.

One of the great unwritten doctrines of the Victorian age was a rigid dualism between soul and body. Though the human body can hardly be ignored, the Victorians tried their hardest to deflect attention away from the body and onto the abstract and Platonically beautiful soul, as exemplified in the concept of woman made famous in Coventry Patmore's The Angel in the

House, as well as in the idealized accounts of sufferers from consumption, such as Helen Burns in Jane Eyre, whose bodies gradually faded away as their souls struggled to break free. In striking and often shocking contrast to the prevailing Gnostic heresy were George Eliot's realist novels. Eliot's characters have bodies. Some are beautiful, some are commonplace, some are deformed, but none are silhouettes or concepts. Sometimes this insistence on corporeality got Eliot into trouble. Biographer Kathryn Hughes writes of Eliot's publisher's comments on The Mill on the Floss: "Blackwood had still not got the hang of her particular brand of realism. Ever the family publisher, bits of description struck him as gratuitously course. He . . . objected to Mrs. Moss as 'a patient, loosely hung, child-producing woman'" (229).

Because her characters have bodies, they can become ill, they require sleep—and they cannot do without proper sustenance. Eliot shows her characters eating food and experiencing physical and emotional reactions. The wealthy people in Silas Marner end up with gout as a natural consequence of their rich diets; in the same novel, the gift of sweet porridge causes the abandoned Eppie to "lift her blue eyes with a wide quiet gaze at Silas" (111). Eliot's realism is not only physical but also, perhaps even more so, psychological. In subtle ways, she demonstrates how food can make people feel secure.

The use of food to signal affection—a companionable, safe manifestation of love—is demonstrated in the frequent arguments and reconciliations of young Tom and Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss. After the fight that takes place as soon as Tom returns from boarding school and enters the novel, Tom finds Maggie in the attic where she has retreated, bringing an offering of cake. Upon his encouraging her to eat, "Maggie's sobs began to subside, and she put out her mouth for the cake and bit a piece; and then Tom bit a piece, just for company, and they ate together and rubbed each other's cheeks and brows and noses together while they ate . . ."

(43). United in the intensely incarnate and even, to use the narrator's word, "humiliating" act of eating the same piece of cake, Tom and Maggie demonstrate a level of comfort with one another that will lower as they grow older.

In a similar scene, after Maggie has impulsively cut off her own hair and is ashamed to reveal herself to the family downstairs, Tom once again fetches her from the attic, this time attempting to entice her with the delights of the dinner being served below. When it seems as though she will refuse to come, Tom still does not want her to miss out on what has clearly been a highlight of his own day, and he offers her another love-gift: "'Shall I bring you a bit o' pudding when I've had mine? . . . and a custard and things?'" (72). Tom has learned this tactic of holding out food as an impetus for reconciliation from his own mother, whom, as the narrator emphasizes repeatedly, he resembles in a number of senses. Later on in the same chapter, Mrs. Tulliver attempts to quell an escalating argument by "pleadingly" exhorting Mrs. Glegg to eat: "'Sister, . . . drink your wine, and let me give you some almonds and raisins'" (79). But in this case, the use of food to effect peace has less to do with the sharing of affection than with a domestic woman's inability to find a more abstract solution to a dispute, leading her to articulate her desire by throwing food at the problem. Food temporarily stops the mouth of argument.

Earlier in the novel, Mrs. Tulliver's concerns regarding her son's placement at Mr. Stelling's school lie solely in the domestic realm. She worries about the linens, a foreshadowing of her breakdown over the sale of her own linens later on, and she hopes that Stelling has a wife, not a housekeeper. But her most touching appeal is that Tom get enough to eat. She asks, "But do you think they'd give the poor lad twice o' pudding? . . . He's such a boy for pudding as never was; an' a growing boy like that—it's dreadful to think o' their stintin' him" (24). She has no fear that her son will literally starve; she simply wants to make sure he gets a double helping of

his favorite food. Mrs. Tulliver is not disappointed in the wife (as she turns out to be) of Mr. Stelling: "[F]inding that Mrs. Stelling's views as to the airing of linen and the frequent recurrence of hunger in a growing boy, entirely coincided with her own . . . she expressed great contentment to her husband when they drove away . . ." (145). Once again, food represents affection: perhaps Mrs. Tulliver feels that if she gives Tom up into the hands of a woman who will feed him just like she does, it will be as though she were not giving him up at all.

Not long afterward, as Tom is returning to school, dejected, from a holiday, he uses food to quiet his anxiety. He is carrying a package of sugar candy for Laura, Mr. and Mrs. Stelling's daughter. While picturing Laura's happiness, "to give the greater keenness to these pleasures of imagination, he took out the parcel, made a small hole in the paper and bit off a crystal or two, which had so solacing an effect under the confined prospect and damp odours of the gig-umbrella, that he repeated the process more than once on his way" (168-69). Hard candy is not generally classified as a comfort food, but it is associated with childhood, and eating it might be a way for the pre-adolescent Tom to forestall his fears about growing up. Even more significantly, Laura, the intended recipient, is a toddler. This candy is apparently an appropriate treat for very small children, and its "solacing" effect on Tom might be wrapped up with his memories of the time when he was barely separate from his mother, with whom, the narrator is clear, he has a bond much closer than the bond between Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver. Here, food is an anchor to a past period of security.

But food can also be a site of judgment in The Mill on the Floss. From Tom's first appearance in the novel, bringing wrath upon the head of Maggie for killing his rabbits by neglect, he displays an inflexible standard of justice that usually takes precedence, at least chronologically, over his affection for Maggie. One such painful scene of retribution begins with

another companionable eating event: the siblings are sitting in a tree eating jam puffs. One pastry is left over, and Tom divides it with his knife and gives the best piece to Maggie, making a show of his generosity that is lost on the ingenuous Maggie. But after eating his own half, Tom, who is—in one of Eliot's intensely corporeal phrases—"feeling in himself a capacity for more" (50), decides that Maggie should have offered him some of her own. He calls her a "greedy thing" (50), denouncing what he perceives as her lack of self-control, which he will blame much later for her secret meetings with Philip Wakem and scandalous trip with Stephen Guest. To condemn a person's lack of self-control in regard to sex or food is to strike at the roots of what it means to be human. It is to imply, intentionally or not, that the out-of-control person has allowed his or her biological, or animal, appetites to override his or her human rationality. Thus food, which can be a tool for demonstrating affection, becomes a weapon of dehumanization, destroying rather than creating a sense of security. Ultimately, the attempts of characters in The Mill on the Floss to protect themselves with food lead to bitter hostility.

In Silas Marner, on the other hand, characters use food to help them forget their past disappointments. The narrator—according to Eliot's insistence that every person, no matter how apparently commonplace, has his secret hopes and joys and pains—invites the reader to imagine that the country gentlemen they find so prosaic may have once loved a woman passionately, but that the love affair may have ended in tragedy:

> and then what was left to them, especially when they had become too heavy for the hunt, or for carrying a gun over the furrows, but to drink and get merry, or to drink and get angry, so that they might be independent of variety, and say over again with eager emphasis the things they had said already any time that twelvemonth? (30)

Once these Midlands squires have gotten past their ardent youthful days, their lives fall into a pattern in which eating and drinking too much play a prominent role. Eliot's narrator certainly seems to imply that this hopeless pattern is a last resort in a life that has been robbed of its vitality.

But the feasting in which these men indulge is not simply a case of what psychologists have called "emotional eating"—the "confusion of food with feelings" (Abramson 3). A different form of the pursuit of security comes into play here as well: the need to be assured and to demonstrate to others that one possesses material wealth. The distinction most emphasized in the novel between landowners like Squire Cass and cottagers like Silas Marner is not only the ability but also the responsibility of the former to host ostentatious open houses during the holidays, at which the food and drink are of central importance: "the rich ate and drank freely, accepting gout and apoplexy as things that ran mysteriously in respectable families, and the poor thought that the rich were entirely in the right of it to lead a jolly life" (23). Later, the narrator lists "social duties" that are accepted inevitabilities of owning property; among these are "urging your guests to eat and drink too much out of hospitality, and eating and drinking too much in your neighbour's house to show that you liked your cheer" (102). So for Silas Marner, eating roast meat is an occasional pleasure he allows himself to enjoy, but for his wealthy neighbors, eating roast meat in large quantities while serving it to as many people as possible is a cultural expectation. Without the performance of this convention, one cannot feel secure in his own financial and social status.

Though many of George Eliot's characters display a belief in the power of food to deliver a sense of security, only one conceptualizes this belief in words. Mr. Vincy, mayor of Middlemarch, first propounds his amateur medical theory in these terms: "'It's an uncommonly

dangerous thing to be left without any padding against the shafts of disease'" (60). Later, in responding impatiently to Mr. Bulstrode's invitation to a more ascetic diet, Mr. Vincy shortens his philosophy into a pithy aphorism: "'Life wants padding'" (82). On a physical level, Vincy's words come to seem prophetic: it is Bulstrode, who lunches on nothing but water and a sandwich, who is repeatedly described as appearing sickly as the novel progresses (e.g., 379, 420, 449). Of course, the reader is led gradually to understand that Bulstrode's ill health has less to do with his spare frame than with the guilt and anxiety that escalate in his life beginning with the arrival of Raffles.

Though Mr. Vincy's maxim is purportedly about protection from illness, not from unwanted interaction with other people, it provides an apt metaphor for the doctrine of sympathy. Middlemarch contains perhaps Eliot's most famous line regarding sympathy. I quoted it in the first chapter in the introductory discussion of sympathy, but it should be quoted again: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence" (124). However, as critic Bert G. Hornback puts it, "we don't die of such an overdose of understanding" (610). In the next sentence, Eliot employs an image that evokes Mr. Vincy's "padding": "As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity" (124). What is here called stupidity, which, according to Hornback, appears most often in the novel as selfishness (610), can be compared to an extra layer of flesh that protects one's fragile inner parts from the hard knocks of life. Avoiding too much involvement in other people's lives is a way to avoid getting hurt.

Edward Abramson, a psychologist and psychiatrist, writes about women who deliberately or subconsciously gain weight in order to deflect unwanted sexual advances. He calls this

phenomenon "Fat as Armor" (156-57). While Abramson only shows how this coping mechanism applies to the avoidance of sex, Mr. Vincy's physical axiom and Eliot's psychological principle combine to indicate that food, eating, and body weight can be used as a shield against a myriad of life's vicissitudes, creating a sense of security. Strangely, Middlemarch does not offer an example of a character who does this—even Mr. Vincy is never really shown practicing his own theory. But the novel is full of defense mechanisms: Lydgate uses his dominant position as husband to defend himself against Rosamond's strong will; Fred Vincy defends himself against a perceived romantic threat from Farebrother by acting as if he has already been defeated; Bulstrode attempts to defend himself against God's judgment by trying to atone for his sin. The default response in Middlemarch to threats, judgments, and any violation of the boundary between individuals seems to be to throw up a wall rather than to attempt understanding. For the most part, though, the walls are verbal or otherwise abstract. Middlemarch is not Dorlcote Mill, and its citizens are not Mrs. Tulliver, who builds her walls out of food.

Middlemarch also contains a character type that shows up only in Eliot's last novels: the disembodied, or partially embodied, soul. Dorothea Brooke, like Daniel Deronda, has an active and well-documented interior life. For this reason, it might seem appropriate to call her a fleshed-out character, except that *flesh* is the wrong word: Dorothea barely has a body. The first sentence of the novel refers to her physical appearance, but it is an abstract description, referring to a quality of beauty: "Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress" (5). The narrator gives no clue about the color of the hair, the shape of the face, or any of those details that the narrators of the earlier novels seemed to consider important. Dinah Morris in Adam Bede is a spiritualized character, especially as compared to the

unmistakably physical Hetty Sorrell in the same novel, but in the first scene where Dinah appears, she is described as being slender and having "grey eyes," "a small oval face," and "pale reddish hair" (79-80). Each of her facial features is delineated, even to the color and shape of her eyebrows and lashes. A reader can imagine a fairly accurate picture of Dinah, but not of Dorothea. It is no wonder, then, that Anna Krugovoy Silver mentions Dorothea along with Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and Dickens's Little Dorrit and Agnes Wickfield in a list of characters "defined in part by their slight, pale bodies" (10). Dorothea is slight and pale not necessarily because the narrator describes her that way, but because the narrator barely describes her at all; thus, her body fades into the Middlemarch landscape even as her thoughts and emotions largely shape the novel. Her spirituality is brought to the reader's attention by comparisons to St. Theresa (55, 514).

What is even more interesting is that Krugovoy Silver mentions Dorothea's incorporeality in the introduction to her book Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body. She is setting up an argument that characters with unobtrusive bodies like Dorothea's represent the Victorian ideal of "the sexually pure and ethereal woman" (10), the woman that many women and girls starved themselves in order to become. The thinness of the ideal Victorian woman was associated with self-sacrifice, which involves exposing the self to possible injury from outside, rather than building a wall. Dorothea stands in contrast to the majority of the characters in Middlemarch because she opens herself up to other people, but does not feed on them. She is both fascinated by and concerned for Casaubon, Lydgate, and Ladislaw, and in reaching out to them she makes herself vulnerable and indeed ends up being disappointed by Casaubon's coldness and Lydgate's failure to raise himself out of crippling depression. Ladislaw ultimately

lives up to her interest in him, but along the way he too disappoints her, when she sees him in a compromising situation with Rosamond.

Dorothea's self-chosen vulnerability could be viewed as a form of masochism similar to anorexia, but she seems to have the narrator's approval and that of most readers and critics. One reason for this is that while the wall-builders in Middlemarch almost all fail in their attempts to protect themselves, Dorothea is successful in the end. After a series of false starts in her lifelong dream of making a career of improving other people's lives, she finally is rewarded with " a life filled . . . with a beneficent activity," even though that activity mostly takes the form of "wifely help" in Ladislaw's Parliamentary efforts (513). Fittingly for the woman who has very little body of her own, she makes her impact on the world through an intermediary. Yet she seems to be satisfied, much to the chagrin of feminist critics. Another reason that the narrator and most readers view Dorothea with approval is that she lives out Eliot's doctrine of sympathy more fully than almost any other character in any of the novels. Her sympathy leaves her not utterly exposed to hurt, because, according to Jaffe's definition, sympathy cannot take place unless a boundary is established between the self and others. Dorothea does not build walls to separate herself from others; she does not need to, because she is already able to conceive of herself as an individual, as is evident from her active interior life and deliberate self-reflection. Because of her strong self-concept, she can open herself up to others without fear of losing her own identity.

The emotional eaters discussed in this chapter—Mrs. Tulliver and her children with their demonstrations of affection and reconciliation, the landowners of Silas Marner with their displays of financial security, and Mr. Vincy with his doctrine of self-protection—live in microcosm their society's practice of using food to keep out danger and hold close what is valued. At the same time, they combat the Victorian spirit of Gnosticism with their manifest

corporeality, and illustrate Eliot’s concern for portraying real human beings and their prosaic problems.

Stuffing: How Sympathy Crosses Boundaries

Fat brings people together. Often overweight people come together in efforts to defeat what they perceive as a common enemy. Weight Watchers is only the most well-known of the many organizations designed to combat obesity itself. Less known, and less socially acceptable, are the organizations like the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance and its more militant counterpart the Fat Underground, which was active during the 1970s (Gilman 1-2). For the members of these groups, the common enemy is external. NAAFA calls itself a "human rights organization," and its website presents statistics supporting the statement that "[f]at discrimination is one of the last publicly accepted discriminatory practices" (National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance). From the essentially negative and reactive mission of these organizations (both the ones united against fat and the ones united against discrimination) can develop a positive camaraderie. The friends in W. Somerset Maugham's story "The Three Fat Women of Antibes," (1952) whose "fat . . . had brought them together" (58) while they were all under the care of the same reducing doctor, are just one example of a kind of relationship that occurs frequently in real life.

If fat brings fat people together, it often has a repelling effect between people who are fat and people who are not. NAAFA reports that in a survey of nurses, "12% say they would prefer not to touch obese patients," and that in a survey of teachers, "43% agreed with the statement 'most people feel uncomfortable when they associate with obese people'" (National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance). This repulsion is different from the padding discussed in the last chapter, because this time the fat person is not deliberately using fat as a barrier against interpersonal contact. In this case, it is the thin person who objects to the encroachment of the fat person's body past its socially-defined limits. Gilbert, working from Carlyle's pulpiness

metaphor, demonstrates that the Victorians had a similar fear of bodies breaking boundaries: "Individuality . . . was based on a model of the body that contained and separated itself from the bodies of others, but the sick, undisciplined body threatened to sink the individual into the unreasoning mass of continuous, imbruted embodiment" (134). In the same way, the corpulent body poses a threat to the thin person who is afraid of too much corporeality—who hates the very idea of incarnation. Loathing of the body is at least as old as the first-century Gnostics, who refused to believe that Jesus Christ could have had anything so vulgar as a body, and it exists still among anorexic individuals who dream of disembodiment. Breaking free of the body was an ideal among many Victorians, including Thomas Carlyle, who in his Reminiscences pictured intellectual enlightenment as an out-of-body experience, the spirit flying "into the eternal blue of ether" (179). For those who think the body is at best a hindrance to spiritual freedom and at worst a corrupting influence, the more body that exists, the greater the evil. Thus, the overweight body is the greatest threat to spiritual and intellectual purity.

Of course, not everyone thinks this way. NAAFA, in accordance with its mission of raising awareness of discrimination, presents only the public's negative perceptions of overweight people and the desired level of contact with them. It does not deal with the apparently contradictory phenomenon of the thin person who likes to be around certain particular fat people because they make him or her feel safe, loved, and accepted. The type of the warm, giving, eminently huggable fat person is necessarily an oversimplification, but it seems to be based on more or less universal experience, judging by its frequent appearance in literature, film, and advertising. Often it appears as female of middle age or older, a matriarch type, who expresses love by cooking for people and then listening to their problems. This is the sort of person that children, or adults who are reduced to childlikeness by pain and tears, gravitate

toward when they want to be enveloped, the sort of person one could hide inside, because he or she has extra corporeality to share.[1]

These social characteristics are not only observed but also self-assigned. Overweight people, especially women, often describe themselves as generous to a fault. People who accept the pathological explanation of obesity, identifying their body size as the result of insufficient physical care of themselves, sometimes associate their weight gain with neglect of their own bodies in favor of taking care of others. They also cite their desire to stay healthy so that they can continue taking care of their loved ones as a reason for wanting to lose weight. This could be interpreted as a conflation of their own needs with the needs of others—a rejection of boundaries altogether. This conflation could result from deliberate self-deception or from incomplete psychological development; in other words, such people may have never learned to view themselves as fully distinct from others. These complementary attitudes shape the predominant discourse of cause and effect used in The Biggest Loser and its corresponding website. In the contestant profiles available on the website (which are narrated in third person but seem to reflect the contestants' own views about their bodies and personalities), one woman is described as a "very outgoing, friendly, and caring" person who "has always put her friends and family before herself, which has left her with little time to care for her own needs, including a proper diet," and another contestant "has to do this [lose weight] for not only himself, but also for his wife and three children." Similar language is used to talk about numerous contestants from all seasons of the program. Within the health and illness discourse of The Biggest Loser, generosity is transformed from a desirable character trait to a contributor to obesity and a motivator for being cured.

In the last chapter, I quoted two case studies of overweight patients which used the term *stuffing* to refer to the subjects' eating practices, but I concluded that a more accurate term for the behavior would be *padding*, a term borrowed from Middlemarch. In this chapter, the word *stuffing* is more appropriate, because the fat characters who will be discussed do not use food and body fat as external defense mechanisms; rather, their fat is part of who they are. They are integrated persons, with no disjuncture between their bodies and their essential selves. In terms of eating, *stuffing* usually has the negative connotation of indiscriminately shoving down food to the point of surfeit, but the denotative definition of the word is almost identical to that of *filling*, a term used in Scripture to refer to the equipping of a saint with blessings, power, and righteousness from God, as in Ephesians 3.19, where Paul prays that his readers "may be filled with all the fullness of God." Shakespeare uses the term *stuffed* in a similar way in Much Ado about Nothing (1599): "A lord to a lord, a man to a man, stuff'd with all honorable virtues" (I.i.56-57).

This chapter will reverse the pathological explanation for the connection between body fat and generosity. Instead of fat being a negative consequence of too much investment in others' lives, this chapter will identify fat as the cause of being able to break the boundaries of other people's lives through fellowship and giving. Only the person who is filled can spill over. To understand fat in this way is to evoke an application of the term that has now fallen almost entirely out of usage. The word *fat* originated from the Old English adjective *fætte*, meaning "well fed, plump." Within this term is the potential for both the current most common usage—fat as a characteristic of the body, usually an adjective—and a second meaning—fat as bounty, abundance, or plenty, usually a noun. The two definitions grew up alongside each other. In an Anglo-Saxon book of riddles (c. 1000), the first definition took a negative turn toward the

connotation it usually carries today, as *fat* was used as an adjective referring to excess or corpulence. In 1393, in Langland's Piers Plowman, the term was used for the first time to refer to the fertility of land ("Fat."). The dual definitions continued into modern English. In the King James Bible, the first definition appears in Judges 3.17: "Eglon was a very fat man," and the second appears in Genesis 45.18: "I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land."

The fertility of the land, the bounty of generosity, and bodily abundance come together in the Poysers, the ideal farming family in Adam Bede. Mrs. Poyser is Eliot's closest approximation to the warm, food- and hug-dispensing matriarch. Mrs. Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss might seem to be a better representative, since she is frequently described as a stout woman while Mrs. Poyser is not explicitly identified as such, but Mrs. Tulliver's familial love is mixed up with a great deal of feeble selfishness. She is never a strong mother, and after her husband's financial failure, she shows emotional and even mental instability. Mrs. Poyser, on the other hand, remains in control of herself and retains her position of strength throughout the crisis that visits her household. Though she does not present herself as a warm person, behind her railing lectures and sharp opinions is an intense devotion to her family. While there is no evidence that she is a fat woman—on the contrary, the narrator introduces her as "well-shapen" and "light-footed" (136)—she is significant to this chapter because of her strongly incarnational religious discourse and her concern that people be fed.

Furthermore, while she may not be particularly large, the members of her family are. Her husband is "a portly figure" (205) whom the other tenant farmers, in settling a dispute about who should sit at the head of the table, place in that position of honor because he is the "broadest," and sitting at the head "'he won't take up other folk's room'" (321). The Poysers have two sons,

ages seven and nine, who are "as much like their father as a very small elephant is like a very large one" (248-49). The comparison is primarily in reference to their Sunday clothes, which resemble their father's in style, but the choice of the elephant as the vehicle of comparison cannot be insignificant. The youngest Poyser, three-year-old Totty, is also the subject of an animal simile, having "an amount of fat on the nape of her neck, which made her look like the metamorphosis of a white sucking pig" (139). While this comment could be applied to numerous toddlers and does not necessarily distinguish Totty as an anomaly, later Mrs. Irwine exclaims upon seeing Totty with her mother, "'Bless me! what a fat child that is she is holding on her knee!" (332).

The Poysers give an impression of bodily abundance, but not unhealthy superfluity. Often when the narrator makes a reference to the size of one of the family members, the comment is in close proximity to an expression implying health and vitality, both physical and mental; for example, when Mr. Poyser is introduced as "portly," he is shortly afterward portrayed as having "a predominant after-supper expression of hearty good nature" (205), and later, his "round good-humoured face and large person" are "a goodly sight" (552). The Poysers' body fat is not like the dead flesh of Falstaff and the Victorian pseudo-scientific weight loss publications. It is closer to the magically buoyant fat of Pickwick and his friends. But the Poysers do not float on air; they are rooted to the earth. The pattern of their lives is inextricably connected to the land and the food it produces. In the chapter in which Mrs. Poyser first appears, almost every speech she makes contains a reference to food and its production, no matter what the conversation is nominally about. She represents the life of a farming family as one of great worry and little sleep as a result of "'thinking as the cheese may swell, or the cows may slip their calf, or the wheat may grow green again i' the sheaf'" (144). Even her figures of speech are

about work and food: "'[A]fter all, at th' end o' the year, it's like as if you'd been cooking a feast and had got the smell of it for your pains'" (144). The reader receives the impression that Mrs. Poyser's lamentations might be exaggerated, however: Her family members' bodies hint that the farm is doing well.

The Poysers are large people, but not so large that they are unable to work hard. They talk about food a great deal and seem to care deeply about food, a feeling that is intimately connected with their love for the land and its fruits, for good work, and for their family. Through the Poysers, Eliot seems to hint that keeping oneself well-fed can motivate one to share the bounty with others, which the Poysers do by reaching out to less fortunate family members. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Poyser and their children, two other people live at the Hall Farm. One is Mr. Poyser's elderly father, who is "shrunken" now but resembles his son (207) and thus may have had a "portly figure" himself once. The other lodger is Hetty Sorrell, Mr. Poyser's niece, a seventeen-year-old orphan who is characterized from her first appearance in the novel with the kind of beauty associated with health and abundance. In her first scene, she is in the dairy molding a pound of butter, a place and occupation bespeaking bounty of a specifically earthy and even female type. Throughout the novel, the narrator repeatedly refers to the roundness of Hetty's arms and neck. This was not considered a defect in the nineteenth century. Alexander Walker's 1892 Beauty in Women Analyzed and Classified, a primarily prescriptive work that offers a generally accurate representation of standards for female body shape throughout the century, declares, "Nothing can completely compensate, in woman, for the absolute want of plumpness," and in particular, the limbs should not be too slender in comparison with the rest of the body (379). Hetty's roundness, far from marking her as unattractive or unhealthy, adds not only to her own bewitching loveliness but also to the picture of plenty that the Poysers present.

Mrs. Poyser's niece Dinah Morris, a Methodist minister from the factory town of Snowfield who stays at the Hall Farm throughout the first several chapters of the novel, is a foil for Hetty in numerous ways, but most of their differences are encapsulated in their contrasting types of beauty. Though Dinah, unlike Dorothea Brooke, is given a detailed physical description, hers is a type of beauty best classified as spiritual. Like Dorothea, Dinah is compared to a saint of the past: Arthur Donnithorne says, "'She looked like St Catherine in a quaker dress'" (124). While Hetty's appearance is characterized in terms of its passive impression on the beholder, Dinah's is characterized in terms of the soul and intellect revealed through the face. The fact that her eyes are grey is not nearly as important as the fact that "they seemed rather to be shedding love than making observations" (80). Furthermore, she is slender (79), and her slenderness is associated with her spirituality, as implied in the contrast between herself and the worldly Bessy Cranage. Instead of listening to Dinah preach, Bessy tries to decide "whether it was better to have such a sort of pale face as that, or fat red cheeks . . . like her own" (87). Bessy is not a major character, but when she does appear in the novel, her fat cheeks are drawn out for particular notice, as is her carnal frivolity. Unlike the Poysers, she does not share her abundance; she is focused only on herself, and thus her body fat is nothing but dead flesh.

Dinah is not associated with food as the Poysers and Hetty are; her most memorable scenes take place on the green where she preaches and in the jail cell where she prays with Hetty, not in domestic settings. When she does appear at the farm, she is sewing, not involved in any stage of food preparation. Her apparent unconcern for feeding either herself or others is a source of constant frustration in her aunt. Mrs. Poyser reports one such conversation in which she claims she told Dinah, "'"If you loved your neighbour no better nor you do yourself, Dinah, it's

little enough you'd do for him. You'd be thinking he might do well enough on a half-empty stomach"'" (252-53).

As the biblical language in Mrs. Poyser's rebuke demonstrates, the difference between her attitude toward food and Dinah's is essentially a religious difference. Dinah's sermon on the green contains a passage about Christ's incarnation: "We can understand what Jesus felt, because he came in a body like ours, and spoke words such as we speak to each other" (84-85). She also, according to the narrator, has the power of creating an impression of Christ's physical presence for her audience: "Dinah had that belief in visible manifestations of Jesus, which is common among the Methodists, and she communicated it irresistibly to her hearers; she made them feel that he was among them bodily, and might at any moment show himself to them in some way that would strike anguish and penitence into their hearts" (88). In her sermon, Dinah dwells at length on Christ's practical, physical ministry of healing and, indeed, of feeding. Her own ministry, however, is concentrated on the spiritual well-being of her hearers. In a discussion with Mrs. Poyser, she draws a distinction between her calling and that of people whose major responsibility is "the things of this life" (141). She does not downplay the necessity of secular work, but she distances herself from it. In a largely autobiographical conversation with Mr. Irwine, the Anglican clergyman, she reveals that she is employed in a factory back in Snowfield where she lives, but she makes it clear that this work is only a source of income so that she can live (150); she makes no reference to the work's inherent value, and she does not mention it again.

Besides her gender, what makes Dinah's preaching ministry so novel is her Methodist theology and practice. In general, the people of Hayslope associate Methodism with attempts to make trouble with the established church or with the soft-headed dreaminess that Seth Bede's co-

workers attribute to him, but they give Dinah's ministry more respect, sensing that there is something different about her. Eliot's novels present a remarkably well-rounded picture of Methodists and other dissenters from the Church of England, due no doubt to her own intimate encounter with Methodism during her youth. If anything, she displays a slight positive bias: good dissenters like Rufus Lyon (Felix Holt) and Dinah are both more frequent and more significant in role than bad dissenters like William Dane (Silas Marner). Nevertheless, Eliot was frank in portraying the theoretical difficulties and psychological trauma that often went along with Methodism and similar movements. Dinah's ambivalence about embodiment reflects a struggle evident in the writings of John Wesley, founder of Methodism. According to Emily Walker Heady, Wesley ascribes great importance to the body's role in configuring one's conversion, but he does not sanction the attention-getting physical reactions that his followers became known for displaying. This is because "[i]n Wesley's narrative physical sensation marks a fundamental disconnection between inside and outside, as his hyperawareness of his body (his warmed heart) is matched at once by an utter absence of self. He is a spirit-filled body, and the feelings he senses are not his own" (152). For Wesley, as for Dinah, the body is useful as a gauge for the spirit's presence, but it becomes a snare when it leads to increased self-awareness.

Dinah, of course, would not be able to articulate this distinction. Neither the Methodists nor the Anglicans of Hayslope are theologically erudite. The difference between the two forms of religion exemplified by Dinah and Mrs. Poyser is not a doctrinal one—both acknowledge the importance of the body—but one of practice, beginning with care for the self. Jesus fasted during a specific forty-day period in the wilderness, but the rest of his time on earth he apparently kept himself well fed, so much so that critics (who, of course, were probably overstating the case) accused him of gluttony (Luke 8.34). In contrast, Dinah seems to be

engaged in a perpetual partial fast, even when she is in the midst of plenty. Mrs. Poyser accuses her of attempting to get by in life "'with poor eating and drinking'" (140). Dinah's aunt couches this accusation in unexpected terms: rather than arguing from the basis of personal well-being, which Mrs. Poyser wisely recognizes would not be a strong claim with her niece, she focuses on the negative effects of Dinah's self-neglect on the world at large: "'[I]f everybody was to do like you, the world must come to a standstill; for if everybody . . . was allays talking as we must despise the things o' the world, as you say, I should like to know where the pick o' the stock, and the corn, and the best new milk cheeses 'ud have to go?'" (140-41)

Certainly, there is a sense in which Mrs. Poyser misunderstands Dinah's language about rejecting the world in favor of the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, Mrs. Poyser seems to understand something about wholeness that Dinah does not. For Mrs. Poyser, there is no discord between the physical and the spiritual. This unity is the state in which, according to Christian doctrine, human beings were created, and this doctrine affects every area of life. C. S. Lewis puts it this way: "[O]nce accept the Christian doctrine that man was originally a unity and that the present division is unnatural, and all the phenomena fall into place" (280). For Dinah, eating is literally a means of keeping body and soul together well enough to complete the work of the soul, but for Mrs. Poyser, the highest form of human charity—loving one's neighbor as oneself—is impossible to separate from food. She can eat without guilt, knowing that by filling herself, she is enabling her cup to run over in charity to others.

Dinah, on the other hand, associates physical plenty with spiritual barrenness, employing a metaphor of hunger to explain why people in prosperous Hayslope seem less open to things of God than people in the bleak industrial areas: "'I think maybe it is because the promise is sweeter when this life is so dark and weary, and the soul gets more hungry when the body is ill at

ease'" (154). She also uses the language of food and abundance to express her own personal fear of temptation. Explaining to Mrs. Poyser why she feels she must return to her work in the poorer region, she says, "'[I]ndeed it is needful for my own soul that I should go away from this life of ease and luxury, in which I have all things too richly to enjoy'" (515). Mrs. Poyser converts Dinah's meaning into more explicitly alimentary terms: "'Why, she means to go back to Snowfield again, and work i' the mill, and starve herself, as she used to do, like a creatur as has got no friends'" (517). Dinah's connection of abundant eating with spiritual dullness echoes one of the primary reasons the medieval church condemned gluttony. Among a number of gruesome physical consequences of gluttony, Evagrius of Pontus listed these spiritual consequences: "the nourishment of evil thoughts . . . terror to moral purpose, . . . pollution of the intellect" (qtd. in Prose 9-10). According to this conception, food is once again a wall, but this time it is a wall between the individual and God that numbs the spiritual senses. A small-scale foreshadowing of what Dinah fears will happen to her if she continues among the plenty of Hayslope occurs when young Tommy Poyser eats "so many cherries as to have his feelings less under command than usual" (291). When Dinah's self-command begins to slip away, it is not because of food at all, but because of her attraction to Adam Bede. Yet since this attraction is too personal and, in Dinah's mind, too shameful to be spoken, she expresses her desire to flee from this temptation in terms of food, in an unconscious echo of the medieval identification between gluttony and lust.

Dinah's progression throughout the novel can be read as a journey to embodiment. In her conversation with Mr. Irwine, Dinah says that the reason she has been staying at the Hall Farm is that Mrs. Poyser had invited her, "'wanting me to have rest from my work here, because I'd been ill . . .'" (150). The farm is a place where Dinah's body can recover, or perhaps where Dinah can recover her body. Taking part in the intensely physical life of the Poysers imparts to Dinah the

incarnation that she preaches about but seems to lack herself. As she preaches, she seems to be "as unconscious of her outward appearance as a little boy" (80). This could be an enviable state, not only in practical but in psychological terms. A state of contented indifference to one's own body is preferable to a state of discontented obsession. But judging from Mrs. Poyser's comments, even taking into account the fact that she is almost certainly exaggerating, Dinah's unconcern about her body might border on neglect.[2] The final chapters of the novel reveal that her ignorance of her body is not as blissfully unconscious as it had at first appeared; rather, it is accompanied by anxieties about food and sexual attraction, which Dinah interprets as temptations.

The ending of the novel, Dinah's marriage to Adam, is frustrating from several perspectives. For one thing, it seems wrong, or at least anticlimactic, that Adam would marry Dinah after his intense and tragic devotion to Hetty. Furthermore, the few times in the novel when Dinah's name has been mentioned in conjunction with the possibility of marriage, Seth Bede has always been the speculative husband. When the strong, resolute Adam marries the woman that the dreamy, rather hapless Seth had set his heart on, the reader may experience a twinge of resentment on behalf of the underdog against Adam, who always comes out the winner in the narrator's comparisons between the brothers' strength of body and of mind. And finally, Dinah's transformation from preacher to housewife might seem, from a feminist point of view, to be a step down, similar to Dorothea's fate of vicariously living out her dreams through her husband's political career.

However, the marriage makes sense if it is considered not as a step down toward dependence, but as a step forward in Dinah's journey toward incarnation. When Dinah begins to yield to her inclination toward Adam, she begins to take notice of the bounty of the land,

without her former association of it with spiritual deadness. After she allows Adam to hold her hands, the two of them walk out to meet the Poysers coming home from church, and when they join the family, the group walks slowly, "lingering in the sunshine to look at the great flock of geese grazing, at the new corn-ricks, and at the surprising abundance of fruit on the old pear-tree" (549). In the next paragraph is a lengthy narratorial intrusion personifying leisure as an old-fashioned country gentleman. His life is described as one of physical ease, especially in terms of food: "He was a contemplative, rather stout gentleman, of excellent digestion, . . . was fond of sauntering by the fruit-tree wall, and scenting the apricots . . . he had an easy, jolly conscience, broad-backed like himself, and able to carry a great deal of beer or port-wine . . . he fingered the guineas in his pocket, and ate his dinners, and slept the sleep of the irresponsible . . ." (550). This discourse on leisure is meant to be a nostalgic commentary on the unhurried Sunday afternoon walk of the kind that the Poysers, Adam, and Dinah are taking. The description evokes the sort of spiritual relaxation of which Dinah has recently expressed her dread, but which now characterizes an activity (or lack of activity) in which Dinah herself is participating.

Dinah is learning what the Poysers have known all along: that idleness, at the right time, is not a sin. Mrs. Poyser is notoriously zealous in her housework, but she is content (despite her claim that concern for the farm keeps her awake at night) to lay aside her work and join her husband in chatting with the guests at the harvest feast. The feast is one of the highlights of Mr. Poyser's year (552), and he is "in his merriest mood" after Arthur Donnithorne's birthday party (348). Yet he is not a lazy man; on the contrary, any time he appears at the farmhouse during the daylight hours, he is taking a short respite from some vigorous physical task on the farm, and he is "as hard and implacable as the north-east wind" toward farmers whom he perceives as slack in

their methods (206). In the same way that Mr. and Mrs. Poyser experience no disjuncture between the spiritual and the physical, they experience no guilt about either their work or their play, as long as each is done at the right time.

The Poysers' work and play are their devotion to God. Early in the novel, the narrator describes Reverend Irwine's religious views, stating that, if forced to conceptualize his beliefs about the effects of religion on the laboring class, "he would perhaps have said that the only healthy form religion could take in such minds was that of certain dim but strong emotions, suffusing themselves as a hallowing influence over the family affections and neighbourly duties" (131). The Poysers live out this concept on a slightly higher intellectual plane than the one Irwine imagines. Mrs. Poyser knows the Bible well enough to debate its meaning with Dinah, and thus her religion is more than just "dim but strong emotions," but her beliefs do manifest themselves as "a hallowing influence" on her daily work and her family and community relationships rather than in any specifically religious acts of devotion. George Eliot is known for creating characters whose Christianity closely resembles the humanistic beliefs that she herself espoused. They may attend church (the Poysers do), but unlike Dinah, they do not speak about a personal relationship with Christ, or about any doctrines other than those that have to do with loving one's fellow human beings and developing virtues that are not necessarily theological. While Eliot, who was no Christian, may have intended to demonstrate that morality is possible without religion, or that Christianity is only one form of the universal religion of humanity, it is possible to interpret Eliot's seemingly irreligious Christians as having an understanding of Christianity that is not incompatible with Christ's teachings. In his story about the sheep and goats, Christ explicitly identifies himself with human beings in need of food, drink, shelter, clothing, healing, and companionship (Matthew 25.31-46). In John 14-17, Christ commissions

his disciples to continue the work that he started on earth, and though he does not confer divinity upon them, he does state that they will experience the same sort of persecution that he did (15.20) and share in the same glory (17.22). They will be his representatives on earth after he ascends to heaven. Dinah may have the ability to evoke a sense of Christ's presence in her hearers, but according to these biblical passages, Christ is already present, manifesting himself through Dinah herself as well as her listeners. When Mrs. Poyser talks about loving one's neighbor as oneself, she does not take the next step and assert that by loving one's neighbor, one is loving Christ, but she does approach an important Christian doctrine: that Christ's incarnation is completed in his church.

Dinah's incarnation is completed in the epilogue of the novel, after she has been married to Adam for several years and has given birth to two children. The narrator takes the role of an observer hiding just out of sight of the family. The first character singled out for mention is Dinah: "We can see the sweet pale face quite well now: it is scarcely at all altered—only a little fuller, to correspond to her more matronly figure, which still seems light and active enough in the plain black dress" (571). The narrator's tone is not at all similar to that regretful tone that mothers sometimes take toward the change in their bodies after bearing children; instead, it evokes that ideal figure of motherhood that occupied a paradoxical position next to the ideal of slim and self-effacing womanhood in the Victorian consciousness. A woman was to be slender, because that symbolized chastity and submissiveness, but the extra curves that came with motherhood were allowed. The crucial word in the description of Dinah is *fuller*. Throughout her journey of embodiment, in which her best teachers have been the Poysers, Adam, and no doubt her own children, Dinah has become a filled woman. She still has the spirituality of the days when she preached on the green, but now she is more clothed with humanity, more

approachable. She no longer stands up on a cart to minister; she ministers in her own home, to people who can touch her. The narrator is careful to point out that Dinah is still "light and active" (571), but she has now become like her aunt, who, though "well-shapen" and "light-footed" (136), has enough bodily abundance to share with others.

Though Dinah is no longer a preacher in the epilogue (a fact due not so much to her marriage as to a change in Methodist regulations), her speech is still seasoned with biblical language. The last words in the novel are hers: "'Come in, Adam, and rest; it has been a hard day for thee'" (574). It is fitting that Dinah's last speech echoes a saying of Christ's that could characterize the rhythmic life of the Hall Farm, and even evoke, to some degree, the personification of old-fashioned Leisure: "'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . For My yoke is easy and My burden is light'" (Matthew 11.28, 30). Dinah's new association with rest, for herself and especially for others, is pictured in her newly filled-out body. While she does not appear to be fat, she has become one of those soft people discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the kind who is filled with enough love and has enough body of her own to break the boundaries between bodies and spill over into someone else's life.

Why Harold Transome Is Fat: Genetics, Exoticism, and Vulnerability

One of the most iconic images of Felix Holt is the glimpse of his arm brandishing a gleaming sword as he attempts to quell a riot (320). Felix's moments of heroism take place in dramatic settings, where he stands like a colossus in the midst of chaos. If Felix's strong arm is his most memorable feature, Harold Transome, who in many ways functions as Felix's foil (Mugglestone xii-xiii), is identified by his plump hands, symbolic of privilege, self-indulgence, and a genetic destiny he cannot escape. For Harold, as for Eliot's earlier wealthy and vulnerable young man Arthur Donnithorne, the temptation to compromise is a daily reality, often succumbed to, but not without struggle. It is a different sort of struggle from the clear-cut combat against corruption that Felix engages in. Harold faces his nemeses in draped and carpeted rooms, where his inner turmoil does not break the drowsy hush. When Eliot compares him to "a legendary hero, selected for peculiar solicitation by the Evil One" (341), he is casually leaning against his own mantelpiece. Yet he is pondering the fate of at least two people whose happiness or ruin, he believes at that moment, awaits his convenience.

Besides the psychological realism with which Eliot has endowed him, Harold's fractured identity is a fertile but unharvested field for character analysis. The moral compromise to which he is tempted is paralleled in his suspension at the midpoint of several pairs of binaries regarding his identity. He is English but has just returned from fifteen years in the East. He has always lived in privilege, but decides to run for Parliament as a Radical, a move that associates him with the lower classes. He finds out near the end of the novel that he is the son of a man whom he has been growing increasingly to hate—and resemble. And he locates himself in the midst of a physical transition from thin to fat. Harold Transome would be a fitting subject for the many studies of shifting identity that are being published in Victorian history and literary criticism.[3]

At the same time, however, Harold's position as wealthy, male colonizer means that if he does appear in Marxist, feminist, or post-colonial criticism, his personal struggles are less important than the less-than-liberal ways he treats his mother, Esther Lyon, the local laborers, and his dark-skinned manservant, as well as his questionable practices as a merchant in Smyrna. The last issue has been dealt with perceptively by Alicia Carroll ("The Giaour's Campaign") and Pamela K. Gilbert (The Citizen's Body). Both authors point out that Harold has been a slave owner, and Gilbert makes a convincing argument that he has been an opium dealer as well, and thus a participant in an exploitative industry. According to Gilbert, despite the fact that Harold has dealt with hallucinogenic substances, he does not allow himself to partake in unrestrained behaviors. She points out that Eliot does use the language of addiction to describe Harold, but only to demonstrate the balance of his addictions—"to rebellion and to conformity" (Eliot 110)—resulting in an equilibrium of respectability, where he is once again suspended in the midst of a binary. In Gilbert's interpretation, Harold's power and threat come from his small, easily fulfilled desires (167-73), and I think this is correct. But I believe that Gilbert's reading ignores one area in which Harold does display immoderate tendencies, evidence of which is clearly read in his physical appearance. I want to show that Harold's unstable identity, including the exoticism that has ironically transformed the colonizer into a foreigner himself (Carroll 237), is connected with a personal vulnerability about which critics have been virtually silent: his overweight body.

Harold Transome enters the novel in the first chapter, carrying several preoccupations with him. Within a few pages he reveals that he is disappointed with the way the Transome estate has been managed, that he is full of definite ideas for improving it (many of them with his own convenience in mind), and that he self-identifies as a Radical. But before any of that, he

reveals a habit of noticing the shape of bodies, including his own. One of the first things he says is "'How is it I have the trick of getting fat?' (Here Harold lifted his arm and spread out his plump hand.) 'I remember my father was as thin as a herring'" (17).

The immediate purpose of these comments is to provide the first clue to a barely-concealed paternity scandal. In the first description of the lawyer Matthew Jermyn, given by Harold's uncle John Lingon, he is called a "'fat-handed, glib-tongued fellow, with a scented cambric handkerchief'" (33). The lawyer's fat hands are thus established as one of his distinguishing features. Shortly thereafter, when Jermyn himself appears, the narrator draws attention once again to his "white, fat, but beautifully shaped hands" (36). Harold feels a short-lived sympathetic connection with the lawyer on the basis of their shared physical feature: "Harold remembered with some amusement his uncle's dislike of those conspicuous hands; but as his own were soft and dimpled . . . his suspicions were not yet deepened" (36). Along with a more general corpulence—both Harold and Jermyn are described as fat, though handsome—the plump hands are the first of a series of genetic clues that, together with allusions to an indiscretion in Mrs. Transome's past, create an increasingly obvious impression that thin old Mr. Transome is not Harold's father. But not until the end of the novel will Harold realize that he is not a true heir to the Transome estate, nor a true member of the nobility at all, but the bastard of a middle-class lawyer.

Throughout the novel, Harold is constantly at cross-purposes with Jermyn over decisions regarding the Transome estate and the parliamentary campaign, both of which Harold accuses Jermyn of mismanaging. He also shows some upper-class prejudice against Jermyn's ingratiating, professional-class manners. But the more Harold begins to hate Jermyn, the clearer the resemblance between them becomes. The coldness present during the post-election

consultation in chapter 35 is mutual, and even the movements of the father and son are sometimes parallel during that scene (332). In the climactic scene in which Jermyn reveals his paternity, Harold catches a glimpse of the two of them in a mirror: "They were both white; both had anger and hatred in their faces; the hands of both were upraised" (456). Each of the men functions as a doppelganger to the other. Harold's face haunts Jermyn with the realization that his youthful sin will not go unpunished, and Jermyn's face haunts Harold with a vision of a future that will intensify everything he is now: domineering, alienated and alienating, and fat.

Though the parallelism between Harold and Jermyn is a crucial aspect of the novel, Harold's opening words about his tendency to be fat do more than set a plot in motion. They mark Harold as conscious, to the point of sensitivity, of the difference between his own body and the "strong-limbed person" (60) of an energetic young Englishman like Felix Holt. Harold does not know yet who his father is, so he shows no vulnerability on that point, and he has not yet been humbled by his lack of success in wooing Esther Lyon, but because of his sensitivity about his body, he is never an entirely self-confident character. Harold's self-deprecating references to his weight occur primarily in two places: the first few chapters,[4] and the last volume, when he is courting Esther and shortly before he receives the news that he is Jermyn's son.[5] Throughout the intervening chapters, Harold takes a subordinate role in the story as his agents become the key actors in his political campaign. When he does appear, he is either establishing his dominance over the family affairs (and thus relegating his mother to the position of an ineffectual figurehead), exchanging angry and imperious words with Jermyn, or compromising the ideals of Radicalism by allowing Johnson, the election agent, to engage in questionable campaigning practices. Harold is not a sympathetic character throughout this long middle section of the novel, and the narrator does not ask for sympathy for him from the reader. But Harold's vulnerability

in the opening chapters prevents him from being interpreted as a villain, no matter how much he disgraces himself, his family, and his political party. Similarly, by allowing Harold to be the target of some mild fat jokes during his flirtation with Esther, Eliot prepares the reader to sympathize with Harold when the devastating revelation of his father drives him to his mother's side with a humility he has not shown since childhood.

Like most cases of obesity, Harold's incipient corpulence also has a nutritional cause. For a George Eliot novel, Felix Holt is rather short on scenes of eating. A number of the scenes that do exist, however, feature Harold Transome—not as an indiscriminate gourmand, but as a person for whom food is much more than just a way to keep body and soul together. The early medieval pope Gregory the Great defined gluttony not simply as the act of eating more than is necessary. He gave a broader definition, which has the curious effect of saving many souls from pride by assuring them that they, too, are gluttons. To commit gluttony, according to Gregory, is to eat in any of the following ways: "Too soon, too delicately, too expensively, too greedily, too much" (qtd. in Prose 7). It is safe to assume that Harold's eating habits may often fall into the last category, but the text reveals only the results, not the commission, of such behavior. If "greedily" is denotatively not very different from "eagerly," Harold can be accused of that failing as well. One morning before an important meeting with Jermyn, Harold eats "with an early abstraction from the business of breakfast which was not at all after his usual manner" (328). The text indicates that the meal is normally a highly interesting time for Harold, a time to engage all of his senses in the "business" of culinary appreciation.

The novel is more explicit about the "too delicately" and "too expensively" categories. During his first meal at home, Harold displays clear disappointment at the lack of flavor in what is presented to him. After sending the butler on a mission for sauces and finding himself pleased

by none of them, he finally gives up, “falling back from his plate in despair” (32). Eliot’s use of such a dramatic noun in connection with such a mundane activity may be partly for a mild comic effect, but it also demonstrates the high value that Harold has learned, during his Eastern sojourn, to place on good food. Later, Esther notices the same quality when she observes that “he was certainly too particular about sauces, gravies, and wines, and had a way of virtually measuring the value of everything by the contribution it made to his own pleasure” (410-11). Harold’s selectiveness about food and drink is symptomatic of the way that he uses everything in his life—including people when necessary—as instruments in maintaining his own comfort.

One of the distinctive features of George Eliot’s writing is that she does not allow the psychological depth of her major characters to be revealed only through their actions and speech. She often spends entire chapters narrating the interior world of a character, providing a map that can be used to interpret his or her decisions throughout the rest of the novel. In chapter eight of Felix Holt, Eliot does this for Harold Transome. Lest the reader believe, after the first several chapters, that Harold is obsessed with power for its own sake, Eliot asserts that his greatest priority is pleasure—not of the licentious sort, but of the contented sort. He does like power, but not that unmitigated power which would put him into “that tabooed condition which robs power of its triumph” (110). Eliot identifies him as a “good-natured egoist” (110). He likes to be comfortable, and he likes to be liked.

Harold’s view of people is summed up in an earlier chapter, when he calls his servant Dominic “‘one of those wonderful southern fellows that make one’s life easy’” (37). As Esther later perceives, it is by this standard—the degree of contribution to his pleasure—that Harold judges everyone and everything in his life. In this light it is easy to understand the “despair” Harold feels when his meal dissatisfies him. Food is supposed to make him happy, and unlike

people, food is fairly simple to manipulate so that it does that. Nevertheless, he discovers that English food (or, more accurately, food prepared by the manorial staff) stubbornly refuses to please the way Eastern food did. Harold's frustration with food that will not be conformed to his taste foreshadows his anger with Jermyn, who will not conform to his will.

As is evident from his disappointment with the staff at the Transome estate, Harold has grown accustomed in Smyrna to having his will accomplished. As is evident from his figure, he has grown accustomed to being pleased with the food that is presented to him. Carroll says that he is "literally plump with Eastern luxury" (237). The identification between the East and sensuousness is a common one in Victorian literature, particularly sensuousness in those areas of life normally associated with the word *appetite*: sexuality and eating. An example is Lucy Snowe's caustic assessment of a painting of Cleopatra in Charlotte Brontë's novel Villette (1853). Before accusing the Egyptian, as portrayed in the painting, of being lazy, indecently clothed, and sloppy, Lucy wonders at her "affluence of flesh" (223). Later, Lucy refers to the same Cleopatra as a "slug" and a "pulpy mass" (287). Anna Krugovoy Silver demonstrates that the woman in the painting's body fat, race, and evident sexuality form an inseparable triad of repugnance for Lucy, whose prejudice reflects typical Victorian assumptions (105). Of course, this three-way association has roots far deeper than the nineteenth century and branches that extend into the twenty-first, and it is not only applied to women. Summarizing the accepted caricature of the Western man's classic other, Edward Said writes, "An Oriental lives in the Orient, he lives a life of Oriental ease, in a state of Oriental despotism and sensuality, imbued with a feeling of Oriental fatalism" (303).

In Victorian literature, the Oriental is described in terms of a physical and intellectual degeneracy that echoes the effects of age and senility, as well as of sexually transmitted disease.

Perhaps the most iconic nineteenth-century example of the Easterner who embodies disease is Dracula, who brings rats, representing plague, to London, and who physically and morally weakens the victims of his attacks, which are described in sexually charged language. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the language of disease and degeneracy is also used to describe corpulence. The vague sense of moral decay that makes Esther Lyon uneasy about living at Transome Court, even though she is ignorant of Mrs. Transome's great sin, may be reinforced by the decadence of Harold's body, softened by indulgence of the flesh. The language of exoticism is extended to the setting as well: Carroll points out that Eliot uses the imagery of a harem to characterize Transome Court (253). The link, forged in part by Orientalism, between degeneracy of body and corruption of character, allows Esther to raise her decision, essentially an amoral choice of which of two equally domineering men she should subject herself to, to a supreme act of self-renunciation. When she chooses Felix, she chooses Englishness, physical firmness, and moral clarity. When she rejects Harold, she rejects the physical and moral softness of the East, figured either as the premature decline of a body that has been too much indulged, or the immature "liquidity and pulpiness . . . [of] the unformed masculine self" (Gilbert 133).

In a sense, Harold can be explained by both interpretations, decline and immaturity. He leaves England for the East at age nineteen, his manhood still in a malleable state. In Smyrna, he begins to harden into the shape he will wear for the rest of his life, but paradoxically it is the amorphous shape of luxury and degeneracy. He returns to England after fifteen years, long enough to have amassed wealth and had a child, but not long enough to have become a true Oriental. Although he moves back into Transome Court and asserts his dominance with confidence, his loss of the election, his inability to win Esther, and the revelation of his

illegitimate birth are all signs that he is not a true English gentleman any more than he is an Oriental. To borrow Carlyle's pulpiness language, Harold left England only partially hardened, became more solid in Smyrna but began to spoil as well, and returned to England quite doughy, both from insufficient baking and from the rot of decadence.

Esther's sense of moral degeneracy in Transome Court, and Harold specifically, may be influenced not only by Orientalist literature but also by medieval Western tradition, which tended to blur the line between the deadly sins of lust and gluttony (refer to chapter 1 for a fuller discussion). When psychologists began to study obesity in the twentieth century, the connection among sex, eating, and sin remained, but with a crucial difference: fat people could now be understood as substituting food for the physical love they could not or preferred not to experience. Geneen Roth, a popular speaker and writer on eating disorders, wrote a book entitled When Food Is Love, in which she asserts that food-related anxieties "have to do with neglect, lack of trust, lack of love, sexual abuse, physical abuse, unexpressed rage, grief, being the object of discrimination, protection from getting hurt again" (4). Esther approaches this understanding in her banter with Harold. As if to counteract the impressions of Oriental degeneracy and mystery that Transome Court and its occupants give her, she reads Harold as a prosaic figure. During one exchange, Esther tells Harold that he is fit not for tragedy or romance but "'for genteel comedy . . . where the most thrilling event is the drawing of a handsome cheque.'" When he asks, "'I don't look languishing enough?'" she replies, "'O yes—rather too much so—at a fine cigar.'" This is right after Harold has wondered whether he is perhaps "a little too stout" for romance, and Esther has answered in the affirmative (420). Esther's implication is that the passion of amorous love, particularly of the dangerous sort, has been replaced for Harold by the more easily obtained sensual pleasures of food and cigars. Once

again, Esther is perceptive in her realization that Harold is pleased by what he can control. Food can sometimes frustrate, as Harold realizes when his first English meal disappoints his expectations, but food does not have the power to break a heart.

Genetics, exoticism, gluttony, sympathy, self-protection, desire for control, and identity confusion all are reasons why the man Harold Transome became overweight and why George Eliot needs the character Harold Transome to be overweight. One other reason is that he is a capitalist—figuratively and literally a consumer. Though he decides to run for Parliament as a Radical, he is no socialist. As if to increase the distance between Harold and the man of dogma Felix Holt, Eliot never has Harold explain his reasons for standing as a Radical in his own words. The closest the reader comes to hearing Harold's political views is to hear his uncle John Lingon's newly Radicalized position, a conclusion which, the narrator says, Harold's reasoning has assisted in bringing about. Reverend Lingon sums up this resigned utilitarian view—again, as far as possible from Felix's idealism—as follows: "'If the mob can't be turned back, a man of family must try and head the mob, and save a few homes and hearths, and keep the country up on its last legs as long as he can'" (34). Thus, Harold's brand of Radicalism is characterized, ironically, as a strategy to protect property rights.

Harold's capitalism goes beyond simply protecting what is already owned to amassing more property. It becomes that famously Victorian form of capitalism, colonialism. Though Harold had originally traveled to Constantinople to pursue a career as a diplomat, an unusual turn of events has led him to enter the business world in Smyrna (24). The novel does not reveal his specific trade (though Gilbert argues that it hints at the opium industry), but it does state that the total profit he returns to England with is around 150,000 pounds (106). Most of the capital is invested in improvements to Transome Court that Harold deems necessary after Jermyn's

mismanagement; thus, it is never truly expended, but it remains, like superfluous calories, in the body that consumed it.

The image of the fat capitalist is so prevalent in popular and literary publications from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in both England and America that to invoke it in description of Harold Transome is not a great stretch. But the ambiguities in Harold's identity complicate that picture, as does as the uneasy self-consciousness Harold displays about his own growing corpulence. Hilde Bruch wrote, "Men who become obese later in life . . . [o]ften . . . consider their girth a sign of their imposing power and virility. This was described as a cultural trait for German men, with upper-class men tending to be heavy as a sign of their status and power" (97). The application to German men can safely be extended to other Western nations as well, especially in the time before the medical paradigm came to dominate discussion of obesity. The fact that Harold is not comfortable with his weight may indicate that he is not entirely comfortable with his economic status, which may also be an unconscious reason why he decides to run for Parliament as a Radical.

There are, however, two characters in the novel who fit the picture of the consuming capitalist better, though they are not merchants but lawyers: Matthew Jermyn, Harold's actual father, and John Johnson, who serves as one of Harold's campaign managers. Both men are consistently described as fat, and both are characterized as prosperous members of the middle class. The rise of the bourgeois, as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the professionalization of practices such as medicine and law, was still in progress during the years when the novel takes place. Though Reverend Lingon is certainly displaying class prejudice when he dismisses Jermyn as "'one of your middle-class upstarts who want to rank with gentlemen, and think they'll do it with kid gloves and new furniture'" (33), Lingon has hit upon

the professional class's key strategy for attaining respectability. The one advantage that the bourgeois has over the nobility is the means to obtain more capital rather than stagnating in static wealth, and the most obvious way to display their advantage of productivity is through consuming.

The practice of earning or asserting status by displaying material wealth is so prevalent in human society that Thorstein Veblen in 1918 coined the now-common term *conspicuous consumption* to describe it. As Reverend Lingon notices, Jermyn makes his consumption conspicuous through items, such as clothing accessories, that are not particularly valuable in themselves but that denote prosperity. Johnson has the same strategy. When he first appears in the novel, he is "smartly-dressed" and wearing "a conspicuous expansive shirt-front" (132). The word "expansive" can be interpreted in two ways at once: The shirt-front may be expansive with the opulence of unnecessary, purely decorative cloth, denoting Johnson's economic consumption, and it is also necessarily expansive in order to fit Johnson's "stout" (133) figure, denoting his literal consumption.

There is also a clear connection between the shape of Johnson's body and his political hypocrisy, at least in Felix Holt's opinion. When Felix sees Johnson at the parliamentary nominations, he feels it is "a little too exasperating to look at this pink-faced rotund specimen of prosperity, to witness the power for evil that lay in his vulgar cant, backed by another man's money, and to know that such stupid iniquity flourished the flags of Reform, and Liberalism, and justice to the needy" (287). Johnson's rotundity is not the only reason for Felix's revulsion, but it is a reason. Felix's polarizing mind calls into question the political integrity of a man who enjoys the advantages of affluence as much as Johnson clearly does. Neither Felix nor the reader is given the opportunity to see an example of a person who is living in middle- or upper-class

prosperity and who also actively works to alleviate poverty. (Rufus and Esther Lyon are not destitute, but are hardly well-off.) The novel's only representatives of organized Radicalism are Harold Transome, Matthew Jermyn, and John Johnson, who are all, in varying degrees, hypocrites, and who are all fat.

As the novel unfolds, Johnson turns out to be more than just a flattering politician, full of empty promises for the poor. He works behind Jermyn's back to discover and reveal information that could ruin Jermyn's clients the Transomes. Though Johnson is not a major character, Eliot devotes one of her case study chapters to him, explaining his motivation for working against his superior Jermyn. The consummate example of a middle-class consumer, Johnson is "a man who aimed at respectability, a family man, who had a good church-pew, subscribed for engravings of banquet pictures where there were portraits of political celebrities, and wished his children to be more unquestionably genteel than their father" (278-79). He is motivated by his desire for greater "respectability," and his envy of Jermyn's more conspicuous respectability.

Other than this chapter, however, Johnson is not extensively developed as a character. He is not shown struggling with the ethical implications of his decisions, as so many of Eliot's characters are. His two most distinguishing features are his skillful use of language (which is rarely seen, since Johnson has so few speeches) and his corpulence. His duplicitous actions reveal his character more than the narration does, and those actions, combined with his corpulence, allow him to be read as a consuming mouth and stomach. With nothing more than shallow motivations, he feeds on other people's prosperity and happiness. Eliot rarely offers characters that can be interpreted merely symbolically, but Johnson's lack of development as a human suggests that he can be understood as the dark side of capitalism, always consuming and never giving or expending.

Of the two lawyers, Jermyn is given more humanity, and as in Harold's case, some of that humanity comes in the form of the vulnerability particular to the overweight man. In a telling phrase, the narrator describes Jermyn as "fat, but tall enough to bear that trial to man's dignity" (36). The fact that Jermyn is "remarkably handsome" (36) also helps him to bear the trial, but it is a trial, and one that he has not always had to bear, according to flashbacks in the narration. According to Philip Fisher, the older characters—Rufus Lyon, Mrs. Transome, and Jermyn—are the most psychologically interesting in the novel, but the choices that have shaped who they are all take place in the past; they can no longer act meaningfully (157). Jermyn would be an entirely unsympathetic character if not for the youthful motivations that the narrator reveals. Two of these flashbacks refer to the change in his weight. One refers to "all the years which had converted the handsome, soft-eyed, slim young Jermyn (with a touch of sentiment) into a portly lawyer of sixty" (220), and in the other, Mrs. Transome remembers the days when Jermyn was "young, slim, and graceful, with a selfishness which then took the form of homage to her" (399). The humanization of a fat and rather villainous character by recalling his thinner youth can be an effective device; Sander L. Gilman points out that several opera composers have done the same thing with Shakespeare's Falstaff (770). Jermyn, "like other self-justifiers" (399) cannot express regret for his past actions without making excuses, but the loss of slenderness might be something that he can regret sincerely, however content he may seem to be in his middle-class portliness.

Besides introducing a hint of the pathetic to Jermyn's characterization, the ghost of young Jermyn begins the series of stages completed by Harold and the present-day Jermyn. Harold, the transitional figure, is well on his way from slim to corpulent, from sentimental to coldly practical, but not completely transformed—just as he is caught in the middle of the binaries of

Oriental and English, capitalist and Radical, heir and bastard. Unlike Jermyn, he can still become someone other than the man he is tending to become. Esther Lyon does not wait for the fulfillment of that transformation, choosing instead to spend her life with the static Felix Holt, and neither does the narrator. Shortly after "the most serious moment in Harold Transome's life," when "for the first time the iron had entered into his soul" (Eliot 461), the novel ends, with no closure for Harold. The reader is left to guess whether the revelation of his parentage stuns Harold into changing his life in a conscious attempt not to turn out like Jermyn, or whether it cripples any sense of initiative he may have had. Having learned that his existence is nothing but a consequence of others' sin, and forced back into a stage of identity confusion (Erikson, qtd. in M. Jaffe 175) characteristic of adolescence, he may react similarly to the obese teenagers that Hilde Bruch describes: "They suffer from a conviction that they are the misshapen product of somebody else's action and do not experience themselves as independent self-directed individuals, with initiative and autonomy" (155). Harold is virtually invisible in the epilogue; his future is not distinguishable from that of his family. In effect, the pulpy, unformed man is absorbed back into the source of his origin, and the last word goes to the solid, fit Englishman.

The Binary Self: Private Arthur Donnithorne Meets Public Arthur Donnithorne

Hilde Bruch treats the onset of obesity in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as three very different events, each accompanied by distinct psychological phenomena. In general, she implies, obesity that begins in adulthood is considered more normal and less indicative of psychological maladjustment than that which begins at a younger age (119). Obesity beginning in adolescence is often especially traumatic because of its inextricability from the physical, emotional, and cognitive upheavals that come with the teenage years, including the process of working toward an identity. Though significant changes to one's identity, either externally imposed or resulting from deliberate choice, can occur during adulthood, these changes are so typical to adolescence that an adult who experiences a jarring identity shift can be thrown backward into a psychological state that, more or less, resembles that of adolescence. Erik Erikson coined the term *identity confusion* to characterize the state of individuals on the brink of adulthood who lack a concept of their own future and ability to contribute to society (M. Jaffe 175). As briefly mentioned at the end of the last chapter, the shock that Harold Transome receives—finding out at age 34 that he is the illegitimate son of his enemy—is the kind of experience that could send an adult back to identity confusion after having formerly passed through that stage.

The boundaries between the stages of one individual's life thus can be as permeable as the boundaries between individuals. So can the boundaries between the multiple ways one person can be interpreted. Psychologists have posited that identity is composed of a number of different selves, including the public self—the concept other people have of a person—and the private self—that which the person believes that he or she truly is (M. Jaffe 186). This chapter

will examine a potential barrier between individuals: the disconnect between the way people see themselves and the way others see them.

I closed the last chapter by setting up a continuum of development (or degeneration) from the young Matthew Jermyn who appears in brief flashbacks in Felix Holt, to the transitional figure of Harold Transome, to the middle-aged Jermyn. Harold occupies a watershed position between Jermyn's romantic youth and his calculating present, and his youthful slimness and current portliness. In this chapter, I would like to transpose a character from another novel—Arthur Donnithorne in Adam Bede—to find out how he fits into this continuum. Several similarities exist between Arthur and Jermyn, and between Arthur and Harold.[6] Like Jermyn, Arthur is a selfish lover who impregnates a woman with whom he is truly in love, but for whose future he takes little thought. (The class roles of Arthur and his young woman are the reverse of Jermyn and his, however.) Like Harold, Arthur likes comfort, likes to be liked, and is tempted to compromise. Both of them experience a conversion late in their respective novels, but they both virtually disappear from the novel afterward, unable to be reintegrated into the community. Harold is reabsorbed into his family; the Transomes are mentioned only as a unit in the epilogue of Felix Holt. Arthur, on the other hand, goes off to fight in the Napoleonic Wars, only returning to Hayslope after seven years have passed since the main events of the novel, and even then, it is assumed that his readjustment to his inherited position as squire will be a slow process.

Like Harold, Arthur experiences a considerable shock to his self-concept. Harold's primary shock is the externally imposed revelation of his illegitimacy, though his political and romantic failures augment the shock. Arthur's shock is different in that it results entirely from his realization of the enormity of his own sinful actions. But the effects are similar: both men who had formerly put so much stock in the good opinions of others are disgraced in a highly

public fashion, so they are forced to reconfigure their own identities. They must deal with the disjuncture between the public and private selves. The relationship between these two selves is one of the major themes of Felix Holt. Eliot sets forth this theme early in the novel, when the narrator states that "there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life" (50). The theme is also explored in Adam Bede, as omniscient glimpses into the inner workings of characters' psyches are juxtaposed against the voice of public opinion regarding those same characters. Even after their humbling, Harold and Arthur cannot think about their identities without considering the way they appear to others, because the private self is inseparable from the public self, though the two do not always necessarily match up.

The question remains, of course, as to what all of this has to do with overweight bodies. The concept of the private and the public self is helpful in understanding a psychological disturbance that often characterizes both obese and anorexic people. Bruch writes, "Fat people tend to talk about their bodies as external to themselves. They do not feel identified with this bothersome and ugly thing they are condemned to carry through life, and in which they feel confined or imprisoned" (102). She quotes Cyril Connolly's famous aphorism: "Imprisoned in every fat man a thin one is wildly signaling to be let out" (102). In other words, the private self of some obese people might actually be thin. This does not necessarily mean that they have a warped view of their physical body and believe that they are literally thin. It more likely means that they identify themselves as having personality characteristics that are often erroneously associated with slenderness, including initiative, self-control, and success in work, school, and relationships. In these cases, there is a disjuncture between the private and public selves. The public self (and what the subject is afraid that the public self might be) is a fat person, with all the accompanying stereotypes, but the private self is Connolly's thin man frantic for

emancipation. This kind of split between the private and public selves, depending on its extent, can cause serious psychological trauma.

Other times, however, it can lead to complacency if the subject is unaware of or in denial of the split. Bruch writes about a very heavy man "who in spite of circulatory difficulties did not follow a diet, denying that there was anything wrong with his size" (91). She then narrates how a revelatory moment, when he slowly and observantly looked at himself in a mirror, closed the gap between the perception others had of him and the perception he had had of himself. In this example, the disjuncture had to do with physical size, but the same sort of obliviousness to a problem that others can see is also commonly found in regard to character traits—in fact, it is such ignorance of personal flaws that gives classical and Shakespearean tragedies their irony. On a less heroic scale, much of the irony in the main plot of Adam Bede comes from the chasm between public opinion of Arthur Donnithorne after his sin with Hetty is revealed, and his own complacent self-concept.

Once again, body size is a convenient site for a discussion of boundaries—this time, of the boundary between the public and private selves. The slippage between Arthur's selves is one reason, which I will return to shortly, that Arthur is a prime candidate for obesity at some point in his near or distant future. Other reasons include his resemblance to the corpulent Matthew Jermyn and Harold Transome (including factors, such as wealth and love of comfort, that are often associated with obesity) and, less convincing but worth noting, a potentially foreshadowing statement that Arthur makes early in the novel: "'I'm not likely to settle for the next twenty years, till I'm a stout gentleman of forty'" (144). This statement is highly ironic because Arthur does indeed find himself unable to settle down in a community for a number of years (seven, not twenty, as it turns out), but for reasons far more complicated and painful than youthful

wanderlust. In light of this chapter's hypothesis, the statement has added irony. Arthur imagines his future self as "stout," and from the context, a good-natured conversation with Mrs. Poyser, the adjective should be interpreted positively, having the connotations of prosperity and comfort that it often had for middle-aged men in rural England during that time. But if the arguments that will be put forward in this chapter are true, Arthur's future weight gain will be connected with psychological trauma.

The strongest reason for hypothesizing that Arthur Donnithorne is at risk for obesity is his identity confusion. Chapter 12 is one of several chapters in which Arthur's psyche is explored, with a heavy-handed narratorial tone, both critical and sympathetic, that is characteristic of Eliot's earliest novels, including Adam Bede. Repeatedly throughout this chapter, Arthur's good intentions are emphasized, in an ironic stage-setting for the tragedy soon to take place. His private and public selves are shown to be in alignment at this point in his life: "You perceive that Arthur Donnithorne was 'a good fellow'—all his college friends thought him such: he couldn't bear to see any one uncomfortable; he would have been sorry even in his angriest moods for any harm to happen to his grandfather; and his aunt Lydia herself had the benefit of that soft-heartedness which he bore towards the whole sex" (186). The irony does not come from any inaccuracy in these observations about Arthur's pleasant spirit, which are actually quite correct; rather, it comes from the fact that these vague generous feelings do not make Arthur truly "a good fellow" at all, especially because they are mingled with a selfishness that becomes increasingly evident as the fatal encounter with Hetty approaches. He may be "good-natured," but like Harold Transome, he is a "good-natured egoist" (Felix Holt 110).

The Hayslope community realizes this sooner than Arthur does, so for a time there is a disjuncture between his private and public selves. Perhaps the chapter in Adam Bede that is

most difficult to read for emotional reasons is chapter 44, "Arthur's Return." Positioned right after Hetty is sentenced to death, this chapter is extremely ironic because Arthur, who has been out of the country for some time, knows nothing of Hetty's pregnancy, let alone her conviction of murder. The chapter is full of optimistic and self-congratulatory plans that Arthur formulates as he travels home to take the position that his recently deceased grandfather has left vacant. His plans include not primarily comforts for himself, but ostentatious favors for the people for whom he will be responsible: "Arthur had not an evil feeling in his mind towards any human being: he was happy, and would make every one else happy that came within his reach" (485). He is full of benevolence toward all the world, but it is a faulty benevolence because it is based on the assumption that he has escaped the consequences of his sin. When Arthur arrives home and reads the letter from Mr. Irwine that informs him of Hetty's trial, he realizes that this assumption is wrong, and his private self begins painfully to come into alignment with his public self.

The scanty narration of this readjustment stands in notable contrast to the detailed, even belabored narration of Arthur's previous self-justification. Arthur provides a fascinating study of the gradual descent, fuelled by compromise, into a falsely complacent self-concept, but after he is startled out of his complacency, the narrator seems to have little further use for him.[7] Eliot rejects an elaborate description of conversion and instead represents the result of his conversion with an observable act: obtaining the reprieve from the death sentence for Hetty.

To acknowledge that Arthur's realization of his public self is necessary and salutary both for himself and for Hetty is not to say that the public's perception of him is completely correct. Adam Bede's judgment (typically for Adam, who resembles Felix Holt in many ways) lays all the blame for Hetty's crime in one place: "'Let 'em put *him* on his trial—let him stand in court beside her, and I'll tell 'em how he got hold of her heart, and 'ticed her t' evil, and then lied to

me'" (456). Martin Poyser's former opinion of Arthur reverses completely, and neither end of the pendulum's swing is fully accurate: "'An' me, as thought him such a good upright young man, as I should be glad when he come to be our landlord. I'll ne'er lift my hat to'm again, nor sit i' the same church wi'm . . . a man as has brought shame on respectable folks . . . an' pretended to be such a friend t' everybody'" (461). Arthur has not exactly been the willful deceiver of Adam's and Mr. Poyser's descriptions, but neither has he been the "good fellow" (186) of his earlier public and private selves. His conversion is complete when he can balance those extremes, when he can view himself with something akin to sympathy—though to use the term in this way is to depart from Audrey Jaffe's definition, since according to her the subject and object of sympathy must be distinct entities. Arthur begins to show this mingled grace and justice toward himself in chapter 48, during his last encounter with Adam Bede (excluding the one in the epilogue, which is only reported after the fact), in which he acknowledges his guilt and his unworthiness to act as squire, but also asks Adam for sympathy and reminds him that they have both loved Hetty.

Despite the emerging signs in chapter 48 of a healthy, holistic self-concept, Arthur is still a broken man. Eighteen months later, Mr. Irwine receives a letter from him that says, "'You can't think what an old fellow I feel . . . I make no schemes now. I'm the best when I've a good day's march or fighting before me'" (522). Seven years after that, when Arthur finally returns to Hayslope, he seems happy again, according to Adam's report, but a recent fever has left his body weak. Besides that, there is a general sense of resignation and irretrievable loss in the tone of the epilogue toward Arthur. Adam says that Mr. Irwine thinks Arthur should be left alone his first day back, "'as it'll be bad for him t' have his feelings stirred with seeing many people one after another'" (573), and Arthur's very last words in the novel, as quoted by Adam, express his regret

at never having been able to repay Hetty, who has died, for his actions toward her (574). Emotionally scarred, recently ill, newly retired from a physically active career, and stepping into a position that will require him once again to reconfigure his identity, Arthur is at great risk for what Bruch calls "reactive obesity" (125). She attributes this condition to emotional stress, but she also states that events such as surgery or injury (and presumably illness, though she does not mention it) can also be contributors (129).

Though the epilogue to Adam Bede gives no textual indication or foreshadowing of such a reaction in Arthur, the options for emotional self-medication in rural, early nineteenth-century England were few, and for a single man with no wife to abuse (who is also a kind man who probably would not abuse his wife if he had one), food and alcohol, and perhaps gambling, were virtually the only choices.[8] Earlier in the novel, Arthur is characterized as an avid horseman who rides in order to vent strong feelings (189, 366), but his bodily weakness has almost certainly cut off that option for some time to come. The lack of physical exercise, the return to affluence and probably to good food, and the psychological need for comfort create a strong likelihood that Arthur will be well on his way to becoming that "stout"—or less ambiguously, corpulent—"gentleman of forty" (144) before he is out of his twenties. He has already said that he feels old; now it remains only for him to become fat in order for his prophecy to fulfill itself. After all, his statement was that he would not "settle" until he reached the stipulated age and physical build, and his intention in returning to Hayslope seems to be to "settle."

At the same time as he prematurely ages, Arthur is also returning to an adolescent-like stage of identity readjustment. In reference to Harold Transome's discovery of the shameful circumstances of his birth, I mentioned Bruch's statement that obese adolescents often feel unable to take control of their bodies because they see themselves as the consequences of

decisions that other people have already made (155). Arthur may feel a similar helplessness regarding his body, but in his case, the feeling results from his own past mistakes rather than the mistakes of others. Generalizing from years of psychotherapeutic work, Bruch says that "obese young people are defective in their awareness of being self-directed, separate individuals with the ability of identifying and controlling their body urges, and of defining their needs and presenting them in a way that they can find appropriate and satisfying responses" (154). Arthur has proven himself unable to control his urges, and his one brief encounter with Hetty was both inappropriate and unsatisfying. His decision to enter the army, where the soldier is essentially the property of the state, may reflect a desire to relinquish control of decisions about his own body. Whether the army teaches him self-discipline, or whether it simply gives him seven years on psycho-physiological auto-pilot, Arthur's brief off-stage appearance at the end of the novel does not disclose.

Arthur's willingness to allow someone else to control his body may reflect an anxiety about what would happen if he retained control. Fear of what one is capable of becoming is configured as another self, the dreaded self (M. Jaffe 188). Arthur Donnithorne's dreaded self is less obvious than Harold Transome's dreaded self (which is clearly based on Jermyn) perhaps because the term *dread* seems so foreign to the cheerful, self-satisfied early Arthur. But Arthur's reference to the "stout gentleman of forty" who has settled down permanently on his estate (144) may reveal a tendency to divide himself chronologically, an attempt to thrust age, responsibility, and an inevitable portliness far from him—another evidence of the permeability of the boundaries between stages of development.

Though the dreaded self can often be prophetic, a more reliable indicator of how Arthur's future will turn out is his place in the economy of the novel, especially in relation to his foil,

Adam Bede. I have already mentioned the similarity between Adam and Felix Holt, in that they are both hard-working men with high standards for themselves and others, who tend to polarize right and wrong, leaving little room for sympathy. (The difference is that Adam learns sympathy, while Felix apparently never does.) They are also alike because at the end of their respective novels they are both allowed happiness, which primarily consists in marriage to the spiritually beautiful woman in the novel. In both cases, their happiness is at the expense of someone else's. In choosing Felix, Esther Lyon must reject Felix's foil, Harold.

The situation is more complicated in Adam Bede because there are more characters involved. As far as the plot is concerned, in order to choose Adam, Dinah must reject his brother Seth, the only other man mentioned as a potential husband for her. But from a structuralist perspective, Adam's happiness is at the expense of Arthur's, since the two are binary opposites. Arthur's ultimate end is just like Harold's: it is undisclosed. Unlike Harold, who disappears utterly after he reconciles with his mother, Arthur is at least given some closure and allowed to return to the community, but his last words to Adam haunt any prospects of happiness that might be imagined for him. The line is delivered by Adam, who is quoting Arthur, who was quoting something Adam had said seven years earlier: "'"There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for"'" (574).

To return to the continuum set up at the beginning of this chapter, it is now evident that Arthur at the end of Adam Bede falls around the same uneasy midpoint as Harold does. He is past the young Jermyn but not yet the middle-aged Jermyn. Like the young Jermyn, Arthur has fathered an illegitimate child, but the fates of the two children are radically different. Jermyn's son survives and becomes more powerful yet more vulnerable than his father; Arthur's baby, its sex never even revealed, dies long before it can know what it means to be a bastard. Jermyn's

illegitimate fatherhood is kept a secret from the community for thirty-four years; therefore, he can hold it like a sword over Mrs. Transome's head. Arthur's error, on the other hand, becomes public property even before he fully grasps its enormity himself. Arthur is given a gift that Jermyn misses: the opportunity to attain an accurate self-concept. Arthur experiences his identity shock when he is still relatively young and pulpy, which means that he can still change. When the public perceives Arthur's sin, he has the choice of either living in denial of the gap between his private and public selves, or closing the gap. Within the second choice there are two further choices: he can be a self-aware rogue, agreeing with the public's perception about him but refusing to change, or he can work, taking his new self-knowledge into account, to become truly the kind of "good fellow" that he once thought himself. This dilemma within a dilemma is the same as that which faces overweight individuals. They can choose ignorance, like the people Bruch describes who hide from mirrors (91); they can acknowledge that they are heavier than what the public considers standard but choose not to change,[9] or they can make an effort to change.

While the last several chapters of the novel indicate that Arthur is taking steps toward reformation, the reader never knows his final choice, just as the reader never knows whether Harold decides to live the rest of his life attempting not to be like Jermyn or whether he resigns himself to his genetic fate. A common stereotype of the Victorian novel is that it always wraps up all loose ends. Readers of Dickens and many of his contemporaries learn to expect the what-happens-afterward chapter, in which even the most minor character is placed in a comic marriage, or sent off to India, or provided with an unexpected inheritance. Nevertheless, George Levine argues that "narratives touched by the realistic impulse try to resist or circumvent the formal conventions of narrative" (15). George Eliot, the epitome of realists, resisted the

unwritten rule that says that all characters need to be given a determinate future. Though she does follow the rule to a degree, letting the reader know about the happy marriages of Adam and Dinah, and of Felix and Esther, she refuses or neglects to invent a tidy ending for Arthur and Harold. (There is no explicit evidence of how purposeful this lack of closure is, but judging from the general self-consciousness of Eliot's realism, it may very well be quite deliberate.)

Thus, Arthur and Harold perpetually remain the pulpy, unformed man that, according to Gilbert, threatens social structure by his potentiality to overflow. The Victorian reader may have sensed danger in Eliot's allowing an illegitimate, orientalized man to remain at large somewhere, perhaps in England, at the end of Felix Holt, rather than domesticating him in a safe marriage to a woman who could make him respectable, and the same danger might have been seen in Arthur's indeterminate status at the end of Adam Bede. After all, he has seduced a young woman before, and he is still single—could he not do it again? On the other hand, the reader who identifies more with Arthur and Harold than with Adam and Felix—perhaps a fat man, or a foreigner, or someone with an ignominious past—may be troubled by the fact that while Arthur and Harold get to retain their freedom in a manner of speaking, they are not rewarded with happiness. It is as if the narrator has doomed these two characters, and by extension those who see themselves in these characters, to permanent identity confusion.

This thesis has been all about the boundaries between people: how self-defense builds these boundaries, how sympathy can break them down, and how public and private selves face each other across them. If George Eliot can be said to have a doctrine of boundaries, it is, characteristically of Eliot, a balanced doctrine. We need a barrier between ourselves and all of the stimuli with which the world teems; otherwise, "we should die of that roar which lies on the

other side of silence" (Middlemarch 124). But the barrier must be permeable, for it is the ability to cross the barrier that makes humanity so gloriously human. This is what life is about, as Eliot demonstrates again and again through characters like Edgar Tryan in "Janet's Repentance," whose sacrificial love saves Janet Dempster from despair, and Dorothea Brooke, who, even after her grand schemes of benevolence are foiled, still believes that she can spend the rest of her life in no better way than in working for the good of others.

Eliot's novels allow various interpretations of the ways that body fat can mediate relationships. It can, itself, be the boundary, or it can be the means of crossing the boundary. In order to negotiate relationships with others, the self must first be configured, and body fat also provides different ways of configuring the self, depending on whether it is considered part of the self or external to it. I have intended this study to be a starting point for exploration of these various functions of body fat. True to the goal of boundary-crossing, this exploration should be interdisciplinary. For a long time discourse about fat has been compartmentalized according to the categories of medicine, psychology, and sociology, and contributions from literary studies have been virtually ignored, though the sub-discipline of fat studies is gaining popularity within the field. Besides the fact that advertising and popular culture will never offer a single clear message about fat and how it affects people, another major reason why overweight people receive so many conflicting messages about themselves, and why thin people do not know how to relate to overweight people, is this lack of communication among the academic fields. In the tradition of Eliot, whose novels are informed by history, psychology, linguistics, theology, the arts, and the natural sciences, we must learn from each other. We must also be willing to take seriously cultural phenomena like The Biggest Loser, because even a television show has

theoretical assumptions. The result of this conversation will probably not be consensus, but perhaps, as Eliot's novels imply, consensus is not nearly as important as sympathy.

[1] For some non-scholarly but apt examples, refer to the mother in My Big Fat Greek Wedding, the many portrayals of Santa and Mrs. Claus, and the competing maple syrup matrons Mrs. Butterworth and Aunt Jemima (who would provide an interesting basis for a study of racial differences in the various incarnations of the concept of food as love).

[2] It is possible that Dinah's illness resulted from insufficient care of her body, but there is no way to prove this, since the nature of the illness is unstated. The connection is also weakened by the fact that Mrs. Poyser, who apparently does keep her body well-fed and cared for, is afflicted with illness almost yearly (138, 513-14).

[3]See, for example, Audrey Jaffe, Saidiya V. Hartman, and Martha Nussbaum.

[4]Besides the passage already mentioned, see Harold's comment, "'I'm fond of sport; we had a great deal of it at Smyrna, and it keeps down my fat'" (33). See also Reverend Lingon on Harold and the connection between Englishness and physical fitness: "'When he's had plenty of English exercise, and brought out his knuckle a bit, he'll be a Lingon again as he used to be'" (44).

[5] Harold asks his mother, "'Am I not capable of making a conquest? Not too fat yet—a handsome, well-rounded youth of thirty-four?'" (348). Later, he tells Esther, "'The fact is . . . you consider me a fat, fatuous, self-satisfied fellow" (410). And in response to Esther's comment, "'I shall ask you to confess that you are not a romantic figure,'" he replies, "'I am a little too stout.'" Esther's answer: "'For romance—yes. At least you must find security for not getting stouter'" (420).

[6] I have not found any extended comparison between either of these pairs, although Helena Granlund lists all three characters as exemplars of "lower egoism in men" (32). Granlund makes many of the same points (about self-awareness and how it leads to change) that I do in this chapter, but she expresses them in theological rather than psychological terms.

[7] Granlund makes this same point and posits a reason for why Arthur does not become an unrepentant egoist like Tito in Romola or Grandcourt in Daniel Deronda (41).

[8] For other examples of substance abuse (loosely defined) or abuse of other people by British rural males in Eliot's novels, see Dempster's alcoholism and wife-beating in "Janet's Repentance" (Scenes of Clerical Life), Silas Marner's gold hoarding, and Mr. Tulliver's angry tirades and occasional physical violence in The Mill on the Floss.

[9] Whether or not this choice is advisable is not my subject, because it is not George Eliot's subject. I have, however, demonstrated throughout this study my inclination to think that being "overweight" (an arbitrary term itself) is not *necessarily* the unequivocally unhealthy condition that it is generally assumed to be. This is an important question, but it is one that properly belongs to the social science field, which should pay more attention to it.

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