

Epigraphic Form, from Ann Radcliffe to George Eliot

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Abstract

My thesis charts a history of the chapter epigraph through the eighteenth-century periodical, and the novels of Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott, and George Eliot. It examines the formal developments and stylistic variations of epigraph composition practiced by these authors, shedding light on the content and aims of their fiction, and on how they sought to moderate the imagined relationship between reader and writer. I argue that while Radcliffe, Scott, and Eliot, used the epigraph to different ends, consistent with their respective genres, all three attempted to correct some version of exclusionary politics. In particular, I sketch out a long tradition in which the epigraph has been used for highly gendered purposes, and explore how the practice laid the foundations for the modernist and, indeed, feminist, use of the fragment.

The emergence and popularisation of epigraphs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was concomitant with the expansion of the British reading audience. Whereas books had once been scarce and expensive, read several times over, and often aloud to friends and families, reading materials, such as books, newspapers, and periodicals, began to proliferate at this time. In turn, reading became a solitary, silent, and fast-paced activity. While we may think of the 'slow' movement, from slow cooking to slow reading, as a response to postmodern life, my research reveals how an earlier age confronted similar challenges. Then, as now, authors used epigraphs to fasten attention in a society devoted to haste and speed. In tracing the development of the epigraph from the eighteenth century to the present, my thesis therefore offers one possible approach to thinking about the cultural work of the novel and its effect on the mind of the reader.

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Introduction

Herman Melville's novel, *Moby-Dick, or the Whale*, was first published by Richard Bentley in England in 1851, coming out three weeks before the first American edition. Two days after he sent the corrected proofs to London, Melville decided to change his title from *The Whale* to *Moby-Dick*, and to dedicate the novel to his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne. Bentley received the changes in time to insert the dedication but was unable to change the title. Without Melville's approval, he also removed the novel's Epilogue in which Melville explains how Ishmael survives the sinking of the *Pequod* and is able to tell his tale. The abrupt ending to the novel led to some confusion, affecting the novel's critical reception and its sales in both Britain and America.

In the pages preceding the first chapter of his novel, Melville had placed an 'Etymology' of the word 'whale' and eighty 'Extracts' providing the reader with an assortment of allusions to whales throughout the ages, taken from various sources; some famous, some obscure. To make matters worse, Bentley moved these sections from the front of the novel to the back of it, placing them after the sinking of the *Pequod*. In effect, he accidentally turned what could be considered epigraphs into something closer to a set of epitaphs.¹ Melville, however, understood the importance of their placement. The 'Extracts' were intended to provide readers with "a historical and evolutionary frame for *Moby-Dick*'s narrative vision of death and rebirth," and to provoke them into "an attentive, reactive, and questioning reading of Ishmael's narrative."²

George Eliot would do something similar in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860): the Biblical title-page epigraph, "In their death, they were not divided," doubles as the epitaph on Tom and

¹ Thank you to Robert Douglas-Fairhurst for pointing this out to me.

² Frank Shuffelton, "Going Through the Long Vaticans: Melville's 'Extracts' in 'Moby-Dick'," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 25, no. 4 (1983): 528-29.

Maggie's tomb, creating a circular structure to the novel from a seemingly minor detail.³ In her late novels, Eliot used chapter epigraphs, but their meaning is often not apparent until the end of a chapter or, in some cases, the end of the novel. These additional elements, often overlooked, structure how one might read the text. Epigraphic interpretation is in equal parts anticipatory and retrospective, encouraging readers to look forward and then circle back. Used as keys, clues, or summaries, epigraphs colour the reader's expectations of the narrative; but when used as red herrings to disrupt expectations, the reader is called to reflect on the limits of her perceptions. Through this process of selection and reflection, she is transformed from a passive consumer into an active participant.

The reader of the epigraphic novel is a participant but not, as Roland Barthes defines it, a "producer of the text."⁴ In *S/Z* (1970), Barthes argued that texts could either be *lisible* (readerly) or *scriptible* (writerly). The *lisible* text, he claimed, "plunge[s] [the reader] into a kind of idleness, — he is intransitive; he is, in short, *serious*."⁵ By contrast, the *scriptible* text demands great effort of the reader who must "appreciate what *plural* constitutes it" and in effect become its writer or producer.⁶ The meaning of the *scriptible* text cannot be reduced, nor can one interpretation of it be privileged above another. The epigraphic novel, on the other hand, sets limits to the reader's interpretations. While the reader can and should appreciate the multiplex ties of such a work, she must also work within its various strictures. Interpretations may be illimitable, as Eliot claimed, but meaning is not.

Alongside Eliot's chapter epigraphs, Melville's own seem parodic or fantastical. Supposedly compiled by a monomaniacal "sub-sub" librarian, whom he describes as "a

³ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 1; 460.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

burrower and a grub worm,” his extracts suggest, as Robert Douglas-Fairhurst has observed, “a chaotic world in which all things are connected, nothing is irrelevant, and each doorway leads to a corridor full of more doors.”⁷ Melville does not refer to his “Extracts” as epigraphs. Yet, grouped together at the front of the book, they function much as a title-page epigraph would, providing an overview of what is to come. Present in such large number, however, these extracts exceed the confines of the title-page and rather bring to mind those used to populate the headings of chapters. Indeed, Melville’s contemporaries drew this comparison. Once the American edition had restored the “Extracts” to the front of the novel, William Young wrote in the New York *Albion* that, “Mr. Melville has crowded together in a few prefatory pages a large collection of brief and pithy extracts from authors innumerable, such as one might expect as headings for chapters. We do not like the innovation. It is having oil, mustard, vinegar, and pepper served up as a dish, in place of being scientifically administered sauce-wise.”⁸ Young, it seems, would have preferred the extracts to be parsed throughout the novel, as opposed to grouped together at the beginning of it.

The comparison of reading to eating is age-old but sheds light on a debate at the time of Melville’s writing about the nature and purpose of an extract. In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, fiction was often likened to a sweet, in contrast to instructive writing, which was described as nutritious food. Later, this distinction between the indulgent and the wholesome was applied within the novel itself through the metaphor of the English pudding, in which fictional narrative is the dough holding together the aphoristic plums. Reviewers were criticised for picking out these plums, and authors such as Eliot developed an ambivalent attitude toward anthologies, which were a commercial success but were thought to be a

⁷ Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, e-mail message to author, March 05, 2020.

⁸ William Young, review of *Moby-Dick*, *Albion* 10 (22 November 1851): 561; in Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, ed., *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 380-82.

mutilation of the novel's organic whole.⁹ While some believed the part, whether an aphoristic passage or an epigraph, could be picked out, extracted like a tooth, others thought the relationship between part and narrative whole was symbiotic. Extracted, the part could at best be a concentrated essence of the whole. Graham Greene would later suggest that we "save [our] valuable time and read only the epigraph . . . for the epigraph is what the novel is about," which was not a shared view in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ In a variation on more conventional culinary metaphors, Melville's reviewer, Young, figured extracts as condiments with the potential to add flavour and texture to a novel. This suggests epigraphs are consumed at the reader's discretion. Perhaps for this reason, epigraphs have traditionally received very little critical attention in comparison to other paratextual elements.

The subject of this thesis is the evolution of the chapter epigraph in British literature, charted through the eighteenth-century periodical, and the novels of Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott, and Eliot. It brings together the three authors who made the most substantial changes to the chapter epigraph and its intended function, and offers an account of how they sought to structure their readers' attention through this one particular form of paratext. Although the term paratext is now often associated with Gérard Genette, it was earlier used by Thomas Clayton in a paper on Shakespearean films, which he presented at an MLA conference in 1973. "By 'para-text'," Clayton wrote, "I mean a text that in fact and by intention and design stands alongside another, and — as the prefix implies — is in some sense derived from the other."¹¹ By this definition, Shakespearean films are 'para-texts' of Shakespeare's plays. However, it wasn't until Genette's *Seuils* was published in 1987, and then translated into English in 1997 as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, that the term gained traction in literary studies. His

⁹ Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 147-49.

¹⁰ Graham Greene, *Why the Epigraph?* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1989), 7.

¹¹ Thomas Clayton, "Aristotle on the Shakespearean Film: or, Damn Thee, William, Thou Art Translated," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 183-189.

book developed the concept of paratext, which came to encompass all of the physical and conceptual elements that affect a reader's reception of a given text; and paratextual scholarship has since become an important feature of the history of the book.¹²

In *Paratexts*, Genette set out his theories about the epigraph, among other paratextual elements. He distinguished allographic epigraphs (attributed to an author who is not the author of the work) from autographic epigraphs (attributed to the author of the work), terms he adapted from Nelson Goodman. Genette noted that attributions may be fictional; apocryphal; authentic but inaccurately referenced, if referenced at all. He identified the epigraph's four functions: to explain the title of the work, to comment on the work itself, to associate the work with another author, genre, or tradition; and to lend the work cultural or intellectual gravitas. He also noted that epigraphs are fair-use and can be obtained without permission. Authors seek the "indirect backing" of other authors, whose names can exert positive or polemic influence.¹³

Genette focuses on the intertextual aspects of the epigraph, an approach which has dominated most criticism of the form since *Paratexts*. It is an important one, especially as it comes to bear on the authors examined in this thesis; but it obfuscates the more important lines of inquiry running through Genette's study. Epigraphs are first and foremost hermeneutic challenges for the reader. Their significance can sometimes be divined; in other cases, the meaning of an epigraph is only clear in retrospect. Genette even claimed that certain epigraphs' semantic relevance is "random" although without the least ill-will on the part of the author. Certainly, not all epigraphs seek to orient readers toward a specific reading of the text, with some deliberately opening up interpretative possibilities as opposed to closing them down.

¹² See for instance, Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, ed., *Renaissance Paratexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth, ed., *Book Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹³ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, ed. Richard Macksey and Michael Sprinker, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 159.

While Genette distinguishes title-page epigraphs from those placed at the back of a work, writing that “the relationship between introductory epigraph and text is still prospective, whereas in theory the significance of the terminal epigraph, after the text has been read, is obvious and more authoritatively conclusive,” he makes no real distinction between title-page and chapter epigraphs.¹⁴ “Epigraphs of chapters, or of parts,” he claims, “or of individual works assembled in a collection, are placed even more regularly at the head of the section, and that is all there is to say about their location.”¹⁵ In the following chapters, I will be referring to novels with epigraphs as ‘epigraphic novels’ and to chapter epigraphs as ‘epigraphs’ unless otherwise specified. Although I am cognisant that the use of the chapter epigraph developed out of and alongside other practices such as classical imitation, this thesis assumes a fundamental difference between title-page epigraphs or poetic epigraphs (those at the head of poems), and chapter epigraphs. In some ways, chapter epigraphs are more similar to chapter titles than to title-page epigraphs. Chapter epigraphs have an important place in narrative form, structuring and setting a pace of reading. They emphasise the role of the reader in the construction of text, rather than its consumption.

The term epigraph migrated into the English language through the Greek word *epigraphēin*, meaning to ‘write upon or above’ something. Indeed, *epigraphy*, or the study of inscriptions, informs much of what we do as readers of epigraphic novels: the identification of a source, the clarification of meaning, the classification of cultural context, and the drawing of conclusions about the writing. However, the epigraph also shares affinities with the fragments of Greek works that have come down to us through quotation and paraphrase, the accidental remainders of a larger whole. In the Romantic period, Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August founded the *Athenaeum* journal (1798-1800), in which they both published fragments and theories about

¹⁴ Ibid., 149.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the fragment form. Unlike the Greek fragments, Romantic fragments were written as such. While, for Schlegel, the fragment is both part *and* whole, the chapter epigraph is dialogical and relational. It is not complete in itself. To read an epigraphic novel is to use the part to reconstruct the whole. Nonetheless, the Romantic fragment remains an important influence on Radcliffe, Scott, and Eliot, especially as it pertains to the political implications of the form. These authors used chapter epigraphs to different ends, consistent with the content and aims of the Gothic, historical, and realist genres. However, all three attempted to correct some version of exclusionary politics, be it gender, nation, or class.

The emergence and popularisation of chapter epigraphs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was concomitant with the expansion of the British reading audience. Changes in print technologies, paper production, copyright, and transportation, allowed the world of print to grow and circulate, while access to education widened. New readers might have been literate but lacking in general knowledge, and chapter epigraphs offered them clearer allusions than those embedded in the text, which are often unmarked.¹⁶ Latin and Greek more or less disappeared from the margins: most chapter epigraphs are in, or translated into, English. Eliot also quoted in the Romance languages but, by the time of her writing, could reasonably expect both her male and female readers to be familiar with them. First and foremost, however, chapter epigraphs were used to develop readers' critical thinking skills, to influence their attention spans, and to deepen their understanding, as well as their knowledge. Through chapter epigraphs, readers were taught to relate passages to more or less obvious contexts; to pursue a range of interpretative threads and detect their potential applications; and, in some cases, to preserve favoured parts of texts through memorisation, including material with oral associations. If the uses to which authors put chapter epigraphs seem to in large part

¹⁶ Rachel Sagner Buurma, "Epigraphs," in *Book Parts*, ed. Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 170.

accommodate a growing readership, they also betray an ambivalence about the novel's commercialisation and a desire to make the novel a respectable form.

Chapter epigraphs raise many familiar questions about the function of paratext, such as the proper delimitation of a work, and the relative significance and unspoken hierarchies of textual elements. In the novel, however, these questions acquire new ontological significance: who is speaking, from where and whence? Title-page or poetic epigraphs might tell us something about a writer or poet's sensibilities — humour, taste, ambitions; in this, epigraphs are indebted to earlier traditions of keeping a commonplace book, a record of one's reading-related interests. Yet chapter epigraphs often seem to belong to the characters as much as to the authors. Indeed, in the novel, chapter epigraphs help authors represent the minds of their characters and enable readers to better imagine them. Chapter epigraphs are more than a matter of authorial credentials and narrative content. Understood as formal features with cognitive and temporal, as well as aesthetic and affective, dimensions, chapter epigraphs shed light on how Radcliffe, Scott, and Eliot, imagined and moderated the relationship between author and reader.

While there are critical studies of chapter epigraphs in the work of these individual authors, this thesis examines chapter epigraphs within a longer perspective. Grouping Radcliffe, Scott, and Eliot, is in itself something of a radical gesture since Eliot's place in the canon often precludes her association with Radcliffe. However, this thesis draws a clear line of influence between all of them, arguing that each author's paratextual practice grew out of those preceding it. I have focused on one author per chapter, although, in Eliot's case, it is one novel per chapter. The chapters are consecutive, offering a chronological spectrum of the chapter epigraph and an overview of its use between the founding of the *Spectator* (1711-12) and the publication of *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

This thesis is not an exhaustive historical account of the chapter epigraph. Its argument unfolds through very close reading of the relationship between a novel's epigraphs and the

narrative in which the epigraphs have been placed, while also taking into account relevant historical, biographical, and compositional factors. The argument relies on a number of theoretical approaches, including Genette's paratextual and narrative theories, in *Paratexts* and later in *Narrative Discourse* (1983); Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia, polyphony and dialogism, first presented in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975); ideas and terms set forth by Barthes in both *S/Z* and *The Pleasures of the Text* (1973), as well as the introduction he wrote to La Rochefoucauld's maxims. It also builds on Leah Price's *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (2000) and the work she has done to show the reciprocal influence of the anthology and the novel forms. In placing the paratextual, intertextual, book historical, and narratological, in dialogue with one another, this thesis provides a departure from more conventional methods of describing both the historical development of the chapter epigraph and, more broadly, of the novel form.

I begin with the claim that Classical mottos, such as those used to preface individual issues of early eighteenth-century periodicals, are one possible origin of the chapter epigraph. The terms 'motto' and 'epigraph' cover a range of meanings that have served comparable purposes (such as philosophies of life, inscriptions on buildings, tombs, and coins, and quotations placed on title-pages) and have been used interchangeably. Tracing the transition of the epigraph from the periodical motto into the novel, I investigate how conventions of this sort develop over time and through genres. I then examine the use of epigraphs in the works of three seminal epigraphers, Radcliffe, Scott, and Eliot. I consider the evolution of chapter titles into chapter epigraphs, the shift from allographic to autographic epigraphs, and how the epigraph, at first considered an ornament, became a formal practice.

In Chapter One, I provide the historical background of the term 'epigraph'. I examine the extant eighteenth-century writing on the classical motto in order to demonstrate that the epigraph was conceived of as a humorous, as opposed to a pedantic, device, and to uncover the

class and gender biases latent in its use. While a limited number of middle-class women would have been able to read the Classical mottos in early eighteenth-century periodicals, women were given a significant role as implied readers, suggesting that women's developing access to print culture in the eighteenth century was a process of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion.

Chapter Two treats Radcliffe's epigraphs as a political form, bound up with issues of patriotic sentiment and gender. I argue that she wrote her fiction with the interests of a growing female readership in mind, placing English, as opposed to Latin or Greek, epigraphs at the head of her chapters, and quoting women alongside men. Examining the tropes of reading and forgetting oneself, I demonstrate how she used epigraphic form to temper the imagination through the development of rational thought. In doing so, Radcliffe worked to moderate the escapist potential of the Gothic novel, and her texts became a prevailing model of epigraphic form for Scott and, in turn, Eliot.

Radcliffe played an important part in catalysing interest in the epigraph but Scott was instrumental in its continued popularity. In Chapter Three, therefore, I turn to the epigraphs in Scott's first three novels, tracing, as far as is possible, Scott's debt to Radcliffe and his influence on Eliot. His transition from chapter titles to chapter epigraphs within a single novel, *Waverley* (1814), allows us to look at the place of titles in the historical development of the chapter's paratext, while the fictive sources to which he ascribed his autographic epigraphs mark a new epoque in the epigraph's record. Scott's epigraphs, I argue, function as both an archive of his reading and a form through which readers might be encouraged to memorise small passages through interpretation rather than mere reiteration. Through the cultivation of individual and cultural memories, Scott foregrounded the importance of heritage in the building of national sentiment; but he maintained a profound scepticism about the value of the 'authentic'. His epigraphs instead suggest that national inheritance might be as much manufactured as it is recovered.

Eliot, Scott's successor, pushed the epigraphic form even further. The second half of this thesis, Chapters Four, Five, and Six, are dedicated to her last three novels and the great imagination with which she used epigraphs. I consider both the evidence of authorial process through extant manuscripts, and the particular relationship between epigraphs and diegesis, in order to detail the progression of Eliot's epigraphic form and to make a case for *Daniel Deronda* as its striking summit. In Chapter Four, I consider how the epigraphs in *Felix Holt* (1866) articulate particular formal principles that were, for the Victorians, central to other spheres, such as science, politics, economics, and narrative. The epigraphs offer models and metaphors that help illustrate the dichotomies at work in the novel, such as determinism and choice, continuity and change. *Felix Holt* was the first of Eliot's three consecutive novels with epigraphs and, of the three, its epigraphs are the most constraining in terms of interpretative possibilities. In this longer perspective, I suggest the novels can be viewed as a training ground for the reader, as Eliot ceded the reader more freedom of thought over the course of her last three novels.

In *Middlemarch*, we find an Eliot far more probing of both the predictive function and protean qualities of epigraphic quotation. Eliot uses epigraphs to mislead her readers, making the experience of reading epigraphs analogous to the difficulties of knowing the other: we encounter others in fragments, a partial glimpse of a larger whole. Epigraphs remind us that there are at least two ways of 'telling' the same story. Chapter Five, therefore, uses the epigraphs in *Middlemarch* to think about sympathy as an exercise in choice, through the lens of prediction, gossip, translation, and emotion. Close attention to the epigraphs reveals the nuances of Eliot's determinism: to what extent can we shape our own character, and what role does reading have in this equation? Through epigraphs, Eliot attempted to make our recognition of other points of view a powerful mental habit, and to redeem gossip as a form of moral inquiry and a path to self-understanding.

Eliot devoted a great deal of *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch* to exploring the role of necessity and choice in determining our fate. In *Daniel Deronda*, she turned to a concept we now recognise as contingency, or *kontinge*: the idea that things are so, but might have been otherwise. Epigraphs, I argue, present themselves as perfect models of the contingent: at once fixed in meaning and open to the vagaries of interpretation. Eliot used them to negotiate the conditions of reception of her novel, granting her readers the freedom of “imaginative *reach*” while maintaining causal sequence as her organising principle.¹⁷ In recognising contingency, and the ways in which it structures the novel, we are able to see more clearly how *Daniel Deronda* anticipates experiments in Modernist literature.

In the Modernist period, the chapter epigraph more or less disappears from the novel. However, Eliot’s legacy is felt in the fragmentation of the Modernist novel, an aesthetic that has since moved into post-modern and, specifically, contemporary feminist, writing. The chapter epigraph has experienced a revival of late, appearing in novels of diverse genres. In conclusion, I turn to Annie Proulx’s *The Shipping News* (1993) and Kate Zambreno’s *Green Girl* (2011) to show how both these authors participate in the long and highly gendered tradition I will be sketching out.

In comparing epigraphs to sauce, Melville’s reviewer, Young, captures much of the conflict at the heart of this thesis: to the cook, the sauce might seem an integral part of the dish, but sauce is also, in its nature, optional. The diner might choose to partake, or not. While the novels this thesis examines are intelligible without their epigraphs, the epigraphs provide perspectives that are crucial to the prose that follows them. Did novel-readers of the past read epigraphs? Not all, I suspect, but it is impossible for us to know. In our own age of distraction, it seems more probable than ever that epigraphs remain unread. However, we *are* able to deduce from

¹⁷ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 195.

narrative form how authors past and present both expected and desired their novels to be read, and how epigraphic form was used to shape the reading habits of their audiences. In tracing the development of the epigraph from the eighteenth century to the present, this thesis offers one possible approach to thinking about the cultural work of the novel and its effect on the mind of the reader.

Chapter One

“That Little Scrap”: The Politics of the Periodical Motto

In 1989, Graham Greene published a small volume entitled *Why The Epigraph?* in which he assembled the epigraphs he had used over the span of his career. He claimed he could not expect a reader to plough through all of his novels. This way, “At least, [the reader] will be able to boast that he knows what they were about.”¹⁸ Greene understood the epigraph as summative or proleptic, giving the reader a sense of what is to come. However, he also gestured toward the epigraph as a marker of personal history. In the forward, he explained that, “an author’s work changes, as his ideas change, with the years, and the epigraphs he uses, like his books, form a sort of autobiography.”¹⁹ Arranged in chronological order, the epigraphs inform us about the author’s evolving sensibilities, and remind us that writers are also readers. Read in this way, the epigraph is more like a motto, expressing a philosophy of life. Indeed, in early modern texts, title-page mottos more often referred to the author of the work than to the work itself.²⁰

Chapter epigraphs began in earnest as Greek or Latin ‘mottos’, placed at the head of a periodical issue. One reader of Henry Fielding’s political journal *The True Patriot* (1745-6) writes to the journal to say that he likes Fielding’s “method of placing a motto from the classics at the head of every paper.” The reader adds that, “It must give some Encouragement to [his] readers that the author understands, at least, one line of Latin, which is perhaps more than can

¹⁸ Graham Greene, *Why the Epigraph?* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1989), 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ “Gérard Genette suggests, like [Anne] Ferry, that the author’s coat of arms—specifically, the quotations that sometimes appear upon coats of arms—might be considered the epigraph’s forerunner.” See Rachel Sagner Buurma, “Epigraphs,” in *Book Parts*, ed. Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 167.

be safely predicated of every writer in this age.”²¹ This is the epigraph’s most powerful and oblique effect: the mere presence of an epigraph is a sign of high culture. However, in removing epigraphs from their (newest) sources, collections such as Greene’s *Why the Epigraph?* and, more recently, Rosemary Ahern’s *The Art of the Epigraph: How Great Books Begin* (2012), attempt the impossible task of making the epigraph stand alone. As Rachel Sagner Buurma notes, Ahern’s “brief descriptions cannot restore to readers the deep roots that anchor epigraphs in the fertile ground of their hosts. If it floats alone, the epigraph is merely a quotation.”²² Epigraph collections are therefore unusual, although these have a storied past that stretches back to the shifting print culture of early eighteenth-century England.

The collection and publication of epigraphs is a practice that predates the term. As we have seen, the term ‘epigraph’ came into the English language from the Greek word *epigraphēin*, meaning to ‘write upon or above’ something. This understanding of the epigraph as an inscription placed upon a building, tomb, statue or coin, or as the superscription of a letter or book, can be dated back to the seventeenth century.²³ Its definition as “a short quotation or pithy sentence placed at the commencement of a work, a chapter, etc. to indicate the leading idea or sentiment,” did not appear until the mid-nineteenth century; at which time the interest in the materiality of the Greek language started to become more pronounced, especially within classical studies.²⁴ The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s earliest recorded usage of the term

²¹ Henry Fielding, *The True Patriot and Related Writings*, ed. W. B. Coley (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 152.

²² Rachel Sagner Buurma, “Do Epigraphs Matter?” *The New Republic*, December 6, 2012, <https://newrepublic.com/article/110640/art-epigraph-how-great-books-begin-rosemary-ahern>.

²³ “epigraph, n.”. OED Online. March 2020. Oxford University Press. <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2360/view/Entry/63381?rskey=ZcPXEf&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed May 18, 2020).

²⁴ Stefano Evangelista, “Greek Textual Archaeology and Erotic Epigraphy in Simeon Solomon and Michael Field,” *Cahiers Victoriens & Édouardiens (Online)* no. 78 (Autumn 2013): 2-17. <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2186/docview/1629952238?accountid=13042>.

‘epigraph’ is from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850).²⁵ In this sonnet, the last of the sequence, Barrett Browning looks forward to a new life with Robert Browning. She claims to “seek no copy now of life’s first half” and invites Browning to “write me new my future’s epigraph.”²⁶ The epigraph represents the threshold between the first and second halves of her life.

The *OED* offers George Henry Lewes’ *Problems of Life and Mind* (1874) as an early example of the term ‘epigraph’ being used in relation to the chapter unit. Stressing an important distinction between animal and human consciousness, Lewes writes that, “[the distinction] is formulated by Auguste Comte in that phrase [“Entre l’Homme et le Monde il faut l’Humanité”] which is placed as an epigraph to this chapter.”²⁷ However, he also observes that “the phrase was not by [Comte] understood precisely in the sense here assigned,” pointing to the power of meaning to shift according to context, and of authorial intention to create that shift. Epigraphs allow text to be repurposed, placed in a new context to which the epigraph’s quoted author has not consented, the original meaning distorted or forgotten. Although Gérard Genette claims paratext is “always bearer of authorial commentary either more or less legitimated by the author,” the meaning of an epigraph can also transcend the quoting author’s intention, as most epigraphic quotation is susceptible to more than one interpretation.²⁸ Lewes, whose *Problems of Life and Mind* postdates his partner George Eliot’s first two epigraphic novels, would have had her in mind, as her epigraphs are a prime example of both of these risks. The nineteenth century, therefore, saw a substantial change in the definition and the use of the epigraph.

²⁵ “epigraph, n.”. *OED Online*. September 2019. Oxford University Press. <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:10465/view/Entry/63381?rkey=DnrU7D&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed November 25, 2019).

²⁶ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Sonnets from the Portuguese,” in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Josie Billington and Philip Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 498-99.

²⁷ George Henry Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind: The Foundations of a Creed* (London: Trübner and Company, 1974), 1:123. (Between men and the world we need humanity.)

²⁸ Gérard Genette, “Introduction to the Paratext,” *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 261.

Prior to this change, the epigraph was known as a motto, and the terms continued to be used interchangeably for some time. Although the use of the motto in English literature can be traced back as far back as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400), the *OED* suggests that the motto, defined as "a short quotation or epigram placed at the beginning of a book, periodical, etc." was an eighteenth-century development.²⁹ In France, the motto had already appeared in works of ideas, such as the 1678 edition of La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions, ou Sentences et Maximes Morales*, and La Bruyère's *Caractères* (1688) but, as in England, did not become widespread until the eighteenth century.³⁰ In England, the motto was popularised by its use in the periodical essay, although it abounded in print culture more widely, including novels and dictionaries.³¹ The *Tatler* (1709-11), precursor to the *Spectator* (1711-12), made use of the motto, as did Daniel Defoe's *Review* (1704-1713), the *Guardian* (1713), and the *Rambler* (1750-2). However, the *OED*'s first example for this definition of the motto is from the *Spectator*, in which Joseph Addison asserts, "But as for my unlearned Friends, if they cannot relish the Motto, I take care to make Provision for them in the Body of my Paper."³² Addison points to the motto as an indulgence for those with a classical education, and to the exegetical relationship between motto and essay. Although the study of epigraphy gained an increasingly prominent status within classical studies in the nineteenth century, these

²⁹ "motto, n.". *OED Online*. June 2017. Oxford University Press. <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2355/view/Entry/122777?rskey=ZJN6jg&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed October 12, 2017).

³⁰ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, ed. Richard Macksey and Michael Sprinker, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 145.

³¹ Janine Barchas, "The Title Page," in *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60-91.

³² *Ibid.* See No. 221 (November 13, 1711). Joseph Addison et al., *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 2:359.

eighteenth-century essayists were already borrowing from the aesthetics of epigraphy, reproducing classical text in the pages of periodicals.³³

By the end of the eighteenth century, the motto was so ubiquitous that James Boswell expressed surprise that, “a motto, the usual trapping of the periodical paper, is prefixed to very few of the *Idlers* . . . hav[ing] heard Johnson commend the custom: and he never could be at a loss for one, his memory being stored with innumerable passages from the classicks [*sic*].”³⁴ Perhaps, as Walter Scott would happen to many decades later, he grew tired of having to provide them.³⁵ In issue No. 9 of the *Idler* (June 10, 1758), one reader complains to Johnson that the *Idler* (1758-60) is not idle enough for his liking. “You may publish, burn, or destroy this [letter],” he writes to Johnson, “it is ten to one but I forget that I wrote it before it reaches you. I believe you may find a motto for it in Horace, but I cannot reach him without getting out of my chair; that is a sufficient reason for my not affixing any.”³⁶ Perhaps Johnson thought along the same lines as his disgruntled reader; that having to source mottos for each issue did not accord with the idling ethos of this particular periodical.

In this chapter, I argue for the motto as one possible origin of the chapter epigraph, and uncover Fielding as an unlikely but important figure in its history. The periodical reached its full flowering in Addison and Richard Steele’s daily *Spectator*, and it is in this periodical that Addison theorised about his use of mottos. This chapter, therefore, performs a close reading of issue No. 221 (November 13, 1711) in order to examine the convention, and the assumptions about class, and gender, that it both makes and enforces. In thinking about the motto as a speech

³³ Evangelista, “Greek Textual Archaeology and Erotic Epigraphy in Simeon Solomon and Michael Field,” 2-17.

³⁴ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin, 2008), 178.

³⁵ On March 24, 1826, Scott wrote in his journal: “J. B. clamorous for a motto. Go to. D—n the mottoe. It is foolish to encourage people to expect mottoes and such like Decoraments. You have no credit for finding them, and there is a disgrace in wanting them.” See W. E. K. Anderson, ed. *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 119.

³⁶ No. 9 (June 10, 1758). Samuel Johnson, *The Idler* (London: Printed for T. Davies, 1767), 49.

act, this chapter pushes back on Terry Eagleton's claims about periodicals and the creation of an egalitarian public sphere. He argues that, "*What* is spoken or written, within this rational space, pays due deference to the niceties of class and rank; but the speech act itself, the *énonciation* as opposed to the *énoncé*, figures in its very form an equality, autonomy and reciprocity at odds with its class-bound content."³⁷ This chapter demonstrates on the contrary that the periodical motto did not contradict but actively enforced hierarchies and exclusions.

The Motto and Imitation

As far back as 1730, in *The Author's Farce*, Fielding was poking fun at the motto. In *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), Fielding compares his own use of introductory chapters to the *Spectator's* use of mottos. Both of these, he teases, function "as a kind of mark or stamp" allowing readers "to distinguish what is true and genuine in this historic kind of writing, from what is false and counterfeit."³⁸ His allusion to marks and stamps reflects an early definition of the epigraph as the legend on a coin that conveys information about which country it was minted in and for what purpose. Just as Fielding's chapters are meant to differentiate *Tom Jones* from a potential "swarm of foolish novels and monstrous romances," the motto protects the periodical from 'imitators' of the form:³⁹

the ingenious author of the *Spectator* was principally induced to prefix Greek and Latin mottos to every paper, from the same consideration of guarding against the pursuit of those scribblers, who having no talents of a writer but what is taught by the writing-master, are yet nowise afraid nor ashamed to assume the same titles with the greatest genius, than their good brother in the fable was of braying in the lion's skin.

³⁷ Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1990), 14-15.

³⁸ Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), 428.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

By the device therefore of his motto, it became impracticable for any man to presume to imitate the Spectators, without understanding at least one sentence in the learned languages. In the same manner I have now secured myself from the imitation of those who are utterly incapable of any degree of reflection, and whose learning is not equal to an essay.⁴⁰

With witty self-consciousness, Fielding claims the motto to be a protection against plagiarism and uses this tongue-in-cheek solution as a defence of his own digressive form. As Janine Barchas observes, “the epigraphic trend seems to come up against the decade’s escalating self-consciousness about the way the emerging novel presents itself in printed form.”⁴¹ Just as the motto is the device through which the author, according to Genette, “chooses his peers and thus his place in the pantheon,” Fielding aligned himself with the essay, which requires ‘reflection’ and ‘learning’, unlike the unserious and unsophisticated novel.⁴²

Despite Fielding’s humorous tone, he points to a genuine concern in the print culture of the time around issues of reprinting and repurposing. When the Licensing Act lapsed in 1695, it became technically legal to publish under false imprints. The periodical essay, more than other genres, was subject to imitation, forgery, and plagiarism.⁴³ The *Tatler*’s most famous imitator was the *Female Tatler*, by Mrs Crackenthorpe, a Lady that Knows Everything (1709-1710), one of the first periodicals written primarily for, although not aimed solely at, female readers. In turn, the *Female Tatler* acquired its own imitator. The first 18 issues of the periodical were printed triweekly by Benjamin Bragge. On 19 August 1709, however, two *Female Tatlers* appeared: one printed by Bragge, the other by Ann Baldwin.⁴⁴ These two

⁴⁰ Ibid., 428-9.

⁴¹ Barchas, “The Title Page,” 89.

⁴² Genette, *Paratexts*, 160.

⁴³ Robert DeMaria, Jr., “The Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay,” in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 535.

⁴⁴ Iona Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: Anxious Employment* (London: Routledge, 2005), 49.

publications continued to be issued concurrently for about two months, each denouncing the other as an illegitimate product of male authorship.⁴⁵ In October 1709, Bragge ceased publication, but the *Female Tatler* continued to appear under Baldwin's imprint until the end of its run in March 1710.

Although the *Female Tatler* set up a challenge to its predecessor on the grounds of gender, it followed the *Tatler*'s example and used mottos at the head of its issues. The mottos were taken from classical texts and therefore could only be understood by those versed in Greek and Latin. In the eighteenth century, this excluded many men and most women. Issue 3 of the *Female Tatler* alludes to this issue: "Several Ladies . . . had a dispute about the story of *Sum Canna Vocalis*, the Motto of this Paper, (tho' they know the English of it, which is this, *I am a talking Reed*, having learn'd Latin of the famous *Mr. Switterda*)."⁴⁶ Nicola Parsons explains the tale from Ovid which has caused this dispute:

The motto recalls the myth of a man who digs a hole in a riverbank in which to whisper a secret he is unable to keep. Nearby reeds take up his secret and broadcast, or publish, it with each gust of wind. This story provides a motif for the *Female Tatler*'s approach to its subject matter: rather than suggesting the intimate communication that is established and sustained by gossip, it emblematises communication that is indiscriminate and thus relatively democratic.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "[T]he reader is constantly meeting with claims that the so-called "spurious" *Female Tatler*, which was published consistently by B. Bragge, in Paternoster Row, is the original and genuine periodical (see especially Nos. 22 and 33 of the B. Bragge series) and that the other, put out by A. Baldwin, from No. 19, is in reality the fraud." Practically every number of the B. Bragge *Female Tatler* claimed Bragge could provide "complete setts [of the periodical] from the beginning," while the other 'Mrs. Crackenthorpe' declared she had been mistreated by Bragge, left him for Baldwin, only to find that "authors cannot even command their names and titles." See Walter Graham, "Thomas Baker, Mrs. Manley, and the "Female Tatler"," *Modern Philology* 34, no. 3 (February 1937): 268.

⁴⁶ Early in the eighteenth century, a Mr. Switterda advertised his services in the *Postman* as a private tutor, offering "a very easy, short, and delightful Method, which is full, plain, most expeditious and effectual, without pedantry, resolving all into a laudable and most beneficial practice by which Gent. And Ladies, who can but spare to be but twice in a week with him, may in two years time learn *Latin, French and High Dutch*, not only to speak them truly and properly, but also to understand a classical author." See James Peller Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London During the Eighteenth Century* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), 1:327.

⁴⁷ Nicola Parsons, *Reading Gossip in Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 111.

Rather than trivialising gossip as a feminine pursuit, the motto legitimises gossip as a form of public discourse. The editor acknowledges that not all women can read Latin, although some readers of the *Female Tatler* do. In acknowledging this disparity, the editor positions the *Female Tatler* as a periodical for and by educated women, specifically; regardless of whether its editorial figures were indeed all female.⁴⁸ Although the *Female Tatler* attempts to recoup periodical writing as a female enterprise, it translated fewer of its mottos than the *Spectator*, thereby not challenging but consolidating this norm. The use of the classical motto reinforced bonds among the more educated and largely male audience, establishing a cultural currency and shared language.

The Politics of the Motto

Several decades before the publication of *Tom Jones*, and before he was writing full numbers for the *Tatler*, Addison began supplying the periodical with its various Latin mottos. Prior to this, Steele had used the same motto for every issue, taken from Juvenal's first satire: "Quidquid agunt homines nostri farrago libelli," or "Whatever men get up to is the motley subject of our little book." This change was representative of the influence of Addison's classical learning on the *Tatler* and, later, on the *Spectator*.⁴⁹ Addison would later dedicate an entire issue of the *Spectator* to the motto, in which he theorised about its use in his own essays. In No. 221 (November 13, 1711), he wrote:

⁴⁸ Scholars remain uncertain about the *Female Tatler*'s authorship but Thomas Baker (1656–1740) seems the most likely candidate. Delarivier Manley is another possible contender, as are Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733) and Susanna Centlivre (1669?–1723). For a summary of evidence, see *ibid.*, 49–52. However, Rachel Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008) finds the evidence for Manley unconvincing and leans toward Baker.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

When I have finished any of my Speculations, it is my Method to consider which of the ancient Authors have touched upon the Subject that I treat of. By this means I meet with some celebrated Thought upon it, or a Thought of my own expressed in better Words, or some Similitude for the Illustration of my Subject. This is what gives Birth to the Motto of a Speculation, which I rather chuse [*sic*] to take out of the Poets than the Prose-writers, as the former generally give a finer Turn to a Thought than the latter, and by couching it in few Words, and in harmonious Numbers, make it more portable to the Memory.

My Reader is therefore sure to meet with at least one good Line in every Paper, and very often finds his Imagination entertained by a Hint that awakens in his Memory some beautiful Passage of a Classick [*sic*] Author.⁵⁰

Addison establishes some of the motto's functions, including historical precedence, memorisation, and prolepsis. Genette would nuance this list in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), claiming four general functions for the epigraph: a comment on the title, a comment on the text, a citation of an author whose name gives backing to the work, or a quotation marking the period or tone of a piece.⁵¹ Addison's claim that his reader might recall a beautiful passage from the Classics echoes one of his earlier observations. Reflecting on his visit to Rome, the highlight of a tour he made through Europe from 1701 to 1703, he wrote: "A man who is in Rome can scarce see an Object that does not call to Mind a Piece of a Latin Poet."⁵² Borrowing from the aesthetics of epigraphy, Addison's Greek and Latin mottos behave like material objects, appealing to the reader's senses, including the traditional gaze and the more surprising touch. This anticipates Eliot's description of Latin fragments in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) as "mysterious sentences, snatched from an unknown context, — like strange horns of beasts, and leaves of unknown plants, brought from some far-off region."⁵³ In this

⁵⁰ No. 221 (November 13, 1711). *The Spectator*, 2:358-9.

⁵¹ Genette, *Paratexts*, 156-60.

⁵² Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy in the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* (London, 1705), 140, in *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. A. C. Guthkelch, 2 vols. (London, 1914), 2:13-237; 140; cited in Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 178.

⁵³ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 130.

passage, language is textured and can be apprehended through haptic perception. Eliot, like Addison, used epigraphs to encourage a more embodied mode of reading but, as I will argue in the last chapter of this thesis, excitingly positioned this reading as peculiarly feminine.

In the passage above, quoted from issue No. 221 of the *Spectator*, Addison explains that he writes his own “Speculations” before consulting the classical authors for a relevant motto. Reluctant to admit his own ideas are derivative, he claims the mottos are added to his “Speculations” once he has finished writing them. Yet, many issues of the *Spectator* seem to contradict this claim of a retrospective search, with references to the motto in the main text. Addison does concede, however, that the classical poets are able to “give a finer Turn to a Thought” than he or the classical prose writers could. From this we can infer that brevity, and the voice of common wisdom, play an integral part in the shaping and reshaping of culture.

Sometimes, the motto is itself the subject of the essay, creating an exegetical relationship between both. In such cases, the mottos seem to have been points of departure for Addison. Buurma observes that, “In English books printed before 1700, epigraph-like texts appear primarily in sermons to introduce biblical texts for explication.”⁵⁴ This fact is particularly interesting in light of the idea that, as Joseph Collet, an East India agent, wrote to his daughter, “Next to the Bible you cannot read any writings so much to your purpose for the improvement of your mind and the conduct of your Actions [as the *Spectator*].”⁵⁵ In the *Spectator*, mottos are utilised as an oblique form of teaching via their links to enigma, riddle, and oracular utterance. Despite its ironies, it seems the *Spectator* was near sacred to some readers; published six times a week, it could be likened to reading a devotional. Addison

⁵⁴ Buurma, “Epigraphs,” 168.

⁵⁵ Joseph Collet, *Private Letter Books of Joseph Collet*, ed. H. H. Dodwell (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1933), 74–75; cited in the introduction to *The Spectator*, by Joseph Addison et al., ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1:xcv.

himself draws a playful comparison between his use of Latin and Greek, and that of two preachers:

I have heard of a Couple of Preachers in a Country Town, who endeavoured which should outshine one another, and draw together the greatest Congregation. One of them being well versed in the Fathers, used to quote every now and then a Latin Sentence to his illiterate Hearers, who it seems found themselves so edified by it, that they flocked in greater Numbers to this learned Man than to his Rival. The other finding his Congregation mouldering every Sunday, and hearing at length what was the Occasion of it, resolved to give his Parish a little Latin in his Turn; but being unacquainted with any of the Fathers, he digested into his Sermons the whole Book of *Quæ Genus*, adding however such Explications to it as he thought might be for the Benefit of his People. He afterwards entered upon *As in præsentia*, which he converted in the same manner to the Use of his Parishioners. This in a very little time thickned [*sic*] his Audience, filled his Church, and routed his Antagonist.⁵⁶

Unfamiliar with the Classics, this second preacher fills his sermons with words from the Latin Grammar. Although this anecdote is amusing, it condescends to those without a classical education. Addison figures himself by implication as a sort of secular preacher; and, taken as evidence of the extent of Addison and Steele's reading, the mottos represent the *Spectator's* enterprise of cultural and moral self-improvement through the interpretation of civil, as opposed to religious, literature. In issue No. 4, Steele laments those who "perused [his] Papers like Spectators rather than Readers."⁵⁷ The exegetical relationship between motto and essay is an example of the active reading required of the periodical's audience, and positions Addison and Steele as mediators, suggesting the periodical essay as an early form of criticism. Indeed, the epigraph has now become a hallmark of critical practice. Yet, while the essays posit this active reading as a basic condition of thoughtful citizenship, the conditions of civic participation are prohibitive for many of its middle-class readers.

⁵⁶ No. 221 (November 13, 1711). *The Spectator*, 2:358-9.

⁵⁷ No. 4 (March 5, 1711). *The Spectator*, 1:18.

This process of enablement and restriction is simultaneous, and related to that of the public realm and private sphere. In issue No. 221, Addison compares the motto to a letter of recommendation:

It was a Saying of an ancient Philosopher, which I find some of our Writers have ascribed to Queen Elizabeth, who perhaps might have taken occasion to repeat it, That a good Face is a Letter of Recommendation. It naturally makes the Beholders inquisitive into the Person who is the Owner of it, and generally prepossesses them in his Favour. A handsome Motto has the same Effect. Besides that, it always gives a Supernumerary Beauty to a Paper, and is sometimes in a manner necessary when the Writer is engaged in what may appear a Paradox to vulgar Minds, as it shews that he is supported by good Authorities, and is not singular in his Opinion.⁵⁸

The ancient Philosopher quoted here is Diogenes Laertius. He himself attributed the phrase to Aristotle.⁵⁹ The phrase also makes an appearance in Fielding's *Tom Jones* when an old Gentleman tells Jones that, "I have read that a good countenance is a letter of recommendation" and in *Amelia* (1751) when Dr. Harrison tells Amelia that, "A good face they say, is a letter of recommendation."⁶⁰ Given the close attention he paid to Addison's use of the motto, Fielding presumably got this phrase from the *Spectator*. Just as a good face inspires confidence in the beholder, a handsome motto lures in the reader. If the essayist is making an unpopular claim, the motto can also legitimise his opinion. However, the analogy between good face and handsome motto complicates more than it explicates. Just as Nicholas Dames argues of chapter heads, mottos "are also, peculiarly, narratorial speech acts. They exist, that is, both outside of and within the diegesis; they raise a question of voice . . . that is also a question of ontology."⁶¹ The motto raises questions as to who is its owner; whether a motto can be considered a speech

⁵⁸ No. 221 (November 13, 1711). *The Spectator*, 2:359.

⁵⁹ Thomas Keymer and Alice Wakely, explanatory notes to *The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling*, by Henry Fielding (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), 930.

⁶⁰ Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 395; Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 374.

⁶¹ Nicholas Dames, "Chapter Heads," in *Book Parts*, ed. Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 162.

act, or whether it is simply a report or mention of a past one. The possibility of misattribution also demonstrates how quotation straddles the divide between the privately owned and collectively produced. The original source can get lost as quotations are reinflected and acquire new meanings.

The *Spectator*'s paratext both performed and permitted Addison and Steele's anonymity. Addison prefixed to issue No. 221 a passage from Horace's *Satires*, "Ab Ovo / Usque ad Mala," meaning from beginning to end. In its original context, it referred to the Roman custom of beginning a meal with eggs and ending it with apples.⁶² In the *Spectator*, Addison uses it to illustrate what he calls the "extremities" of his paper; the motto at the beginning of it, and the capital letters placed at the end of it.⁶³ While the motto and its functions are playfully thought-through, Addison pokes fun at the self-evidence of the signatures. "There may be a great deal of fine Writing in the Capital Letters which bring up the Rear of my Paper but as for the full Explication of these Matters, I must refer them to Time, which discovers all things."⁶⁴ Addison and Steele picked arbitrary letters as their signatures, and often changed them, so that the essays could not be linked to one or the other.⁶⁵ "I have made use of these obscure Marks," writes Addison, "for the [purpose that you should not know]. They are, perhaps, little Amulets or Charms to preserve the Paper against the Fascination and Malice of Evil Eyes."⁶⁶ Perhaps, then, Fielding's facetious comments, about the motto as protection

⁶² No. 221 (November 13, 1711). *The Spectator*, 2:358. Addison shortens Horace's "From eggs, which first are set upon the board, / To apples ripe, with which it last is stored."

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2:359.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:361.

⁶⁵ Scholarly work has attributed the various letters to their respective authors: Steele's signature was R until No. 91; then T, and occasionally R, until No. 134; then always T. Addison signed C until No. 85, when he first used L; and he was L or C until No. 265, then L again, until he first used I in No. 372. Once or twice using L, he was I until No. 405, which he signed O, and by this letter he held, except for a return to C (with a single use of O), from 433 to 477. See Henry Morley, ed., *The Spectator: A New Edition Reproducing the Original Text Both as First Issued and as Corrected by its Authors with Introduction, Notes, and Index* (New York: George Routledge and Sons, 1883), 1:15.

⁶⁶ No. 221 (November 13, 1711). *The Spectator*, 2:360.

against plagiarism, are a deliberate conflation of Addison's explanations of mottos and signatures.

Within the periodical itself, mottos functioned as vessels and markers of culture, helping to determine what was read and by whom. Although Isaac Bickerstaff, the *Spectator's* editorial persona, claims that, "The Club of which I am a Member, is very luckily composed of such Persons as are engaged in different Ways of Life and deputed as it were out of the most conspicuous Classes of Mankind," it is clear that the *Spectator's* address to its readers was not altogether democratic.⁶⁷ The periodical's audience was educated but not to the same extent as, for example, the audiences for journals of learned societies; and although this middle-class audience was often female, the *Spectator* made extensive use of Addison's classical learning.⁶⁸ Addison likened the classical motto found at the top of each issue of the *Spectator* to a sign hanging from metal brackets at the side of an inn:

I must confess, the Motto is of little Use to an unlearned Reader, for which Reason I consider it only as *a Word to the Wise*. But as for my unlearned Friends, if they cannot relish the Motto, I take care to make Provision for them in the Body of my Paper. If they do not understand the Sign that is hung out, they know very well by it, that they may meet with Entertainment in the House; and I think I was never better pleased than with a plain Man's Compliment, who, upon his Friend's telling him that he would like the *Spectator* much better if he understood the Motto, replied, *That good Wine needs no Bush*.⁶⁹

The origin of inn signs can be traced back to the Romans, who hung vine leaves outside their tavern doors to indicate that they sold wine. In Britain, inn keepers used small evergreen bushes, as vines were in short supply. Some centuries later, medieval publicans placed distinctive objects at the front of their establishments in order to distinguish them from the

⁶⁷ No. 34 (April 9, 1711). *The Spectator*, 1:141–42.

⁶⁸ DeMaria, "The Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay," 528.

⁶⁹ No. 221 (November 13, 1711). *The Spectator*, 2:359.

surrounding properties. While the ‘naming’ of inns and public houses was commonplace by the twelfth century, signage became a legal requirement in 1393. As a large portion of the population was illiterate, most of the signs were pictorial representations of tankards and hops, white harts, or crowns and roses. Just as the illiterate would have been able to recognise simple pictures, so women and ‘plain’ men would be able to read the English text, if not the classical motto. Once a purely economic marker, the motto became for the *Spectator*, and other periodicals, a site of class and gender bias. The expectation was that few female readers would be able to read the required Latin and Greek.

Despite this, women were given a significant role as implied readers, suggesting that women’s developing access to print culture in the eighteenth century was a process of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. Addison continues:

The natural Love to *Latin* which is so prevalent in our common People, makes me think that my Speculations fare never the worse among them for that little Scrap which appears at the Head of them; and what the more encourages me in the Use of Quotations in an unknown Tongue is, that I hear the Ladies, whose Approbation I value more than that of the whole Learned World, declare themselves in a more particular manner pleased with my *Greek* Mottos.⁷⁰

The periodical motto both widens the net that Addison can cast over his audience and affirms, within this audience, serious socioeconomic and sexual difference. According to Addison, the motto can be of no use to the unlearned, although “common people” love Latin and “the Ladies” love Greek.⁷¹ This interest in the classical motto is superficial, with the motto figuring as a kind of exotica. Indeed, the following year, Steele admits in issue No. 370 (May 5, 1712) that:

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2:360.

⁷¹ For more on the gender politics of Ladies’ Greek, particularly in the Victorian period, see Simon Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek? Contests in the Cultural History of Hellenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Yopie Prins, *Ladies’ Greek: Victorian Translations of Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Many of my Fair Readers, as well as very gay and well-received persons of the other Sex, are extremely perplex'd at the *Latin* Sentences at the Head of my Speculations; I do not know whether I ought not to indulge them with Translations of each of them.⁷²

Steele spearheaded the *Spectator*'s efforts to make the world more polite to women.⁷³ Robert DeMaria claims that while Addison is quick to ridicule coquettish women, their childish, 'French' behaviour, or their reading, Steele seems to like women more and is slower to articulate dismissive principles.⁷⁴ In this particular issue, Steele did translate the motto in the body of the essay for his female readers, but this was not true of all issues.

The mottos from the *Spectator* were, at a later date, collected, translated, and published as commonplace books.⁷⁵ However, in stripping the mottos of their exegetical counterparts, the value of translation is no longer apparent. "If commonplace books enable the collection of the textual gleanings that furnish an educated mind," Scott Black argues, "essays enable the work of digestion that integrates those findings into one's thinking."⁷⁶ Within the periodical, the mottos demonstrate how everyday life can be invested with moral significance in relation to the past. The translation might grant more readers access to a motto's literal meaning but, given that these collections were published in the years following the end of the *Spectator*'s run, it seems unlikely readers would have cross referenced the mottos to past issues in order to uncover the design behind their use.

⁷² No. 370 (May 5, 1712), 3:393.

⁷³ DeMaria, "The Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay," 540.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ For instance *The Motto's [sic] of the Five Volumes of Tatlers, and the Two Volumes of the Spectator, Translated into English. To Which is Added, a Complete Index to the Two Volumes of the Spectator* (London: Printed for John Morphew near Stationers-Hall, 1712); *The Motto's [sic] of the Last 224 Spectators, from N° 170 to N° 400 Inclusive. To Which is Added an Alphabetical Index* (London: Printed for Bernard Lintott between the Two Temple-Gates in Fleet-Street, 1712); and *The Motto's [sic] of the Two Last Volumes of Spectators, from N° 401, to N° 555 Inclusive* (London: Printed for Bernard Lintott between the Two Temple-Gates in Fleet-Street, 1713).

⁷⁶ Scott Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2.

The *Spectator* was also republished in volumes, as a better edition was seen as the best course of action against imitation and plagiarism.⁷⁷ “In book form stripped of ads,” writes DeMaria, “usually reduced in size from folio to octavo (or smaller), bound, often with mottoes added or translated, with controversial numbers sometimes removed, read in a library or drawing room instead of a coffee house, the genre of the periodical essay was drastically changed.”⁷⁸ However, these publications were not attempts to widen the periodical’s audience. Rather, they highlighted the fundamental differences of production and reception within print culture. The periodical itself remained a participant in, and reinforcer of, elite forms of social and political power, such as educational institutions and classical literary traditions.

The Art of the Chapter

Fielding makes surprising reappearances in the history of the chapter epigraph. Never having used them himself, he was an unlikely agent in its evolution from the periodical motto. However, as we have seen through his frequent references to the *Spectator* in his own works, he paid great attention to Addison and Steele’s paratext, and shared with them an active interest in it. As novelist Francis Coventry observed,

An Author of true Humour will consider, that his Book should be entertaining in the smallest Particulars, and afford Amusement

*ab ovo
Usque ad mala.*

For which Reason Mr. *Addison* prefix’d Mottos to his Spectators, and at the Corner of each Paper added some particular Letter, which he himself imagin’d to be not the least entertaining Part of his Speculations. And nearly for the same End, Mr. *Fielding* thought proper to be facetious in the Titles to the several Chapters of his Histories, to

⁷⁷ See for instance *The Spectator, in Eight Volumes, to Which is Added a Translation of the Mottos and Quotations* (Dublin: Printed for Peter Wilson, in Dame-Street, 1754).

⁷⁸ DeMaria, “The Eighteenth-Century Periodical Essay,” 537.

shew the Reader he would not permit the least Occasion to slip which offer'd an Opportunity of amusing him.⁷⁹

Although Addison and Fielding both used paratext to comedic ends, the *Spectator*'s mottos and Fielding's chapter titles had other purposes and implications than that of pure entertainment. Addison drew on the didactic potential of the classical epic as well as the comedic value of the satire, while enforcing class and gender differences among his readership. Fielding used chapter titles to amuse his readers, and the chapter itself to structure their attention and moderate the pace of their reading. In doing so, he transformed the novel, which tended to presume continuous, serial reading, into a form oriented around pauses.

Fielding was one of the first English novelists to place a classical motto on the title-page of a novel, a practice that seems to have replaced the dedicatory epistle.⁸⁰ He also turned chaptering into an art. In *Joseph Andrews* (1742), he used Addison's metaphor of the inn to explain that, "those little spaces between our chapters may be looked upon as an inn or resting-place where [the reader] may stop and take a glass or any other refreshment as it pleases him."⁸¹ While the periodical mottos were signs hung out to lure the reader in and indicate that "they may meet with entertainment in the house," the novel's chapter titles were "inscriptions over the gates of inns" that informed the reader what entertainment he could expect, and gave the reader permission to move on if desired. This metaphor was capacious: reading was at once a long journey, which needed to be punctuated with periods of rest, and sustenance for the ravenous reader.

⁷⁹ [Francis Coventry], *An Essay on the New Species of Writing founded by Mr. Fielding* (1751), in *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood (London: Routledge, 1995), 265.

⁸⁰ Genette, *Paratexts*, 156.

⁸¹ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 76.

Fielding played on chapter titles as finding aids, designed for the information-seeking reader. “As the primary lingering trace of informational or consultative reading within literary genres otherwise devoted to producing immersive, continuous reading,” explains Dames, “chapter heads always implicitly allude to an indexical function that they might nonetheless be discarding or even parodying.”⁸² One of the chapter titles in *Tom Jones*, for instance, reads: “An apology for the Insensibility of Mr. Jones, to all the Charms of the lovely Sophia; in which possibly we may, in a considerable Degree, lower his Character in the Estimation of those Men of Wit and Gallantry, who approve the Heroes in most of our modern Comedies.”⁸³ Taking a stand against prescription, Fielding uses form and content to mock the conventions of popular literature. This title does nothing to aid informational or consultative reading. Uselessness is its comedic point.

These playful chapter titles also appear, though to a lesser degree, in the works of nineteenth-century authors. Charles Dickens’s *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), for instance, contains a chapter “In which is given a faithful Portraiture of two distinguished Persons; and an accurate Description of a public Breakfast in their House and Grounds: which public Breakfast leads to the Recognition of an old Acquaintance, and the Commencement of another Chapter.”⁸⁴ Like his predecessors, Dickens humorously draws out minor points, turning his chapter titles into parodies of plot summaries, signalling, as Dames writes, “the mismatch between such labels and the continuous, immersive reading that novels implicitly sought.”⁸⁵ By 1830, shorter chapter titles had become the norm; and Walter Scott managed to make even his briefest titles amusing and self-reflexive, before transitioning to chapter epigraphs. Eliot

⁸² Dames, “Chapter Heads,” 156.

⁸³ Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 154.

⁸⁴ Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of The Pickwick Club*, ed. Bernard Darwin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), xvi.

⁸⁵ Dames, “Chapter Heads,” 161.

also used chapter titles at the beginning of her career, but hers are more concise and have no comedic value. In her late novels, she replaced them with epigraphs, although she continued to use book titles for clusters of chapters. Radcliffe, however, never used chapter titles, preferring either to leave her chapters unadorned or to use chapter epigraphs.⁸⁶ The chapter epigraph, therefore, seems to have evolved out of the periodical motto, the title-page dedication, and the novelistic chapter title; and, as it migrated into the novel, acquired new levels of significance in the history of reading and its gender politics.

⁸⁶ There is one exception to this rule in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). One chapter is prefixed with a title (“a surprise—an adventure—a mystery”) but it is unclear whether Radcliffe had intended to use chapter titles and later replaced them with epigraphs, or whether this one chapter title was an irregularity, intentional or otherwise.

Chapter Two

Forgetting Oneself: Epigraphs and Escapism in Ann Radcliffe's Novels

"It is rather when
 We gloriously forget ourselves, and plunge
 Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's profound,
 Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth —
 'Tis then we get the right good from a book."⁸⁷
 - *Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning

When Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote *Aurora Leigh* (1856), she did so in light of a century's worth of worry about young women's susceptibility to the fantasies and seductions of reading. *Aurora Leigh*, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests, dismisses the social improvement model of reading. Rather, it shapes a model of reading in which self-forgetfulness becomes a source of self-discovery. In its oldest, early thirteenth-century form, to forget oneself meant to omit care for oneself. By the late fourteenth century, it also meant to lose consciousness. Shakespeare, however, transformed the meaning of the phrase. In his plays, to forget oneself is, "To lose remembrance of one's own station, position, or character; to lose sight of the requirements of dignity, propriety, or decorum; to behave unbecomingly."⁸⁸ According to Grant Williams and Christopher Ivic, "That this sense of the phrase pervades English literature cannot be overstated."⁸⁹ Shakespeare's own understanding of the phrase, however, extends beyond this popular usage. Queen Elizabeth's interesting question in *Richard III*, "Shall I forget myself to be myself?" suggests that forgetting oneself is as much a recovery or discovery

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh," in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Josie Billington and Philip Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197-98.

⁸⁸ "forget, v.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2355/view/Entry/73319?redirectedFrom=forgetting+oneself> (accessed November 15, 2017).

⁸⁹ Grant Williams and Christopher Ivic, "Introduction: Sites of Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture," in *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe's Legacies*, ed. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams (London: Routledge, 2004), 5.

of identity as it is a loss.⁹⁰ In the seventeenth century, the term self-forgetfulness, meaning, “The quality, state, or process of forgetting oneself or one’s own needs, welfare, actions,” evolves alongside the phrase to forget oneself. It isn’t until the nineteenth century that the variant, self-forgetful, meaning “having no thought of self,” also appears.⁹¹ This Ruskinian model of self-suppression was the defining feature of conservative ideals of Victorian womanhood: “that consummate angel in the house who repeatedly puts her own desires aside to attend to the needs of those around her.”⁹² While Shakespeare had often cast forgetting oneself as a masculine vice (think of Hamlet, or Falstaff), the Victorians cast self-forgetfulness as a feminine virtue.

The phrase, to forget oneself, seems to have slipped out of common parlance in the eighteenth century. The concept, however, was developed through a discourse surrounding women’s reading. Just as charges of moral corruption were made by anti-theatrical treatises in the Elizabethan period, alleging that the theatre served as, “an agent of forgetting to transform the spectator’s body from one known by ‘virtuous labor’ to one constituted by idleness,” reading romances was imagined as producing a negative somatic state of self-forgetfulness, and leading to transgressive behaviour.⁹³ One important effect of the growth of the middle-class at the end of the eighteenth century was an unprecedented increase in female literacy, which allowed large numbers of women to be more active in the public sphere. This wider social transformation provoked fears about how women might now choose to spend their

⁹⁰ William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 4.4.351. References are to act, scene, and line.

⁹¹ “self-forgetful, adj.”. OED Online. September 2019. Oxford University Press. <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2360/view/Entry/175253?redirectedFrom=self-forgetful> (accessed December 03, 2019).

⁹² Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 91.

⁹³ Garrett A. Sullivan, “Lethargic Corporeality on and off the Early Modern Stage,” in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s Richard II*, ed. Kirby Farrell (New York: G. K. Hall, 1999), 49–50; cited in Jonni Koonce Dunn, “The Functions of Forgetfulness in *1 Henry IV*,” *Studies in Philology* 113, no. 1 (2016): 82–100.

leisure time. The negative social impact of circulating libraries and novels on women was soon being compared to that of brothels and gin-shops. James Beattie, for instance, claimed that, “A habit of reading . . . breeds a dislike to history, and all the substantial parts of knowledge; withdraws the attention from nature and truth; and fills the mind with extravagant thoughts, and too often with criminal propensities.”⁹⁴ Beattie’s statement exceeds habitual complaints about reading and escapism: the concern here is not only that the reader might forget herself, but also that she might become other than herself. From the late eighteenth century through to the middle of the nineteenth century, women were perceived as unable to differentiate between fiction and life. Novels were considered disruptive to the domestic sphere: they promoted dangerous ideas and emotions that might lead to illicit affairs. Forgetting oneself was held to be an effect of reading, particularly as conjoined with a lack of critical distance.

The Gothic novel was particularly susceptible to this kind of criticism, although those by Ann Radcliffe were considered exceptions. Radcliffe wrote her fiction with the interests of a growing female readership in mind.⁹⁵ While the phrase forgetting oneself appears only once in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) when the heroine Emily claims, “it will be very long before I forget myself in sleep,” her novels contain varied depictions of forgetting oneself, including losing consciousness, speaking out of turn, and reading for escape.⁹⁶ It is this last definition of forgetting oneself, however, that receives the most serious treatment in her novels. Although Radcliffe and Barrett Browning used the term differently, they both placed more importance on how one read than on what one read. Radcliffe believed that the female imagination needed

⁹⁴ James Beattie, “On Fable and Romance,” *Dissertations Moral and Political* (London and Edinburgh, 1783), 573-4.

⁹⁵ Claire Knowles, “Feminism and the Gothic: A Brief History,” *University of Melbourne Library* online, 2018, <https://library.unimelb.edu.au/exhibitions/dark-imaginings/gothicresearch/feminism-and-the-gothic-a-brief-history>.

⁹⁶ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 259; hereafter cited in the text.

to be tempered by reason and rational thought in order to be most effective.⁹⁷ She therefore worked against self-forgetfulness through her epigraphic form, advocating a moral model of reading in which the reader participates in the tracing of associative and causal connections.

Radcliffe and her Reviewers

The use of the epigraph expanded with the growth of the new middle-class reading public in the eighteenth century. “New readers, beneficiaries of a widening education and growing paths to literacy, knew English but not necessarily the classical or modern literary traditions well enough to be able to track implicit and unmarked references embedded within texts,” explains Rachel Sagner Buurma: “Epigraphs offered a clearer type of allusion.”⁹⁸ Epigraphs in English, as opposed to Greek or Latin, also allowed female readers access to a traditionally masculine convention. In spite of the motto’s gendered heritage, Radcliffe (‘authoress’ as she was called) was an early adopter of the chapter epigraph.⁹⁹ If, as I argued in Chapter One, the chapter itself was understood as a haunt, a place of frequent resort or usual abode, the metaphor was transformed in the Gothic novel: the chapter epigraphs are often likened by critics to the haunting, spectral presences of long-deceased British poets.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Knowles, “Feminism and the Gothic: A Brief History.”

⁹⁸ Rachel Sagner Buurma, “Epigraphs,” in *Book Parts*, ed. Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 170.

⁹⁹ Other examples include William Chaigneau, *The History of Jack Connor*, 2 vols. (London: W. Johnston, 1752); Sarah Fielding, and Jane Collier, *The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable*, 3 vols. (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1754); [Anon.], *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen-House, As Supposed To Be Related by Themselves*, 2 vols. (London: John Rivington and J. Dodsley, 1760); Elizabeth Helme, *Louisa, or, The Cottage on the Moor*, 4th edn. (London: G. Kearsley, 1787); Anna Maria Mackenzie, *Calista: A Novel*, 2 vols. (London: W. Lane, 1789); John Moore, *Zeluco: Various Views of Human Nature, Taken from Life and Manners, Foreign and Domestic*, 2 vols. (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1789). See Corinna Readioff, “Paratext and Self-Promotion in the *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington, Bookseller* (1791),” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no. 2 (June 2020): 189.

¹⁰⁰ See Deidre Lynch, “Canon Love in Gothic Libraries,” in *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Radcliffe published five novels in her life-time, with one published posthumously. Of these six works, only three contain chapter epigraphs. Her third novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), marks the beginning of her engagement with the epigraphic convention. In this novel, she assigns at least one epigraph to every chapter (some have two) with one peculiar exception: chapter five does not have an epigraph, but something resembling a chapter title. The heading reads: “A surprize — An adventure — A mystery.”¹⁰¹ This chapter head, as Nicholas Dames writes of others, “does not encapsulate the contents of the unit it announces so much as instigate a kind of curiosity about them.”¹⁰² The manuscript of the novel no longer exists and it is therefore impossible to ascertain whether Radcliffe had, in *The Romance of the Forest*, intended to use chapter titles and later replaced them with epigraphs, or whether this one chapter title was an irregularity, intentional or otherwise. It is clear, however, that Radcliffe was intentional in her approach to the chapter form. She was aware that the novel both required and induced a prolonged state of attention from its reader; that, as Laurence Sterne writes in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), “chapters relieve the mind — that they assist — or impose upon the imagination.”¹⁰³ She therefore used the chapter unit to temper her readers’ imaginations, imposing upon them a break from sequential reading. While many earlier authors embellished and elongated their chapter titles, Radcliffe was instrumental in transforming the motto, the trademark of periodical papers, into the epigraph, understood as a short quotation placed at the commencement of a novelistic chapter.

E. J. Clery, in her acclaimed *Women’s Gothic*, acknowledges the novelty of this move, but her claim that the epigraph is “a form of textual kidnapping quite new to the novel”

¹⁰¹ Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. Chloe Chard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁰² Nicholas Dames, “Chapter Heads,” in *Book Parts*, ed. Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 156.

¹⁰³ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 225.

understates the complexity of this development.¹⁰⁴ Epigraphs are, for Clery, simply a method through which Radcliffe, “succeeded in bolstering her credentials as a writer to be taken seriously, with powers that aspired towards the standards set by the great national poets.”¹⁰⁵ This is a common sentiment among scholars, for whom epigraphs are often ornamental and therefore do not merit serious critical attention. Even recent work by Leah Price (2000), Edward Jacobs (2014), Deidre Lynch (2015), and Kate Rumbold (2016), has not given sufficient credit to the import or impact of Radcliffe’s paratextual practice.¹⁰⁶ Their approach has been to conflate the paratextual epigraphs with intertextual interpolations such as quotations and diegetic poems. The common assumption that these fragments perform the same function is limiting, cutting short any consideration of their structural functions within the overall narrative.

Strangely, Radcliffe’s contemporaries also took little notice of the epigraphs. In fact, *The English Review*, which ranked *The Romance of the Forest* as among the first class of ‘Modern novels’, excerpted one of the epigraphs as an illustration of Radcliffe’s descriptions. “The fair author,” the reviewer comments, “has evidently bestowed most labour on the descriptive part, of which the following is a specimen.”¹⁰⁷ The reviewer then quotes both the epigraph, taken from Horace Walpole’s *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), and the narrative that succeeds it. It is unclear whether the reviewer was praising Radcliffe’s descriptive powers or

¹⁰⁴ E. J. Clery, *Women’s Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Horndon, Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004), 53.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰⁶ See Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: from Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Edward Jacobs, “Ann Radcliffe and Romantic Print Culture,” in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, ed. Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Deidre Lynch, “Canon Love in Gothic Libraries”; Kate Rumbold, “Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic Epigraphs,” in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Cultures of Quotation from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ “Review of *The Romance of the Forest*,” *The English Review, or, An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature* 20 (November 1792): 52-53.

calling her approach ‘laboured’. In any case, the reviewer seems to consider the epigraphs as part and parcel of Radcliffe’s novel, which sheds light on how ubiquitous quotation was at this time. Catherine in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1817) is famously mocked for having, “read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives.”¹⁰⁸ The Gothic, however, specifically popularised the epigraph. Despite this, reviewers seemed more concerned with “[t]he original verses interspersed through the work” than with the epigraphs.¹⁰⁹

The Romance of the Forest and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* both carry the subtitle *Interspersed with some pieces of Poetry*. This hybrid form generated a uniform response among reviewers of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: while not all thought her verse was good, they all agreed these poems had no place in the novel. William Enfield, for instance, praised “the embellishments of the work [as] highly finished” but feared that readers, “in the eagerness of curiosity, should be tempted to pass over . . . them for the sake of proceeding more rapidly with the story.”¹¹⁰ Another anonymous reviewer argued that, “the verses, scattered through all the romances, are so inartificially introduced, that they have little chance of being estimated by an impatient reader” (inartificially meaning clumsily, or inartistically).¹¹¹ This sentiment was echoed by Anna Laetitia Barbauld when she wrote that the poetry, “is generally neglected; for . . . the common reader is always impatient to get on with the story.”¹¹² The reviewer for the

¹⁰⁸ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7.

¹⁰⁹ “Review of *The Romance of the Forest*,” 52-53.

¹¹⁰ William Enfield, review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Monthly Review* 15 (November 1794); reprinted in Ioan Williams, ed. *Novel and Romance 1700-1800, A Documentary Record* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 392-95.

¹¹¹ [Thomas Noon Talfourd], “Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe,” in *Gaston de Blondeville . . . to Which is Prefixed a Memoir of the Author* (London: Henry Colburn, 1794), 1:131.

¹¹² Anna Laetitia Barbauld, “Mrs. Radcliffe,” *The British Novelists* (London, 1810), 43:viii.

British Critic concluded that, “However fond the reader may be of poetry, and however excellent the verses themselves . . . few will choose to peruse them whilst eagerly and anxiously pursuing the thread of a tale.”¹¹³ Even Coleridge, in his review of the novel, asserted that, “poetical beauties have not a fair chance of being attended to amidst the stronger interest inspired by such a series of adventures.”¹¹⁴ Prose readers were implicitly condemned for their speed: “The pace of reading,” Price concludes, “becomes a test of taste.”¹¹⁵ For Price, Radcliffe uses the poems to discourage ‘vulgar’ readers. However, as I will demonstrate, descriptions of reading in her novels seem concerned with class only insofar as class and gender were linked through an increase in female literacy.

Perhaps in response to these reviews, the poetic interpolations are notably absent from *The Italian*. Radcliffe, however, persisted in her use of epigraphs, suggesting she conceived of them as distinct phenomena. While analogous to other fragments, the epigraph is set apart by its liminality: it is roughly defined by Gérard Genette as “a quotation placed en exergue” (outside of the work) as opposed to within the narrative.¹¹⁶ It is neither completely independent of its original context, nor of the narrative context in which it has been placed. This suggests that artistic influence is reciprocal: “the past,” writes T.S. Eliot in *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), “should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.”¹¹⁷ The epigraph allows influence to move in two directions: its original context can be used to enrich the new one in which it has been placed, but the epigraph can also perform, in

¹¹³ “Review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” *British Critic* 4 (August 1794): 110-21.

¹¹⁴ [Samuel Taylor Coleridge,] “Review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,” *Critical Review* 11 (August 1794): 369.

¹¹⁵ Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 97.

¹¹⁶ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, ed. Richard Macksey and Michael Sprinker, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 153.

¹¹⁷ T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” reprinted in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 106-107.

its relation to the chapter, a re-reading of that original context. While there has always been a tradition of borrowing and imitation, the epigraph allows authors to foreground the traces of other texts that are present within their novel, and to make the relationship of one text to another, the tracing of repetitions and transformations, a defining part of the reading experience.

The motto, and the epigraph in turn, originated in the commonplace book, in which readers carefully recorded passages under headings. This was a kind of reading that generated writing, and was therefore inherently bound up with reflection and memory. (The most substantive extant manuscript source written by Radcliffe is a commonplace book she kept during the last months of her life.)¹¹⁸ Likening epigraphs to speed-bumps and doors, Price has argued that the epigraphs in Radcliffe's novels "force readers to pause and withdraw from the action at regular intervals."¹¹⁹ Building on the existing criticism, this chapter demonstrates that epigraphs can provide revealing insights into the nature and consequences of reading, and claims for Radcliffe a significant place in its unfolding history. If, as modern critics have argued, the Gothic novel reveals a displaced engagement with social and political problems, what can the epigraphic convention tell us about the negotiation of those problems?¹²⁰ In the first part of this chapter, I consider epigraphs as a political form, bound up with issues of gender and patriotic sentiment at a time of national crisis. I then turn to the tropes of reading and forgetting oneself in order to demonstrate how Radcliffe used epigraphic form to counter the escapism of the Gothic novel. In the final section I examine epigraphs as neglected narrative

¹¹⁸ Ann Radcliffe, "Commonplace Book," MS Ch.K.1.10, Boston Public Library, Boston. We know from Talfourd's "Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe," prefixed to her posthumously published novel *Gaston de Blondville* (1826), that Radcliffe kept other journals. See Cheryl L. Nixon, "Ann Radcliffe's Commonplace Book: Assembling the Female Body and the Material Text," *Women's Writing* 22, no. 3 (2015): 355-375.

¹¹⁹ Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 93.

¹²⁰ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fiction from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Longmans, 1980), 8.

frames that do not separate the inside from the outside but mediate between the two. In doing so, I demonstrate the way in which these frames govern the reader's expectations of the work.

Epigraphs, Gender, and Nation

The English-language epigraph developed out of the Classical motto — this much we know. Whether Radcliffe was inspired by the English periodical, by the English and French novelists who placed Latin epigraphs on their title-pages, or by the less canonical authors that used chapter or part epigraphs, is more difficult to ascertain. We know, from references to *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) in *The Romance of the Forest*, that Radcliffe read Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He was, along with Fielding and Sterne, one of the few major eighteenth-century writers to have used a title-page epigraph for his novel.¹²¹ That Radcliffe could have been inspired by a French author is intriguing because any survey of the Gothic reveals that the genre was, in part, a nationalist movement; an interest in the origins of Englishness amid dramatic alterations in the domestic political climate resulting from the political revolution in France.¹²² The word 'Gothic' referred at once to the Middle Ages, and to the racial past that gave birth to the English. Shakespeare and Spenser, by this understanding, were 'Gothic' writers of national genius. Robert Miles explains that,

Shakespeare and Spenser were not only set beside the ancients, such as Homer and Virgil, but at times, patriotically, above them . . . The classics were not available to women, but Shakespeare was; the higher his stock rose, the greater the potential for female cultural literacy and power.¹²³

¹²¹ Genette, *Paratexts*, 146.

¹²² However, Angela Wright shows that Radcliffe had a "judiciously balanced approach to both literary cultures." Angela Wright, "The Castle Under Threat," in *Britain, France and The Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 104.

¹²³ Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 30.

In *The Romance of the Forest*, a novel interested in the discussion of national character, Radcliffe used epigraphs to raise Shakespeare above the Classics through the appropriation of the hitherto masculine motto. While essayists had once used the motto to enforce exclusion, affirming difference along gendered lines, Radcliffe used the epigraph to dislodge the gender-determined criteria of cultural participation, claiming a place for herself and her female readership within a masculine tradition. “As the classics formed a kind of lingua Franca for cultural transactions,” Miles writes, “women were, as a consequence, in this respect unvoiced and powerless.”¹²⁴ Through her use of dramatists and poets such as Shakespeare, Thomas Warton, William Collins, James Beattie, William Mason, James Thomson, and Thomas Gray, Radcliffe empowered her female readership with access to the sphere of masculine education and knowledge. Just as the novel’s heroine Adeline reads the ‘best’ English poets, Radcliffe’s books became the medium from which women derived both information and amusement.

While in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the heroine Emily is taught both Latin and English “chiefly that she might understand the sublimity of their best poets” (*MU*, Vol. I, Ch. 1, 6), *The Romance of the Forest* associates Horace and Ovid with the decadence and hedonism of the novel’s French villain, the Marquis de Montalt. Despite the epigraph’s own classical heritage, Radcliffe effaces most references to the Classics, even when they are mediated through the English poets. Despite the epigraph’s own classical heritage, Radcliffe’s references to the Classics are often (and deliberately) vague, even when they are mediated through the English poets. As James Uden notes, “Radcliffe’s novels exchange classicism for a “classical effect,” an aspect of rhetoric, which approximates the scope and prestige of the classical while dimming its literary and historical specificity.”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹²⁵ James Uden, *Spectres of Antiquity: Classical Literature and the Gothic, 1740-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 86.

William Collins' *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects* (1747) provided Radcliffe with many of her epigraphs. She quoted his *Ode to Fear* at length, parsing out fragments of it throughout her novel. The epigraph, itself a fragment, becomes a model for a new kind of poetic originality, freed from the constraints of Classical genres.¹²⁶ The first half of the ode figures as the epigraph to Chapter 11. The second half, from which Radcliffe cut several lines, is used as the epigraph to Chapter 15. (Radcliffe would use it again in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*):

‘Danger, whose limbs of giant mold
What mortal eye can fix’d behold?
Who stalks his round, an hideous form!
Howling amidst the midnight storm! —
And with him thousand phantoms join’d,
Who prompt to deeds accurs’d the mind! —
On whom that rav’ning brood of Fate,
Who lap the blood of Sorrow wait;
Who, Fear! this ghastly train can see,
And look not madly wild, like Thee!’

(RF, Vol. II, Ch. 15, 224)

This passage describes the same liminal state of fear to which the Gothic aspired, encouraging readers to view ‘Graveyard Poetry’ as its aesthetic precursor. Collins maintains regular Pindaric structure, but the originality of his Ode lies in the intensity of its vision and the importance of the imagination. Further, Radcliffe purges the *Ode* of its Classical remnants, omitting the couplet that most suggests Virgil as Collins’ inspiration: “Or throws him on the ridgy Steep / Of some loose hanging Rock to sleep” which bears resemblance to the ninth *Aeneid*’s “Te, Catilina, minaci Pendentem scopulo.”¹²⁷ This omission suggests Radcliffe’s

¹²⁶ Anne Janowitz, “The Romantic Fragment,” in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 442.

¹²⁷ “Thee, Cataline, suspended from a rock that still threatens to fall.” Virgil, *The Works of Virgil Translated into English Prose* (London: George B. Whittaker, 1826), 264.

desire to move away from neo-classical restraint in search of a more affective form. In this same Ode, Collins implores: “Teach me but once like him [Shakespeare] to feel.”¹²⁸ Radcliffe thus defines her own genre in opposition to the Classical, to which women had little access.

What is most striking about *The Romance of the Forest*’s epigraphs is that Radcliffe quoted another woman. Anna Seward was hailed by her contemporaries as “th’ immortal muse of Britain,” “our British Muse,” “Queen Muse of Britain,” and labelled “the most famous woman poet in England.”¹²⁹ Radcliffe cited her most acclaimed poem, *Monody on the Death of Major André* (1781), a narrative of patriotic heroism that painted Major John André as a national hero and condemned his execution in the American Civil War. The particular passage given, “And venom’d with disgrace the dart of Death” (*RF*, Vol. III, Ch. 20, 307), relates to George Washington’s decision to hang André for espionage, as opposed to shooting him as he requested — and is meant to suggest to the reader that Adeline’s suitor, Theodore, will meet a similar untimely death for deserting his regiment and wounding a superior officer. Unlike André, Theodore is later pardoned. Seward’s poem implicates the French in André’s death, and blames Major General the Marquis de la Fayette (“the Frenchman”) for his role in it. Radcliffe’s use of this poem reflects anti-Gallic sentiments that pre-dated the Revolution. Given Seward’s position as a spokeswoman for national pride, it makes sense that Radcliffe would include her among her epigraphs. However, if we consider the fact that few other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors who used chapter epigraphs quoted women, Radcliffe starts to look quite modern.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ William Collins, “Ode to Fear,” in *The Poetical Works of William Collins* (London, 1797), 71.

¹²⁹ Francesca Blanch-Serrat, “Anna Seward,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, March 21, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anna-Seward>.

¹³⁰ Radcliffe’s practice foreshadows the use of epigraphs in contemporary feminist writing, particularly feminist theory. Susan Lanser, for instance, notes that, “In texts by theorists like Sheila Rowbotham, Mary Daly, and Susan Griffin, chapters are usually prefaced not simply by one epigraph but by a series of them . . . In contrast to the novel-writers of the nineteenth century, these contemporary women are quoting other women, not men.” See Susan Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 122.

Seward, like all of the poets that Radcliffe quotes in her epigraphs, was a national literary figure. Angela Wright argues that Radcliffe's use of the canon can be read as an attempt to secure for herself a position within this English heritage.¹³¹ Yet, this concern with reputation seems inconsistent with Radcliffe's modest public persona, which comes down to us through her obituaries. One 1823 article in *The Edinburgh Review* for instance observed that, "nothing was known of her but her name on the title page. She never appeared in public, nor mingled in private society, but kept herself apart, like the sweet bird that sings its solitary notes, shrowded [sic] and unseen."¹³² It wasn't until the second edition of *The Romance of the Forest*, which appeared in 1792, that Radcliffe acknowledged the work as her own. (Her first three novels were published anonymously.) Further, Radcliffe was quite liberal in how she used her sources: these are not simple transcriptions of verse. Several of her epigraphs are misquoted, or altered, including complete changes in line-schemes and word-choices, suggesting a certain nonchalance regarding her position within the English tradition, rather than an attempt to secure it.

Radcliffe's epigraphs, however, certainly suggest an attempt to lay hold of her readers' emotions in relation to foundational forms of English experience. *The Romance of the Forest* was published two years after the French Revolution, amid debates about whether or not the British should follow in France's footsteps and design a new constitution. The origins of Englishness were at stake: should the remains of a 'Gothic' legislation, brought across the sea by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the fifth century, of the kind protecting feudal barons such as the novel's villain the Marquis, be abolished or preserved? No definite conclusions about Radcliffe's politics can be drawn from her novels. Adeline, for instance, reads Shakespeare

¹³¹ Angela Wright, "The Castle Under Threat," 104.

¹³² "The Periodical Press," *Edinburgh Review* 38 (May 1823): 360n; cited in the introduction to *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, ed. Deborah Rogers (Westport: Greenwood, 1994), xxv.

and Milton, which “taught her to distinguish the superiority of the English from that of the French. The genius of the language, more perhaps than the genius of the people, if indeed the distinction may be allowed, occasioned this” (*RF*, Vol. III, Ch. 17, 261). Despite her patriotic defence of England’s heritage, Radcliffe also celebrated her neighbouring nation’s literature and culture. However, in one conversation about English and French national character, La Luc describes the French’s “airy thoughtlessness, which seems alike to condemn reflection and anticipation” (*RF*, Vol. III, Ch. 17, 269). Radcliffe’s epigraphic form, which encourages critical thinking, reflection, and anticipation, suggests a concern about both the corrupting influence of the French on English culture, and the thoughtless way in which the Gothic novel was being consumed.

Radcliffe’s repeated use of the poetic fragment could be read as a political statement in itself. In their short-lived journal *The Athenaeum* (1798–1800), Friedrich and August Schlegel reflected upon the fragment form as a ‘modern’ poem refusing to conform to traditional poetic genre. “The usual classifications of poetry,” Friedrich Schlegel wrote, “are mere dead pedantry designed for people with limited vision.”¹³³ Anne Janowitz has pointed to the influence of the French Revolution on this kind of statement. To assert poetic independence is to protest against an *ancient régime*.¹³⁴ Indeed, Schlegel continues, “Poetry is republican speech: a speech which is its own law and end unto itself, and in which all the parts are free citizens and have the right to vote.”¹³⁵ The poetic fragment is therefore a political form, and its use carries those implications. We can also infer, from Radcliffe’s equal balance of Shakespeare, and eighteenth-century poets who were more or less her contemporaries, a desire for a sense of

¹³³ Friedrich Schlegel, “Athenaeum Fragment 434,” in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 90.

¹³⁴ Janowitz, “The Romantic Fragment,” 447.

¹³⁵ Schlegel, “Critical Fragments,” in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, ed. Kathleen M. Wheeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 42.

historical continuity amid perceptions of Revolutionary France as modern but dislocated. The epigraphs permitted the transmission of earlier forms of thought through to the present moment, and helped to define modern literary history. As Genette states, paratext is both a space of transition and transaction.¹³⁶ It simultaneously offers connection and illuminates distinction between two spaces or temporalities.

Although there were several successful Gothic novels published prior to the French Revolution, including Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1781), and Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1783–5), Radcliffe popularised the genre. From 1800 onward, between 20 and 30 titles were being published every year, and the influence of the Gothic novel persisted long after the end of its efflorescence in the 1820s.¹³⁷ The development of the Gothic seems to have been in part due to its strong correspondence to the events in France. "It was," according to the Marquis de Sade, "the inevitable product of the revolutionary shocks with which the whole of Europe resounded."¹³⁸ He observed that the Romantic novel had languished because its readership had experienced more recent misfortune than its writers could ever depict.¹³⁹ In opposition, the Gothic flourished because the historical facts had become more distressing than the fictional. In *The Literature of Terror*, Punter notes that:

the 1790s were chaotic years in which domestic unrest and fears of invasion from abroad shaped political and cultural life, and the literary market was flooded with a mass of fiction which rejected direct engagement with the activities of contemporary life in favor of geographically and historically remote actions and settings.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Gérard Genette, "Introduction to the Paratext," *New Literary History* 22, vol. 2 (1991): 261-272.

¹³⁷ David S. Miall, "Gothic Fiction," *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 373-382.

¹³⁸ Marquis de Sade, "Essay on the Novel," from *Selected Writings of de Sade*, trans. Leonard de St-Yves (New York: British Book Centre, 1954); reprinted in Angela Wright, ed. *Gothic Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 64.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 61.

Gothic authors, Radcliffe included, often set their novels abroad, and in different time periods to their own. However, this mass of fiction was also accused of impeding “direct engagement with the activities of contemporary life,” in the sense that its readers would disregard their domestic duties in favour of these page-turners. Intrigued by the concept of forgetting oneself, especially forgetting one’s current circumstances or conditions, Radcliffe used epigraphic form to challenge this perceived social threat. Implicit in her depictions of self-forgetful reading, particularly, is a critique of the Gothic genre’s escapist potential. (Forgetting what has happened in the past is a much rarer inflection in her novels.) Through epigraphs, she rescues her readers from the same rejection of the present to which her characters are liable. “Like the massy doors that block so many subterranean passageways in the course of so many gothic heroine’s escapes,” writes Price, “the epigraphs . . . cut readers off from the next chapter or the next event.”¹⁴¹ Epigraphs are figures of disruption. These fragments, lifted from other contexts, both raise the possibility of wholeness through assimilation, and disavow it through their forceful interruption of the narrative.

Price’s ‘massy door’ metaphor is an apt one because it captures the epigraph’s status as a threshold, through which we both enter and leave the narrative. It also gestures toward a late eighteenth century taste for ‘ancient’ literature and medieval buildings, and how these two elements were often paired. In the Gothic novel, the architectural ruin becomes a useful analogue for the epigraph. Implicit in the fragment, or the ruin, is a selective process of remembrance. Some fragments are to be kept and others discarded. Some ruins will remain standing and others will crumble. Both are open to perpetual reinterpretation and to an accretion of meaning. The abandoned abbey in *The Romance of the Forest*, for instance, is

¹⁴¹ Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 96.

made up of Gothic remains and a structure that is “evidently of much later date” (*RF*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 20). Other rooms “appeared to have been built in modern times upon a Gothic plan,” though, as Pierre La Motte notes, their style “was not strictly Gothic” (*RF*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 20). Radcliffe’s text is of a similar construction, made up of anachronistic quotations. This anachronism draws attention to epigraphs’ power to interrupt narrative progress, and gestures toward other violations of historical progress latent in the Gothic. The epigraph to Chapter 2, a passage from the opening of Horace Walpole’s *The Mysterious Mother* (1791), gestures toward the relationship between architectural ruin and textual fragment:

‘How these antique towers and vacant courts
Chill the suspended soul! Till expectation
Wears the face of fear: and fear, half ready
To become devotion, mutters a kind
Of mental orison, it knows not wherefore.
What a kind of being is circumstance!’

(*RF*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 15)

In the chapter to which this epigraph is affixed, La Motte, his wife Constance, Adeline, and their servant Peter, come upon a decaying abbey. When the wheel of their carriage collapses, the travellers take refuge within the abbey, despite their apprehension. Amid these ruins, characters are called to recollections of the past, which in turn engender fears for the future. “A few years,” ponders La Motte, “and I shall become like the mortals on whose relics I now gaze” (*RF*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 16). Madame La Motte thinks of her son and questions: “What will be my years to come?” (*RF*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 32). Adeline “reflected upon the past with astonishment, and anticipated the future with fear” (*RF*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 21). Memory does not link the past to the present but to the future. The epigraph illustrates a similar architectural structure, and, at the level of form, allows readers to experience the same kind of cognitive dislocation as the novel’s characters. Epigraphs interrupt the narrative, forcing readers out of the diegesis and making them question what lies ahead. Walpole writes of “expectation” and

of “half” states: these are both the trappings of the Gothic genre, and fitting descriptions of paratext as a threshold or liminal space.

Forgetting Oneself

Radcliffe’s epigraphic form was indicative of the culture at large, which looked backward to its feudal past and forward, with apprehension, toward perceived decline. It can therefore give us historically specifiable ways of thinking about the novel’s effect upon the cognition of its readers. In the epigraph to Chapter 21 of *The Romance of the Forest*, Radcliffe quotes William Mason’s *Caractacus* (1759). Unwilling to betray his brother, Elidurus maintains his silence. Evelina suspects foul play and tells him:

‘Tis only when with inbred horror smote
At some base act, or done, or to be done,
That the recoiling soul, with conscious dread,
Shrinks back into itself.’

(*RF*, Vol. III, Ch. 21, 315)

This epigraph illustrates a recoiling of the self, the same kind of toxic effect the eighteenth-century alarmists believed the Gothic novel had on its readers. In Mason, as in Walpole, the present is impossible to grasp. “Conscious dread” occurs in anticipation of an act “to be done” or posterior to an act already “done”. In the present, we tend to forget ourselves. This rejection of the present is Radcliffe’s subject: Adeline seeks to escape her impending marriage to the Marquis, Emilie the confines of the castle of Udolpho, and Vivaldi the accusations of the Inquisition. This process of escape also takes cognitive forms, and it is this kind of abstraction that Radcliffe seeks to work against. When La Motte robs a chevalier on horseback in an attempt to rectify his financial situation, he is afterwards “startled as one awakened from a dream” (*RF*, Vol. III, Ch. 21, 315). In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily notes that, “her present

life appeared like the dream of a distempered imagination, or like one of those frightful fictions, in which the wild genius of the poets sometimes delighted. Reflection brought only regret, and anticipation terror” (*MU*, Vol. II, Ch. 9, 296-7). Similarly, in *The Italian*, the Marchesa sometimes “felt as one who, awaking from a dream, opens his eyes only to measure the depth of the precipice on which he totters.”¹⁴² These frequent cognitive lapses reveal Radcliffe’s interest in altered states of mind, of the kind understood to be produced in readers of the Gothic genre.

Modern critical discussions of the Gothic genre have tended above all to emphasise its necromantic impulses. Deidre Lynch, for instance, writes that,

the gothic accompanied its defining interest in the hallucinatory psychology involved in ghost seeing, or the belief that one is ghost seeing, with an interest in the hallucinatory phenomenology of reading. And this fictional mode had a case of quotation compulsion of its own, pillaging the canon of English poetry for tags of mood-enhancing verse that it could redeploy as chapter epigraphs.¹⁴³

Lynch establishes a connection between characters’ experiences of reading and our own: just as reading conjures the afterlife in the form of mental apparitions, epigraphs transform the canon into a supernatural phenomenon that haunts the margins of the text. Emily, for instance, upon entering her father’s library, recalls that, “St. Aubert, on the evening before his departure from the chateau, had read to her some passages from this his favourite author” (*MU*, Vol. I, Ch. 8, 95). Her recollection triggers fears about the returning spirits of the dead and she fancies that, “she saw him before her” (*MU*, Vol. I, Ch. 8, 95). In another passage, we are told that, “[she] hoped for the pleasure of . . . dwelling on the passages, which [Valencourt] had admired, and of permitting them to speak to her in the language of his own mind, and to bring himself

¹⁴² Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*, ed. Frederick Garber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 167; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁴³ Lynch, “Canon Love in Gothic Libraries,” 199.

to her presence” (*MU*, Vol. I, Ch. 6, 58). Annette tells her that, similarly, Valencourt “would stay . . . reading [Emily’s] books, till sunset” (*MU*, Vol. III, Ch. 11, 593-4). Through their association of the textual and the spectral, these passages depict reading as both an embodied experience and an act of remembrance. Epigraphs immortalise those whom Radcliffe quotes. Playwright Alan Bennett claims that,

The best moments in reading are when you come across something — a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things — which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours.¹⁴⁴

In this model, in which quoting is a phenomenological experience, epigraphs become prosopopoeial; figures of speech in which an imagined, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking. In reading these fragments that have survived the death of their authors, we perform our own commemoration or, more eerily, our own communing.

In most of the episodes from Radcliffe’s novels that this chapter treats, however, she presented reading as an act of forgetting, both the moment and oneself. In *The Romance of the Forest*, “a book was the opiate that lulled [the mind] to repose” (*RF*, Vol. I, Ch. 5, 82) and is “able to soften for a time the sense of [one’s] misfortunes” (*RF*, Vol. II, Ch. 14, 208). Reading is “Lethan medicine to a wounded mind” (*RF*, Vol. II, Ch. 14, 208), in terms that anticipate John Stuart Mill’s characterisation of poems as “medicine for my state of mind.”¹⁴⁵ Indeed, poetry is particularly effective in this regard, and Adeline “frequently took a volume of Shakespeare or Milton,” which would “lull her to forgetfulness of grief” (*RF*, Vol. II, Ch. 17, 261). The narrator also tells us that “no species of writing had power so effectually to withdraw

¹⁴⁴ Alan Bennett, *The History Boys* (London: Faber, 2004), 56.

¹⁴⁵ John Stuart Mill, *The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, ed. A. O. J. Cockshut (Halifax, England: Ryburn, 1992), 81.

[her] mind from the contemplation of its own misery” (*RF*, Vol. II, Ch. 17, 261). Reading becomes a drug used to alleviate pain and suffering. Although this is a familiar conceit passed down from Classical antiquity (Apollo was the Greek God of medicine, music, and poetry), it takes on added significance in the Gothic because it gestures toward a cultural compulsion. In Radcliffe’s romances, the Apollonian fantasy becomes unbounded: the effect of the illusion becomes pathological and the semblance deceives as if it were reality. In overstepping this delicate line, the fantastical descends into Dionysiac self-forgetting.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, characters take up books to kill time. Reading can “charm [the] mind, till the hour of dressing” (*MU*, Vol. I, Ch. 12, 121) and “beguile the tediousness of the night” (*MU*, Vol. IV, Ch. 8, 572). Inside the castle of Udolpho, however, Emily struggles to do this: “Emily sought to lose the sense of her own cares, in the visionary scenes of the poet; but she had again to lament the irresistible force of circumstances over the taste and powers of the mind” (*MU*, Vol. III, Ch. 5, 383). Unable to escape through reading, she is forced into painful contemplation of her present situation. For Wright, “Emily’s inability to read and appreciate Shakespeare implies a broader significance to this passage. England’s national literary treasure, Shakespeare, cannot console, and cannot compensate for the escalation of Anglo-French hostilities and the political paranoia in England.”¹⁴⁶ Wright sees in this passage a gesture toward the social and political circumstances under which Radcliffe was writing. Yet Radcliffe’s epigraphic form, its signification of itself as a function with a differential relation to reality, suggests that she sought to limit her own novels’ lethean qualities. In the concluding chapter of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, she states that her aim was to have “beguiled the mourner of one hour of sorrow” (*MU*, Vol. IV, Ch. 19, 672). While she recognised the affective power of literature, she implied that it should be temporally moderated, consumed in small doses.

¹⁴⁶ Wright, “The Castle Under Threat,” 151.

Walter Scott gestured to this when he compared “the perusal” of Radcliffe’s works to “the use of opiates, baneful when habitually and constantly resorted to, but of most blessed power in those moments of pain and of languor.”¹⁴⁷ In fact, the form of Radcliffe’s fiction ensures the reader periodically withdraws her attention from the narrative in order to reflect upon it.

Radcliffe’s novels are fragmented, requiring patience of the reader, as her characters require patience from one another. Just as readers were reported to have skipped over portions of the novels, depending on their preference for the verse or the prose, her characters often suffer from attention deficits, losing track of their thoughts mid-sentence. When Annette recounts to Emily the history of the castle of Udolpho, her attention is intermittent. She is easily distracted, often by sound, and consequently, much to Emily’s frustration, her narrative is interrupted: “O, where was I?” Annette asks herself (*MU*, Vol. II, Ch. 5, 237). The phrase “as I was saying” reoccurs several times and Emily must repeatedly recall Annette to her purpose. “Do come to the end of your story,” she says, and again: “Do tell me the substance of your tale” (*MU*, Vol. II, Ch. 5, 237). Despite their best intentions, characters are often unable to finish their stories. Could this aposiopesis also be a form of self-forgetfulness? Susan Stewart has argued for redundancy in poetic form as, “a means of representing the . . . compulsive way-laying of subjective intention” and as “the submersion of will.”¹⁴⁸ Redundancy in Radcliffe adopts a similar function: as Radcliffe’s narrator tell us, “thought cannot always be controlled by will” (*MU*, Vol. III, Ch. 5, 383). This is a variation on Samuel Johnson’s claim that, “[reading can] produce effects almost without intervention of will.”¹⁴⁹ Both formulations point to a reader lacking in agency. It is also interesting to note that one reviewer wanted Radcliffe

¹⁴⁷ Walter Scott, *On Novelists and Fiction*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 105.

¹⁴⁸ Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 118-9.

¹⁴⁹ 31 March, 1750. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, no. 4 (London: Printed for J. Payne, 1752): 27-36.

to “keep a stricter rein over her descriptive powers,” as if she too needed to master her narrative impulses.¹⁵⁰

In her study of forgetfulness in Early Modern poetry, Amanda Watson notes that “losing track of one’s intentions . . . can be an unsettling loss of control over self . . . or a productive ‘flight’ into whole new territories of invention.”¹⁵¹ Indeed in Radcliffe’s novels, readerly consumption seems to breed writerly production. (As did Radcliffe’s novels themselves: her work inspired plays, operas, imitations, and influenced a whole host of Romantic and Victorian writers.) In *The Romance of the Forest*, Adeline composes her own poems “after having read that rich effusion of Shakespeare’s genius” (*RF*, Vol. III, Ch. 18, 284). The novel’s chapters, made up as they are of prose and verse, can be read as an homage to Radcliffe’s own reading, represented through the epigraphs. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, this process is not so straightforward. Characters are subject to “starts of imagination, which deceive the senses into what can be called nothing less than momentary madness” (*MU*, Vol. I, Ch. 10, 102). Imagination is the absence of reason: it “suggest[s] even more terrors, than . . . reason could justify” (*MU*, Vol. II, Ch. 5, 228). It prompts “visions of the future” (*MU*, Vol. I, Ch. 13, 153) and accentuates “possible evils” (*MU*, Vol. I, Ch. 13, 158). Suggestion, futurity, potentiality: these are the realm of epigraphic form. Radcliffe co-opted this narrative feature to work against the very escapism the Gothic genre had created. She used epigraphs as cognitive obstacles, with the goal of producing a slower, more thoughtful, and more rational reading experience.

¹⁵⁰ Review of *Gaston de Blondville*, *Scots Magazine* 18 (1826): 703-4; reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, 71-2.

¹⁵¹ Amanda Watson, “Off the Subject: Early Modern Poets on Rhyme, Distraction, and Forgetfulness,” in *Forgetting in Early Modern English Literature and Culture: Lethe’s Legacies*, ed. Christopher Ivic and Grant Williams (London: Routledge, 2004), 93.

For Radcliffe, forgetting oneself is not a marker of class but of gender. While the eighteenth-century preoccupation with the relationship between female reading habits and social behaviour was by no means a novelty, the rise of the Gothic novel alongside that of the circulating library meant that, “[i]nstead of remaining an amusement limited to clearly defined periods of leisure, [reading] becomes an all-absorbing vocation.”¹⁵² Because women had more leisure time at their disposal than men, a feminine discourse emerged around this genre. While there is strong evidence for the male consumption of Gothic novels, satirical articles from the 1790s suggest women, in particular, were victims of fearmongering. In “Terrorist Novel Writing” (1797), for instance, one contributor wrote:

A novel, if at all useful, ought to be a representation of human life and manners, with a view to direct the conduct in the most important duties of life, and to correct its follies. But what instruction is to be reaped from the distorted ideas of lunatics, I am at a loss to conceive. Are we come to such a pass, that the only commandment necessary to be repeated is, ‘Thou shalt do no murder?’ Are the duties of life so changed, that all the instructions necessary for a young person is to learn to walk at night upon the battlements of an old castle, to creep hands and feet along a narrow passage, and meet the devil at the end of it? Is the corporeal frame of the female sex so masculine and hardy, that it must be softened down by the touch of dead bodies, clay-cold hands, and damp sweats? Can a young lady be taught nothing more necessary in life, than to sleep in a dungeon with venomous reptiles, walk through a ward with assassins, and carry bloody daggers in their pockets, instead of pin-cushions and needle-books?¹⁵³

The editor attached a footnote to this letter, targeting Radcliffe. “It is easy to see,” he claimed, “that the satire of this letter is particularly levelled at a literary lady of considerable talents.”¹⁵⁴ While the article satirizes the anti-Jacobin tendency to decry novel reading in general, it also points to the Gothic genre’s supposed lack of instructive purpose with specific regard to female

¹⁵² E.J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 97.

¹⁵³ “Terrorist Novel Writing,” *Spirit of the Public Journals for 1797* (London, 1798): 1:233-5; reprinted in Wright, *Gothic Fiction*, 24-5.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

conduct. Novels, according to the alarmists, should encourage femininity and domesticity. The Gothic, however, was doing neither; and, furthermore, was threatening household order. In “The Terrorist System of Novel-Writing” (1797), another satirical writer claimed his daughters would read Gothic novels “whether [he] pleased or not.”¹⁵⁵

There also were wide-ranging concerns that women would cease to find amusement in other, more appropriate books, and that due to “the luxurious and voluptuous descriptions” found in Gothic novels, women would develop a “distaste for the affairs of life.”¹⁵⁶ As I have shown in this article, these fears regarding the cognitive and existential effects of fiction can be found within Gothic narratives themselves. “Gothic novelists,” Lynch writes, “take an interest in the psychology of reception . . . in the strange power fiction has to transport its beholder from this world, and in the conditions under which that power fails.”¹⁵⁷ In Radcliffe, those conditions are built into the form of her novels. While the narrative fosters rapt absorption, the epigraphs regulate the reader’s immersion.

Radcliffe’s Frames

Radcliffe’s ambivalent attitude toward the power of the imagination reached its apex in *The Italian*. “[Imagination] may not willingly confine itself to the dull truths of this earth,” she wrote, “but, eager to expand its faculties, to fill its capacity, and to experience its own peculiar delights, soars after new wonders into a world of its own!” (*TI*, Vol. III, Ch. 11, 371). In this novel, she reprimanded both her characters and her readers for their quixotic conflation of fact

¹⁵⁵ “The Terrorist System of Novel-Writing,” *Monthly Magazine* 4,21 (August 1797); reprinted in *Gothic Readings: the First Wave, 1764-1840*, ed. Rictor Norton (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000), 299-300.

¹⁵⁶ W.W., “On Novels and Romances,” *The Scots Magazine* 64 (June 1802): 470-74.

¹⁵⁷ Deidre Lynch, “Gothic Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 58.

and fiction. Radcliffe seems to have ‘reined in’ her own descriptive powers: the narrative itself is more restrained and less ‘Gothic’ than its precursors. The supernatural (which is always, in Radcliffe’s novels, an explained supernatural) is sparse and, perhaps in response to the reviews, the poems and quotes interspersed throughout *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* are absent from this novel. Reviewers were glad of this. One wrote in *The Monthly Mirror* that, “The reader of the *Italian* is not perpetually harassed with . . . poetry, [which is] impertinent in a work of narration, inasmuch as they call off the reader’s attention from the principle objects, and interrupt the emotions which the work is calculated to produce.”¹⁵⁸ In this remark, the poems seem to take on a life of their own, endowed with life-like abilities to harass and distract; to induce self-forgetfulness. The epigraphs and their own interruptive power go unmentioned although Radcliffe continued using them in the novel. Perhaps they are implicit in Mary Wollstonecraft’s assertion that, “The interest of the story is interrupted by the reader’s attention to guard against delusions of the imagination.”¹⁵⁹ Wollstonecraft’s famous feminist treatise, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which was published in the same year as the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, was aimed at the predominantly middle-class women who read Radcliffe’s fiction. Despite the difference of their literary forms, there are a number of similarities between the philosophies espoused by both writers, including the importance of female rationality.¹⁶⁰

While the epigraphic form of *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* demonstrates Radcliffe’s interest in the process of reading, that of *The Italian* has for its central focus the examination of frames and the framing process. In *The Italian*, she moves the times

¹⁵⁸ “Review of *The Italian*,” *The Monthly Mirror* 3 (March 1797): 155-58; reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, 52-53.

¹⁵⁹ [Mary Wollstonecraft,] “Review of *The Italian*,” *Analytical Review* 25 (May 1797): 516-20; reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, 54-55.

¹⁶⁰ Knowles, “Feminism and the Gothic: A Brief History.”

of events closer to her own historical moment, 1758, and frames the narrative itself as a confession that has been recorded by a young student, and subsequently read by an English traveller. In 1764, a group of travellers enters a church in Naples. One of the travellers, an English gentleman, spots a strange man entering a confessional and enquires after him. A friar explains that the man is an assassin seeking sanctuary in the church. The English gentleman is astonished. The friar then asks the gentleman whether he has heard of the strange circumstances surrounding the confessional itself and promises to send this gentleman a volume containing the story written by the young student. Radcliffe writes, “the Englishman, soon after returning to his hotel, received the volume. He read as follows,” (*TI*, 6) and thus begins her novel. “You will perceive from the work,” the friar tells the gentleman and, consequently, the reader, “that this student was very young, as to the arts of composition, but the facts are what you require, and from these he has not deviated” (*TI*, 6). By displacing narrative responsibility onto this student, Radcliffe distances herself from her position as the authorial figure. Framing the narrative as a recorded confession assimilates fact and fiction, but the deviation of the reader’s attention from assassin to confession suggests that fact is often stranger than fiction.

This preface, which recounts the circumstances of the gestation of the main text, shares affinities with epigraphs. While many eighteenth-century authors adopted forms of narrative framing, and although Radcliffe was not the first to use chapter epigraphs in her novels, she understood, before it became a received notion, that paratext was a cognitive frame that allowed authors to guide and even to enable interpretation.¹⁶¹ As I have shown, epigraphs at once lead the reader into the text, “the massy doors” through which she enters a solipsistic world, and deliberately lead her out of it, encouraging her to concentrate on the context rather than the text itself.¹⁶² “Frame story structures,” explains Werner Woolf, “can be employed not only to

¹⁶¹ Although it is implicit in his work, Genette never actually named paratext as a framing device.

¹⁶² Marie Maclean, “Pretexts and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral,” *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 273.

intensify the reader's involvement but also for what may appear to be the reverse: the creation of distance."¹⁶³ In the case of Radcliffe, this distance is both aesthetic (counteracting aesthetic illusion) and of the kind that dissociates the author from embedded narrators.

Although Radcliffe mostly quoted from the English canon, several of the epigraphs remain unattributed. Untraceable by modern editors, we can assume Radcliffe composed these herself. "Radcliffe," explains Wright, "was here playfully leaving the cryptic signature of the *auteur*."¹⁶⁴ While in *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, only one or two epigraphs are untraceable (most of her own poems being presented within the text as her characters' inventions), in *The Italian* these intradiegetic poems have disappeared and the (assumed) autographic epigraphs are more numerous. The autographic epigraphs might be considered metaleptic, an instance of characters forgetting themselves as characters and intruding into the extradiegetic existence of the author or the reader. "Such intrusions," explains Genette, "disturb, to say the least, the distinction between levels."¹⁶⁵ In the case of *The Italian*, this diegetic rupture suggests a world in which the fictional and referential have collapsed into one another. Readers are given free-rein to "decide on fictionality and reference, case by case."¹⁶⁶ Of course, it is also possible to read the use of autographic epigraphs as Radcliffe's attempt to make herself a point of reference within a male poetic tradition.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, she was successfully marketed by her publishers as Shakespearean: for example, their

¹⁶³ Werner Woolf, "Framing Borders in Frame Stories," in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 192.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 88.

¹⁶⁶ Elaine Freedgood, *Worlds Enough: The Invention of Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 114.

¹⁶⁷ One of her epigraphs was used, although without acknowledgement, by Francis Lathom as an epigraph for *The Unknown; or, The Northern Gallery* (1826). Explanatory Notes, in *The Italian*, 418.

advertisement for the fourth edition of *The Romance of the Forest* in *The Courier*, and *Evening Gazette* for Saturday, 10 May 1794, included two quotations from *Macbeth*. Nathan Drake would later refer to Radcliffe as “the Shakspeare [*sic*] of Romance Writers.”¹⁶⁸

Radcliffe’s autographic epigraphs extend the solitary voice of the author into a generalized, communal one. In one epigraph, Radcliffe quotes from Milton’s *Lycidas* (1638):

Thus sang th’ unletter’d Swain to th’ oaks and rills,
While the still morn went forth with sandals gray,
And now the sun had stretch’d out all the hills,
And now was dropt into the western bay. ———

(*TI*, Vol. II, Ch. 2, 144)

The epigraph is taken from the poem’s last stanza, although Radcliffe has omitted two lines. She has also replaced Milton’s “uncouth” (awkward and uncultured in appearance or manners) with the word “unletter’d” (uneducated, unlearned, perhaps even illiterate), suggesting a concern with literary authority. *Lycidas* complicates narrative voice. Although Milton labelled *Lycidas* a monody, a lyrical lament performed by a single person, the poem in fact contains many voices. It also adopts the irregular rhyme and meter characteristic of the Italian canzone, a polyphonic lyrical form. The particular stanza that Radcliffe has chosen is a moment of revelation, in which the reader discovers that the entire poem is quoted speech, with “th’ unletter’d Swain” acting as the narrator. This recalls the frame of *The Italian*, mediated as it is through a ‘very young’ student and a fictional reader. While, in *Lycidas*, this revelation comes at the end of the poem, Radcliffe is constantly asking her reader to readjust her perspective. Due to the narrative devices she uses, such as narrative frames and epigraphs, it is sometimes difficult to tell where one voice ends and another begins.¹⁶⁹ “In Radcliffe’s novels,” argues

¹⁶⁸ Nathan Drake, *Literary Hours: or Sketches, Critical, Narrative, and Poetical*, vol. 1 (London, 1800; reprinted New York, 1970), 359; cited in Wright, *Women’s Gothic*, 51.

¹⁶⁹ Radcliffe also quoted herself in the narrative. Nick Groom, recent editor of *The Italian*, calls this “a pseudo-quotation.” He also points to the fact that Radcliffe’s contemporaries did not necessarily realise she had written

Buurma, “the epigraph is not limited to being an authorial gesture towards a thematic element or a signal of literary or generic affiliation but may be something quite different: evidence of the possible expression of a heroine’s thoughts.”¹⁷⁰ This produces a strange effect, in which a character’s voice is tied to another in the extra-diegetic space of the epigraph. A frame is what relates a text to its context, but the epigraph possesses a characteristic ambiguity: it is positioned in between text and context and belongs to the ‘work’ but not to the text proper. This raises several issues of delimitation, including the fictional or historical status of the autographic epigraph. Is the autographic epigraph part of the narratorial or the authorial voice? Susan Lanser offers the term *extrafictional* to describe epigraphs, among other forms of paratext, including titles, prefaces, and dedications. “This extrafictional voice,” she writes, “the most direct counterpart for the historical author, carries all the *diegetic authority* of its (publicly authorised) creator and has the ontological status of historical truth.”¹⁷¹ This voice organises and presents, and plays a significant role in conditioning the reader’s expectations of the narrative. Yet, neither autographic nor allographic epigraphs can claim the status of historical truth, both being acts of imagination. Further, Lanser’s term does not account for comic or satirical epigraphs, nor for the fact that epigraphs gain their ‘voice’ from their relationship to the chapters. On their own, their status is unclear.

In a letter dated 4 October 1796, an American editor named Elihu Hubbard Smith wrote to his sister, Mary S. Mumford, about the *Mysteries of Udolpho*. “Beware of false impressions,” he warned her, “Historical characters and events, policy, morals, manners, arts, . . . stand no chance when once the disfiguring hand of Fiction seizes upon them; they are despoiled of their

her own epigraphs, which is indicated by one of her epigraphs being signed ‘anonymous’ in “A Sea-side Incident” in *The World of Fashion, and Continental Feuilletons* 9, no. 95 (Feb. 1832): 114. See the Explanatory Notes, in *The Italian*, ed. Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 416-17.

¹⁷⁰ Buurma, “Epigraphs,” 172.

¹⁷¹ Lanser, *The Narrative Act*, 122.

proper ornaments, or receive new ones; and are moulded into any shape, and applied to any use, which may best suit the purpose of that fantastic architect.”¹⁷² Radcliffe’s use of epigraphs, passages prised from their original contexts and placed into new ones, suggests that she realised the inadequacies and the arbitrariness of meaning that can arise under new circumstances. Just as Ellena’s suitor Vivaldi tells the court of the Inquisition that, “I will not suffer my assertions to be misrepresented, or my words to be perverted against myself” (*TI*, Vol. II, Ch. 6, 194), Radcliffe’s autographic epigraphs seem to close down possible readings through their clear correspondence to the narrative. One epigraph, for instance, reads: “Bring the roses, violets, and the cold snow-drop, / Beautiful in tears, to strew the path-way / Of our saintly sister” (*TI*, Vol. I, Ch. 11, 111). Readers are then told that the pavement of the convent’s choir “was strewn with palm-branches and fresh flowers.” In a subsequent chapter, Ellena wraps herself in a nun’s veil in order to escape the convent in which she is being kept prisoner. In the epigraph, this veil is described as, “That lawn [which] conceals her beauty / As the thin cloud, just silver’d by the rays, / The trembling moon: think ye ’tis shrouded from / The curious eye?” (*TI*, Vol. II, Ch. 1, 125). While these epigraphs might alert readers to upcoming developments in the narrative — the latter, for instance, suggests that Ellena’s escape will not be straightforward — their application to the chapter relies on a one-to-one correspondence, as opposed to a many-sided logic.

Unlike her highly apposite autographic epigraphs, Radcliffe’s allographic epigraphs are more provisional in their application to the chapters. Gothic novels, as Lynch has written, have a penchant for, “making words seem eerily mobile, detachable from their contexts of origin, and for recording the interpretative difficulties resulting from that decontextualisation.”¹⁷³

¹⁷² 4 October 1796. Elihu Hubbard Smith, *The Diary of Elihu Hubbard Smith*, ed. James E. Cronin (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973), 225-6; reprinted in *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, 26-27.

¹⁷³ Lynch, “Gothic Fiction,” 60.

Miles, too, notes that in *The Italian*, “Radcliffe builds up layers of possible interpretation through the cunning use of allusion, where epigraph and text do, and do not fit.”¹⁷⁴ In one chapter, for instance, Schedoni and his hired assassin Spalatro are advancing toward Ellena’s room when Spalatro sees the apparition of a hand, beckoning him with a blood-stained finger. The epigraph to this chapter, “I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat” (*TI*, Vol. II, Ch. 9, 214), is taken from *Macbeth* and, indeed, the blood-stained finger recalls Shakespeare’s blood-stained dagger. These lines illustrate Macbeth’s final decision to acquiesce in his wife’s wishes to murder Duncan and claim the throne. As a preface to the chapter, the epigraph is somewhat misleading. It suggests Spalatro will murder Ellena, which he doesn’t — nor does Schedoni. In fact, Schedoni most resembles Lady Macbeth, in that he is prevented from killing her when he notices the miniature of himself hanging from Ellena’s neck and believes she is his daughter. She is actually his niece, but he takes this portrait as sufficient proof of their filial attachment. (Lady Macbeth is, inversely, prevented from killing Duncan while he sleeps due to his resemblance to her father.) Schedoni’s guilt, however, is suggestive of Macbeth’s own. The epigraph is evocative but not prescriptive: the reader is free to make his or her own associations between epigraph and chapter. In fact, the epigraph does more to enforce the chapter’s aesthetics than it does to define its contents, allowing Radcliffe to defy the reader’s expectations: Ellena is spared. In doing so, Radcliffe purposefully misleads the reader in order to create fear and suspense. As Rumbold argues, “Narratorial epigraphs . . . create suspense and atmosphere, and . . . hint that the ghostly or murderous plots of plays such as *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* might recur in [Radcliffe’s] novels.”¹⁷⁵ Most importantly, however, Radcliffe demonstrates the power of words to circulate outside of their original context — to forget themselves, so to speak — and the contingencies of meaning that arise in the process of

¹⁷⁴ Robert Miles, Introduction to *The Italian*, ed. Robert Miles (London: Penguin Books, 2000), xxviii.

¹⁷⁵ Rumbold, “Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic Epigraphs,” 133.

interpretation. If the paratext is a “zone indéclose entre le dedans et le dehors, elle-même sans limite rigoureuse,” how then can one delimit an epigraph’s meaning?¹⁷⁶ What the epigraphs stage in Radcliffe’s novel, as Dames argues of the chapter head in Trollope, “is the contagion of speech itself, spilling beyond the confines of the novel’s action, as if to refuse the distinction between paratext and text, narrated world and our world.”¹⁷⁷ In this regard we could see Radcliffe’s epigraphs, in Dames’ terms, paying “homage to the refusal of our words to remain our own.”¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

In the epigraph to this chapter, Barrett Browning contends that, “[i]t is rather when / We gloriously forget ourselves, . . . [that] we get the right good from a book.”¹⁷⁹ For Barrett Browning, self-forgetfulness, or complete immersion, is the necessary condition for an ethical, responsible reading. Radcliffe’s novels, however, offer a different model of self-forgetfulness and a different ‘right’ way of reading: one that seeks to temper the imagination through the development of rational thought.

Radcliffe’s epigraphic form sheds an interesting light on how she imagined the reading of her novels and, consequently, how they might help us to construct the eighteenth-century reader as Radcliffe conceived of her. They point to *what* this reader consumed — the Gothic novel; *how* she read it — immersed, to a fault; and, most importantly, *why* she read — for escape, although presumably among other reasons. Radcliffe recognised the ambitions of the

¹⁷⁶ “an undecided zone between the inside and the outside, without a rigorous limit.” Genette, *Paratexts*, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Dames, “Chapter Heads,” 162.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Barrett Browning, “Aurora Leigh,” 197-98.

Gothic genre, which she was instrumental in establishing, but, as her use of the explained supernatural would also suggest, was suspicious of the consequences of escapist literature with regards to a reader's commitment to civic life. When Miles asks, "How do we reconcile these two views of Radcliffe: a conventional eighteenth-century thinker attached to Enlightenment verities (notoriously, the explained supernatural) and the media sensation who helped define the spectre-crazed literary culture of the first-generation Romantics?" he points to a similar ambivalence, if not contradiction.¹⁸⁰

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1810), Wordsworth wrote: "[A] multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor."¹⁸¹ These causes included national events, urbanisation, and industrialisation. Literature, he argued, was conforming to this commercial growth, responding to the public's desire for instant gratification. The Gothic genre is implicated in Wordsworth's gendered fears about the cognitive effect of "frantic novels" and "idle and extravagant stories in verse."¹⁸² Although Radcliffe's romances were singled out as Gothic in its most acceptable form, she registered this discourse surrounding the Gothic through the association of reading with forgetting oneself. The concept of forgetting oneself, rich in social and economic meaning, allowed her to represent fears about women's reading and sexual transgression, and the drastic change in the nature and size of readerships. Her epigraphs, however, attempted to revise this gendered rhetoric by subverting the traditionally male convention of the classical motto. In placing herself, and other women, in the epigraphs of her novels, she revised norms of cultural inclusion and British patriotism. While Radcliffe was instrumental in popularising the Gothic

¹⁸⁰ Robert Miles, "Popular Romanticism and the Problem of Belief," in *Ann Radcliffe*, 120.

¹⁸¹ William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 99-100.

novel she, like the male editors of the *Spectator*, wanted her audience to read with attention, to pause often, and to reflect. She therefore developed a paratextual apparatus that called for critical distance and rational thought. Through her epigraphs, she encouraged her readers to exit the fictional world, and then permitted them to return, that they might get “the right good” from her books. In doing so, Radcliffe worked to moderate the escapist potential of the Gothic novel, and became the primary model of epigraphic form for Walter Scott and, in turn, George Eliot.

Chapter Three

“To read and to remember”: Epigraphs and Memory in Walter Scott’s Waverley Trilogy

In his 1724 edition of Allan Ramsay’s *Tea-Table Miscellany*, Walter Scott wrote: “This book belonged to my grandfather, Robert Scott, and out of it I was taught Hardiknute [*sic*] by heart before I could read the ballad myself. It was the first poem I ever learnt — the last I shall ever forget.”¹⁸³ This marginal note suggests that Scott’s life-long interest in ballads relates back to his earliest experiences of being read to and of memorising through aural reception. For Scott, memorising was both the perpetuation of something in writing (a definition that is now obsolete) and the act of learning by heart.¹⁸⁴ Throughout his life, reading continued to be bound up with memorisation and recitation. Describing his first time reading Bishop Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) as an adolescent, Scott claimed that, “To read and to remember was in this instance the same thing, and henceforth I overwhelmed my schoolfellows, and all who would hearken to me with tragical recitations from the ballads.”¹⁸⁵ Although rote memorisation was an important feature of education in both the Romantic and Victorian periods, Scott took genuine pleasure in his performances.¹⁸⁶ The *Tea-Table Miscellany* and the *Reliques* were seminal for him, prefiguring his own collection of ballads,

¹⁸³ Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott, The Great Unknown*, 2 vols. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970), 1:11; cited in Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 113. *Hardiknute* (1719), which chronicles an invasion of Scotland, was published as a fragment of ancient heroic ballad discovered in a vault. It was later ascribed to Elizabeth Wardlaw.

¹⁸⁴ “memorize, v.”. OED Online. March 2020. Oxford University Press. <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2360/view/Entry/116361?redirectedFrom=memorise> (accessed April 03, 2020).

¹⁸⁵ John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, Blanchard, 1838), 1:38; cited in Catherine Jones, *Literary Memory: Scott’s Waverley Novels and the Psychology of Narrative* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003), 34.

¹⁸⁶ Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), and the importance of memorisation to this project.

Scott began collecting Scottish ballads in 1792, making annual trips to the Scottish borders with his friend John Leyden and consulting manuscript collections. In 1799, James Ballantyne printed a few copies of some ballads, which Scott had written for Matthew Gregory Lewis's miscellany *Tales of Wonder* (1800), under the title *An Apology for Tales of Terror*. Scott was so pleased with the printing that he ventured a second request: "I have been for years collecting old Border ballads, and I think I could, with little trouble, put together such a selection from them as might make a neat little volume, to sell for four or five shillings."¹⁸⁷ Scott had recruited assistants to help him collect the ballads but gave them no credit; not even to John Leyden, who is thought to have done most of the work. The *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* was published in two volumes in 1802, containing twenty-nine historical ballads and twenty-four romantic ballads. A third volume appeared in 1803, featuring modern 'imitations' of ballads by antiquarians Robert Jamieson, John Leyden, Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, and Scott himself. It is Scott's name that appears on the title-pages of all three volumes.

The *Minstrelsy* was Scott's first experiment with paratext. Each ballad was accompanied by introductory remarks and end notes, in which Scott sometimes indicated that he had produced a more 'complete' version of the ballad by either supplementing or amalgamating variant readings and filling in textual gaps. Scott also used footnotes to explicate or translate words. As Andrew Piper has observed, "The paratextual elements of Scott's edition suggested a gradual, if incomplete, movement of the editor beyond the boundaries of his primary text and towards the margins."¹⁸⁸ Scott's interest was therefore not only in spatial and

¹⁸⁷ Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 1:180.

¹⁸⁸ Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 105.

temporal borders, to which scholars have drawn repeated attention, but also in textual ones. Perhaps this is what attracted Scott to the epigraph; the transgression of textual delineation, and the act of taking over others' words.

In the introduction to his first novel *Waverley* (1814), Scott demonstrates the extent to which paratext shapes a reader's expectations.¹⁸⁹ "Had I, for example, announced in my frontispiece, 'Waverley, a Tale of other Days,' must not every novel-reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than that of Udolpho?" he asks.¹⁹⁰ Ann Radcliffe set a pattern for the genre: many Gothic romances and novels, post-dating her own, also contain chapter epigraphs.¹⁹¹ While Scott sought to distance himself from the Gothic, certain elements persisted into his historical novels, including chapter epigraphs. The presence of epigraphs across different genres transformed them into a literary, as opposed to a strictly Gothic, convention. It also established Scott as Radcliffe's successor, at least in terms of paratext. Scott reviewed and admired Radcliffe, writing after her death in 1824 that, "Mrs Radcliffe, as an author, has the most decided claim to take her place among the favoured few, who have been distinguished as the founders of a class, or school. She led the way in a peculiar style of composition, affecting powerfully the mind of the reader, which has since been attempted by many, but in which no one has attained or approached the excellencies of the original inventor."¹⁹² Despite her lack

¹⁸⁹ Scott published the *Waverley* novels anonymously under the guise of the 'author of *Waverley*'. Critics have put forth several explanations for this choice but even Scott himself found it difficult to explain, given the popularity of the books. He often suggested anonymity gave him courage, though perhaps it stemmed from modesty. Marilyn Orr emphasises his "distrust of the authorial role and of narrative form itself." See Marilyn Orr, "Voices and Text: Scott the Storyteller, Scott the Novelist," *Scottish Literary Journal* 16, no. 2 (1989): 41-59; cited in Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 124.

¹⁹⁰ Walter Scott, *Waverley*, ed. P. D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 3-4; hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁹¹ Warren Hunter Smith has surveyed nineteen Gothic romances or novels with chapter epigraphs, all post-dating *The Romance of the Forest*. See Warren Hunter Smith, *Architecture in English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 53.

¹⁹² Walter Scott, "Ann Radcliffe," in *Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction*, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge, 2010), 78.

of “insight into the human heart” and “observation of life and manners,” he appreciated her power to affect the mind and emotions of the reader.

Scott began using chapter epigraphs in *Waverley* and continued to do so throughout the rest of his career. Indeed, epigraphs are present in all of his novels except for in *Redgauntlet* (1824). His journal reveals that he would, at a later stage in his career, become frustrated with having to use epigraphs. He wrote on March 24, 1826: “J. B. clamorous for a motto. Go to. D — n the mottoe. It is foolish to encourage people to expect mottoes and such like Decoraments. You have no credit for finding them, and there is a disgrace in wanting them.”¹⁹³ There are no extant contemporary comments about Scott’s epigraphs but this passage suggests the convention was popular among his readers. However, it also points to a development over the time-period covered in this thesis. As Leah Price explains, “A culture in which serious critics appreciated timeless truths while frivolous ladies devoured stories gave way to one where women relished ornamental digressions and men demanded the narrative point.”¹⁹⁴ Scott’s comment about their being “a disgrace in wanting [epigraphs]” suggests that his novelistic career coincided with this historical shift. He published *Woodstock* (1826) one month after expressing his frustration, placing an epigraph at the head of every chapter. In the subsequent five novels he wrote, he was less industrious in assigning epigraphs and some chapters are without one.

Scott’s historical novels emerged in the aftermath of the French Revolution (1787–1799), against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars (1800–1815), and amid intense concerns about the preservation of culture. Waterloo marked the end of more than two decades of uninterrupted conflict in Europe. If, as Robert Crawford argues, post-war reconciliation was

¹⁹³ W. E. K. Anderson, ed., *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 119.

¹⁹⁴ Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.

central to the ethics of Scott's novels, the fragments of European Romanticism were crucial to his compositional practice.¹⁹⁵ The fragment has been part of European thought since the Renaissance at least, at which time the excavation of Roman artefacts integrated the fragment into aesthetic reception.¹⁹⁶ In the eighteenth century, the fragment was imbued with political valence. Writing in 1791, the Comte de Volney used ruins to demonstrate the failure of elitist and aristocratic nations, and the dawning of revolution, reason, and equality. *Les Ruines* captured both the ruin's picturesque potential and its philosophical import. For Volney, the fall of empires was the work of man as opposed to an accident of nature. In turn, Romanticism transformed the ruin, or fragment, into an aesthetic object, bringing about an important change in the nature of reading, and of writer-reader relations. British Romantic poets left works unfinished, and published finished works as fragments. Rather than "appropriating the poet . . . as the provider of definable goods and services," eighteenth-century readers of the Romantic fragment poem were expected to be self-sufficient in their interpretations.¹⁹⁷

While in Britain, ballads and poems were being published in fragment form, the German Romantics launched a larger philosophical investigation of the fragment as a genre.¹⁹⁸ For Friedrich Schlegel, as I explained in the last chapter, the fragment was a political protest against traditional genres. "Poetry is republican speech," he wrote, "a speech which is its own law and end unto itself, and in which all the parts are free citizens and have a right to vote."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Robert Crawford, "Walter Scott and European Union," *Studies in Romanticism* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 144.

¹⁹⁶ See Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); and Elizabeth Wanning Harries, "'Unifinish'd Sentences': The Romantic Fragment," *A Companion to European Romanticism*, ed. Michael Ferber (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 360; although Harries also argues that the Romantic fragment exists along the formal continuum of a mixed form that can be traced back to Petrarch and Rabelais at least (see 371-72).

¹⁹⁷ Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 209.

¹⁹⁸ For the differences between English and German Romanticism, see *ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁹⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, "Critical Fragment 65," cited in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe*, ed. Kathleen M. Wheeler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 42.

Figuring poetic revolution in political terms, Schlegel's theories reflect the influence of the French Revolution's ideologies on Romantic literature. Thus, we see in Scott's own use of the fragment, of which the epigraph is one example, his interest in German Romanticism and the wide ranging impact of the European conflict on his fiction.²⁰⁰

During the French Revolution, acts of vandalism, such as selling paper to dealers and plundering administrative archives for gunpowder funnels (most of which were spurred on by immediate necessity), resulted in calls to preserve the records of the *ancien régime* and to conserve those of the New.²⁰¹ Under the *ancien régime*, deposits had been made within specific institutions but there was no unified archival administration. The French state thus established the Archives Nationales in 1790. Almost two centuries later, laws were passed to centralise all these extant repositories and record-producing public agencies, to provide free public access, and to set up an archival service in each *département*.²⁰²

The historical development of the archive is open to a dialectic of remembering and forgetting, and has therefore been associated with some of the most negative aspects of modern political culture.²⁰³ Pierre Nora, for instance, observes that, "professional archivists have learned that the essence of their trade is the art of controlled destruction."²⁰⁴ The archive cannot preserve the whole, only the fragments from which to reconstruct the whole. In his historical

²⁰⁰ Robert Crawford, "Walter Scott and European Union," 140.

²⁰¹ See Ralph Kingston, "The French Revolution and the Materiality of the Modern Archive," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 46, no. 1 (2011): 1-25.

²⁰² Books on the history of France's national archives include Claire Béchu, *Les Archives Nationales* (Paris: Archives Nationales-Éditions Somogy, 2008); Lucie Favier, *La Mémoire de l'État* (Paris: Fayard, 2004); Françoise Hildesheimer, *Les Archives de France* (Paris: Champion, 1997).

²⁰³ Derrida claims that, "If there is no archive without consignment in an external place which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction." Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 14.

²⁰⁴ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire," *Representations* 26, no. 26 (1989): 14.

novels, Scott leaves this archival reconstruction for the reader to perform through epigraphic interpretation.²⁰⁵

Scott's own mind was also something of an archive. In *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James explains that, "Those persons . . . who retain names, dates and addresses, anecdotes, gossip, poetry, quotations, and all sorts of miscellaneous facts, without an effort, have desultory memory in a high degree."²⁰⁶ Scott was one of these men; "an example, in short, of your quarto or folio editions of mankind, [who] must needs have an amazing retentiveness of the purely physiological sort."²⁰⁷ According to James, it would be impossible to be influential at scale without this retentiveness. Catherine Jones has also observed that Scott's memoirs emphasise "the ways in which his mind ordered, or failed to order, particular information acquired" and demonstrate his interest in "the processes whereby oral or written texts were lodged in his memory for future recall."²⁰⁸ Scott himself recognised that he had "a wonderful facility in retaining in [his] memory whatever verses pleased [him]."²⁰⁹ However, he stresses that he "got by heart not as a task, but almost without intending it[,] the passages with which [he] was most pleased."²¹⁰ Although rote memorisation long constituted the dominant method for teaching both reading and other subjects in Britain, for Scott it was the act of reading, or being read to, that lead to memorising.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ Linking the epigraph and the archive, Derrida calls the exergue "the first figure of an archive, because every archive . . . is at once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional." Derrida, however, considered neglected textual details, such as notes, epigraphs, and post-scripts, as *parerga*, whereas I read epigraphs as part of, not supplementary to, the text. Derrida, "Archive Fever," 12.

²⁰⁶ William James, *Principles of Psychology, Volume I*, in *The Works of William James*, ed. Fredson Bowers and Fredrick H. Burkhardt, 19 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975-86), 1:621.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Jones, *Literary Memory*, 31-32.

²⁰⁹ *Scott on Himself: A Selection of the Autobiographical Writings of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Scott Academic Press, 1981), 26; cited in Jones, *Literary Memory*, 33.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Robson, *Heart Beats*, 26.

Scott's epigraphs, this chapter argues, function as both an archive of his reading and a form through which readers might be encouraged to memorise small passages, like George Eliot's character Lydgate, who "read so much when [he] was a lad, that [he] used to know Scott's poems by heart."²¹² Epigraphic quotation invited readers to memorise through interpretation rather than mere reiteration. Broadly, this chapter looks at the large-scale transformations in Scott's epigraphic practice in the first three Waverley novels, including his transition from chapter titles to chapter epigraphs; his inclusion of epigraphic quotation within the chapters themselves; and his attempts to disguise the provenance of his autographic epigraphs.²¹³ As far as it is possible, I trace Scott's debt to Radcliffe and Scott's influence on Eliot, although the latter relationship is given fuller treatment in a subsequent chapter of this thesis. Within these larger movements, I also examine Scott's engagement with popular discourses about superficial reading practices, bibliomania, and antiquarianism; and his use of other Gothic conventions, such as letters and manuscript fragments. I argue that Scott used epigraphs to cultivate memory, both as a form of attention and as a cultural force. Through the cultivation of individual and cultural memories, Scott conceded the importance of heritage in the building of national sentiment; but he maintained a profound scepticism about the value of authenticity. His epigraphs instead suggest that national inheritance might be as much manufactured as it is recovered.

Scott and the Chapter

²¹² George Eliot, *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 265.

²¹³ Given the size of Scott's oeuvre, it has been necessary to restrict the corpus and this chapter is not exhaustive. As this thesis is interested in the historical evolution of the epigraph and its intended functions, I have chosen to look at Scott's first three novels. These were intended as a trilogy and are witness to the most drastic transformations in Scott's paratextual practice.

In the initial stages of Scott's novelistic career, comparisons were drawn between him and Henry Fielding.²¹⁴ In his own time, Fielding had been celebrated as a master of chapter divisions. Chapters were parts of what critics deemed the "sacred" laws of his art, and readers praised the "excellence" of his chapter titles.²¹⁵ Scott inherited from him the idea of reading as a contractual agreement between reader and author, and of reading as travel. "Our journey is now finished, gentle reader," Scott writes at the end of *Waverley*, "and if your patience has accompanied me through these sheets, the contract is, on your part, strictly fulfilled" (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 25, 362). Fielding compared chapters to inns where an exhausted traveller might rest; and, in a likely nod to him, Sterne wrote in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) that "chapters relieve the mind."²¹⁶ Both established the chapter as an interruption in an ongoing series of events. Scott's chapters, however, close with reflections such as, "But more of this in a subsequent chapter" (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 3, 12) or, "The effect of this indulgence upon his temper and character will appear in the next chapter" (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 4, 19). These are attempts to protract the reader's attention and to incite continued reading. Another chapter ends with the observation that, "this, being an important subject, must form the commencement of a new chapter" (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 18, 97), suggesting that segmentation was also used for legibility and analytic clarity.²¹⁷ Maria Edgeworth claimed of Scott's novels that she and her family "could not endure the[se] occasional addresses from the author to the reader. They are like Fielding," she wrote, "[and]

²¹⁴ James Hillhouse, *The Waverley Novels and their Critics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1936).

²¹⁵ [Francis Coventry], *An Essay on the New Species of Writing founded by Mr. Fielding* (1751), in *Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood (London: Routledge, 1995), 263; 267.

²¹⁶ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 225.

²¹⁷ Dames describes the dual function of chapter titles, which serve both as summaries of the chapter they introduce, and as graphic features, segmenting the text for legibility as well as analytic clarity. See Dames, "Chapter Heads," 156.

the only thing we dislike.”²¹⁸ However intrusive, Scott’s narratorial comments demonstrate that he was thinking about the chapter form and help us to see how chaptering was understood at the time of his writing.

Chapters are, for Scott, ways in which the novel takes on the shape of life: some things end, others begin, and chapters mark these important transitions. In the novel, as in life, “the change, though steadily and rapidly progressive, has, nevertheless, been gradual” (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 25, 362). In life, however, “we are not aware of the progress we have made until we fix our eye on the now-distant point from which we set out” (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 25, 362). As James Wood contends, “This process of retrospective comprehension in fact constitutes a life — is indeed how life is lived.”²¹⁹ This is where the novel differs: narrative is experienced in segments and chapters mark the shifts that make up the sum of our progress. In life, these shifts are often slow and imperceptible.

Scott’s epigraphic form developed out of his attention to the chapter and its titles. Nicholas Dames notes that, as the modern novel developed, explanatory chapter titles became “less necessary.”²²⁰ The chapter title’s prepositional syntax (the “in which” or “concerning”) was replaced with briefer summaries of the chapter’s contents.²²¹ While Fielding and Sterne’s novels had “playfully elongated and acutely self-conscious” chapter titles, the chapter titles in the first volume of *Waverley* are, by and large titled simply, “EDUCATION” (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 3, 12) or “CHOICE OF A PROFESSION” (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 5, 20), harking back to the earliest practitioners of the chapter.²²² These authors were “compilers of knowledge, either

²¹⁸ Letter from Maria Edgeworth to James Ballantyne, 23 October 1814, in *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John O. Hayden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 75.

²¹⁹ James Wood, *The Nearest Thing to Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), 114-5.

²²⁰ Nicholas Dames, “The Chapter: A History,” *newyorker.com*, 29 October, 2004, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/chapter-history>.

²²¹ Dames, “Chapter Heads,” 161.

²²² *Ibid.*, 156.

utilitarian or speculative,” writes Dames, “who used chapters as a way of organizing large miscellanies.”²²³ Scott had some classical training in his childhood and it is possible that he drew upon it when thinking about his novelistic chapters; both in terms of chapters as information-seeking devices and, later, in terms of epigraphs and memorisation. Indeed, the recitation of hundreds and hundreds of lines of Homer and Virgil, among other sources, was a constitutive feature of classical education.²²⁴

In the second volume of *Waverley*, Scott is more playful with his chapter titles. For instance, he titles one chapter “UPON THE SAME SUBJECT” (*Waverley*, Vol. II, Ch. 4, 139). In pointing to the often arbitrary nature of novelistic segmentation, he seems to question its necessity. Dames explains: “As the primary lingering trace of informational or consultative reading within literary genres otherwise devoted to producing immersive, continuous reading, chapter heads always implicitly allude to an indexical function that they might nonetheless be discarding or even parodying.”²²⁵ The titles “SHOWS THAT THE LOSS OF A HORSE’S SHOE MAY BE A SERIOUS INCONVENIENCE” (*Waverley*, Vol. II, Ch. 7, 158) and “AN INCIDENT GIVES RISE TO UNAVAILING REFLECTIONS” (*Waverley*, Vol. II, Ch. 22, 230) are this volume’s longest and most obviously comical. They do not encapsulate the contents of the chapters they announce so much as instigate a curiosity about them.

For the most part, Scott’s titles have none of Fielding and Sterne’s garrulousness. In fact, it is often in their succinctness and opacity that they are parodic. The third volume, for instance, contains a chapter titled “RATHER UNIMPORTANT” (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 3, 252) while another questions, “WHAT’S TO BE DONE NEXT?” (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 15, 305). The former mimics the informational label as if to signal the mismatch between such

²²³ Nicholas Dames, “The Chapter: A History.”

²²⁴ Robson, *Heart Beats*, 30.

²²⁵ Dames, “Chapter Heads,” 156.

labels and the continuous, immersive reading sought by Scott and other novelists. The latter alludes to the chapter as a mechanism for intrigue and, more thoughtfully, to the dilemma at the heart of the chapter unit. As Dames questions, “how do we know when we are starting a new chapter? How are we justified in picking a moment out of fluid passing time and declaring a pause?” This, he concludes, “is the ambiguity that the novel learned to love.”²²⁶

Shilly-shallow Readers

The development of chapter titles into epigraphs helped Scott to resolve temporal issues, time being both the enemy of attention and of memory. Unlike periodicals or anthologies, which, as Robert Altick observes, “on the whole . . . do not require sustained attention, having been dedicated from their earliest days to the principle of variety,” the novel had to reconcile length to limited attention.²²⁷ One Victorian line of thought held that the process of reading a long, detail-rich novel was wearisome to readers’ intellects and disastrous for their concentration.²²⁸ Scott’s novels, however, offered a solution to the problem of overburdened attention spans. Rather than economise the reader’s attention, Scott sought to develop it through supposed narrative omission, misleading the reader into thinking she is being granted a form of mental rest. He also used epigraphs, which offer both brief cessations from continuous narrative and small units for memorisation. “The art of memory,” as one periodical put it, “is little more than the art of attention.”²²⁹ If Scott could use the epigraphic

²²⁶ Dames, “The Chapter: A History.”

²²⁷ Robert Altick, *The English Common Reader: a Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 318.

²²⁸ Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.

²²⁹ “On the Means of Cultivating the Memory,” in *The Weekly Entertainer and West of England Miscellany* 2 (November 1820): 381.

novel to cultivate his readers' attention, sensitive as audiences were to other generic options, he might legitimise the form.

While the Gothic novel was perceived to have transformed reading into an all-absorbing vocation, Scott's fictional representations of reading in *Waverley* are critical of the leisured, distracted perusal. In this novel, reading encourages "habits of abstraction and [a] love of solitude" (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 4, 16), which are perceived as unattractive and undesirable male qualities. Much to his uncle's despair, Waverley develops the "dainty, squeamish, and fastidious taste acquired by a surfeit of idle reading" and "dissipation of mind incidental to such a desultory course of reading" (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 3, 15). These descriptions recall Scott's own "random perusal" of libraries and bookshelves as a young man: "few ever read so much," he confesses, "and to so little purpose."²³⁰ Flora Mac-Ivor, on the other hand, is characterised as a perceptive reader. Quoting several passages from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, she explains to Waverley how the transfer of Romeo's affections from Rosaline to Juliet are "not only reconcilable to nature, but such as in the highest degree evinced the art of the poet" (*Waverley*, Vol. 3, Ch. 7, 272). In anticipation of his own audience's idle reading, Scott adopted a form that instead offered his readers "the opportunity of acquiring habits of firm and assiduous application, of gaining the art of controlling, directing, and concentrating the powers of his mind for earnest investigation" (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 3, 13).

While Radcliffe wrote with a rapt, female readership in mind, Scott sought to combat idle reading and its effect on the implied male reader. Indeed, his historical subject matter was held to be fit for mature, masculine minds. The *British Critic* praised Scott's novel for its criticism of a "mode of education" that "render[s] the minds of the rising generation pert, superficial, and effeminate."²³¹ In another article, "shilly-shallow readers" are condemned for

²³⁰ *Scott on Himself*, 27; cited in Jones, *Literary Memory*, 34.

²³¹ *British Critic* (August 1814): 189-211, in *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, 71-72.

participating in the “prevalent vicarious way of reading [which] instead of valiantly mastering the books themselves, utterly emasculates the mind.”²³² This criticism, though not always so conspicuously gendered, was widespread, long-lasting, and mostly directed at the novel. Scott, however, was exempt: the *British Critic* was “unwilling to consider this publication in the light of a common novel, whose fate it is to be devoured with rapidity for the day, and to be afterwards forgotten for ever; but as a vehicle of curious accurate information upon a subject which must at all times demand our attention.”²³³ In 1839, *The London Saturday Review* published an article that outlined different kinds of reading, including reading for relaxation, reading for historical fact and experience, and reading to store up knowledge for future use. It was emphasized that, when reading for the retention of information, “reading should be performed slowly and deliberately.”²³⁴ Scott’s historical novels managed to amalgamate all of these purposes and to impose upon readers the slow pace required for retention. Although in 1840 *The London Saturday Review* still claimed that, “There [is] much more light reading at the present day than solid,” Scott’s novels were not the object of this light reading. Instead, it was thought that, “[a] stimulus [had] been added by his works to the increasing thirst after knowledge.”²³⁵ In order to pursue this knowledge, the readers of Scott’s novels are encouraged to venture outside of the diegetic space.

Scott knew from experience that readers dip in and out of books and skip portions of text under the false impression that “the mere tracing [of] the alphabetical characters with the eye is in itself a useful and meritorious task” (*Waverley*, Vol. I, Ch. 3, 13). He accounted for this “sin of omission” in the narrative: *Waverley* is full of large temporal lapses and structural

²³² “What Books to Read and How to Read Them,” *The Scottish Review* (October 1859): 368-380.

²³³ *British Critic* (August, 1814): 189-211, in *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, 69.

²³⁴ “Reading and Books,” *The London Saturday Journal* 1, no. 12 (March 1839): 187.

²³⁵ “Reading and Study,” *The London Saturday Journal* 4, no. 80 (July 1840): 23.

omissions, which “leave [the reader] to suppose those things which it would be abusing his patience to relate at length” (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 23, 353). (An internet search for ‘reading Walter Scott’ will generate links to articles with titles such as “Don’t chop Ivanhoe — just skip the boring bits”, revealing the ubiquity of this approach.)²³⁶ One paragraph in the novel is entirely made up of omissions, each sentence beginning with a negation such as “We will not attempt to describe,” “Still less will we attempt to analyse,” and “We will not even trouble the reader with . . . hum-drum details” (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 20, 338). Scott also assumed that his readers would skip the preface and placed it at the end of his novel instead, claiming that, “these remarks, being introduced last in order, have still the best chance to be read in their proper place” (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 25, 363). His concern about idle reading is more than just self-deprecation. Scott used paratext to catch out the hastiest of readers and, under the guise of narratorial omission, he ventured to prolong their concentration.

First using chapter titles and then turning to epigraphs, Scott demonstrated that paratext could be used to produce a more alert, disciplined, and concentrated reader. Although he claimed to “proceed in my story with all the brevity that my natural style of composition, partaking of what the scholars call periphrastic and ambagitory, and the vulgar circumbendibus, will permit me” (*Waverley*, Vol. II, Ch. 1, 122), Scott parodied his own prolix and discursive writing at the level of the sentence. Instead of abstaining from “further tyranny over my readers, or display of the extent of my own reading” (*Waverley*, Vol. II, Ch. 1, 122), epigraphs became host to Scott’s wide-ranging knowledge. Epigraphs helped Scott to slow the rate of his readers’ textual consumption and transformed the leisured act of reading into a rewarding form of labour. Indeed, the digressiveness of Scott’s narratives remains one of the biggest hurdles for readers to surmount: to understand his novels, one cannot rush through them.

²³⁶ Allan Massie, “Don’t chop Ivanhoe – just skip the boring bits,” 30 January, 2012, *The Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/9050321/Dont-chop-Ivanhoe-just-skip-the-boring-bits.html>.

In the last volume of *Waverley*, Scott turned from chapter titles to epigraphs. Just as Radcliffe had before him and Eliot would after him, Scott drew most of the novel's epigraphs from Shakespeare. "When I want to express a sentiment which I feel strongly," Scott wrote in his journal, "I find the phrase in Shakespeare."²³⁷ Scott's first attempt at the epigraph was cautious, and the epigraph shared the graphic features of his chapter titles: "TO ONE THING CONSTANT NEVER." (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 7, 270). It is set apart at the head of the chapter and printed in capital letters, as are his other chapter titles. Taken from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, the epigraph alludes to man's fickle nature. The only constant thing about men, Balthasar's song and Scott's chapter suggest, is the inconsistency of their affections. The epigraph illustrates the shift in Waverley's attention from Flora to Rose Bradwardine, prompted by Fergus Mac-Ivor's sudden interest in Rose.

Following his amalgamation of chapter title and epigraph into "TO ONE THING CONSTANT NEVER," Scott ironically reverted to using conventional titles for his next eleven chapters. The first epigraph to be typologically presented as such is taken from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*: "Now is Cupid a child of conscience — he makes restitution" (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 19, 330). Though Scott credits the phrase to 'Shakspeare' [*sic*], he does not make use of its original context to multiply available narrative meanings, as Eliot would later learn to do. In Shakespeare's play, the phrase has a lewd connotation. Falstaff tells Mistress Ford and Mistress Page to "[d]ivide [him] like a bribed buck, each a haunch."²³⁸ The restitution made, then, is the consent of both women, following Falstaff's unsuccessful sexual advances. In Scott's chapter, Cupid's restitution refers to Waverley's large fortune, his even larger inheritance, and "his intention to share them with Miss Rose Bradwardine" (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 19, 331), and to the letters of protection in favour of both Waverley and the Baron

²³⁷ *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, 252.

²³⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 5.5.21.

of Bradwardine. It is not sexual but financial and social restitution. This shows that Scott was aware of the potential of epigraphs to incite continued reading, for instance using this particular epigraph as a form of titillation.

In Scott's novel, the epigraph acquires new effects. While Radcliffe had used epigraphs to refer to plot revelations, Scott also used them to mislead his readers. The following epigraph is taken from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*: "To-morrow? O that's sudden! — Spare him, spare him." (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 21, 340). In *Measure for Measure*, it is Isabella that pleads for her brother Claudio's life, but in *Waverley*, it is not Flora, but Evan Dhu who pleads; and while Claudio's execution is postponed as a result of Isabella's appeal, Evan Dhu is unable to obtain a pardon for Fergus. While Isabella is unwilling to compromise her virtue in exchange for her brother's life, Evan Dhu, whom the court would pardon, offers his own life in exchange for Fergus' life. In this chapter, as Georg Lukács observes, "Scott familiarises us with the peculiar historical qualities of the inner life of an age . . . by showing how thoughts, feelings, modes of behaviour grow up out of this basis."²³⁹ The epigraph, in its anachronism and difference, emphasises Evan Dhu's heroism in that it offers an alternative scenario, in which familial sacrifice is denied.

From the beginning of his epigraphic practice, Scott quoted from his Scottish contemporaries as well as from anthologised favourites such as Shakespeare. This is illustrative of his efforts to recover and make distinct Scotland's place within a British literature. The next epigraph, for instance, is taken from Thomas Campbell's *Lochiel's Warning* (1802):

———A darker departure is near,
The death-drum is muffled, and sable the bier.

(*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 22, 346)

²³⁹ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1962), 50.

Unlike its Shakespearean counterparts, this epigraph is notably apposite. In order to illustrate Fergus's looming execution, Scott quotes a poem that Campbell wrote in the form of a dialogue between Donald Cameron of Lochiel, a Highland chief and supporter of the Jacobite cause, and a 'wizard' who prophesies Charles Stuart's defeat and Lochiel's death. While Lochiel was not sentenced to death, he was wounded in battle and fled to France, recalling Evan Dhu's request that Fergus be allowed to do the same. Unlike Fergus, however, Lochiel died without ever returning to Scotland. Campbell wrote, "And coming events cast their shadow before." Similarly, Scott utilises the predictive function of the epigraph, using it to falsely suggest to his reader that Fergus' death is imminent.

Waverley's last epigraph is taken from an old Scottish song, reflecting the eclecticism of Scott's sources and his efforts to protect this amorphous oral culture. He quotes: "This is no mine ain house, I ken by the biggin o't" (*Waverley*, Vol. III, Ch. 24, 355). According to Peter Garside, there existed a Jacobite version of this song, in which "the house apparently represents a Scotland usurped and corrupted by outsiders."²⁴⁰ Perhaps, then, we can read Scott's use of ballads as a question about what counts as a legitimate historical source for both England and Scotland, and as an attempt to shape a richer, unconventional canon. As Fiona Robertson observed, paratext itself is an exercise of authorial control and a test of competing narratorial and historiographical authorities.²⁴¹ Scott's epigraphs account for both cultures, in their official and unconventional forms, from Shakespeare to inscriptions on the Edinburgh Tolbooth. Indeed, in *Guy Mannering*, Scott quotes an inscription that hung on a board in the Hall of the Old Tolbooth jail:

A prison is a house of care,
A place where none can thrive,
A touchstone true to try a friend,

²⁴⁰ P. D. Garside, notes to *Waverley*, by Walter Scott, ed. P. D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 617.

²⁴¹ Robertson, *Legitimate Histories*, 118.

A grave for one alive
 Sometimes a place of right,
 Sometimes a place of wrong,
 Sometimes a place of rogues and thieves,
 And honest men among.²⁴²

When the building was demolished in 1817, Scott salvaged the stones, door, and fastenings that made up the Tolbooth gate, and used these to decorate the entrance to the kitchen-court of his Abbotsford home. He also featured the Old Tolbooth in *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), whose title referred to the jail itself. The site of the Tolbooth's original entrance is now marked with a mosaic of granite set in the shape of a heart, after the title of his novel. In Scott's imagination, the Tolbooth became (to borrow Ruth Livesey's phrase) "a portable figure capable of replication and remediation across . . . forms for generations to come."²⁴³

Throughout his career, Scott continued to be preoccupied with the question of how best to represent and to preserve oral culture. The epigraph, with its peculiar status as a narratorial speech act (an idea which is explored in more depth in the first chapter of this thesis) offered Scott a method of transmitting song in print, whether these be border ballads or popular songs. Scott's interest in ballads and memorisation was bound up with recitation: the pleasures of memorisation are to be found in oral performance. In light of this, it is important to remember that novels were often read aloud. In the previously quoted letter that Scott's friend, Maria Edgeworth, wrote to James Ballantyne in 1814, she claimed that, "[*Waverley*] was read aloud to this large family, and I wish the author could have witnessed the impression it made."²⁴⁴

²⁴² Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering*, ed. P. D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 262; hereafter cited in the text. These verses can also be found in a volume called *Essayes and Characters of a Prison and Prisoners* by Geffray Mynshul, published in 1618. See Robert Chambers, *Traditions of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: W. and R. Chambers, 1847), 79.

²⁴³ Ruth Livesey, "George Eliot and Van Gogh: Radiant Realism," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 29 (2020), [10.16995/ntn.1936](https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.1936).

²⁴⁴ Letter from Maria Edgeworth to James Ballantyne, 23 October 1814, in Scott: *The Critical Heritage*, 75.

Many years later, Eliot explained to Alexander Main her peculiar admiration of Scott and her memories of reading his novels to her father: “I began to read him when I was seven years old, and afterwards when I was grown up and living alone with my Father, I was able to make the evenings cheerful for him during the last five or six years of his life by reading aloud to him Scott’s novels.”²⁴⁵ Thus we might ask: were the epigraphs also read aloud or, as they so often are now, considered optional?

In Eliot’s case, it is difficult to imagine she skipped over them, given the influence of Scott on her own epigraphic form, which I examine in Chapter 5 of this thesis. In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Maggie reads Scott’s novel *The Pirate* (1822), although she claims to have gotten no further than the part in which “Minna is walking with Cleveland.”²⁴⁶ *Middlemarch*, *A Study of Provincial Life* (1871) is replete with references to Scott: Mary Garth compares herself and Fred Vincy to Flora and Waverley; Mr. Trumbull recites from *Anne of Geierstein* (1829); the Garths read *Ivanhoe* (1819) aloud; and Lydgate, as I have mentioned, claims he once knew the poems by heart. Eliot never quoted Scott in her own epigraphs, nor any of his epigraphs, though she used some of the same sources. Perhaps she got from him the practice of quoting plays in her epigraphs, including sometimes the speakers. (The Shakespearean 1st Gentleman and 2nd Gentleman become her autographic signature.) As Price comments, “Scott’s absence from the epigraphs paradoxically confirms Eliot’s debt to him: it would be redundant to quote him in mottoes whose form already alludes to his work.”²⁴⁷ However, one of the autographic epigraphs in *Middlemarch*, to which I give lengthier treatment in Chapter 5, is about Scott and Eliot’s experience of reading *Waverley* as a child. In this epigraph, Eliot tells

²⁴⁵ George Eliot to Alexander Main, 9 August 1871, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 7 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-55), 5:175.

²⁴⁶ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 269.

²⁴⁷ Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 117.

us of the novel's effect on her imagination. Having to return the book to a neighbour before she finished it, she wrote her own ending to it. A far cry from his own childhood's random perusals and purposeless reading, one would like to think this was the kind of "firm and assiduous application" Scott hoped his novels would develop in its readers. What we can confirm is that, in Eliot's esteem, "no other writer could serve as a substitute for Scott."²⁴⁸

Scott and the Gothic

The Gothic's influence on other genres can be difficult to isolate. In Scott's historical novels, this is because it tends to come mingled with other influences.²⁴⁹ The epigraph, however, allows us to examine the development of one particular Gothic convention. While Scott made it his own, the use of the epigraph is a convention he inherited; and given the convention had hitherto been used to enforce (Addison and Steele) and dislodge (Radcliffe) gender-determined criteria of cultural participation, it is worth noting that Scott quoted both men and women in his epigraphs, although not in equal quantities. Robertson argues, and the reviews of his novels do suggest, that Scott's role was "to rescue the novel from a creeping feminisation which was particularly noticeable in the production and consumption of the Gothic."²⁵⁰ She notes that, in his own critical remarks on the Gothic, Scott allows Radcliffe to be a great 'poetess' but stops short of calling her a great novelist.²⁵¹ Despite this attempt to reclaim the novel from his feminine predecessors and contemporaries — "ever delighted with the marvellous" (*GM*, Vol. 3, Ch. 16, 338) as he puts it in *Guy Mannering* (1815), some

²⁴⁸ George Eliot to Alexander Main, 9 August 1871, *Letters*, 5:175.

²⁴⁹ These include "the taste for German sensationalism in the 1790s, his editorial interests in medieval literature, and his experimentation in ballad." See Robertson, *Legitimate Histories*, 17.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

consider Scott a protector of marginal figures, including women.²⁵² Maria Edgeworth and Joanna Baillie were friends and colleagues with whom Scott had long correspondences. Scott praised Edgeworth as his forerunner and model in the field of prose fiction, and Baillie as the equal of Shakespeare.²⁵³ He provided her with advice on the commercial aspects of literature and theatre, and promoted her work, quoting her several times in his epigraphs. Scott also quoted James Hogg, with whom he had a complicated relationship. Some critics have called Hogg's relationship to Scott "feudal" because of the socio-economic difference between the two men.²⁵⁴ Indeed, the relationship toed the line between that of a colleague and client. Although a number of Scott's letters suggest that he rejected the idea of his being anyone's patron, the epigraphs do function as a kind of patronage, which Scott used to bestow prestige upon some of his contemporaries.

While he sought to distance himself from the genre, Scott's historical novels owe much to the narrative strategies and conventions of the Gothic, including epigraphs. While the use of epigraphs had become widespread among Gothic authors at the time of his writing, Radcliffe remains Scott's obvious forerunner in this respect.²⁵⁵ In *Guy Mannering*, Scott stopped using chapter titles altogether and instead assigned an epigraph to each chapter. Of the 58 epigraphs, only 15 were added after the manuscript composition.²⁵⁶ This suggests that, rather than searching for decorative fodder, Scott chose his epigraphs with narrative purpose. Emendations to those in *Guy Mannering*'s manuscript also indicate the care and consideration he devoted to

²⁵² See Robert Mayer, *Walter Scott and Fame: Authors and Readers in the Romantic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 109-110.

²⁵³ Ibid., 61.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 99.

²⁵⁵ Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Sir Walter Scott and the Gothic Novel* (Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), 24-25.

²⁵⁶ P.D. Garside, notes to *Guy Mannering*, ed. P. D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 376.

his epigraphs and the part he assigned to them in shaping the reading experience. For instance, Scott had originally chosen a quote from *Tom Jones* (1749) as the epigraph to the first chapter of *Guy Mannering*. It would have anticipated the execution of the hero by hanging, and, as Garside suggests, “was perhaps felt subsequently to be too abrupt for Scott’s more genteel counterpart.”²⁵⁷ Dieter Berger, too, asserts of Scott’s epigraphs that, “An over-explicit anticipation of a subsequent event reduces the tension motivating us to read on.”²⁵⁸ Scott sought to sustain the reader’s attention rather than cut it short. Whether he was successful in this aim is up for debate, with one reviewer claiming that, “at the very beginning of the second volume, the reader knows very nearly as much as he is acquainted with at the conclusion of the last.”²⁵⁹

Scott instead chose to open *Guy Mannering* with a passage that both exposes and reinforces the romance conventions at the heart of his novel; the epigraph being just one of these conventions. Quoting from the March 24, 1759 issue of *The Idler*, he wrote:

“He cannot deny, that, looking round upon the dreary region, and seeing nothing but bleak fields, and naked trees, hills obscured by fogs, and flats covered with inundations, he did for some time suffer melancholy to prevail upon him, and wished himself again safe at home.”

(*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 1, 3)

In the first chapter, *Guy Mannering* loses his way at twilight. When he comes upon a hut, a young boy called Jock agrees to lead him and his horse to the closest house for shelter. Mannering passes “twinkling lights,” “reliques,” and “ruins,” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 1, 3-7) and is characterised as “a knight-errant of old” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 1, 4). Later, Scott scorns “the grand and the romantic tales of knights, dwarfs, giants, and distressed damsels, soothsayers, visions,

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Dieter Berger, “Damn the Motto: Scott and the Epigraph,” *Anglia* 100 (1982): 394.

²⁵⁹ *Augustan Review* (July 1815), 228-33, in *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, 88.

beckoning ghosts, and bloody hands” (*GM*, Vol. II, Ch. 8, 161), the characteristics of his Gothic predecessors.

Despite his repeated disavowals of Gothic conventions, the motifs are persistent, whether located in the surface dispositions of materials or at a deeper level, helping to shape the style and structure of his novels. Horace Walpole, whom he praised for reintroducing the ancient chivalric romances into modern literature, is the source for one of his epigraphs:

——Yes, ye moss-grown walls,
Ye towers defenceless, I revisit ye
Shame-stricken! Where are all your trophies now?
Your thronged courts, the revelry, the tumult,
That spoke the grandeur of my house, the homage
Of neighbouring Barons?——

(*GM*, Vol. III, Ch. 2, 243)

Scott’s selection of this passage from Walpole’s *The Mysterious Mother* (1768) reflects the relationship between rank and property; a preoccupation he shared with Walpole.²⁶⁰ Drawing upon Walpole’s poem, Scott writes of, “the grandeur of [the castle of Ellangowan’s] former inhabitants” and “the stones of the ruinous castle” (*GM*, Vol. III, Ch. 2, 245). In the preceding chapter, George Brown, lover of Julie, the daughter of Mannering, is revealed to the reader as the Bertram heir — in an inheritance plot also reminiscent of the Gothic novel. As Letellier states, many of Scott’s plots are “centred on a cloudy or lost origin, of heroes and heroines whose parents are unknown. At the end of the novel, the child recovers his family and his legitimate property — so that state and self are affirmed.”²⁶¹ In Gothic fashion, Brown stands outside the castle, admiring “the massive and picturesque effect of the huge round towers,” “pursuing the usual train of ideas which flows upon the mind at such scenes,” and “continuing to follow out the succession of ideas which the scene prompted” (*GM*, Vol. III, Ch. 2, 244).

²⁶⁰ Letellier, *Sir Walter Scott and the Gothic Novel*, 19.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

Scott's insistence on the reader's recognition of the sublime, and its corresponding aesthetic response, signals his ambivalence toward this Gothic trope. Indeed, this chapter suggests disdain on the part of the author toward the common reader. In his description of the Bertram escutcheon, for instance, he describes a salvage man, "holding in his hand an oak tree ERADICATED, that is, torn up by the roots" (*GM*, Vol. III, Ch. 2, 244), suggesting that the heraldic language would escape the average reader of the Gothic novel.

In this chapter, Scott also offers a rare insight into his use of epigraphs. As Brown tries to decipher the castle's coat of arms, he states, "it is odd the tricks which our memory plays us; the remnants of an old prophecy . . . return to my recollection upon hearing that motto" (*GM*, Vol. III, Ch. 2, 247). Scott and his readers would have referred to epigraphs as mottos and, therefore, the use of the word 'motto' in this context would have evoked both a phrase of special significance to the bearer placed above a crest, and the quotation at the head of the chapter. A parallel is established between the armorial motto that awakens Brown's recollections, and an epigraph's echo of an earlier moment in the narrative, indicating a plot's architectonics, or foreshadowing of future narrative events. Jones has observed that, "The selection of epigraphs is dependent upon an act of mind that tells of the indirect influence of the will over the association of ideas."²⁶² "The odd tricks" of which Brown speaks bring to mind questions of voice and of ontology. Who speaks and where from? Like Brown's memories, epigraphs seem to exist in an unlocatable, extra-diegetic space.

Just as "the visions of our sleep that float confusedly in our memory . . . are recalled by the appearance of such real objects" (*GM*, Vol. III, Ch. 2, 247), epigraphs can also transcend borders, often reappearing in the chapters themselves. The epigraph to Chapter 2, for instance, is then quoted in the narrative:

²⁶² Jones, *Literary Memory*, 58.

—Comes me cranking in,
And cuts me from the best of all my land,
A huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle out.

Henry Fourth, Part I

(*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 7)

This epigraph refers to the diminishing hold of the Bertram family on their Ellangowan estate. Describing the misfortunes of Dennis Bertram, he writes of how “The appriser [*sic*] . . . entered upon possession, and, in the language of Hotspur, ‘came me cranking in,’ and cut the family out of another monstrous cantle of their remaining property” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 2, 9). The repetition of these phrases further obscures their original context. In *Henry IV, Part I*, it is the river Trent that cuts off part of Hotspur’s land, not an appraiser. However, it is not until Eliot begins to use epigraphs in her novels that these issues are pushed to their extreme. In her novels, she relies on a quotation’s original context to enrich the meaning of her narrative. Scott allows his epigraphs to travel into the diegesis but does not require his readers to travel far outside of it in order “to ‘read’ properly, thoroughly, and knowledgeably.”²⁶³

While, for Brown, the motto recalls past memories, for Scott, the epigraph anticipates future developments. It is significant that Scott committed himself to using epigraphs in a novel that is, at least in part, about prediction. Although Julia exclaims, “Alas! how little we ought to jest with futurity! . . . But I will not anticipate my narrative” (*GM*, Vol. II, Ch. 29, 162), the novel does allow readers to anticipate the narrative through the use of epigraphs. Berger notes that while most of Scott’s epigraphs have the “simple function of anticipating particular events of the narrative,” others “can only be realised by a second reading, as it were *a posteriori*.”²⁶⁴ This retrospective comprehension raises important questions about how Scott envisioned the

²⁶³ Elaine Freedgood, *Worlds Enough: the Invention of Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 78.

²⁶⁴ Berger, “Damn the Mottoe,” 385-6.

consumption of his narratives, and suggests that he endeavoured to produce readers like Eliot who, as I explain in a subsequent chapter, were re-readers.

The Fragment

Scott first encountered the ballad as an anthologised fragment (Hardyknute, for instance, was subtitled “A Scottish Fragment”) and his interest in the fragment form is carried through his novels and their plots. Robert Crawford notes the author’s “delight in self-conscious anthologizing, in manifestly piecing together a work from various documents and kinds of language.”²⁶⁵ More than self-consciously anthologising, Scott anthologised himself. While Scott’s narratives were considered particularly unquotable, epigraphs (which are one kind of fragment) allowed him to present his own poetic work to the reading public in a brief, and therefore memorisable, format.²⁶⁶ Scott placed his autographic epigraphs alongside other kinds of fragments, such as anthologised favourites, forms of folklore, and letters. *Redgauntlet* (1824), Scott’s most protracted engagement with the epistolary, progresses from this mode to an omniscient narrative.²⁶⁷ *Guy Mannering*, on the other hand, is largely told through third-person narration, but sometimes devolves into the first-person.

Although Scott’s implied reader was male, his critique of the romance novel brings women into the fold. Mrs Mannering, we are told, “read romances until she became so enamoured of the complicated intrigues which they contain, as to assume the management of

²⁶⁵ Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 133.

²⁶⁶ “No man,” wrote Thomas Carlyle, “has written as many volumes [as Walter Scott] with so few sentences that can be quoted.” Walter Bagehot, too, claimed of Scott that “no one is able to quote a single phrase.” See Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. J. A. Froude (New York: Scribner’s, 1881), 319.

²⁶⁷ Price claims that, “although the epistolary false start of *Redgauntlet* can at first be taken to refer to any of a number of eighteenth-century novels, Scott’s move away from that initial form eventually narrows the field to *Pamela*.” See Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 56.

a little family novel of her own, and constitute her daughter, a girl of sixteen, the principal heroine” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 18, 96). Conflating fact and fiction, she introduces her daughter Julia to Van-Beest Brown and encourages a relationship between the two without the consent of her husband. However, Scott asserts that “to expand [on the consequences of Mrs Mannering’s plotting] into further explanations would be to abuse the patience of our readers. We shall therefore proceed with our promised extracts from Miss Mannering’s letters to her friend” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 18, 96). Predicting which aspects of his narrative would incite boredom, Scott used the fragment in order to prolong his readers’ attention.

With characteristic ambivalence, Scott both criticised and utilised the epistolary form. One chapter, made up of first-person letters, is prefaced with the following epigraph:

“Heaven first, in its mercy, taught mortals their letters,
For ladies in limbo, and lovers in fetters,
Or some author, who placing his persons before ye,
Ungallantly leaves them to write their own story.”

(*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 17, 91)

In the Edinburgh edition of *Guy Mannering*, this epigraph is left unattributed, but it was in later editions attributed to “Pope, *imitated*.” The two first lines are taken from *Eloisa en déshabille* (1784) by Richard Porson and George Tierney, a parody of Alexander Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard* (1719) which matched the original line for line.²⁶⁸ Scott added to these lines two of his own in order to turn the parody of an epistle into a parody of the epistolary novel. Yet, he interspersed extracts from letters within his own narratives, asking readers to perform the same narrative labour he repudiates in his epigraph. “The perusal of a few extracts,” Scott writes in this chapter, “may be necessary to render our story more intelligible” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 17, 91).

In the ‘memoir’ Scott wrote to preface the novels of Samuel Richardson for *Novelist’s Library*, he weighed the merits and demerits of the epistolary:

²⁶⁸ In Pope’s version, the lines read: “Heaven first taught letters for some wretch’s aid, / some banish’d lover or some captive maid.”

it requires that incidents must be, in many instances, detailed again and again, by the various actors, to their different correspondents. If this affords the opportunity of placing the characters, each in their own peculiar light, and contrasting their thoughts, plans, and sentiments, that advantage is at least partly balanced, by arresting the progress of the story, which stands still while the characters show all their paces, like horses in a *manège*, without advancing a yard.²⁶⁹

Although Scott could appreciate that letters brought the reader into close contact with a protagonist's interior life, and allowed the reader and the protagonist to experience the events of the narrative together, not sensing the lapses in time between letters, he also found letters plodding. In his own use of them, he found a way to circumvent this temporal issue. Jones observes that, "Scott maximises disjunction by juxtaposing different discourses, genres, and conventions in a narrative that is temporally fractured . . . Each character possesses a fragment of the past, which requires coordination and unravelling for the story's resolution and the restoration of the lost heir."²⁷⁰ This disjunction not only takes place at the level of plot and character but also at the level of form. Epigraphs, which are themselves made up of different discourses and genres, impose themselves upon the reader's sequential progress. Like the characters in his novels who work to untangle the past and restore a rightful heir, Scott's readers are asked to decipher fragments, epigraphic and other, and to uncover their significance to the narrative. The epigraphic novel makes for slow reading or, if the epigraphs are experienced as optional, discontinuous reading.

This discontinuous comprehension is managed through various practices of fragmentation. In a subsequent chapter, for instance, the reader is asked to do some investigative work. Mannering is introduced to "some of the first literary characters of Scotland" (*GM*, Vol. II, Ch. 18, 226). These anachronistically include David Hume; John

²⁶⁹ Walter Scott, "Samuel Richardson," in *Biographical Memoirs of Eminent Novelists* (Freeport: Essay Index, 1972), 69.

²⁷⁰ Jones, *Literary Memory*, 132.

Home; Adam Ferguson; Joseph Black; Henry Home, Lord Kames; James Hutton; John Clerk of Eldin; Adam Smith; and William Robertson. However, the reader is given no insight into these meetings. Instead, the narrator claims that:

it is not in our power to give the reader an account of the pleasure and information which [Mannering] received, in admission to a circle never closed against strangers of sense and information, and which has perhaps at no period been equalled, considering the depth and variety of talent which it embraced and concentrated. It is true he kept a journal of these golden days, but, as it afterwards passed through the hands of Mr Dominie Sampson, it is to be feared his indiscreet zeal mutilated Mannering's account of some of these philosophers . . . One or two scraps I have been able to extract from some mutilated letters to Mr Mervyn, found in an old cabinet at Mervyn Hall, Llanbraithwaite; but as the room looked out upon the lake, they have suffered much from damp, and what is very provoking, I have not been able to assign to the fragments those names which are necessary to expound and to illustrate them. So I hesitated for some time, whether or not I should insert them in this place. At length, upon the economical consideration that they will go far to complete this volume, without giving me any other trouble but that of copyist, I will transfer two or three of these characters to this narrative.

(*GM*, Vol. II, Ch. 18, 226)

Scott uses the Gothic trope of the mutilated manuscript to tantalise the reader and spur on further reading. Through the omission of names, he invites the reader to match fragment to philosopher, making of the reader an archival researcher; a riddle-solver.²⁷¹ He closes this chapter with the assertion that: "There are several more of these fragments in my hands, but to detail them here would keep us too long from the proper business of our history, to which, with the reader's permission we now return" (*GM*, Vol. II, Ch. 18, 229). The narrator includes the fragments on "economical consideration" but differentiates them from "proper business," suggesting it is a certain class of readers that prefers fragments to narrative. This passage also demonstrates how, as Kate Trumpener claims, "Scott's novels at once depict and re-enact the process of cultural erasure."²⁷² Dominie Sampson's mutilation of the accounts in Mannering's

²⁷¹ Careful reading and thoughtful consideration reveals 'Fragment First' to be about John Clerk of Eldin; 'Fragment Second' about James Burnett, Lord Monboddo; 'Fragment Third' about Adam Ferguson; and 'Fragment Fourth' about John Home.

²⁷² Kate Trumpener, "National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of Waverley, 1806-1830," *ELH* 60 (January 1993): 711.

journal, the erosion of Mannering's letters due to dampness, and Scott's own fragmented and revisionist form, point to the selective nature of historical record-keeping and to the questionable survival of the cultural artefact.

Bibliomania

As Eliot would be after him, Scott was interested in the materiality of texts, and the archiving and transmission of knowledge. These interests are crucial to both the form and the theme of *Guy Mannering*. Dominie Sampson, the novel's bibliophile, is likened to Samuel Johnson in an epigraph taken from James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791): "A gigantic genius, fit to grapple with whole libraries" (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 20, 106). Mannering instructs Sampson to catalogue and order the collection of books he inherits from his uncle:

Some, indeed, of BELLES LETTRES, poems, plays, or memoirs he tossed indignantly aside, with the implied censure of "psa," or "frivolous" but the greater and bulkier part of the collection bore a very different character . . . Books of theology and controversial divinity, commentaries, and polyglots, sets of the Fathers, and sermons which might each furnish forth ten brief discourses of modern date, books of science, ancient and modern, classical authors in their best and rarest forms — such formed the late bishop's venerable library, and over such the eye of Dominie Sampson gloated with rapture. He entered them in the catalogue in his best running hand, forming each letter with the accuracy of a lover writing a valentine, and placed each individually on the destined shelf with all the reverence which I have seen a lady pay to a jar of old china.

(*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 20, 109)

Scott ridicules the bibliomaniac Dominie for his inordinate attachment to these books, his passion for the book as a material object. "He grinned like an ogre," the narrator tells us, "swung his arms like the sails of a wind-mill, shouted 'Prodigious' till the roof rung to his raptures," as if suffering from a disorder (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 20, 109). The arrangement of the bishop's books occupies him, mind, body, and soul.

In Regency Britain, book-collecting became common among gentlemen, growing into an obsession which Thomas Frognall Dibdin, an English cleric and bibliographer, called ‘the bibliomania’. Dibdin published a book by the same title, a gentle satire of those afflicted by this neurosis. Mannering’s deceased uncle is described as having, “loaded his shelves with volumes which displayed the antique and venerable attributes so happily described by a modern poet” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 20, 109). This is George Crabbe, whose poem *The Library* (1781) illustrates the “weight of wood,” the “leathern coat,” and the “ample clasps” of books. In this figuring of libraries, books are rather like fashionable articles of decorative art. In turn, a parallel is established between the novel and these libraries, which are filled to the brim with all kinds of books. Indeed, a frustrated Scott would, late in his career, refer to epigraphs as ‘Decoraments’. However, his narrative insists that we treat the epigraphs as more than the furniture of the novel. “If, as perhaps often happens now,” writes Berger, “the reader skips and neglects it, then there is nothing the author can do. Almost nothing, one should rather say, because Scott attempts to catch even such a cursory reader.”²⁷³

In this scene of possessive love, the national canon is transformed into intimate, personal property. When Dominie states that, “He had never . . . seen so many books together, except in the College Library” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 20, 109), Scott points to a concentration of print in the private sphere; these books have been passed down from one aristocrat to another. The novel’s assimilation of historical material into an imaginative genre signals a gradual shift of cultural artefact from academic and aristocratic spaces into public ones. As Robertson explains, “The transfer of private to public took place not just in a concrete-material sense with the founding of museums, archives, and libraries but also (more important for an understanding of Scott’s career) in an intellectual sense, as historical knowledge was more widely

²⁷³ Ibid., 384.

disseminated.”²⁷⁴ Figured as borderlands, the margins of Scott’s novels model the dissemination of cultural and historical knowledge, and give shape to an amorphous collection of oral and print traditions. His epigraphs account for both the canonical works that Dominie dismisses as “frivolous” and the marginal kinds of writing which are subject to our own “implied censure” (*GM*, Vol. I, Ch. 20, 109). William Hazlitt, who disliked Scott but admired his works, praised him for “tak[ing] occasion to remember and quote almost every living author (both illustrious and obscure).”²⁷⁵ From belles lettres to ballads, Scott ensured the survival of these forms in both our individual and collective memories.

Patriotic Historicism and Antiquarianism

Scott’s interest in paratext began with the work it might do to produce a more attentive and therefore retentive reader. In time, his interest came to encompass other, collective forms of memorisation. He imagined the margins of his novels as anthological or archival sites. Unlike the epigraphs in Scott’s first two novels, for which he often quoted from his contemporaries, a more significant number of those in *The Antiquary* (1816) are taken from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, the two centuries over which the “antiquarian enterprise” developed in England.²⁷⁶ As Barbara Benedict has acknowledged, “it is no coincidence that the genre of the literary collection crystallized during the long eighteenth century when collecting itself became a popular activity.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Fiona Robertson, *The Edinburgh Companion to Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 11.

²⁷⁵ William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age: or, Contemporary Portraits* (London: H. Colburn, 1825), 153.

²⁷⁶ Joseph Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 73-106.

²⁷⁷ Barbara M. Benedict, “The Paradox of the Anthology: Collecting and Difference in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *New Literary History* 34 (2003): 231–56.

The turn of the nineteenth century was witness to vigorous debate about the purpose, audience, and content of poetic collections. While some antiquarians believed the collection should contain prize pieces from influential and recognized works, “carelessly mingled with all the ease and wildness of natural variety” (in the words of Vicesimus Knox), others thought it should endeavour to recover and preserve lesser-known works of equal merit.²⁷⁸ Although he mocked the “omnivorous eclecticism” of antiquarianism, Scott’s novels tend to lean rather more toward the popular than the pedantic.²⁷⁹

In *The Antiquary*, the epigraphs become a collection of their own. Scott quotes from Shakespeare, of course, but also dramatists such as Henry Carey (1687? - 1743), Ben Jonson, William Cartwright (1611 - 43), Richard Brome, Thomas Dekker, Joseph Hall, John Fletcher, Philip Massinger, and Thomas Southerne; and from poems such as Abraham Cowley’s ‘Davideis’, first published in *Poems* (1656), and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667). Scott also quotes from two collections: a song attributed to James V (1512 - 42), published in Allan Ramsay’s *The Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724), a copy of which Scott owned in its 13th edition (1762), and a poem from *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), an anthology of the ‘Venus and Adonis’ theme published by William Jaggard. Scott’s use of miscellanies and anthologies as sources for his epigraphs anticipated editors’ collections such as *The Poetry Contained in the Novels, Tales and Romances of the Author of Waverley* (1822) and the more miscellaneous ones that followed.²⁸⁰ Just as these collections do, epigraphs sever fragments from the narrative. In quoting from them, Scott turned his own novel, in which recollection and recitation are a

²⁷⁸ *Elegant Extracts: or Useful and Entertaining Pieces of Poetry, Selected for the Improvement of Youth*, ed. Vicesimus Knox (London, 1791), xii–xiii; cited in Dahlia Porter, “Specimen Poetics: Botany, Reanimation, and the Romantic Collection,” *Representations* 139, no. 1 (Summer 2017): 61.

²⁷⁹ Yoon Sun Lee, “A Divided Inheritance: Scott’s Antiquarian Novel and the British Nation,” *ELH* 64, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 541.

²⁸⁰ For a full list, see Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 66.

matter of national pride and cultural preservation, into a means of discovering passages worth learning.

Set at the height of the French invasion scare of 1803–4, *The Antiquary* satirises fanatical antiquaries seeking to validate notions of national origin. When Hector tells his uncle Jonathan Oldbuck about his friend singing him songs out of Ossian, Oldbuck emphatically asks: “And did you believe . . . did you absolutely believe that stuff of Macpherson’s to be really ancient, you simple boy?”²⁸¹ In 1759, James Macpherson claimed to have discovered an ancient Ossian manuscript on one of his walks across the Scottish Highlands, containing some of his Gaelic poems, which had hitherto circulated only through the spoken word. Other known Gaelic fragments were few and far between and, for all their historical interest, rather crude. Ossian’s poems, on the other hand, were epic, imaginative, and passionate. When Macpherson published some of these poems in translation as *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), the book became an overnight sensation, shattering all Enlightenment expectations of ‘primitive’ art. Macpherson continued to ‘find’ and ‘translate’ longer selections, culminating in the publication of *Temora: An Ancient Epic Poem* (1763). Critics, including Horace Walpole, David Hume, and Dr. Johnson (who all figure in Scott’s novel either in the narrative or in the epigraphs) became sceptical of Macpherson, questioning whether these poems were authentic and requesting to see the original manuscript, which Macpherson never produced. This dispute was not resolved until Macpherson died in 1805. The Highland Society of Edinburgh undertook a full investigation of Macpherson’s papers after his death and came to the conclusion that while Macpherson had used some genuine Gaelic fragments in his text, most of them were of his own invention.

²⁸¹ Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 243; hereafter cited in the text.

Macpherson's success inspired Scott, despite his full knowledge that the work was a fraud.²⁸² Scott believed that "the question of authenticity ought not to be confounded with that of literary merit."²⁸³ Scott was also, in this regard, not without reproach. When he published his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), he gave no credit to John Leyden, who did most of the work. He was liberal in his edits to the ballads he collected; and his paratext, rife with false attributions, owes something to Macpherson's framing of the Ossian 'translations' within an invented Highland history. Hector, however, is "a sturdy Celt, [who] imagined the honour of this country and native language connected with the authenticity of these popular poems, and would have fought knee-deep, or forfeited life and land, rather than have given up a line from them" (*TA*, Vol. III, Ch. 1, 243). This exchange between nephew and uncle points to the divergent philosophies of patriotic historicism and antiquarianism.²⁸⁴ The poems are part of Hector's cultural inheritance. For him, the value of national character is "contingent on recognizing their origins in the past and conceiving of their survival as a process of deliberate transmission."²⁸⁵ For Oldbuck, the antiquarian, and for Scott, the value of such present institutions, such as national character or constitution, is contingent on processes of obsolescence and fragmentation. Historical knowledge is not inherited but produced out of experiences, records, and reconstructions.

With characteristic good humour, Scott satirises both the rhetoric of patriotic historicism and of antiquarianism: *The Antiquary* is self-parodic. Scott describes Oldbuck as, "A diligent collector of . . . legendary scraps of ancient poetry" (*TA*, Vol. III, Ch. 11, 310) who,

²⁸² Susan Manning, "Ossian, Scott, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Literary Nationalism," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 17 (1982): 39-54.

²⁸³ David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Grieg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 1:320-321; cited in Dafydd Moore, "The Reception of *The Poems of Ossian* in England and Scotland," in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. Howard Gaskill (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 31.

²⁸⁴ Lee, "A Divided Inheritance," 537-567.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 539.

like himself, is fascinated by the historical ballad. When Oldbuck hears Elspeth singing one of these, “his hand instinctively took pencil and memorandum-book” (*TA*, Vol. III, Ch. 11, 310). Scott writes: “‘It’s a historical ballad,’ said Oldbuck eagerly, — ‘a genuine and undoubted fragment of minstrelsy! — Percy would admire its simplicity — Ritson could not impugn its authenticity’” (*TA*, Vol. III, Ch. 11, 310). Joseph Ritson took a scholarly view of traditional song and strongly disapproved of editors who ‘improved’ their texts; in his *A Select Collection of English Songs* (1783), he accused Percy of corrupting the texts in the *Reliques*.²⁸⁶ Scott’s twinned allusions to Percy and Ritson reveal the tensions between compilation and composition that underpin most of his own work.

The eclectic structure of Scott’s novels comes out of a Scottish tradition whose major figures were in equal parts collectors and creators. “Sometimes,” writes Robert Crawford, “as in the case of the Ossianic works, collection and creation became so confused as to be virtually inextricable.”²⁸⁷ Scott, like Macpherson and Percy, ‘improved’ upon the ballads he collected; he changed words, inserted new stanzas, amended rhymes and rhythms, and fused different versions of songs. Although we might now look askance at these practices, it is natural for songs and stories to evolve over time as these often oral cultural traditions are passed from one person to another.

In 1822, Archibald Constable and Hust Robinson published *The Poetry contained in the Novels, Tales and Romances of the Author of Waverley*. In this volume, which is mostly made up of epigraphs, the editors noted that: “it is our opinion that some of the following poetry is neither entirely original, nor altogether borrowed; but consists in some instances of passages from other writers, which the Author has not hesitated to alter considerably, either to supply

²⁸⁶ David Hewitt, notes to *The Antiquary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 516.

²⁸⁷ Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 124-5.

defects of his own memory, or to adapt the quotation more.”²⁸⁸ It is through anthologies of this kind that Eliot would become associated with Scott. Her own anthologiser, Main, seems to have been inspired by the repackaging of Scott’s works in various forms; including the Index given at the end of each volume in recent editions of Scott’s novels and the many anthologies that followed *The Poetry*.²⁸⁹ The large number of epigraphs in those anthologies set the precedent for their “disproportionate representation” in Main’s *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot* (1871).²⁹⁰

In *The Antiquary*, the epigraph become the most playful and potentially deceptive of forms. While Scott corrected the novel’s proof-sheets, he started writing his own epigraphs. According to J. G. Lockhart’s *Memoirs*, Scott asked Ballantyne, who was sitting by him, to hunt for a particular passage in Beaumont and Fletcher. When John was unable to find it, Scott exclaimed: “Hang it, Johnny. I believe I can make a motto sooner than you will find one.”²⁹¹ While Scott is not the first author to have written his own epigraphs (as I explain in the last chapter, Radcliffe did too), he approached this task with more humour and imagination than his predecessor. As Gérard Genette writes,

The theoretical alternative to the allographic epigraph is obviously the autographic epigraph, one explicitly attributed to the epigrapher himself — that is, roughly speaking, to the author of the book . . . [But] [m]ost often the epigraph by oneself is more modestly disguised, either . . . as an apocryphal or fictive epigraph . . . or as an anonymous epigraph.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 170.

²⁸⁹ These include *The Genius and Wisdom of Sir Walter Scott, Comprising Moral, Religious, Political, Literary, and Social Aphorisms, Selected Carefully from his Various Writings: With a Memoir* (London: W. S. Orr, 1839), *Beauties of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.: being a selection from his writings and life: comprising historical, descriptive, and moral pieces, lyrical and miscellaneous poetry* (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1849) and *The Abbotsford Miscellany: A Series of Selections from the Works of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1855). See *ibid.*, 66.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 4:10; cited in Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 75.

²⁹² Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 152.

Scott wrote his own epigraphs, paving the way for Eliot; but while she pushed the possibilities of the epigraph further, writing dialogue as well as verse and prose, she never fictionalised their attribution, as Scott did. “Scott’s metalepsis,” writes Elaine Freedgood, “suggests the opening of a circuit between fact and fiction.”²⁹³

Scott developed the practice of assigning fictitious attributions to his autographic epigraphs. In the first volume of *The Antiquary*, Scott used the facetious ‘*True Story*’. In the second volume, he adopted the signature ‘*Old Play*’ and the more unusual ‘*The Loves of the Sea-weeds*’. Twelve of the third volume’s sixteen epigraphs are autographic — most are also attributed to an ‘*Old Play*’, which he continued to use in subsequent novels. The third volume’s allographic epigraphs are taken from Shakespeare, Walpole, and Hogg, indicating the kinds of works with which Scott was aligning his own. For instance, in Volume 3, Chapter 4, he writes:

Remorse — she ne’er forsakes us —
 A bloodhound staunch — she tracks our rapid step
 Through the wild labyrinth of youthful frenzy,
 Unheard, perchance, until old age hath tamed us;
 Then in our lair, when Time hath chill’d our joints,
 And maim’d our hope of combat, or of flight,
 We hear her deep-mouthed bay, announcing all
 Of wrath and woe and punishment that bides us.

Old Play

(*TA*, Vol. III, Ch. 4, 259)

In this autographic epigraph, Scott represents the past and the present as the old and the young, giving the two historical periods characteristics associated with different phases of individual life. Remorse is, in Gothic fashion, personified as a tireless tracking hound, and the epigraph is replete with archaic terms such as “perchance” and “hath”. Scott often made light of his mottos, for instance writing in the introduction to the *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827) that, “[he] found it too troublesome to turn to the collection of the British Poets to discover apposite

²⁹³ Elaine Freedgood, “Fictional Settlements: Footnotes, Metalepsis, the Colonial Effect,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 400.

mottoes . . . [and therefore] drew on [his] memory as long as [he] could, and when that failed, eked it out with invention.”²⁹⁴ However, his investment in masking the autographic nature of his epigraphs behind the fictitious signature of ‘*Old Play*’ is made evident through the stylistic consistency of these epigraphs.

Scott also attempted to disguise the autographic as allographic through typography. He often begins or ends his poetic epigraphs with an ellipsis, parading these verses as surviving fragments or extracts of longer poems. Through the ellipsis, Scott encourages his readers to participate in the act of deciphering and authenticating a cultural artefact. Lockhart, his biographer, was “entertained when Dr. Watts and other graver authors have been ransacked in vain for stanzas for which the novelist alone was responsible.”²⁹⁵ Scott sent readers on this goose chase in order to problematise the antiquarian enterprise and to undercut the idea of an authentic narrative.

When used in allographic epigraphs, the ellipsis becomes a more serious comment on the process of cultural erasure and the importance of memorising. The epigraph to Volume 2, Chapter 3, for instance, taken from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, is cut short by an interruptive dash:

As when a griffin through the wilderness
With winged course, o’er hill and moory dale
Pursues the Arimaspians, who by stealth
Had from his wakeful custody purloin’d
The guarded gold: So eagerly the Fiend——

(*TA*, Vol. II, Ch. 3, 136)

This fragmentation is designed both to create suspense and to reward readers with a thorough knowledge of Milton’s poem. Scott’s assumption that most readers will know what follows points to the widespread memorisation of poems at the time of his writing. Memorising long

²⁹⁴ Walter Scott, introduction to *Chronicles of the Canongate*, ed. Claire Lamont (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 9.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

portions of text was a favourite pastime among all English readers, in particular those who were self-educated and had limited access to good books and a lack of leisure time and guidance. Having few books as a child, for instance, Eliot read the books she did have again and again, until she knew them by heart.²⁹⁶ Richard Altick claims that, among self-made readers, “Milton was comparably the most influential in encouraging a taste for poetry.”²⁹⁷ Scott’s epigraphs point us to the poems that would have held secure places in the memorisation and recitation canon, such as passages from Shakespeare and Milton; but alongside these revered British poets, Scott placed the verses of “peasant” poets as well as ballads and songs that had hitherto circulated only in oral form.²⁹⁸ In doing so, Scott promoted and demonstrated his pride in Scotland’s cultural achievements and made the memorised poem, ballad or song, an important constituent of this patriotic sentiment.

Concluding Remarks

With the same attention to his readership as Radcliffe gave hers, but with all of Fielding’s facetiousness, Scott instituted the epigraph as a literary, as opposed to Gothic, convention. Through his paratext, he responded to a popular discourse that posited novel reading, in particular female novel reading, as shallow reading; and set out to make the novel into a respectable form. Scott was self-conscious about abusing his readers’ patience, but also attempted to protract their fragile attention, to incite their interest across lengthier reading times, and to catch out readers who were reading for plot and might therefore be tempted to

²⁹⁶ J. W. Cross, *George Eliot’s Life, as Related in her Letters and Journals, Arranged and Edited by her Husband, J. W. Cross*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1885), 1:20.

²⁹⁷ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 256.

²⁹⁸ Edgar Johnson observes that, “[s]ince the success of Robert Burns, Scotland had been deluged with peasant authors.” Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown*, 288; cited in Mayer, *Walter Scott and Fame*, 109.

skip over parts of his narratives. His paratext, as he developed it over the course of his first three novels, became both a mechanism through which he supplied quotations for his readers' memories, and an archive for cultural ones. He pushed the boundaries of what counts as a legitimate historical artefact and probed the value of the search for an 'authentic' national culture, suggesting culture can be made, and remade, as much as it can be inherited from older generations.

Scott considered his audience to be "the critical generation."²⁹⁹ Faced with a modernising Scotland, Scott questioned how best to collect, and preserve in print, oral traditions that would otherwise be lost; and how best to balance the virtues and traditions of the Scottish past with the governance and progress of the British present. Now that the Nationalists are dominant in Scottish politics, and that a second referendum on Scotland's independence seems inevitable, it is arguably useful to turn to the long-neglected margins of Scott's novels. For one of the last chapters of *The Antiquary*, Scott wrote an epigraph that illustrates the difficulties of leaving behind one's past:

Still in his dead hand clench'd remain the strings
That thrill his father's heart — e'en as the limb,
Lopp'd off and laid in grave, retains, they tell us,
Strange commerce with the mutilated stump,
Whose nerves are twinging still in maim'd existence.

(*TA*, Vol. III, Ch. 5, 267)

If this passage can be read as a metaphor for the peculiar status of the epigraph, "lopp'd off" from its original sources but retaining "strange commerce" with it, it can also be figured as a metaphor for the consequences of secession. Independence would leave Scotland "laid in grave" and struggling to recover, and Britain scarred, its nerve endings maimed and twinging. While it is beguiling to read Scott's eclecticism as nationalism, Scott felt himself to be a Briton

²⁹⁹ Paul Hamilton, "'Waverley': Scott's Romantic Narrative and Revolutionary Historiography," *Studies in Romanticism* 33, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 611.

and sought to develop a sense of Scotland's important place within British culture. His margins, in which border ballads and songs sit alongside passages from Shakespeare and Milton, remind us that both of these cultures are constituent parts of a four-part Union, one that Scott hoped would transcend mutual prejudices.

Chapter Four

Uprooting and Replanting: Epigraphs and Determinism in *Felix Holt, the Radical*

“My mind, never the most highly organised genus, is more than usually chaotic, or rather is like a stratum of conglomerated fragments that shews [*sic*] here a jaw and rib of some ponderous quadruped, there a delicate alto-relievo of some fernlike plant, tiny shells, and mysterious nondescripts, encrusted and united with some unvaried and uninteresting but useful stone. My mind presents just such an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern, scraps of poetry picked up from Shakspeare [*sic*], Cowper, Wordsworth, and Milton, newspaper topics, morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry entomology and chemistry, reviews and metaphysics . . .”³⁰⁰

In 1868, George Eliot formulated a definition of organic form. In a notebook, she wrote that, “as knowledge continues to grow . . . it arrives at the concept of wholes composed of parts more and more multiplied and highly differenced, yet more and more absolutely bound together by various conditions of common likeness or mutual dependence.”³⁰¹ But long before she had written these “Notes on Form in Art,” which related artistic form to the growth of the mind, she was already thinking of the organic principles underpinning this development. Eliot imagined her own mind as “a stratum of conglomerated fragments.” From fragment we get fragmental, a geological term for rocks and shales that are heterogeneous, composed of more than one substance. Taken from a letter that she wrote to her friend Maria Lewis in 1839, the epigraph demonstrates just how far her interest in scientific method reaches back in time, and allows us to trace an evolution in this interest from her pre-writing years to her later work. Eliot wrote this letter between the publication of Charles Lyell’s monumental *Principles of Geology*

³⁰⁰ Letter to Maria Lewis, 4 September 1839, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 7 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-55), 1:29; hereafter cited as *Letters*.

³⁰¹ George Eliot, “Notes on Form in Art,” reprinted in *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin, 1990), 232. This essay is little cited but integral to understanding the structure of her novels. For more work on Eliot and organic form, see S. Pearl Brilmyer, “Plasticity, Form, and the Matter of Character in *Middlemarch*,” *Representations* 130, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 60-83.

(1830-33) and the *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), and it suggests the influence of the developing field of geology on her creative process. It can also be read as an apt description of her novelistic form. Her use of epigraphs reflects the same principles of differentiation and assimilation, and the extent to which the assemblage she describes anticipates the content of her epigraphs is striking.

Eliot began using epigraphs in earnest while writing *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), generating a substantial amount of comments from reviewers. *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* wrote that, "He reminds us of Walter Scott in . . . his old-fashioned 'headings' to his chapters, which he not seldom composes for himself, albeit he does not waggishly write the words *Old Play* beneath them, as he of Abbotsford was wont to do."³⁰² That is, Eliot did not attempt to obscure herself as the author of the unattributed epigraphs, as Scott had done in his Waverley novels. It was clear to reviewers, as to her publisher John Blackwood, that she had composed them herself.³⁰³ Because Eliot first intended to use epigraphs in her historical romance, *Romola* (1862-63), Walter Scott is often credited as Eliot's epigraphic inspiration. However, as I show in the next chapter of this thesis, it is only in *Middlemarch, a Study of Provincial Life* (1872) that her debt to Scott in this regard becomes apparent. Bulwer Lytton, a favourite among Victorian readers, also offered her a model. In preparation for *Romola*, Eliot read Bulwer Lytton's *Rienzi: The Last of the Roman Tribunes* (1835), which contains book epigraphs, wanting to "examine his treatment of an historical

³⁰² "Review of *Felix Holt*," *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, no. 137 (August 11, 1866): 508-512.

³⁰³ Checking of digital databases would tend to confirm this assumption. Further, the 'unascribed mottoes' were included in Alexander Main's anthology *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot* (1871) and it is unlikely she, or George Henry Lewes, would have allowed these to appear under the heading "George Eliot (in propria persona)" had she not composed them herself. George Eliot also neatly transcribed the verse mottoes she composed for *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*, into the Yale Poetry Notebook, date 1870.

subject.”³⁰⁴ Bulwer was a good friend of Blackwood’s and was acquainted with both Eliot and her partner, George Henry Lewes.³⁰⁵ Early on in her career, in a letter to Sara Hennell containing feedback on the proofs for Hennell’s *Thoughts in Aid of Faith* (1860), she wrote: “Beginnings are always troublesome, “μισυ παντον” as Bulwer would say. (I like to follow great models).”³⁰⁶ In the last chapter of this thesis, I demonstrate how Eliot gives serious treatment to beginnings through the epigraphs in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Perhaps, then, Scott was not the only inspiration behind her own use of epigraphs.

On 30 April 1866, as she awaited the proofs for *Felix Holt*, Blackwood wrote to her saying, “By the way, how admirable your mottoes are. Many of them I imagine to be your own. I see you have left blanks in many cases. Do you mean to fill them up?”³⁰⁷ Indeed, on 17 May, Eliot recorded doing nothing but writing mottoes.³⁰⁸ Some scholars have read this as “a confession of artistic weariness.”³⁰⁹ In the manuscript, a quarter of the chapters are without epigraphs, and there are more blank spaces in the second and third volumes. This does suggest she laboured to produce the epigraphs, but she could have given them up at any time, as she had in *Romola*. Her perseverance alone demonstrates their value. The reviews, however, were ambivalent. *The Contemporary Review* and *The Argosy* both noted the ‘original’ mottoes, though *The Argosy* expressed surprise that a prose author with so little rhythm would try her

³⁰⁴ See J. W. Cross, *George Eliot’s Life, as Related in her Letters and Journals, Arranged and Edited by her Husband, J. W. Cross*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1887), 348; and Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 353; both cited in Hugh Witemeyer, “George Eliot’s *Romola* and Bulwer Lytton’s *Rienzi*,” *Studies in the Novel* (Spring 1983): 62.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ George Eliot to Sara Hennell, 15 October 1859, *Letters*, 3:130.

³⁰⁷ John Blackwood to George Eliot, 30 April 1866, *Letters*, 4:250.

³⁰⁸ Fred C. Thomson, “Introduction,” in George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, ed. by Fred C. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1980), xxviii.

³⁰⁹ J. R. Tye, “George Eliot’s Unascribed Mottoes,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 3 (December 1967): 235.

hand at verse.³¹⁰ The reviewer assumed the epigraphs “to have been thrown off for the occasion” and referred to them as “fragments of verse flung carelessly in.”³¹¹ It is likely that they were composed specifically for *Felix Holt*, as we have no evidence for rough composition of the mottoes beyond the manuscript itself. Even in the manuscript, rough composition is scarce, and the manuscript suggests many of the epigraphs were composed after the chapter was written: longer epigraphs are crowded into insufficient space left at the head of chapters; some of these lines are semi-spaced; there are variations in the opacity of the ink she used, and differences in the thickness of her pen strokes.³¹² She added both allographic and autographic epigraphs, so it was not simply a case of scanning her bookshelves for literary fodder. The epigraphs in *Felix Holt* should therefore be considered a creative comment on the chapters, through which Eliot refracts our reading, as opposed to the chapter being a sort of exegesis of the epigraph.

Eliot’s wide-ranging sources for the epigraphs in *Felix Holt* include both major and minor writers and, in many cases, her autographic epigraphs suggest a studied imitation of particular poets and poetic styles. She quotes passages from Thomas Fuller, Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare, Theocritus, Wordsworth, Sir Thomas Browne, Roger North, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Book of Job, Sophocles, Tennyson, Æschylus, and Benjamin Constant. Fred Thomson, editor of the Clarendon Edition of *Felix Holt*, praises the epigraphs’ “appositeness” describing their effect as “often choric, epitomizing or commenting upon the material to follow.”³¹³ This understates the function of a large portion of the epigraphs and

³¹⁰ “Review of *Felix Holt*,” *The Contemporary Review*, no. 3 (September 1866): 51-70; Matthew Browne, “George Eliot, and Poetry,” *The Argosy: A Magazine of Tales, Travels, Essays, and Poems* 2, no. 12 (November 1866): 437-443.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, 3 vols., 1866, Add MS 34030-34032, Western Manuscripts, British Library, London.

³¹³ Thomson, “Introduction,” xxviii.

simplifies their relationship to the chapters. Most epigraphs have a predictive, as well as a descriptive, function, and their formal qualities offer insight into the political and moral concerns of the novel. While other Victorians authors made their chapter apparatus more tacit, Eliot transformed her chapters into interpretative boundaries.

Eliot wrote *Felix Holt* at a time of great political change. The novel is set in 1832 in the months following the passing of the First Reform Act, which was a rather modest adjustment to the electorate. It was published, however, in 1867, just prior to the passing of the Second Reform Bill, which gave the vote to virtually all middle-class males and to most town-workers. In the context of the novel's politics, its epigraphs become charged with political significance, offering their own sphere of reform. If, as Caroline Levine states, "the political is a matter of imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns and hierarchies of experience," epigraphs can be read as outliers pushing against the boundaries of the book's page.³¹⁴ The margins of the page are not just figurative: readers are invited to cross them, to undo these imposed boundaries and hierarchies.³¹⁵

Epigraphs make it possible to relate the novel's class politics to the unprecedented growth in the readership. Victorian novelists had "an audience that was larger, less knowable, and contained more newly literate readers than at any time in the past."³¹⁶ Through epigraphs, new readers could be taught to relate passages to more or less obvious contexts, to pursue a

³¹⁴ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3.

³¹⁵ Alicia Williams, in her article "The Politics of Address in George Eliot's Fiction," argues the opposite: "Eliot addresses an unspecified number of readers and evokes the threshold of the text—an abstract space suspended between novel and audience—without asking them to cross it." Williams claims that most of Eliot's epigraphs are "not especially noteworthy" and "do not make noticeably substantive contributions to their meaning". She seems to be suggesting epigraphs are democratic addresses *because* superfluous, dismissing the central epigraphic tenet of critical reflection. See Alicia Williams, "The Politics of Address in George Eliot's Fiction," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 52:1 (2019): 64-83.

³¹⁶ Debra Gettelman, "The Victorian Novel and its Readers," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. Lisa Rodensky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119.

range of interpretative threads, and to detect their potential applications to the narrative. If this seems in large part to accommodate the growing readership, it is also a mark of ambivalence about the novel's commercialisation and a desire to exert control over its reception. Eliot wrote three consecutive epigraphic novels between 1866 and 1876. *Felix Holt* was the first and the most overtly political of these novels, which led her to be more cautious in her use of epigraphs. In this longer perspective, the epigraphic novels can be viewed as a sort of training ground for readers, as Eliot gradually ceded them more freedom of thought.

In this chapter, I consider how epigraphs articulate particular formal principles that were, for the Victorians, also central to other spheres, such as science, politics, economics, and narrative. In the first section, I examine the novel's paratactic epigraphs, through which Eliot sustains a dialogue with Shakespeare. I show how she responds to his ideas about determinism, using Spencer's social theories, Darwinian evolution, and Machiavellian politics. Next, I turn Eliot's dialogical epigraphs and the metaphor of chess, which she uses to account for self-interest in the historical process and to limit the value of deterministic approaches. In the last section, I demonstrate how Eliot grounds her epigraphic representations of continuity and change in the language and laws of energy physics in order to redeem the process of transformation from implicit loss. In this novel, epigraphic interpretation is a means of replanting the historical roots that have been deracinated in the process of national development; of finding once again "a vital sense of connection with the past."³¹⁷ While the narrative grants readers a sense of local attachment, the epigraphs allow them to travel outside the confines of the page, and then to return to the narrative, changed.

The Epigraph as Seed

³¹⁷ George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life" (*Westminster Review*, July 1856), reprinted in *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, 127.

The novel's paratext, including the title-page describing Eliot as the author of *Adam Bede*, signalled her return to the representation of English life for which she had won the public's admiration. Shakespeare, whom Eliot was reading in the novel's germinal months, took pride of place in her epigraphs; he accounts for 14 of the 28 allographic epigraphs. In *Mansfield Park* (1814), Jane Austen described Shakespeare as "a part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them everywhere; one is intimate with him by instinct."³¹⁸ This account of Shakespeare's reach still held true at the time of Eliot's writing, when the export of English literature, including of her own works, formed a pervasive part of the culture of empire.³¹⁹

The margins are an inherent if abstract part of the space of the novel and, as such, lend themselves to the "imagining of imperial space."³²⁰ Through her epigraphs, Eliot colonised the margins of her novel, modelling the dissemination of Shakespeare throughout the empire. "Novels are perhaps always in some sense colonies for their authors and readers," writes Elaine Freedgood, "small worlds under the control of the author who makes them, and then the reader who can turn the pages or not, who can imagine the world represented or not, live in it for a time or not, can believe in this or that aspect of it or not."³²¹ In the case of epigraphs, the reader can decide to skip them or not. This choice is part of what Freedgood terms the "colonial effect."

The composition of an epigraphic novel can thus be described, like empire itself, as a process of uprooting and replanting. Felix Holt and Harold Transome, the novel's two returning

³¹⁸ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 264-65.

³¹⁹ Nancy Henry, *George Eliot and the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8.

³²⁰ Elaine Freedgood, "Fictional Settlements: Footnotes, Metalepsis, the Colonial Effect," *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 399.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 394.

sons, both identify as Radicals, but whereas Felix's politics are "rooted in the common earth, having to endure all the ordinary chances of past and present weather," Harold's approach is to "remove the rotten timbers and substitute fresh oak."³²² The metaphor relies on a distinction between those who acknowledge their past and those who conceal it. Since epigraphs often take the form of quotations that have been excised from their original surroundings and placed into others, they allow us to examine the destructive and curative aspects of this process. While Harold, the self-proclaimed 'Oriental', returns from his sojourn in the East having fathered a son with a slave, Felix gives up a medical apprenticeship in Glasgow in order to return to "[his] heritage — an order [he] belong[s] to" (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 27, 224). Both have been "changed by a filter of conscious deracination."³²³ Through epigraphs, which are at once bound to their origins and transformed through their relocation, the novel raises questions such as: when does one thing cease to be itself and become another? Can people both change and remain the same?

Following the publication of *Felix Holt*, and after the passage of the Second Reform Bill, *Blackwood's Magazine* commissioned Eliot to write "An Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt" (1867). She was reluctant, and much of the novel's subtlety was lost in the resulting political tract. While there should not be a straight translation from one to the other, the "Address" nonetheless helps to reveal the values which underlie Felix's politics in the novel, as it makes use of similar images and arguments. Felix, often thought to be a mouthpiece for Eliot's conservatism, does not believe in extending the vote to the working class but in the power of education and sober living to generate moral and social reform. In the novel, social change is conceived of in terms of mental development.³²⁴ The dominant metaphors for this

³²² George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, ed. by Fred C. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1980), 45; 39; hereafter cited in the text.

³²³ Ruth Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 192.

³²⁴ Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 127.

development are seed, harvest, and organic growth, through which Eliot questions the relative importance of soil and labour. In the Address, for instance, Felix describes “general prosperity and well-being [as] a vast crop.”³²⁵ To Felix, land is a metaphor for the mind, which can be cultivated through “honest labour” (*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 5, 55).

If the mind can be cultivated, it can also be contaminated. In the epigraph to Chapter 11, for instance, Felix’s harvest becomes infested with insects. His particular form of Radicalism, with its emphasis on truth and “honest labour,” begins to seem futile:

Truth is the precious harvest of the earth.
But once, when harvest waved upon a land,
The noisome cankerworm and caterpillar,
Locusts, and all the swarming foul-born broods,
Fastened upon it with swift, greedy jaws,
And turned the harvest into pestilence.
Until men said, What profits it to sow?

(*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 11, 111)

This epigraph reimagines the biblical parable of the sower, who, as he sowed, dropped some of the seed along the path, which the birds then came and devoured.³²⁶ Other seed fell on rock. Plants sprang up because the soil was shallow but, having no root, they withered in the sun. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew and choked the plants. Yet, some seed fell on good soil and produced an abundant crop. “Whoever has ears,” writes Matthew, “let them hear.”³²⁷

In the chapter to which the epigraph is affixed, Felix tries to set up a meeting in order that he might preach to the miners his doctrine of sobriety and self-improvement, but Mr. Johnson has bribed the miners and Felix’s words fall on deaf ears. The Bible, however, claims that the seeds will not bear fruit because of the conditional realities of the soil: blame does not lie with the sower but in the soil. The epigraph thus demonstrates Eliot’s scepticism as to the

³²⁵ George Eliot, “Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt,” Appendix B to *Felix Holt: The Radical* (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), 486.

³²⁶ Matthew 13:1-23.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

effects of meliorism and evolutionary progress among the “distrusted mob.”³²⁸ Perhaps she also had doubts as to whether her epigraphs, narrative seeds of their own, would be read.

The paratactic placement of allographic and autographic epigraphs complicates the straightforward model of organic inheritance that the epigraphic form, bound to sources and origins, might otherwise seem to offer. Eliot quoted from *2 Henry IV* in greatest proportion, three times, and twice from the same scene. It seems therefore to have been of particular importance to Eliot in writing her novel and in thinking through ideas of determinism, lineage, and inheritance. Most of her epigraphs stand alone but others are placed in dialogue with one another, in which case their mutual relationship seems biological, a linked separateness. Through this paratactic form, Eliot calls attention to the point at which the two epigraphs converge, and asks the reader to reflect on the likeness and difference between them. The Shakespearean epigraph to Chapter 8, for instance, is paired with an autographic epigraph:

“Rumour doth double like the voice and echo.”

The mind of a man is as a country which was once open to squatters, who have bred and multiplied and become masters of the land. But then happeneth a time when new and hungry comers dispute the land; and there is trial of strength, and the stronger wins. Nevertheless the first squatters be they who have prepared the ground, and the crops to the end will be sequent (though chiefly on the nature of the soil, as of light sand, mixed loam, or heavy clay, yet) somewhat on the primal labour and sowing.

(*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 8, 93)

The Shakespearean epigraph is quoted from *2 Henry IV*, Act III, Scene 1. In this scene, King Henry, the Earl of Warwick, and the Earl of Surrey, discuss the ongoing war against the Earl of Northumberland. King Henry has heard rumours about the size of the rebel forces that are attempting to overthrow him, and the Earl of Warwick attempts to reassure him that the rebels have no more than half of that number. In its relation to the chapter, the epigraph illustrates the

³²⁸ Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, 127.

rumours that are spreading about Harold Transome's reputed fortune. In Shakespeare's time, the word "rumour" still retained some of its original Latin meaning of "noise" and was used to describe the clamour and tumult of battle, and disturbances such as popular protests and unlawful assemblies.³²⁹ The epigraph, therefore, also points to the incipient disquiet and social unrest that accompanied the election in the aftermath of the first Reform Bill.

The use of this Shakespearean epigraph calls attention to the curious relationship between rumour and epigraphic form, which both take fragments out of their original context in order to construct a new narrative. In the prologue of Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*, Rumour is described as "a pipe / Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures."³³⁰ In Eliot's novels, epigraphs are rumour-like, operating at the margins of sanctioned discourse and allowing readers to conjecture about what is to come. However, to encourage analogies between rumours and epigraphs raises questions about appropriation, and how words and ideas can be repurposed without permission. Listening to Johnson bribe the colliers, Felix feels that, "There is hardly any mental misery worse than that of having our own serious phrases, our own rooted beliefs, caricatured by a charlatan or a hireling" (*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 11, 119). This phrase has political dimensions, of course, but sounds foreign coming from Felix. It is as if this utterance enacts the potential of the complete assimilation of another's words into the narrative, an idea to which she gives lengthier treatment in *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* (1871-1872). Paired with the use of epigraphs, it suggests Eliot's ongoing fascination with the ethical dilemma of cultural appropriation, and an element of self-doubt in her own repurposing of Shakespeare.

The paratactic epigraphs enact rumour's doubling of voice. In figuring her own epigraph as Shakespeare's echo, Eliot stages organic inheritance as both a given and changeable structure. While she uses Shakespeare's archaic language and mannered diction,

³²⁹ Richard Knowles, "Unquiet and the Double Plot of *2 Henry IV*," *Shakespeare Studies* 2 (1966): 133.

³³⁰ William Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, Prologue.15-16.

the Shakespearean epigraph, as she quotes it, seems to bear no thematic relation to her own. However, if we trace the Shakespearean epigraph back to its original context, it is possible to see both divergences and continuities between their metaphoric images. In the same scene from which the epigraph is quoted, Shakespeare writes:

WARWICK

There is a history in all men's lives
 Figuring the nature of the times deceased,
 The which observed, a man may prophesy,
 With a near aim, of the main chance of things
 As yet not come to life, which in their seeds
 And weak beginnings lie intreasurèd.
 Such things become the hatch and brood of time,
 And by the necessary form of this,
 King Richard might create a perfect guess
 That great Northumberland, then false to him,
 Would of that seed grow to a greater falseness,
 Which should not find a ground to root upon
 Unless on you.³³¹

Using seed as a metaphor for character and ground as a receptacle, the Earl of Warwick explains how past behaviour can be used to predict future actions. Eliot adopts a similar metaphor in her epigraph, comparing the mind of a man to a country open to squatters. In the chapter itself, she writes that, "Reduced to a map, our premises seem insignificant, but they make, nevertheless, a very pretty freehold to live and walk over" (*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 8, 98). Mind and character are grounds that can be mapped, sowed, laboured, and reaped, but this preparation is not always sufficient nor successful. In its relation to the chapter, the epigraph illustrates the relationship between Mrs Transome and her son Harold, whose mind has become unmanageable to her, as well as the developments that have been made to the Transome Estate. Harold was the first "squatter" but the land is now overseen by the family lawyer. Mr Jermyn is the "new and hungry comer" who has mismanaged the property: "The woods had been recklessly thinned, and there had been insufficient planting" (*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 8, 94). Mr Jermyn

³³¹ Ibid., 3.1.75-87.

depreciates the great value placed on transmitting woodland intact, and the respect for custom and tradition inherent to that transmission.³³² The epigraph also analogises the legalities of inheritance and the political struggles that inform much of the novel's construction. Perhaps most importantly, it offers a general comment on the function of epigraphs in her novels: through epigraphs, Eliot sows the narrative seeds of the novel, which take root in the soil of the reader's mind. The author, responsible for the primal labour and sowing, hopes the planted crops will be sequent. Eliot, however, had misgivings about the inherent qualities of the soil.

Shakespeare offers Eliot a particular model of historical determinism, in which the repetitive dimension of human affairs has didactic potential. Through what Ruth Livesey terms "rituals of perpetual repetition," characters and implied readers are able to "sustain better choices for the future."³³³ Indeed, the paratext of Eliot's late novels consists in the teasing-out of connections, and the detection of pattern, shape, and direction. Just as Samuel Coleridge praised "the judgement with which Shakespeare always in his first scenes prepares, and yet how naturally, and with what concealment of art, for the catastrophe — how he presents the germ of all the after events," a chapter brings to life the narrative seeds or the "beginnings [that] lie intreasurèd" in the epigraph.³³⁴

These rituals of repetition bear much resemblance to the work of historians, who, as Willis Regier observes, "ask old books what will be. What must happen, and what must happen again? What did the past predict about tomorrow? What did it say about today?"³³⁵ In making the part stand for the whole, they reflect on the continuities and the changing specifics of historical experience. Charles Lock also draws a comparison between the function of criticism

³³² Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*, 196.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 201.

³³⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare: A Selection*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 12.

³³⁵ Willis Goth Regier, *Quotology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 131.

and that of epigraphs: “the axiomatic offers the conclusion without the trouble of reading the text, while the cryptic may be merely off-putting,” he writes. “As with literary texts, so with criticism, where the epigraph is often set to do the critic’s work.”³³⁶ However, if criticism supplies readers with contextual relationships in order to demonstrate influences, affinities, or analogies, in the epigraphic novel, the epigraph must be made to speak to the novel’s other constituent parts. The reader is given an important role in the ongoing dialogue. “Even past meanings,” writes Mikhail Bakhtin, “that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) — they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue.”³³⁷ Through the paratactic placement of her epigraphs, Eliot demonstrates that nothing is isolable, and that both the past and the future are implicit in the present.

Eliot’s use of a Shakespearean epigraph demonstrates the value of cultural transmission and her own assimilates social and scientific debates into this pre-established Shakespearean model of the mind. In her autographic epigraph, Eliot draws both on Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection and Herbert Spencer’s theory of organic evolution from homogeneity to heterogeneity. For Spencer, these processes constitute progress. Eliot, like Darwin, is unsure, recognising that there can be change without progress, and that social heterogeneity can come at the expense of social harmony. The autographic epigraph provides clear evidence of her ambivalence: “the crops to the end will be sequent, (though chiefly on the nature of the soil, as of light sand, mixed loam, or heavy clay, yet) somewhat on the primal labour and sowing.” The syntax of her epigraph’s last sentence is bizarre and masks its own internal hierarchy,

³³⁶ Charles Lock, “Epigraphs and Absences: A Comment on Rajeev S. Patke’s ‘Ambiguity and Ethics: Fictions of Governance in Geoffrey Hill’s *Mercian Hymns*’,” *Connotations* 2, no. 22 (New York: Waxmann Münster, 2012/2013): 319.

³³⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 170.

relegating the dominant causation to parentheses. The parentheses (“(though chiefly on the nature of the soil, as of light sand, mixed loam, or heavy clay, yet)”) seem reluctant to concede full weight to the words they contain. Eliot is unwilling to completely negate the hierarchy of causation, instead emphasising the interaction of soil and labour in the production of crops. In light of this debate about nature and nurture, it is important to note the influence of Eliot’s father and his experience with soil on her metaphorical thought.³³⁸ It is mentioned in all of her novels, often in relation to inheritance. With her own upbringing in mind, she asks: is there freedom to break away from the soil in which you are bred?

The novel is ambivalent about the relationship between self-advancement and social advancement. Felix, for instance, questions, “Why should I want to get into the middle class because I have some learning?” (*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 5, 57). Eliot was herself of lower-middle-class origin and achieved class mobility through education. The small changes she made to the novel’s title-page epigraph shed light on how she conceived of her own position within these class politics:

“Upon the midlands now the industrious muse doth fall,
The shires which we the heart of England well may call.

My native country thou, which so brave spirits hast bred,
If there be virtues yet remaining in thy earth,
Or any good of thine thou bred’st into my birth,
Accept it as thine own, whilst now I sing of thee,
Of all thy later brood the unworthiest though I be.”

Drayton: *Polyolbion*

(*FH*, Title Page)

³³⁸ Robert Evans was initially employed as a forester on the Newdigate family’s Wootton estate in Staffordshire, and worked his way up to be their main land agent, managing the Arbury estate in Warwickshire. His agricultural skill was noted early on, and his tasks at Arbury would have included agricultural development, such as drainage, seed selection, crop rotation, and fertilizing; as well as tenant management, rent collection, staff appointments, investment decisions, the sales and safety aspects of coal mining production, timber conservation, and transport improvements. See David Paterson, *Fair Seed-Time: Robert Evans, Francis Newdigate and the Making of George Eliot* (Kibworth Beauchamp: Matador, 2019), 10-12; 61.

In quoting from a British classic, Eliot positions herself as part of a “later brood” with a shared, cultural past; but, importantly, she replaced the poem’s “thou breathd’st” with “though bred’st” or, in other words, nature with nurture. Darwin’s natural selection depends on both environmental factors and heritable traits, but it is the heritable traits that ensure a species’ survival. Darwin did, however, later recognise the importance of cultural adaptation, writing in 1871 that, “as far as the highest part of man’s nature is concerned there are other agencies more important. For the moral qualities are advanced . . . much more through the effects of habit, the reasoning powers, instruction, religion, et cetera, than through natural selection.”³³⁹ In other words, learned behaviour is “more important” than heritable traits in determining social change. While Eliot’s own heritage caused her a great amount of self-doubt (“the unworthiest though I be”), she nonetheless claimed for herself poetic authority.

In Chapter 36, Eliot returns to *2 Henry IV* and paratactic form in order to explain the mutual dependence of moral standards and political life:

“Are these things then necessities? —
Then let us meet them like necessities.”

See now the virtue living in a word!
Hobson will think of swearing it was noon
When he saw Dobson at the May-day Fair,
To prove poor Dobson did not rob the mail.
'Tis neighbourly to save a neighbour's neck:
What harm in lying when you mean no harm?
But say 'tis perjury, then Hobson quakes —
He'll none of perjury!

Thus words embalm
The conscience of mankind; and Roman laws
Bring still a conscience to poor Hobson's aid.

(*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 36, 285-86)

³³⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (New York: Appleton, 1898), 633.

The Shakespearean epigraph (“Are these things then necessities? — / Then let us meet them like necessities”) is also quoted from Act III, Scene 1. It is part of King Henry’s response to the Earl of Warwick’s speech about historical determinism, which I quoted above, and it suggests that our fate is in large measure of own making. It both anticipates Mrs Transome’s assertion in the chapter that, “I must put up with all things as they are determined for me” (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 36, 338) and questions whether there are alternatives to her resignation. Mrs Transome attempts to barter with her son for her submission. When Harold thanks her “for making no difficulties,” Mrs Transome tells him that, “You ought to listen to me in return” (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 36, 294). However, her attempts are futile: “Poor Mrs Transome’s strokes were sent jarring back on her by a hard unalterable past” (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 36, 295). When she accuses Harold of having brought unhappiness upon her, he retorts that she has brought it on herself. The form of the allographic epigraph enacts this jarring back: “Are these things then necessities? / Then let us meet them like necessities.” Whatever possibilities are opened up in the first line of epigraph are foreclosed in the second, and Mrs Transome’s attempts at self-expression end in self-defeat.

In her autographic epigraph, Eliot supplants Shakespeare’s historical necessities with Niccolò Machiavelli’s *necessità* in order to illustrate the tensions between public and private moralities. In the chapter which this epigraph precedes, we find Harold conflicted. Jermyn has threatened him with the revelation of a remainder-man who has a claim upon the Transome Estate.³⁴⁰ Harold would like to prosecute Jermyn for his mismanagement of the estate but does not want to lose it as a consequence. He comes to the conclusion that, “The unconscious remainder-man was probably much better off left in his original station: Harold would not have been called upon to consider his existence, if it had not been presented to him in the shape of a

³⁴⁰ A remainder-man is a person who is entitled to inherit property upon the termination of the estate of the former owner. This person holds an interest in the remainder and will become its possessor at some future time.

threat from one who had power to execute the threat” (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 36, 286). Harold’s conscience stems from his self-interest, as opposed to his ethics.

When Eliot writes of “the virtue living in a word,” she refers to the word “necessities” set out in the Shakespearean epigraph. In bringing together virtue and necessities, Eliot turns to the world of Machiavellian politics, which is “compounded of *virtù* struggling with *necessità*, of human excellence building a political order and of the obstacles that environment presents.”³⁴¹ For Machiavelli, *necessità* is what is given, and unavailable to human intervention and transformation. However, as an obstacle, it can also become a concept of action and can be mobilised for political purposes.³⁴² In the first chapter of *Discourses*, for instance, Machiavelli claims that the task of the law is to impose “such necessities” as are not supplied in natural conditions.³⁴³ The autographic epigraph reformulates this claim, stating that “words embalm / The conscience of mankind” and that “laws / Bring still a conscience.” While Machiavelli considered *necessità* a condition for political virtue, and believed that all political means could be justified on the grounds of reason of state, Eliot was more distrustful of political measures and their power to effect beneficial social change. Her epigraph questions whether law is indeed the external expression of historical and moral progress, or even the framework which makes progress possible. For Eliot, the individual is not an effect of greater social law but is part of a social whole that is itself bound by law.³⁴⁴

The Epigraphic Novel as Chess

³⁴¹ Carl J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Reason of State* (Providence, Brown University Press, 1957), 19.

³⁴² Yves Winter, “Necessity and Fortune: Machiavelli and the Politics of Nature,” in *Second Nature: Rethinking the Natural through Politics*, ed. Crina Archer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 33-36.

³⁴³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 8-9; cited in *ibid.*, 35

³⁴⁴ Jesse Rosenthal, “The Large Novel and the Law of Large Numbers; or, Why George Eliot Hates Gambling,” *ELH* 77, no. 3 (2010): 796.

Drawing on her own experience of social and self-advancement, as well as Shakespeare and Machiavelli, Eliot used paratactic epigraphs to weigh choice against historical determinism. Her dialogical epigraphs went further, using Adam Smith's image of the chess-board to illustrate the limits of the deterministic approach to historical evolution. Eliot's distaste for gambling is well-documented, reaching its full-force in *Daniel Deronda*, but her use of the chess metaphor in *Felix Holt* allows us to see this contempt beginning to take shape.³⁴⁵ The problem with prediction, Eliot shows, is that living systems are not exemplars of ideal types, nor slaves to linear forces, but messy, historical phenomena. George Boole, who, in 1854, attempted to formulate a general method in probabilities, warned that "it would be unphilosophical to affirm that the strength of . . . expectation, viewed as an emotion of the mind, is capable of being referred to with any numerical standard."³⁴⁶ However, Harold, with his "practical mind" (*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 1, 23), and Jermyn, with his "legal imagination" (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 29, 240), both attempt to submit to calculation the strength of human hopes and fears. "For them," writes Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "the past is a suppressed arsenal of secrets to be drawn out one by one as required for the manipulation of others, the future an arena of calculated prediction."³⁴⁷

Through dialogical form, Eliot enacts the figurative game of chess that unfolds between the novel's characters. In the epigraph to Chapter 35, she writes:

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 777-811.

³⁴⁶ George Boole, *An Investigation into the Laws of Thought, on Which Are Founded the Mathematical Theories of Logic and Probabilities* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 244. We know from Lewes' letters that he was familiar with Boole's work. By extension, Eliot is likely to have been familiar with it also. See George Henry Lewes to Clement Mansfield Ingleby, 12 October 1871, *Letters*, 9:27, and George Henry Lewes to Alexander Main, 25 June 1872, *Letters*, 5:283. For more on George Eliot and mathematics, see Derek Ball, "Mathematics in George Eliot's Novels" PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2016, PQDT - UK & Ireland, and Melanie Bayley, "Mathematics and Literature in Victorian England" PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2010.

³⁴⁷ Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 213.

M. Check to your queen!

N. Nay, your own king is bare,
And moving so, you give yourself checkmate.

(*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 35, 280)

One player gives check to another, putting the opposing queen under immediate threat of capture. However, according to the rules of chess, a bare king can never give check and therefore cannot deliver a checkmate or win the game, although a draw is possible. The epigraph prefaces the chapter in which Jermyn reveals to Harold the existence of the remainder-man. Jermyn then asks Harold to suspend the court proceedings against him in exchange for his silence. “Was it possible,” Harold questions, “that he should have the weapon wrenched out of his hand?” (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 35, 281). The chess metaphor connects this chapter to an earlier one, in which we are told that Harold’s servant, Christian, “felt very much like an uninitiated chess-player, who sees that the pieces are in a peculiar position on the board, and might open the way for him to give checkmate, if he only knew how” (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 25, 211). Christian in fact becomes the king that is left bare, bribing Harold in exchange for the remainder-man’s identity. Once Harold is made aware that Esther is the remainder-man, he regains his advantage and “sense of mastery” (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 35, 281). In his attempt to manipulate Harold, Jermyn has given himself checkmate.

Eliot’s may have been indebted to Adam Smith in her use of the chess-board metaphor.³⁴⁸ The opening to Chapter 29 of *Felix Holt* seems to have been adapted from his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in which Smith describes what he calls the man of system:

He seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board. He does not consider that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, in the great chess-board of human

³⁴⁸ Imraan Coovadia, “George Eliot’s Realism and Adam Smith,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 42, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 819-835.

society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse [*sic*] to impress upon it.³⁴⁹

Smith reminds his readers that all human actors are self-interested. Rule-based systems should therefore, according to Smith, be constructed with human nature in full view, and those that fail to account for this self-interest will result in the highest degree of disorder. Eliot elaborates on Smith's image of the chess-board:

Fancy what a game at chess would be if all the chessmen had passions and intellects, more or less small and cunning: if you were not only uncertain about your adversary's men, but a little uncertain about your own; if your knight could shuffle himself on to a new square by the sly; if your bishop, in disgust at your castling, could wheedle your pawns out of their places; and if your pawns, hating you because they are pawns, could make away from their appointed posts that you might get checkmate on a sudden. You might be the longest-headed of deductive reasoners, and yet you might be beaten by your own pawns. You would be especially likely to be beat, if you depended arrogantly on your mathematical imagination, and regarded your passionate pieces with contempt.

Yet this imaginary chess is easy compared with the game a man has to play against his fellow-men with other fellow-men for his instruments. He thinks himself sagacious, perhaps, because he trusts no bond except that of self-interest: but the only self-interest he can safely rely on is what seems to be such to the mind he would use or govern. Can he ever be sure of knowing this?

(*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 29, 237)

In Eliot's novel, Smith's "great chess-board of human society" comes alive. Chess-men are fellow-men, and each has their own measure of self-interest and sympathy. Eliot claims that an overreliance on the "mathematical imagination" will end in defeat. The "deductive reasoners" who seek logical conclusions and do not engage with their emotions will make the wrong instinctive calls. Jermyn, for instance, is unable to imagine that he is disliked by his subordinate, Johnson, who acts a double-part as an electioneering agent, undermining Harold;

³⁴⁹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 234.

and Harold is unable to anticipate Jermyn's outburst of passion, in which he reveals that he is Harold's father.

Using the metaphor of chess, Eliot sets limits to the Shakespearean determinism laid out in her paratactic epigraphs. Her dialogical epigraphs make self-interest an important causal variable and an integral part of the historical process. Whereas the former uses regularities in relationships and patterns of causation to generalise and make predictions, the latter suggests that, even in chess, the rules cannot be utilised to predict the course and outcome of a game. One cannot even make a reliable prediction about the next move because a man can never be sure of knowing of what is guiding the opponent's unfolding decisions among the large number of available options. The game of chess cannot escape being historical, despite it also being constrained and shaped through a set of rules.

In bringing pieces of the chess-board alive for her readers, Eliot invites them to consider the reading of an epigraphic novel as its own game of chess. Bakhtin writes that, "The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction."³⁵⁰ Just as a chess-player's game is determined by both the opponent's preceding move and the move that has not yet been made, readers must interpret epigraphs based on what has come to pass and in anticipation of what is still to come, and must readjust their expectations as needed. Indeed, the paratext in Eliot's novels consists in the teasing-out of connections, and the detection of pattern, shape, and direction.

Yet, the chess metaphor also makes plain the lack of control the author can expect to have over his or her audience. Just as chess requires both imagination and the observation of a set of rules, novel readers are both free and unfree. The novelist might plan ahead, strategize,

³⁵⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 324.

and manipulate, moving her characters around like on a chess board, but the movements of readers' minds remain out of her control. Indeed, Eliot acknowledges the constraints of such a project: "Even the bare discernment of facts, much more their arrangement with a view to inferences, must carry a bias: human impartiality, whether judicial or not, can hardly escape being more or less loaded" (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 46, 377). The epigraphic novel, in particular, captures the circular process of actors determining and being determined, the notion of relative freedom and constraint, and the need for the interpretation and application of a set of laws. Through her epigraphs, Eliot invites readers to be active participants in the interpretative process, despite the difficulties she had in accepting the unstable outcomes it might yield.

Epigraphs and Thermodynamics

The novel itself posits transformation as an irreversible and irrecoverable phenomenon but its epigraphic form allows us to imagine a world in which returns and reversals are possible. Both the novel's allographic and autographic epigraphs revive and reimagine older forms. For us, as readers, the epigraphic novel is a circumscribed space, in which we can move forward and then circle back. In this closed, circular world, causes and effects, past and future, are linked through continuities in the epigraphs. Epigraphic form thus allows Eliot to negotiate both our instinctive desire for a circular return and the inevitable movement toward a final point of narrative resolution.

This formal structure can be understood to have its equivalent in contemporaneous scientific discourses. Indeed, as Tina Young Choi observes, "the period's science and its literature were engaged in the same discursive struggles, to which novels, and, in particular,

certain formal qualities of contemporaneous novels, came to offer their own solutions.”³⁵¹ Scientists and novelists alike were meeting metaphysical, epistemological, and ontological problems that arose in the course of their work.³⁵² Eliot’s dialogical epigraphs, in particular, shed light on the ideas she was trying to articulate in her novel.

The epigraph to Chapter 5, for instance, compresses ideas that are rooted in thermodynamics, which was an emerging science at the time of Eliot’s writing.³⁵³ She writes:

1st citizen. Sir there’s a hurry in the veins of youth
 That makes a vice of virtue by excess.
 2^d citizen. What if the coolness of our tardier veins
 Be loss of virtue?
 1st citizen. All things cool with time —
 The sun itself, they say, till heat shall find
 A general level, nowhere in excess.
 2^d citizen. ’Tis a poor climax, to my weaker thought,
 That future middlingness.

(*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 5, 53)

The theory of energy conservation, first formulated in the 1840s, consisted of two separate and seemingly contradictory principles. The first law, the law of conservation, stated that the amount of energy in a given system remained constant through many transformations. While it could manifest itself in different forms, such as heat, light, electricity, or electromagnetism,

³⁵¹ Tina Young Choi, “Forms of Closure: The First law of Thermodynamics and Victorian Narrative,” *ELH* 74 (2007): 303.

³⁵² Selma Brody, “Physics in “*Middlemarch*”: Gas Molecules and Ethereal Atoms,” *Modern Philology* 85, no. 1 (1987): 42-53.

³⁵³ It is difficult to pinpoint when the laws of energy conservation were first articulated but the science was not identified as “thermo-dynamics” until 1854. In 1865, Rudolph Clausius coined the key term “entropy” and a broad popularization of thermodynamic theory followed. Important publications include John Tyndall’s *Heat Considered as a Mode of Motion* (1863), Balfour Stewart’s *The Conservation of Energy* (1874) and, for Eliot (particularly when writing *Middlemarch*), William Grove’s *On the Correlation of Physical Forces* (1846). Tyndall began to visit Eliot and Lewes when Eliot was still at work on *Felix Holt* and she was familiar with his *Heat as a Mode of Motion*. See Barri J. Gold, “The Consolation of Physics: Tennyson’s Thermodynamic Solution,” *PMLA* 117, no. 3 (2002): 450; Barri J. Gold, *Thermopoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 38-39; and Rosenthal, “The Large Novel and the Law of Large Numbers; or, Why George Eliot Hates Gambling,” 793-94.

it could neither be destroyed, nor created. The second law, the law of diffusion, stated that entropy tends toward a maximum; that is, the energy in a given system always tends to decline.

One of the primary questions confronting the period's scientists was how to explain the sun's seemingly constant heat since, according to the laws of thermodynamics, its energy should be dissipating over time. The most widely accepted theory was the Helmholtz-Thomson (or Helmholtz-Kelvin) theory, which posited that light and heat were released from the sun due to a slight gravitational contraction. Hermann von Helmholtz was the first to consider the consequences of a thermal equilibrium or "heat death" on a cosmic scale. "If the universe be delivered over to the undisturbed action of its physical processes," wrote Helmholtz, "all force will finally pass into the form of heat, and all heat come into a state of equilibrium."³⁵⁴ Eliot owned several works by Helmholtz and met him briefly in her travels to Germany during the 1850s.³⁵⁵ Her epigraph picks up on the latent pessimism of his formulation: as applied to history, it implies a decline into disorder.³⁵⁶ Indeed, while Victorians invested evolution with the promise of progress or upward development toward perfect forms, thermodynamics was considered the scientific basis for pessimism, dissipation, and death.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Hermann von Helmholtz, "The Interaction of Natural Forces," in *Science and Culture: Popular and Philosophical Essays*, ed. D. Cahan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 30; cited in Helge Kragh, "The Source of Solar Energy, ca. 1840–1910: from Meteoric Hypothesis to Radioactive Speculations," *European Physical Journal* 41 (October 2016).

³⁵⁵ See Michael Tondre, "George Eliot's 'Fine Excess': *Middlemarch*, Energy, and the Afterlife of Feeling," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 67, no. 2 (September 2012): 212. Tondre suggests thermodynamics were a new interest in the later 1860s, but this epigraph suggests she was already interested in these laws when composing *Felix Holt*.

³⁵⁶ Gillian Beer shows how, throughout the later Victorian age, a "dying sun" was envisioned in response to the thermodynamic alarmism of William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) in particular. (While the heat death scenario for the solar system had earlier been suggested by Thomson, Helmholtz was the first to extend it to a cosmological scale.) See Gillian Beer, "'The Death of the Sun': Victorian Solar Physics and Solar Myth," in *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J.B. Bullen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 159–80.

³⁵⁷ Gold, *Thermopoetics*, 41. See also Patrick Brantlinger, ed. *Energy and Entropy: Science and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays from Victorian Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Eliot uses the image of the cooling sun to express the inevitable break down of Felix's political ambitions. The epigraph suggests that Felix is in danger of being 'excessively' virtuous. His moral vision is rooted in unproductive expenditure and this inefficiency results in his incarceration. In pursuing Esther, however, Felix's energy is transformed into another state. In Chapter 15, Esther questions, "Did he want her to be heroic? That seemed impossible without some great occasion. Her life was a heap of fragments, and so were her thoughts: some great energy was needed to bind them together" (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 15, 152). Felix becomes the requisite binding force, although from a scientific perspective his energies are subject to a loss. Once energy has been transformed into heat at a uniform temperature, it becomes unavailable for use.

The idea of a "future middlingness," a universe tending toward a less useful and more disordered state, was troubling for Victorian readers.³⁵⁸ In figuring Esther's life and thoughts as a heap of fragments that Felix must bind together, we see the resonance of these thermodynamic laws with, and their articulation through, Eliot's narrative form. Indeed, we might read the epigraphic novel as its own heap of fragments, and, as Choi has noted of other Victorian writers, "an attempt to negotiate the space between conservation and entropy, between complete recovery and the admission of loss."³⁵⁹ New readers might be literate but lacking in general knowledge and unable to relate the epigraphs back to their original contexts or to detect their potential applications to the narrative. Michael Edwards goes as far as to claim that, "The novel does not make but unmake; its form is . . . not a construction but a falling-apart, a debris."³⁶⁰ Nevertheless, epigraphs provide readers with opportunities to transform what would otherwise be excess into usefulness.

³⁵⁸ Choi, "Forms of Closure," 306.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 310.

³⁶⁰ Michael Edwards, "George Eliot and Negative Form," *Critical Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1975): 178.

The epigraphs themselves recuperate older forms, either through quotation or imitation. Earlier narratives are revived and transformed, although these transformations are sometimes hidden, reappearing at unexpected moments. For the epigraph to Chapter 31, for instance, Eliot quotes from Roger North's *Examen: Or, an Enquiry into the Credit and Veracity of a Pretended Complete History* (1740). The *Examen* was published in response to the third volume of *A Complete History of England* (1706), written by White Kennett. The title of the *Examen* alludes to Kennett's strategic omissions of material. Given Eliot's own epigraphic practices, it is intriguing to imagine that her interest in it was due to this issue of pretended completeness. She quotes:

In the copia of the factious language the word Tory was entertained, . . . and being a vocal clever-sounding word, readily pronounced, it kept its hold, and took possession of the foul mouths of the faction. . . . The Loyalists began to cheer up and to take heart of grace, and in the working of this crisis, according to the common law of scolding, they considered which way to make payment for so much of Tory as they had been treated with to clear scores. . . . Immediately the train took, and ran like wildfire and became general. And so the account of Tory was balanced, and soon began to run up a sharp score on the other side.

(*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 31, 253)

Between 1679 and 1681, three Exclusion bills sought to exclude King Charles II's brother and heir presumptive, James, Duke of York, from the thrones of England, Scotland, and Ireland, because he was Roman Catholic. Two new parties were formed in the process: the Tories (loyalists), who were opposed to his exclusion, and the Whigs (exclusionists), who supported it. Eliot's epigraph traces the emergence of these terms through gossip. 'Tory' was an Irish term suggesting a papist outlaw. 'Whig', North explains, was "vernacular in Scotland . . . for corrupt and sour whey."³⁶¹ Although Eliot does not include the history of the term 'Whig' in her epigraph, she earlier describes Garstin, the Whig candidate, as "a harsh and wiry fellow; he seemed to suggest sour whey, which some say was the original meaning of Whig in the

³⁶¹ Roger North, *Examen: or An Enquiry into the Credit and Veracity of a Pretended Complete History* (London: Printed for Fletcher Gyles, 1740), 321-2.

Scottish, and it might assist the theoretic advantages of Radicalism if it could be associated with a more generous presence” (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 16, 154). The phrase “some say” obscures North’s scholarship, from which Eliot was quoting, and once again suggests analogies between rumours, or gossip, and epigraphs. Eliot, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, gives additional treatment to these analogies in *Middlemarch*.

The covert reference to North’s *Examen* also demonstrates how Eliot encouraged her own readers to circle back: only in retrospect does it become apparent where Eliot was getting her information, if at all. Fifteen chapters earlier, Eliot had borrowed the term “true-blue” and the economic metaphor from North’s *Examen* to compose her own epigraph in dialogical form. In the epigraph to Chapter 16, she writes:

Trueblue. These men have no votes. Why should I court them?
 Greyfox. No votes, but power.
 Trueblue. What! over charities?
 Greyfox. No, over brains: which disturbs the canvass. In a natural state of things the average price of a vote at Paddlebrook is nine-and-sixpence, throwing the fifty pound tenants, who cost nothing, into the divisor. But these talking men cause an artificial rise of prices.

(*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 16, 153)

Before they became known as Whigs, the Exclusionists were known as ‘true-blues’: a term of insult for the self-proclaimed ‘true protestants’. However, by the nineteenth century, the term ‘true-blue’ was widely understood as referring to the Tory Party. In Eliot’s novel, however, the term ‘true-blue’ refers to the ‘Radical blue’. This is significant if we read Felix’s radicalism as disguised conservatism. In Chapter 17, for instance, Jermyn introduces Felix to Harold: “This gentleman,” he says “is one of ourselves; he is a true-blue” (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 17, 163). In fact, Felix and Harold are not at all alike: Felix is a social conservative who is sceptical about the power of politics to deliver a more equitable society, while Harold runs as a radical candidate as a means to maintain his privilege. In the epigraph, ‘Trueblue’ stands in for Harold and ‘Greyfox’ for Jermyn. Indeed, Jermyn is several times referred to as a fox, both by Felix, who

tells Reverend Lyon that, “An election is coming . . . the foxes have a sincere interest in prolonging the lives of the poultry” (*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 5, 63) and by Christian Bycliffe, who tells him that, “if you’ve been taking Jermyn into your confidence, you’ve been setting the fox to keep off the weasel” (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 25, 214). When Felix reveals to Harold that his agents have been “bribing rough fellows who are no voters,” Harold does little to prevent or to stop the election treating, claiming that “a candidate is very much at the mercy of his agents as to the means by which he is returned” (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 16, 159).

The use of term ‘true-blue’ suggests the composition of the novel enacts its own returns, in this case to Eliot’s own Coventry upbringing. In the fourteenth century, Coventry’s prosperity rested largely on the dyers who produced ‘Coventry blue’ cloth, which was highly sought after across Europe due to the fact that it did not fade. Its endurance resulted in the saying ‘True as Coventry Blue,’ shortened to ‘true-blue,’ meaning steadfast. According to John Ray in his book *A Compleat Collection of English Proverbs* (1670), “Coventry had formerly the reputation for dying of blues; insomuch that true blue became a Proverb to signifie [*sic*] one that was always the same and like himself.”³⁶² Eliot’s use of the term is therefore ironic, meant to underline Harold’s moral corruption and self-interest.

Despite the circular ideals of the novel’s epigraphic form, the novel itself warns of impossible returns. Harold chooses to rebel with “proud insurrection against the hardship” of determinism in order to preserve his “character of gentleman” (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 48, 383) and Esther undergoes an “inward revolution” that modifies her character (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 49, 398). She renounces Transome Court in favour of a more humble life with Felix. Felix, who announces his desire to return to his “heritage” (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 27, 224) finds he cannot be a true representative of the labouring class. In the autographic epigraph to Chapter 17, Eliot writes:

³⁶² John Ray, *A Compleat Collection of English Proverbs* (London: Printed by J. Hughs, 1737), 178.

It is a good and soothfast saw;
 Half-roasted never will be raw;
 No dough is dried once more to meal,
 No crock new-shapen by the wheel;
 You can't turn curds to milk again,
 Nor Now, by wishing, back to Then;
 And having tasted stolen honey,
 You can't buy innocence for money.

(*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 17, 162)

Eliot uses the process of milk fermentation as one metaphor, among others, for political agitation, in which culture, accounting for both meanings of the word, is the driving force of change. Once milk is turned to curd, the process is irreversible. The use of this particular metaphor ties back the epigraph to Eliot's reading of North's *Examen*, in which he writes that Whig was the "vernacular in Scotland . . . for corrupt and sour whey."³⁶³ Indeed, whey is the liquid remaining once milk has been curdled and strained. Through the language of fermentation, Eliot warns against irreversible shifts in allocations of social and political power. Specifically, she condemns the canvassing tactics, which result in the election riots. Noting the difficulty of reversing such an irresponsible plan once it is in motion, Felix tells Harold that, "I saw clearly enough at once that more mischief had been done than could be well mended" (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 17, 163). Johnson confirms this, claiming that, "it is impossible to take a single step backward at Sproxton" (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 17, 166). Eliot therefore encourages slow and stadial progress, reminding us that even organic processes can turn sour.

In this novel, memories provide a buffer against the implicit decline of the linear narrative and a means to moral and social redemption.³⁶⁴ While Harold only remembers "places and people — how they look and what can be done with them" (*FH*, Vol. I, Ch. 1, 21), Felix

³⁶³ North, *Examen*, 321-2.

³⁶⁴ Livesey argues that, "Memory, in *Felix Holt*, is an ever-active recreative force that allows for conscious acts of preservation whilst moving forwards: it provides the keynote of Eliot's mobile conservatism, mediating social stasis and change." See Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*, 199.

and Esther have affective ties to each other, which sustain them in times of need. The fact that Eliot used her contemporaries to populate some of her epigraphs is significant, representing a rare break from the past in favour of the present. Given that she chose to quote Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Tennyson, the two poets that in recent decades had been most attuned to the power of memory, we might also read it as an attempt to show that nothing is lost in the movement toward a final point of resolution. Despite Felix's conviction that he and Esther "must not be married" because "they would ruin each other's lives" (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 32, 263), the following epigraph from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) illustrates the positive conjoining of two souls and offers a counterweight to Felix's entropic outlook:

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore, —
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.³⁶⁵

(*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 32, 259)

Unlike Esther, who has "no trust that she could ever be good without him," Felix finds strength in his memories of her and wishes her to know that "her love was dear to him as the beloved dead are dear" (*FH*, Vol. II, Ch. 32, 263). The transformation of the lover into a spectral

³⁶⁵ Eliot belatedly divided one long chapter into two smaller parts by drawing a line through the manuscript page and adding a note in the margin 'See back'. On the verso of this sheet she transcribed this passage from Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850). These last-minute authorial decisions on segmenting (of which there are several in the manuscript) are the key to understanding how chaptering was understood. Eliot had an intuitive sense of where one chapter should end and another begin, and this revision shows her thinking about how the chapter unit would affect our reading.

presence explains and redeems the narrative of loss. The epigraph thus becomes the novelistic counterpart to the disembodied lover, haunting the margins as the lover haunts the poem's speaker.

Tennyson's *In Memoriam* imagines a similar narrative of conservation in the face of dissipation, transformation in the place of loss.³⁶⁶ In quoting two discontinuous passages from this poem, Eliot holds loss and conservation in careful balance:

Whichever way my days decline,
I felt and feel, though left alone,
His being working in mine own,
The footsteps of his life in mine.

Dear friend, far off, my lost desire
So far, so near, in woe and weal;
Oh, loved the most when most I feel
There is a lower and a higher!

(*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 43, 339)

Once at Transome Court, Esther cannot help but compare Harold to Felix. She uses the language of thermodynamics, such as light and heat, and its opposite: darkness. Although she recognises that, "there was a light in which Harold was vulgar compared with Felix," her pride causes her to wince "at the idea that Harold should discern what, from his point of view, would seem like a degradation of her taste and refinement" (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 43, 341). From Harold's point of view, a future with Felix is one of inevitable degradation, while from Esther's point of view, it is Harold that is "hopelessly in the dark" (*FH*, Vol. III, Ch. 43, 352).

The epigraph itself is saturated with language that suggests the broad concerns of thermodynamics. The word "decline" suggests both a doubt as to how the future will unfold, and a latent, second-law disorder; while the phrase "far off" (in the first line of the second quoted stanza) anticipates the final lines of *In Memoriam* and suggests there is "one far-off

³⁶⁶ Gold, "The Consolation of Physics," 461.

divine event, / To which the whole creation moves.” Heat death is suffused with a first-law optimism, just as Esther’s break with the past is figured as a positive transformation as opposed to an irrecoverable loss. However, “I felt and feel” also makes “decline” a grammatic pun relating to verbal inflection and offers an approach to conceptualising epigraphs. Epigraphs can be considered inflections of their own: Eliot quoted older texts and adopted older forms, making subtle changes to them or to the ideas contained within them. Through this process of epigraphic replanting, Eliot posits a national future that is rooted in the past but changeable.³⁶⁷

It is now possible to see how the laws of conservation inform the geological aspects of Eliot’s epigraphic form, set out in the introduction to this chapter. Despite the chaos and disorder of Eliot’s mind, she figured its contents in terms of conservation as opposed to waste. In providing us, as readers, with “an assemblage of disjointed specimens,” Eliot asks us to reshape them into a coherent whole. The process emphasises change, not loss, as fragments flow from one form to another. Through her epigraphs, Eliot comes to terms with the possibilities of loss and dissipation inherent to modernisation, but offers hope of conservation and transformation through epigraphic interpretation.

Conclusion

In the introduction to *Felix Holt*, Eliot writes of “some tragic mark of kinship in the one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before, and to the life that is to come after, such as has raised the pity and terror of men ever since they began to discern between will and destiny” (*FH*, *Introduction*, 10). In similar fashion, the epigraphs mark the text. Epigraphs connect the time of narrative to the texts “that went before it” and to debates that, relative to the period in which the novel is set, represent “the life that is to come after.” Indeed, Eliot’s epigraphs shed

³⁶⁷ See Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*.

light on the discourses that she used as models for her fiction but also demonstrate how the epigraphic form itself was able to articulate formal principles that were central to other spheres, such as science, politics, economics, and narrative. Drawing on her own cultural heritage and social advancement, as well as various scientific and political theories, Eliot used epigraphs to address issues of determinism and choice, continuity and change. Her epigraphs sustain a particular model of historical continuity, and of the individual's placement within that continuity; one that is grounded in organicism but also allows for change, chance, and freedom. Through her epigraphs, Eliot replants that which has been uprooted, making new shoots of old growth.

Chapter Five

“Every Detail and its Possible Meaning”: Epigraphs and Choice in *Middlemarch*

“I feel obliged (if unwilling) to mention that I found most of the introductory quotations to each chapter, in various languages, long and (even when in English) incomprehensible. Such quotations were, I assume, written for the reader to slowly cogitate over, whilst looking to the drama ahead and waiting for their undoubted relevance to be revealed. Not only did I find the quotations extremely irritating, but I was really sad to find Ms Stevenson’s rendering of those in Italian, French and German equally so.”³⁶⁸
 —Jill, Review of *Middlemarch*, read by Juliet Stevenson on Audible

In the introduction to the published version of his Cornell lectures, Vladimir Nabokov wrote that, “This complicated physical work upon the book, the very process of learning in terms of space and time what the book is about, this stands between us and artistic appreciation.”³⁶⁹ Unlike a painting, which the beholder can take in all at once before attending to its details, books are linear and their meaning cumulative. A good reader is therefore a re-reader. Though Nabokov did not lecture on George Eliot, her epigraphs are a prime example of the labour and rewards he describes. Their pleasure, although contingent on anticipation, is retrospective in nature. Untangling them requires us to both read forward and think backward: we must allow the epigraphs to infuse our judgements about the narrative, and permit the narrative to colour our inferences about the epigraphs. In the case of allographic epigraphs, we must also be alert to the possible nuances of original context. Through this process, we appreciate how well the groundwork of narrative has been laid, we savour the patterns of significance, or, indeed, we reflect on the limits of our perceptions and conclusions.³⁷⁰ Through epigraphs, what Eliot

³⁶⁸ Juliet Stevenson, Review of “Middlemarch Audiobook,” Audible, <https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/Middlemarch-Audiobook/B004SH6TOW>.

³⁶⁹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (San Diego, California: Harvest, 1982), 3.

³⁷⁰ Vera Tobin’s *The Elements of Surprise: Our Mental Limits and the Satisfactions of Plot* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018) helped me to articulate the demands and rewards of reading epigraphs.

describes as, “[t]hat total missing of each other’s mental track, which is too evidently possible even between persons who are continually thinking of each other,” is made possible for the reader as well.³⁷¹ In this chapter, I first trace Eliot’s debt to Walter Scott. I then use the epigraphs in *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* (1871-1872) to think about sympathy as an exercise in choice, through the lens of prediction, gossip, translation, and emotion. Close attention to the epigraphs reveals the nuances of Eliot’s determinism: to what extent can we shape our own character, and what role does reading have in this equation? Eliot celebrated, as critics have since done, “the capacity of literature to exercise and reinforce our recognition that there are other points of view in the world.”³⁷² Through epigraphs, she attempted to make this recognition a powerful mental habit.

George Eliot and Walter Scott

Given the substantial amount of attention paid by reviewers to the mottoes in *Felix Holt, The Radical* (1866), outlined in the previous chapter, it is somewhat surprising to find so little notice of those in *Middlemarch*. Could it be that Eliot’s nineteenth-century readers, or listeners, found them as ‘incomprehensible’ and ‘irritating’ as some do today? It is more likely that the epigraphs took secondary importance, in terms of critical attention, to the novelty of

³⁷¹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 572; hereafter cited in the text.

³⁷² Elaine Scarry, “Poetry, Injury, and the Ethics of Reading,” in *The Humanities and Public Life*, ed. Peter Brooks and Hilary Jewett (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 42. Other recent work on empathy and sympathy includes: Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* (New York: Norton, 2007); Sophie Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Martha Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (New York: Penguin, 2011). For sympathy and the nineteenth-century novel, see Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Anthem, 2007); and Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-century British Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

the novel's eight-part publication format. Eliot was also by this time accepted, although not always praised, as both a novelist and a poet, having published several poems in the interval between *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch*. In consequence, the 'original mottoes' appear to have been no longer worthy, or less worthy, of note to the reviewer.³⁷³ This is particularly curious given that Eliot redoubled her efforts in both writing and choosing them. She recorded quotations in the Quarry for *Middlemarch* and in her commonplace notebook, some of which became epigraphs; and, unlike *Felix Holt*, to which Eliot added many epigraphs at proof stage, all but one of the epigraphs in *Middlemarch* are present in the original manuscript. "On at least four occasions," observes David Carroll, "it is possible from the manuscript to witness the novelist coming upon the idea for a motto in the course of writing a chapter," which confirms their structural importance.³⁷⁴ While contemporary reviews are silent on the subject of the mottoes, some do concede the novel's placement of "unwonted strain upon [the reader's] intellectual faculties" and observe that, "A reader must often pause and think, and fill in for himself."³⁷⁵ These formulations reveal the work of the novel's epigraphs upon the reader's mind.

³⁷³ It is also the case that there is, to date, no sustained study of epigraphs in *Middlemarch*, but critics who have touched on individual epigraphs include: Reva Stump, *Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959), 173, 201; Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (London, Athlone Press: 1963), 132, 142-43, 193, 225; Bernard Paris, *Experiments in Life* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 39, 49-50; David Hidgon, "George Eliot and the Art of the Epigraph," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 25, no. 2 (September 1970): 127-151; Michael Ginsburg, "Pseudonym, Epigraphs, and Narrative Voice: *Middlemarch* and the Problem of Authorship," *ELH* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 542-58; Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); J. Hillis Miller, *Victorian Subjects* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 229-36; John Plotz, "The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel," *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 405-16; and J. Hillis Miller, *Reading for Our Time: Adam Bede and Middlemarch Revisited* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

³⁷⁴ David Carroll, introduction to *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*, by George Eliot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), lvii.

³⁷⁵ H. Lawrenny [Edith Simcox], "Review of *Middlemarch*," *The Academy* 63 (January 1873): 2; "Review of *Middlemarch*," *The Quarterly Review* 134, no. 268 (April 1873): 346.

From reviewers' comparisons of Eliot to Walter Scott, we can infer that she reminded critics of him in her use of epigraphs.³⁷⁶ "After Chaucer and Shakespeare," writes one critic in *The Quarterly Review*, "no writer can be named who has done so much to nourish British patriotism and that sense of inheritance, which their literature in view of their historic name gives to Englishmen, as Walter Scott. And Eliot follows."³⁷⁷ This acknowledged debt to Scott is important. If, as I argued in the last chapter, Eliot's aborted use of epigraphs in *Romola* (1862-63) could perhaps be traced to Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Rienzi* (1835), her use of epigraphs in *Middlemarch* is an evident gesture to Scott. It is discernible in the form of her epigraphs and in the number of allusions to Scott throughout her novel, including in the epigraphs themselves. The range and eclecticism of Eliot's epigraphs echo Scott's practice of placing border ballads and songs alongside the works of revered British poets. Most of the allographic epigraphs in *Middlemarch* draw upon the British canon (Shakespeare, the Bible and Wordsworth, to name a few) but other sources span several languages (including French, Spanish, Italian, and German), registers, and genres (such as proverbs, ballads and dialogue).³⁷⁸ The epigraphs in *Middlemarch* account for the 'unhistoric' and 'unvisited' as well as the canonical.

In 1871, Eliot was invited to attend the Scott Centenary Festival. "Her veneration for Scott had almost made her resolve to conquer her dislike of crowds," wrote her partner, George Henry Lewes, "and accompany me, among the thousands."³⁷⁹ She later gave up the idea,

³⁷⁶ This was certainly the case when she published *Felix Holt*, with one critic observing that, "[George Eliot] reminds us of Walter Scott in . . . his old-fashioned 'headings' to his chapters." See "Review of *Felix Holt*," *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, no. 137 (August 11, 1866): 508-512.

³⁷⁷ "Review of *Middlemarch*," *The Quarterly Review* 134, no. 268 (April 1873): 339.

³⁷⁸ Scott's epigraphs did not span languages but dialects.

³⁷⁹ George Henry Lewes to Charles Lee Lewis, 26 April 1871, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 7 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-55), 5:144; hereafter cited as *Letters*.

claiming the long journey and the crowds would overwhelm her.³⁸⁰ While she declined the invitation, she described her own admiration for Scott as ‘devout worship’ and *Middlemarch*, which she was at the same time composing, abounds with references to the author: Mr Brook speaks of Scott’s gift for working up comic situations; Mary Garth and her siblings read Scott’s novels, lent to them by Fred Vincy, suggesting Scott provides entertainment for both families; Borthrup Trumbull boasts that he has purchased a superior edition of *Ivanhoe* (1820); and Lydgate tells Rosamond that, “I read so much when I was a lad, that I suppose it will last me all my life. I used to know Scott’s poems by heart” (Book III, Ch. 27, 265).³⁸¹ Although self-congratulatory, Lydgate’s assertion echoes Eliot’s own experience: her childhood reading informed her adult writing. Her epigraphs include passages from John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) and Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1759), which were gifted to her as a child, as well as Pascal’s *Pensées* (1670), which she won as a school prize.³⁸² However, Eliot never quoted Scott in her epigraphs. Perhaps, as mentioned in Chapter 3 of this thesis, his absence confirms her debt to him: to quote him in epigraphs whose form alludes to his work would be redundant.³⁸³

Although Eliot did not attend the Scott Festival, it offered her the chance to reflect on his biographical influence. When Alexander Main wrote to Eliot, expressing how precious her work had been to him, she offered her own worship for Scott as a likeness: “No other writer would serve as a substitute for Scott, and my life at that time would have been much more

³⁸⁰ George Eliot to Mme Eugène Bodichon, 17 June 1871, *Letters*, 5:153.

³⁸¹ “I worship Scott so devoutly that I leaped out foolishly with a consent to go to Edinburgh, feeling that I should have a good happy cry at seeing any honors done to his memory. But I am altogether thankful that the step was not irrevocable. The journey and the fuss would have been intolerable to me.” See George Eliot to Cara Bray, 25 July 1871, *Letters*, 5:170.

³⁸² “Review of *The Life and Letters of George Eliot*,” in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 137, no. 832 (February 1885): 156.

³⁸³ Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117.

difficult without him.”³⁸⁴ It therefore seems fitting that she would dedicate one of *Middlemarch*’s epigraphs to him:

They numbered scarce eight summers when a name
 Rose on their souls and stirred such motions there
 As thrill the buds and shape their hidden frame
 At penetration of the quickening air:
 His name who told of loyal Evan Dhu,
 Of quaint Bradwardine, and Vich Ian Vor,
 Making the little world their childhood knew
 Large with a land of mountain lake and scaur,
 And larger yet with wonder, love, belief
 Toward Scott who living far away
 Sent them this wealth of joy and noble grief.
 The book and they must part, but day by day,
 In lines that thwart like portly spiders ran,
 They wrote the tale, from Tully Veolan.

(Book VI, Ch. 57, 556)

The references in this poetic epigraph are to Scott’s *Waverley*. In the letter to Main, quoted above, Eliot tells him that she began to read Scott when she was seven, providing strong evidence that the epigraph is autobiographical. *Waverley* was lent to Eliot’s older sister Christiana Evans in 1827 and it had to be returned to the neighbour before Eliot had completed it.³⁸⁵ In her epigraph, Eliot reflects on the emotional dimensions of that short-lived reading experience; or what Marcel Proust calls, “that fruitful miracle of a communication in the midst of solitude.”³⁸⁶ Scott’s novel, the epigraph suggests, allowed her mind to travel to “a land of mountain lake and scaur” and to return enlarged. For Proust, this “fruitful miracle of communication” produces in the reader a deep desire for creative action. He calls this the “law of mental optics (a law which perhaps signifies that we can receive the truth from nobody, and

³⁸⁴ George Eliot to Alexander Main, 9 August 1871, *Letters*, 5:175.

³⁸⁵ Edith Simcox, “George Eliot,” *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* 9, no. 51 (May 1881): 779.

³⁸⁶ Marcel Proust, *On Reading*, trans. Jean Autret and William Burford (London: Souvenir Press, 1971), 31.

that we must create it ourselves).”³⁸⁷ Deprived of the novel, Eliot began to write it out as far as she had read it for herself and continued to do so until her surprised parents were moved to get her the book again.³⁸⁸ The pronoun in the epigraph’s couplet is intriguing: “they” implies a co-author, perhaps her sister Christiana. However, it is more tempting to think it was intended for *Brother and Sister*, the sonnet sequence which recreates Eliot’s Warwickshire childhood, and this points to co-authorship with her brother Isaac.³⁸⁹

Scott also figures in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), another work with the relationship of brother and sister relationship at its centre. Maggie tells Philip Wakem that she had once started reading Scott’s *The Pirate* (1822). “I read to where Minna is walking with Cleveland,” she explains, “and I could never get to read the rest. I went on with it in my own head, and I made several endings; but they were all unhappy. I could never make a happy ending out of that beginning.”³⁹⁰ Eliot was much preoccupied by questions of beginnings throughout her career. The epigraph, as I will argue in the last chapter of this thesis, became the form through which she reflected on the nature of beginnings. It is unclear whether she ever finished her own version of *Waverley*. Roland Barthes claims, “to want to write is to want to rewrite,” and, indeed, ideas and motifs present in Eliot’s late novels can be traced back to this particular reading experience.³⁹¹ Eliot’s description of the “lines that thwart like portly spiders ran” echoes *Middlemarch*’s dominant metaphor, the web.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 35.

³⁸⁸ John Walter Cross, *George Eliot’s Life, as Related in her Letters and Journals, Arranged and Edited by her Husband, J. W. Cross* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1885), 16.

³⁸⁹ Thank you to Sally Shuttleworth for pointing out the epigraph’s resemblance to Eliot’s sonnet sequence.

³⁹⁰ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 269.

³⁹¹ Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel, Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France (1978-1979 and 1979-1980)*, ed. Nathalie Léger, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 24-25.

Just as Scott was important to Eliot's development as a writer, his novels offer Eliot's characters a means of narrating their own romantic entanglements. The sonnet on Scott appears at the head of Chapter 57, in which Fred Vincy discovers that Mr Farebrother is also in love with Mary Garth. This is significant because, in Chapter 14, an allusion to Scott is used to hint at Fred's eventual success. When Fred tells Mary that "a woman is never in love with any one she has always known," she responds that, "Minna was still more deeply in love with Cleveland, who was a stranger[, and] Waverley was new to Flora MacIvor; but then she did not fall in love with him" (Book II, Ch. 14, 136). Scott's novels provide them with a shared language, which Mary uses to describe herself to Fred. "Many of us may go around," Elaine Freedgood writes, "with only very partially modified 'lines' from various grubby sources floating around in our silent narratives of ourselves . . . perhaps free indirect discourse is not so much a representation of subjectivity as a representation of the intertextuality of representations of subjectivity, including those we make to ourselves about ourselves."³⁹² If free indirect discourse suggests our self-narration is intertextual, epigraphic quotation suggests our reading of others is also shaped through novelistic form. We encounter Eliot's epigraphic sources as we would other people: given access to a fragment of a life, we are confined to a partial understanding. "[T]he fragment of a life," Eliot reminds us, "is not the sample of an even web" (Book VII, Finale, 818).

The Importance of Context

The difficulty of recognising another's point of view is central to the problems that one encounters when dealing with any work of literature. Readers must engage in acts of

³⁹² Elaine Freedgood, "The Novelist and Her Poor," *Novel* 47, no. 2 (August 2014): 219.

imagination, attempting to reconstruct the voice and intentions of an absent author.³⁹³ In the search for the thinking behind epigraphs, the voice most missed is that of Eliot herself. However, it is possible to infer from her extant writing on quotation how matters such as dependence and sympathy come to bear on her use of epigraphs. For instance, in a letter she wrote to Main in 1873, she pleaded with him:

As to quotations, please — please be very moderate, whether they come from Shakespeare or any other servant of the Muses. A quotation often makes a fine summit to a climax, especially when it comes from some elder author, or from the Bible, so that there is a certain remoteness in the English as if it came from long departed prophets who lived as citizens of the ages that were future to them and had our thoughts before we were born. But I hate a style speckled with quotations.

Nevertheless I enter into what I think is your feeling, that when the consciousness is very full of a particular writer's mode of thought, it is almost a part of rectitude to avow the influence and give a precise quotation rather than melt down the edges and weld the borrowed metal into one's own. I have often, as I daresay you have, experienced a sense of repulsion from a writer who shows an eloquent memory of everything but his own indebtedness.³⁹⁴

The first part of this letter is often quoted as an incongruence: Eliot's own writing is speckled with quotations, all the more so if one takes the epigraphs into account; and Eliot herself made use of "a certain remoteness in the English" in her autographic epigraphs. However, the second half of this passage, less often cited, in part explains this apparent contradiction. There was, as I argue in the previous chapter, an element of self-doubt in Eliot's use of quotation. While she often used quotation and benefited from its cultural capital, she worried about her right to do so. Instead of melting down the "borrowed metal" she used, she set it aside in her margins, alerting us to the way we might "move forward toward a new world while still feeling for the past."³⁹⁵

³⁹³ Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy*, 3.

³⁹⁴ George Eliot to Alexander Main, April 22 1873, *Letters*, 5:404.

³⁹⁵ Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy*, 3.

In writing the letter to Main, quoted above, Eliot was rehearsing an image she had used to describe Dorothea in the opening paragraph of *Middlemarch*; a paragraph which holds the key to understanding how Eliot positioned herself in relation to her own critique of quotation. Her critique is, in fact, not so much about quotation itself as about form. The narrator tells us that:

Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible, — or from one of our elder poets, — in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper.

(Book I, Ch. 1, 7)

In *Middlemarch*, characters' bodies are often figured as texts, reminding us of their fictional status. Mrs Cadwallader, for instance, mocking Casaubon's intellectualism, teases that he is made up of "semicolons and parentheses" as opposed to "good red blood" (Book I, Ch. 8, 69); and Wordsworth is both an epigraphic source and a fellow-student of Mr. Brooke's at Cambridge, with whom Mr. Brooke claims to have once had dinner.³⁹⁶ In this particular passage, Dorothea is set up in contrast to Rosamond, who is later described as a "private album for extracted verse" (Book III, Ch. 27, 262). Price argues that, "[t]he proleptic introduction of Dorothea "by the side of" provincial fashion ten chapters before Rosamond's first appearance establishes not only the interdependence of the two plots, but also the contrast between epigraphs and text, from the very beginning."³⁹⁷ Indeed, the novel makes clear that Dorothea is to Rosamond as epigraph is to prose; a point I will return to in the last section of this chapter. However, rather than emphasise their difference, Eliot's introduction embodies their mutual

³⁹⁶ Elaine Freedgood, *Worlds Enough: The Invention of Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 80.

³⁹⁷ Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 130.

dependence through punctuation: the dashes surrounding the phrase “— or from one of our elder poets, —” are in equal parts differentiating and connective. The newspaper and the common-place book are thus problematic as vehicles of thoughtless reproduction, which do not encourage readers to make these connections.

Eliot’s novels and letters reveal her deep scepticism with regard to both complete assimilation and separatism, which explains at least in part her ambivalent attitude toward Main’s *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot*, first published in 1871 and updated with quotations from each new novel as they appeared. Main included Eliot’s autographic epigraphs in his anthology although most are of limited value as individual poetic or dramatic entities, gathering all of their significance from their relationship to the chapters. Even when Eliot repurposed material in her allographic epigraphs, she relied on its original context to enrich the meaning of her own. This aspect of allusion attracts less attention: we are often more concerned with an author’s use of a passage than we are in the pressure that source exerts on the text. Yet, this is where the power of *Middlemarch* resides: in demonstrating how texts, and lives, impinge on one another.

Epigraphs and Prediction

Eliot never wrote about her use of epigraphic quotation, or other authors’ epigraphs for that matter, but the epigraphs she chose suggest she felt some uneasiness about the practice. Quoted from Sir Thomas Browne’s *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1641), one epigraph in *Middlemarch* states:

It is the humor of many heads to extol the days of their forefathers, and declaim against the wickedness of times present. Which notwithstanding they cannot handsomely do, without the borrowed help and satire of times past; condemning the vices of their own times, by the expressions of vices in times which they commend, which cannot but

argue the community of vice in both. Horace, therefore, Juvenal, and Persius, were no prophets, although their lines did seem to indigitate and point at our times.
(Book V, Ch. 45, 433)

In this passage, Browne illustrates the human impulse to disparage the present in favour of a romanticised past. Using the example of Roman poets and satirists, he comments on the universal truths that endure through literature and the embedded ironies of their survival. This epigraph is as close as Eliot gets to commenting on her use of epigraphs in *Middlemarch*. It demonstrates that she was thinking about her own use of past texts, and the contextual meanings and authorial intentions that might be forgotten in the process of epigraphic quotation. In the chapter itself, Lydgate is criticised by his neighbours for not dispensing drugs and for wanting to perform post-mortem examinations. Quoting Virgil (*experto crede*, or trust the expert), Mr Farebrother cautions him to remain as separable from Bulstrode as possible and to act responsibly with his finances. While the narrative posits experience as a form of knowledge to be passed down through generations, the epigraph reminds us that the same experience might mean two different things to two different people.

The same experience might also mean several different things at several different times. Patricia Spacks claims that re-reading, for instance, “records both the development and the continuity of the self.”³⁹⁸ What do we anticipate, or understand better, the second time through? What mistakes do we make twice? Derek Attridge has written at length about how “literary identity involves both repetition of what is recognised as ‘the same’ and openness to new contexts and hence to change.”³⁹⁹ While the epigraphic novel reproduces “specific words” in “specific arrangement,” the different manifestations of, and the reader’s engagement with,

³⁹⁸ Patricia Spacks, *On Rereading* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 4.

³⁹⁹ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 75; cited in Kate Briggs, *This Little Art* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020), 42-43.

these specific words are non-identical; changed by the new context in which the words have been placed, and through each new reading.⁴⁰⁰

There are a number of epigraphs in *Middlemarch* that recall those in *Felix Holt*, as if Eliot were leading the reader through a cognitive practice that disciplines the mind through repetition. Rae Greiner has argued that, “sympathy requires repeated effort: it is something one must do and do again, and it’s hard work, not the sort of thing on which we want to spend much time.”⁴⁰¹ Perhaps this is why so few read the epigraphs, but also why it is important to do so. Reading epigraphs is a deliberate, reflective, and repetitive act, encouraging readers to read on and then circle back. Through epigraphs, we also feel the influence of Eliot’s previous reading on our own, making epigraphs a kind of re-reading, as well as inciting it.

In *Middlemarch*, courtship and marriage serve as metaphors for intensive and extensive reading, which inhere in form rather than in particular individuals. Eliot writes, for instance, of being acquainted with someone “through the brief entrances and exits of a few imaginative weeks called courtship,” contrasting it with “the continuity of married companionship” (Book II, Ch. 20, 190). Courtship serves as an analogue for the consumption of serialised fiction, and marriage as an analogue for the reading of a novel. In these different forms, Eliot suggests the narrative “will certainly not appear altogether the same” (Book II, Ch. 20, 190). *Middlemarch* was published in eight instalments, twice as long as magazine segments, between December 1871 and December 1872. This format seems to have created a culture of conjecture, in which readers formed expectations based on prior parts.⁴⁰² These readers then blamed the author when their expectations were not met.⁴⁰³ Although Eliot chose the serial form for its commercial

⁴⁰⁰ “These specific words in this specific arrangement.” Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Rae Greiner, “Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel,” *Narrative* 17, no. 3 (2009): 293.

⁴⁰² Carol A. Martin, *George Eliot’s Serial Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 254.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

advantages, she was not pleased with its effect on reading practices. When Main read *Middlemarch*, for instance, Eliot urged him to “Try to keep from forecast of Dorothea’s lot, and that sort of construction beforehand which makes everything that actually happens a disappointment.”⁴⁰⁴

Many Victorian readers expected the eventual union of Dorothea and Lydgate.⁴⁰⁵ The epigraphs, however, would have told them otherwise. Indeed, it is possible to trace the teleological development of Dorothea and Ladislav’s relationship through the reoccurring metaphors of organic process. The first occurs in Chapter 7 of the novel, with Eliot quoting an Italian proverb: “Piacere e popone / Vuol la sua stagione” (Book I, Ch. 7, 62). The facetious epigraph, which translates into “Pleasure and melons / Want the same weather,” serves as an allegory for Dorothea and Casaubon’s courtship. Casaubon looks forward to the “termination” of the courtship, which he sees as a hindrance to be “incurred” in order to “secure” a woman to tend to him in his decline (Book I, Ch. 7, 62). The chapter’s contractual language is evidence of Casaubon’s pragmatic approach to marriage. While the narrator tells us that, “he observed with pleasure that Miss Brooke showed an ardent submissive affection which promised to fulfil his most agreeable previsions of marriage” (Book I, Ch. 7, 62), Eliot’s epigraph foreshadows the failure of this marriage before it has even begun. Through the epigraph, we see Eliot at her most suggestive: the ‘pleasure’ referred to in the epigraph is of a sexual nature. To Casaubon, Dorothea is first and foremost a helpmate, and his work takes precedence over procreation. While both ‘pleasure’ and ‘melons’ require sunshine, Casaubon’s world is getting dimmer. The epigraph anticipates the contrasting descriptions of Casaubon and Will Ladislav: Celia thinks Casaubon has “a smile like pale wintry sunshine,” while Ladislav is described as “an incarnation of the spring whose spirit filled the air” (Book V, Ch. 47, 462). Indeed, the narrator

⁴⁰⁴ George Eliot to Alexander Main, 29 March 1872; *Letters*, 261.

⁴⁰⁵ Martin, *George Eliot’s Serial Fiction*, 252.

writes, “The first impression on seeing Will was one of sunny brightness . . . When he turned his head quickly his hair seemed to shake out light, and some persons thought they saw decided genius in this coruscation. Mr. Casaubon, on the contrary, stood rayless” (Book II, Ch. 21, 203). The reader has not, at this point in the narrative, been introduced to Ladislav. The foreshadowing of his relationship with Dorothea, and Ladislav’s function as a figure of renewal, appear in retrospect.

In its second notice of *Middlemarch*, the *Echo* asked, “Will the benevolently-disposed reader wish that Providence should remove Mr. Casaubon?”⁴⁰⁶ Readers did hope, although Eliot cautioned them not to. In Chapter 47, readers are told that “[Ladislav] did not live in the scenery of such an event, and follow it out, as we all do with that imagined ‘otherwise’ which is our practical heaven” (Book V, Ch. 47, 460). The epigraph, however, suggests that Ladislav’s love requires Casaubon’s death in order to grow, somewhat like the basil plant that “had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man’s brains” (Book VII, Finale, 821). Eliot writes:

Was never true love loved in vain,
 For truest love is highest gain.
 No art can make it: it must spring
 Where elements are fostering.
 So in heaven’s spot and hour
 Springs the little native flower,
 Downward root and upward eye,
 Shapen by the earth and sky.

(Book V, Ch. 47, 459)

The form of the epigraph enacts the sowing of narrative seed. The poem is a single body of text, indented to indicate two stanzas or two halves. The typology, therefore, registers the sense of the final line, of being “shapen by earth and sky,” with spring conjoining both halves of the poem. The figures of repetition cross pairs and halves of lines (“true love loved . . . truest love”;

⁴⁰⁶ *Echo* (January 30, 1872): 2; cited in Martin, *George Eliot’s Serial Fiction*, 264.

“it: it”), as do the rhymes. Words and sounds thus germinate out of what has come before. Indeed, ten chapters prior to this one, Dorothea and Ladislav “[e]ach looked at the other as if they had been two flowers which had opened then and there” (Book IV, Ch. 37, 354), a description which stands in stark contrast to that of Casaubon: “I have been little disposed to gather flowers that would wither in my hand,” he tells Dorothea, “but now I shall pluck them with eagerness, to place them in your bosom” (Book I, Ch. 5, 50). Instead, Dorothea becomes the flower that languishes at Lowick, starved of requisite light and nourishment. Providence did in the end oblige, making Dorothea a widow, but readers persisted in hoping for an alternate ending to the novel.

Dorothea’s marriage to Ladislav was not a spiteful response to readers’ speculations, unwanted as these speculations might have been. Jerome Beaty demonstrates that Dorothea and Ladislav’s union “had been decided upon from the time the very earliest plans for *Middlemarch* were entered in the Quarry.”⁴⁰⁷ The novel’s epigraphic patterning confirms this. Indeed, in the epigraph to Chapter 55, Eliot writes:

Hath she her faults? I would you had them too.
 They are the fruity must of soundest wine;
 Or say, they are regenerating fire
 Such as hath turned the dense black element
 Into a crystal pathway for the sun.

(Book VI, Ch. 55, 534)

The epigraph condenses much of the language used in the novel to describe Dorothea, Casaubon, and Ladislav. In her first marriage, Dorothea is often depicted as shrouded in darkness. This is the condition under which she and Casaubon have their most difficult conversations: sitting up in bed, in the dead of night. In contrast, Ladislav radiates light:

⁴⁰⁷ Jerome Beaty, *Middlemarch from Notebook to Novel: A Study of George Eliot’s Creative Method* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), 88.

“Hence the mere chance of seeing Will occasionally was like a lunette opened in the wall of her prison, giving her a glimpse of the sunny air” (Book IV, Ch. 37, 352). Will, in turn, thinks of Dorothea as a “crystal” which he does not wish to flaw (Book V, Ch. 47, 460). In the chapter to which this epigraph is affixed, Dorothea claims that she will never marry again. The epigraph, however, suggests that Dorothea’s first marriage to Casaubon, “the dense black element,” is part of a causal sequence that will lead to her second marriage to Ladislav, “the sun.” The *Examiner* claimed, “It is not easy to like young Ladislav; one is tempted to think that, in marrying him, Dorothea makes nearly as great a blunder as she did in marrying Mr Casaubon.”⁴⁰⁸ Indeed, the novel’s ending leaves readers with an ambivalent sense of the success of her second marriage. Through her proleptic epigraphs, Eliot demonstrates that, “even our failures are a prophecy.”⁴⁰⁹

Used as summaries, clues, and sometimes major red herrings, epigraphs at once stage and foreclose the competition between author and reader for the unfolding of plot.⁴¹⁰ Hoping to recover her realist endings from her readers’ ideals, Eliot gave readers the freedom to conjecture her beginnings instead. While epigraphs are forward-looking in nature, inviting readers to predict what is to come, the chapter unit delimits their conjectures. It is only on having reached the end of a chapter that readers may admire the groundwork laid in the epigraph or reflect on the failure of their forecasts. Involving readers in complex acts of backwards imagining through epigraphs, Eliot keeps them from imagining too far ahead.

Epigraphs, Gossip, and the Moralities of Attention

⁴⁰⁸ *Examiner* (December 7, 1872): 1204; cited in Martin, *George Eliot’s Serial Fiction*, 253.

⁴⁰⁹ George Eliot, “A Minor Prophet,” *Collected Poems*, ed. Lucien Jenkins (London: Skoob Books, 1989), 40.

⁴¹⁰ Debra Gettelman, “Reverie, Reading, and the Victorian Novel,” PhD diss., University of Harvard, 2005, 149.

Critics have drawn attention to various forms of gossip in *Middlemarch*, although not to the epigraphs, which represent Eliot's most compelling argument for its ethical possibilities.⁴¹¹ Some stories are, in Lydgate's opinion, "much too serious to gossip about" (Book VI, Ch. 59, 586). Such phrasing insinuates that gossip is frivolous at the best of times, operating in the borderlands of sanctioned discourse. Yet, the novel also makes a case for gossip as, what Phyllis Rose calls, "the low-end of the platonic ladder which leads to self-understanding."⁴¹² We want to hear about other people's lives because we want to know how best to live our own. When Dorothea disparages Celia for gossiping with Mrs. Cadwallader, Celia retorts that, "It is better to hear what people say. You see what mistakes you make by taking up notions" (Book I, Ch. 4, 35). Understanding, Celia astutely claims, is often achieved through error. Indeed, as Gérard Genette writes of epigraphs, "one can suspect some authors of positioning some epigraphs hit-and-miss, believing — rightly — that every joining creates meaning and that even the absence of meaning is an impression of meaning."⁴¹³

To understand, characters must listen. Readers must linger and return. The "shallow haste" (Book V, Ch. 53, 508) which Eliot condemns in *Middlemarch* is both a form of attention and a pace of reading. Through shifts in scale, both at the level of the sentence and in its overarching form, the novel makes available entire worlds and existences that would otherwise go unnoticed: the sound of the grass growing and the squirrel's heart beating. From the granular to the cosmic, from the insect kingdom to (what John Plotz terms) the "spiritual half-parallels"

⁴¹¹ For instance, see Maha Jafri, "Stories we like to tell: Gossip in Eliot's Fiction," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 50, no. 2 (2014): 182-195; and Gillian Beer, "Money and Gossip in *Middlemarch*," in *Cahiers Victoriens et Édouardiens* 26 (October 1987): 47-62.

⁴¹² Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (London: Daunt Books, 2020), 6.

⁴¹³ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, ed. Richard Macksey and Michael Sprinker, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 157-58.

of the epigraphs, *Middlemarch* asks us to read the world as we would read the novel: with heightened attention, not semi-detachment.⁴¹⁴

The moralities of attention become clear by contrast. “Mrs Taft,” we are told, “was always counting stitches and gathered her information in misleading fragments caught between the rows of her knitting” (Book III, Ch. 26, 257). If reading can be likened to knitting — and indeed, the novel’s predominant image of the web would have had, for the Victorian reader, strong associations to woven fabric — then epigraphs have their analogue in those misleading fragments of gossip, caught between chapters. Prone to distraction and speculation, readers are liable to the same mistake as Mrs Taft, who “had got it into her head that Mr. Lydgate was a natural son of Bulstrode’s” (Book III, Ch. 26, 257).

Gossip takes several metaphorical shapes in *Middlemarch*: it rings like a bell, spreads like the smell of fire and, like metal, is melted, poured, and moulded. This last metaphor recalls Eliot’s letter to Main, in which she likened quotation to metal: the ethical choice is to “give a precise quotation rather than melt down the edges and weld the borrowed metal into one’s own.”⁴¹⁵ Through this metallurgical metaphor, Eliot calls attention to the relationship between gossip and her own narrative form, which both make use of past stories to construct new ones. In one chapter, for instance, gossip about the New Hospital and its administration spreads throughout Middlemarch; this gossip, we are told, “had a great deal of echo in it, for heaven has taken care that everybody shall not be an originator” (Book V, Ch. 45, 433). The town’s social discourse becomes an echo chamber in which information is repeated, shifting shape as

⁴¹⁴ John Plotz argues that the British provincial novel induces a state of “semi-detachment” through which readers can be both at home and in the world at large, using epigraphs as an example of how *Middlemarch* produces such a state for its readers. For Plotz, epigraphs allow readers to examine the local affairs of the novel from a different historical perspective. He writes that, “[the] epigraphs that lift us away from Lowick to an imagined renaissance scene, the spiritual half-parallels that make Dorothea simultaneously like and unlike St. Theresa, and the insect kingdoms that open beneath her feet . . . all work to remind us that the provinces are in fact like the distant world to which their inhabitants aspire.” Plotz, “The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel,” 405-416.

⁴¹⁵ George Eliot to Alexander Main, April 22 1873, *Letters*, 5:404.

it distances itself from its source. This process is similar to that of the novel, whose epigraphs reinfect past texts.

In both social and novelistic discourse, the origin of voice becomes obscured as meaning is produced at a remove from the point of origin. In the opening of Chapter 41, the narrator asks,

Who shall tell what may be the effect of writing? If it happens to have been cut in stone, though it lie face down-most for ages on a forsaken beach, or “rest quietly under the drums and trappings of many conquests,” it may end by letting us into the secret of usurpations and other scandals gossiped about long empires ago: — this world being apparently a huge whispering-gallery.

(Book IV, Ch. 41, 402)

This passage bears witness to Eliot’s doubts about the effect of her own writing and the possible future interpretations of writing in a general sense. *Middlemarch*, with its constant allusions to past texts, gives readers a strong sense of their ability to persist. Think, for instance, of Bulstrode’s undoing: a small piece of folded paper, fallen within the fender. The passage from Browne’s *Urn Burial* (1658), embedded within the passage quoted above, demonstrates at the level of the sentence how Eliot’s narratives are made from others. However, while the quotation marks indicate that this phrase is what Browne himself called “borrowed help,” the passage also reveals how origins are lost within the “whispering-gallery” that is the epigraphic novel. How many read the epigraphs, and how many fewer follow an epigraph back to its source?

Both gossip and epigraphs create communities of knowledge, raising important questions about the extent to which these communities include or exclude. Sir James Chettam wishes to send Ladislav away, for fear that the town might gossip about him and Dorothea following the disclosure of her husband’s will. Rosamond, once a gossip herself, cowers at the thought of being its subject and wishes to move to London to escape it; and Mr Vincy warns his sister Harriet Bulstrode that “they’ll talk, and nod and wink” (Book IV, Ch. 41, 402) as if the outsider’s perception of her marriage were more important than the actual state of it. Gossip

can both build relationships, emphasising belonging, cooperation, sharing, and loyalty between individuals; it also undermines them.

Epigraphs seem to perform a similar kind of sifting work to that of gossip, inviting knowledgeable and multi-lingual readers into a coterie while excluding others. Susan Stewart, for instance, has argued that, “every allusion . . . is the articulation of a statement of membership” and Freedgood, citing Stewart, interprets the intellectual density of Eliot’s novel as an attempt to control the new, mass public and its reading practices.⁴¹⁶ Janine Barchas goes further, claiming that, “On every level (from naïve to elite) the novel’s use of the epigraph is all about context, rather than text.”⁴¹⁷ By this she means that while the literal meaning of an epigraph can be unlocked through a surface reading, only a familiarity with the larger context of the source from which the epigraph is lifted will reveal the hidden ironies and nuances of meaning. Where does this leave the autographic epigraph, whose meaning exists only in relation to the chapter which it prefaces? I posit instead that Eliot’s epigraphs question all of our reading practices, regardless of class or gender. Epigraphs have little to do with intellectual knowledge but are, instead, an intellectual exercise; one that enables us, as readers, to decide what warrants attention and what does not, and guides us toward perspectives we can either inhabit or let die.⁴¹⁸ “The strongest principle of growth,” as Eliot would later write in *Daniel Deronda* (1872), “lies in the human choice.”⁴¹⁹

The Ethics of Translation

⁴¹⁶ Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 113.

⁴¹⁷ Janine Barchas, “The Title Page,” in *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90.

⁴¹⁸ “Form proves a training ground for sympathetic detachment, guiding readers to take on a variety of perspectives they need not fully inhabit.” Greiner, *Sympathy Time*, 139.

⁴¹⁹ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 499.

In an article “Translations and Translators,” first published in *The Leader* in October 1855, Eliot wrote:

Though a good translator is infinitely below the man who produces good original works, he is infinitely above the man who produces feeble original works. We had meant to say something of the moral qualities especially demanded in the translator — the patience, the rigid fidelity, and the sense of responsibility in interpreting another man’s mind. But we have gossiped on this subject long enough.⁴²⁰

Eliot challenges the belief that translation is an inferior task to writing, without completely undoing the hierarchy between “original works” and translations. She also touches upon the moral qualities demanded of the translator, such as patience in the execution, fidelity to the text, and responsibility to the writer. Translation is more than a linguistic conversion: it is the interpretation of another’s mind. These ethical principles inhere within the technical aspects of translation; it would be difficult to separate the two. Most importantly for understanding *Middlemarch*, Eliot implies the moral qualities are not intrinsic to the translator but “demanded” of him, making the act of translation an exercise through which we might come to better understand others. As Gayatri Spivak argues, “If you are interested in talking about the other, and/or in making a claim to be the other, it is crucial to learn other languages.”⁴²¹ Translation offers us the chance to understand, as well as the instructive experience of failing to understand, of being confused and challenged.

Translation abounds in *Middlemarch*’s epigraphs: Eliot quoted some passages in English and others in their original language; sometimes, she included her own translation. It

⁴²⁰ George Eliot, “Translations and Translators,” in *Translation—Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*, ed. Daniel Weissbort and Astradur Eysteinnsson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 220.

⁴²¹ Gayatri Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2004), 407; cited in Briggs, *This Little Art*, 210.

is unclear why she chose to translate some epigraphs and not others. Perhaps she could reasonably expect her readers to know Italian, French, and German, but regarded a command of Spanish as more unusual; although the Romance languages tend to be mutually intelligible.⁴²² She also performed translations of form, versifying passages of prose and turning verse into dialogue. Epigraphs are themselves a translation, as passages are reinflected through their placement in the novel and with each individual reading. Certainly, interpreting epigraphs is an act of translation, in which the reader must unlock both the epigraph's literal meaning and its conceptual application to the chapter.

The manuscript of *Middlemarch* demonstrates that Eliot conceived of translation as both a linguistic exercise and a philosophical engagement. For the epigraph to Chapter 4, Eliot had originally wanted to use some lines from Goethe's *Faust*, which she transcribed on the verso of the manuscript page: "Ach! unsere Thaten selbst, so gut als unsere Leiden, / Sie hemmen unsere Lebens Gang."⁴²³ This epigraph was subsequently deleted and replaced with the following:

1st *Gent.* Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves.

2d *Gent.* Ay, truly: but I think it is the world
That brings the iron.

(Book I, Ch. 4, 34)

Epigraphs in dialogue, first used in *Felix Holt*, reoccur more frequently in *Middlemarch*, becoming a distinguishing feature of Eliot's prose. Through this dialogical form, Eliot is able to nuance Goethe's formulation. While in *Faust*, "actions" and "sufferings" are given equal weight in the causal system, Eliot separates "the world" (cause) from "deeds" (effect) and gives

⁴²² Eliot had a good reading knowledge of French, Italian, German, Latin and Greek from 1840s, adding Spanish and Hebrew in the 1860s. See Philip Davis, *The Transferred Life of George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 88.

⁴²³ "Alas! our actions equally with our sufferings, clog the course of our lives."

the former precedence over the latter. The 1st *Gent.* makes an opening statement about human agency; the second modifies and secularises this statement in order to account for circumstance. The epigraph makes clear that Eliot subscribed to a form of determinism, believing, as George Levine writes, “the world is rigidly determined, even in cases of human choice, but that man remains responsible for his actions.”⁴²⁴ This epigraph prefaces the chapter in which Dorothea accepts Casaubon’s offer of marriage, following her distressing conversation with Celia about James Chettam’s desire to make her an offer, too. Dorothea is upset — at Celia and at James but, one suspects, mostly at herself. “What was life worth — what great faith was possible,” questions Dorothea, “when the whole effect of one’s actions could be withered up into such parched rubbish as that?” (Book I, Ch. 4, 36). The manuscript indicates that the phrase “the whole effect of” was inserted as a revision. This suggests the importance of the causal chain: in this novel, every action and event has a causal antecedent. While the narrator concedes Dorothea’s “own sad liability to tread in the wrong places” (Book I, Ch. 4, 37), her motives are good: she has a “passionate desire to know and to think, which in the unfriendly mediums of Tipton and Freshitt had issued in crying and red eyelids” (Book I, Ch. 4, 38). Dorothea may have forged her own fetters in agreeing to marry Casaubon but the worlds of Tipton and Freshitt have provided her with the iron. While Eliot remains in Goethe’s conceptual orbit, the translation of his lines into a dialogical form allows Eliot to make room for both Dorothea’s debilitating egoism and her own sympathetic understanding.

Eliot’s approach to translation extended far beyond language and form, into the realm of ideas. Some of Eliot’s epigraphs are, in Isobel Armstrong’s words, “almost better than a

⁴²⁴ This form of determinism is entirely divorced from predeterminism or fatalism. George Levine, “Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot,” *PMLA* 77, no. 3 (June 1962): 269.

translation,” condensing entire philosophical principles into a few lines.⁴²⁵ In the epigraph to Chapter 64, she writes:

1st *Gent.* Where lies the power, there let the blame lie too.
 2d *Gent.* Nay, power is relative; you cannot fright
 The coming pest with border fortresses,
 Or catch your carp with subtle argument.
 All force is twain in one: cause is not cause
 Unless effect be there; and action’s self
 Must needs contain a passive. So command
 Exists but with obedience.

(Book VII, Ch. 64, 634)

The dialogue enacts Hegel’s dialectic of lordship and bondage, a process of mutual recognition, in which the self registers the change that comes about through the interaction of self and other, and both self and other mirror the change in each other.⁴²⁶ When this relationship becomes one-sided, a struggle for freedom against the other’s desire for lordship and exploitation ensues.⁴²⁷ For Hegel, self-consciousness is the desire to possess something, and to transform it, in order to supersede it.⁴²⁸

In *Middlemarch*, these Hegelian power structures are not mapped onto but assimilated into the framework of the bourgeois marriage.⁴²⁹ The epigraph above precedes a chapter in which Rosamond figures herself as the bonded slave, an injured lover struggling for recognition. Feeling she has been misled, she develops an intense determination to hinder her

⁴²⁵ Isobel Armstrong, “George Eliot, Hegel, and *Middlemarch*,” *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 29 (2020), [10.16995/ntn.1992](https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.1992).

⁴²⁶ James Hutchison Stirling, *The Secret of Hegel: Being the Hegelian System in Origin, Principle, Form, and Matter*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), 2:533; cited in Armstrong, “George Eliot, Hegel, and *Middlemarch*.”

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁸ Peter Singer, *Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 57.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.* Armstrong has also looked at the use of Hegel in *Middlemarch*, in relation to the marriages of Dorothea and Casaubon, and Lydgate and Rosamond in particular.

husband's plans for greater household economies. However, this chapter marks a clear turning point in "the slow attrition of [Rosamond's] dissent from him" and a fulfilment of Chapter 12, in which Rosamund describes Lydgate as a man "whom it would be especially delightful to enslave" (Book I, Ch. 12, 115).⁴³⁰ In this chapter, Rosamund becomes despotic, reducing her husband to silence and fear. He begins to feel "his self . . . being narrowed into the miserable isolation of egoistic fears" (Book VII, Ch. 64, 635). The epigraph, however, cautions the reader against holding Rosamond altogether accountable for her husband's bondage. While the epigraph's first speaker conflates power and blame, the second claims that it takes two. Just as "cause is not cause / Unless effect be there," so "command / Exists but with obedience." Wedged between these two phrases is the odd phrase "action's self / Must needs contain a passive," which suggests that the object or person acted upon must accept the action; that there is no pure agency. Indeed, the chapter is equivocal about who has the power. The spouses are stuck in a deadlock: "his will," writes Eliot, "was not a whit stronger than hers" (Book VII, Ch. 64, 635). Both believe in their respective, subjective fictions, and the epigraph demands that we, as readers, do not blame either of them at the expense of the other.

In 1849, as she was translating Spinoza, Eliot wrote to Charles Bray that, "After one has rendered his Latin faithfully into English, one feels that there is another yet more difficult process of translation for the reader to effect, and that the only mode of making Spinoza accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them, and give an analysis."⁴³¹ She was ambivalent about the value of literal translation in making philosophical ideas accessible to a large number and would later find this could be better accomplished through realist narrative. Eliot's epigraphs not only allowed her to condense philosophical principles into a small and engaging form but also to demonstrate how these theories unfold in practice.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ George Eliot to Charles Bray, 4 December 1849, *Letters*, 1:321.

For the readers of *Middlemarch*, as much as for its characters, abstract forces come up against the particulars of life: reconciling both of these on a human scale is the aesthetic challenge of the novel, as well as its ethical principle.

Thinking in Different Directions

The typographical placement of epigraph above chapter would seem to lend itself to a vertical reading, one that proceeds through logic as opposed to intuition, and privileges critical distance.⁴³² For John Plotz, epigraphs are hooks that lift characters up out of the narrow neighbourhood of Lowick and allow readers to reimagine the social world of the novel from a different historical perspective, that of the Renaissance.⁴³³ This may be true of some epigraphs, at least stylistically. However, in terms of narrative form and, indeed, heritage, Eliot's epigraphs tend more toward Greek epigraphy than Elizabethan drama.

The *Middlemarch* notebooks show that Eliot was reading Theocritus at the time she started the introduction to the novel. In her journal, she wrote, "Read Theocritus, Id. 16. Meditated characters for 'Middlemarch'." This same idyll appears in the novel as the epigraph to Chapter 27:

Let the high Muse chant loves Olympian:
We are but mortals, and must sing of man.

(Book III, Ch. 27, 258)

⁴³² Many see critical distance a vital part of sympathetic understanding. For instance see Greiner, "Not Getting to Know You," in *Sympathetic Realism*, 122-40; Plotz, "The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel," 405-16; or Charlie Tyson, "'A being apart': sympathy and distance in *Middlemarch*," *George Eliot Review* 48 (2017): 7-15.

⁴³³ Plotz, "The Semi-Detached Provincial Novel," 412.

In the Berg notebook, she commented: “This Idyll is chiefly admonitory of the need for poets to celebrate heroes.”⁴³⁴ This admonition resonated with Eliot: *Middlemarch*, with its emphasis on ordinariness, and its aversion to traditional forms of heroism, denies permanent identities and taxonomies. The idyll’s ethical mandate is also, on a basic level, the novel’s critical practice. In the *History of European Morals* (1865), William Lecky wrote: “Life is history, not poetry. It consists mainly of little things, rarely illuminated by flashes of great heroism.”⁴³⁵ Despite her criticism of Lecky’s work (she described *The Influence of Rationalism* as “fit to act on the average intelligence”), the eleven pages of notes in the Folger notebook suggest her interest in *European Morals*.⁴³⁶ Indeed, her characters exist in a world similar to the one he describes, made up of little things and small cares. In *Middlemarch*, even the most heroic characters are mere mortals.

The epigraph precedes the novel’s now famous pier-glass parable, in which a candle (the ego) appears to arrange the scratches of a polished steel surface (meant to stand for life’s events) into concentric circles around itself. Rosamond is cited as its prime example, interpreting her brother Fred’s illness as a providential arrangement allowing her to spend time alone with Lydgate. Unlike Ladislaw, who is described as a mortal capable of “divine moments, when love is satisfied in the completeness of the beloved object” (Book IV, Ch. 37, 354), Rosamond is not entirely satisfied with Lydgate: “he seemed to her almost perfect,” writes Eliot, “if he had known his notes so that his enchantment under her music had been less

⁴³⁴ John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt, ed., *George Eliot’s Middlemarch Notebooks: A Transcription* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), xxxiii. This particular Idyll was also copied out, in the original Greek, in her Greek Vocabulary notebook, but this notebook is dated to no earlier than 1872. See Linda K. Hughes, “George Eliot’s ‘Greek Vocabulary’ Notebook (c. 1873) as Commodity and Rare Artefact,” *Cahiers Victorians et Édouardiens* 84 (Fall 2016).

⁴³⁵ William E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1869), 1:204; cited in *George Eliot’s Middlemarch Notebooks*, xli.

⁴³⁶ Eliot, review of “William Lecky’s *The Influence of Rationalism*,” (*Fortnightly Review*, 15 May 1865), reprinted in George Eliot, *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin, 1990), 389; Lecky, *George Eliot’s Middlemarch Notebooks*, xxxix.

like an emotional elephant's . . . she could hardly have mentioned a deficiency in him" (Book III, Ch. 27, 261). This appraisal, made in free indirect discourse, echoes an earlier ironic comment about Rosamond's own singing of popular songs: "mortals must share the fashions of their times, and none but the ancients can be always classical" (Book II, Ch. 16, 158).⁴³⁷ The epigraph revives the novel's proleptic introduction in that it too relies on the unstated contrast between Rosamond, the mortal who must sing of man, and Dorothea, the muse. To Ladislaw, presented in the narrative as a sun God, Dorothea is the perfect embodiment of art and music: a poem; while Rosamond is the vacuous "private album for extracted verse" (Book III, Ch. 27, 262).⁴³⁸

Mortality in *Middlemarch* is both a narratological device and a mode of relation. The phrases "fellow-mortal," "[w]e mortals, men and women," and "we male and female mortals," encompass character, narrator, and reader alike, and are used to incite sympathy. Although a "poor mortal" to the narrator, Dorothea is, to Rosamond, "one of those county divinities not mixing with Middlemarch mortality" (Book V, Ch. 43, 424). The narrator also tells us that, "The country gentry of old time lived in a rarefied social air: dotted apart on their station up the mountain they looked down with imperfect discrimination on the belts of thicker life below. And Dorothea was not at ease in the perspective and chillness of that height" (Book IV, Ch. 34, 318). These passages comment obliquely on epigraphs whose "impressiveness" (Book I, Ch. 1, 7) also depends on their placement above and at a distance from the narrative.

Eliot, like Dorothea, was self-conscious about the realist viewpoint as a position of enlightened spectatorship. In *On Sympathy*, Ratcliffe observes that,

⁴³⁷ An observation made by Lesley Gordon, "George Eliot and Theocritus," *George Eliot - George Henry Lewes Studies*, no. 26/27 (September 1994): 6.

⁴³⁸ When Dorothea tells Ladislaw "I am sure I could never produce a poem," he responds, "You *are* a poem" (Book II, Ch. 22, 218).

writers wrestle with [the difficulties of sympathising with others] by playing up, and playing with, their roles as author-as-god. But their interest in textual allusion always brings them down to earth. They are continually aware of the ways in which humans may catch or miss another's meanings in life, thus 'failing' to acknowledge the other.⁴³⁹

For Ratcliffe, the self-other relation is largely a matter of point of view. While textual allusion in Browning, Beckett, and Auden (the subjects of Ratcliffe's study) reorients them downward, Eliot's epigraphs position her above the narrative, foregrounding the implicit relationship of realist author to the world of her novel: what Athanassia Williamson calls "not extra- but supra-diegetic."⁴⁴⁰ Hovering above the chapter in oracular fashion, the epigraph also seems to belong outside the diegesis. However, instead of viewing the novel as a series of "box-like partitions" (Book II, Ch. 22, 206) or "pigeon-holes" (Book I, Ch. 1, 19), the reader is invited to enact the integration of epigraph into narrative in order to achieve a wider vision. With its wide range of interpretative possibilities, the epigraph offered Eliot the opportunity to subvert the assumptions of the realist narrator's singular perspective, even when omniscient.⁴⁴¹

Reading epigraphs requires a great deal more lateral thinking than the page might suggest.⁴⁴² The epigraph is often proleptic, its meaning nonsequential. It offers readers different choices and permits them to adopt multiple perspectives. The challenge of interpreting epigraphs, of tracing their connections to other authors and modes of thought, models the difficulties of understanding others. This is an intellectual process: sympathy, as Greiner

⁴³⁹ Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy*, 66.

⁴⁴⁰ Athanassia Williamson, "Against Egology: Ethics and Style in George Eliot and Emmanuel Levinas," *George Eliot Review* 48 (2017): 33.

⁴⁴¹ Adela Pinch argues that Eliot plays with the rules governing narrative perspective in order to represent a variety of mental experiences. See Adela Pinch, *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 175.

⁴⁴² Shuttleworth observes how strands between narrative and characters are taken up laterally: "Chapters move either linearly, connecting various strands of plot through an extended chain of characters' opinions about each other, or laterally, from a larger social issue to its effects upon the thoughts and reflections of a single life." See *Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, 148. Hillis Miller encourages the reader to practice "the sort of lateral transfer that Eliot calls 'parabolic'." See Hillis Miller, *Reading for Our Time*, 169.

argues, is formal. There is, however, as Eliot writes in *Adam Bede* (1859), “[a] difference between the impression a man makes on you when you walk by his side in familiar talk, or look at him in his home, and the figure he makes when seen from a lofty historical level, or even in the eyes of a critical neighbour who thinks of him as an embodied system or opinion rather than as a man.”⁴⁴³ Epigraphs provide readers with historical perspectives and theories in which to ground their understanding of character or plot; but narrative moves readers, enabling them to experience and imagine more fully. In order to make sympathy a mental habit, rather than a cognitive exercise, readers must bridge the divide between epigraph and narrative, thought and emotion. Epigraphs are, after all, relational: without the chapter as counterpart, an epigraph is just a quotation.

The characters in *Middlemarch* are often depicted crying; Dorothea, with notable frequency. There are 55 mentions of tears in the narrative, 35 mentions of sobbing, and 15 mentions of crying. One of these passages is particularly interesting because the manuscript indicates careful deliberation over its phrasing. In Chapter 73, Dorothea is described in the novel as “looking [at Celia] through the prism of her tears,” but she was originally, in the manuscript, looking at her through the *prison* of her tears (Book VIII, Ch. 72, 726).⁴⁴⁴ Problems of interpretation are registered through emotion: although whether the prism clarifies or distorts is unclear. In Ecclesiastes, for instance, we are told that “Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.”⁴⁴⁵

We might think of crying as mere physiological expression but Thomas Dixon, historian of emotion, reminds us of its intellectual, moral, and imaginative aspects. Weeping

⁴⁴³ George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 64.

⁴⁴⁴ David Carroll, notes to *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 726.

⁴⁴⁵ Ecclesiastes 7:3.

itself is embodied thought.⁴⁴⁶ “Tears are intellectual things,” Dixon writes, “because they are brought about by cognitive representations of the world possessing certain qualities.”⁴⁴⁷ In other words, emotion is a matter of judgement; often moral judgement.⁴⁴⁸ In Chapter 80, Dorothea is surprised to find Ladislav and Rosamond alone together, and believes Ladislav has betrayed her. Seeking an embodiment of “the mysterious incorporeal might of her anguish” (Book VIII, Ch. 80, 775), Dorothea sobs herself to sleep on the floor of her bedroom. Dorothea is intentional in her emotion. “She began now to live through that yesterday morning deliberately again,” writes Eliot, “forcing herself to dwell on every detail and its possible meaning” (Book VIII, Ch. 80, 776). To re-live, to re-read, to dwell on every detail and its possible meaning: this is the kind of embodied experience that Eliot’s epigraphic novel allows. Further, if emotions are judgments that can be defused through an identification of their cause, it is clear that our emotions are in a sense our own doing, and that we are responsible for them.⁴⁴⁹

Rosamond perhaps serves as a limiting test-case. Although Lydgate instructs her not to, she tells Ladislav about the codicil in Mr Casaubon’s will, which prohibits Dorothea from marrying Ladislav unless she forfeits her property. Nothing else being available to her imagination, Rosamond filters Ladislav’s experience through the romantic clichés of her reading: “— and then — and then — and then,” she falters, “oh, I have no doubt the end will be thoroughly romantic” (Book VI, Ch. 59, 586). Despite her satisfaction with her own imaginings, the narrative suggests Rosamond needs more, and more complex, plots. We all do,

⁴⁴⁶ Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 146-7.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Robert Solomon, “Emotions and Choice,” in *Not Passion’s Slave: Emotions and Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7-8.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 10.

which is why novels like *Middlemarch* provide us with epigraphs that multiply our interpretative choices.

In the manuscript, it is possible to see that Eliot had thought of using the following sentence, “She was pink and smiling: no eyes could see the pale-lipped aerial fury whispering in her ear,” in order to further describe Rosamond’s gossiping.⁴⁵⁰ Instead, Eliot deleted this sentence and composed the following epigraph at the head of the chapter:

They said of old the Soul had human shape,
But smaller, subtler than the fleshly self,
So wandered forth for airing when it pleased.
And see! beside her cherub-face there floats
A pale-lipped form aerial whispering
Its promptings in that little shell her ear.

(Book VI, Ch. 59, 585)

Turning “the pale-lipped aerial fury” into “[a] pale-lipped form aerial,” Eliot softened the depiction of Rosamond as vengeance personified. Still, Rosamond’s soul is so assertive as to be given, like the ideas in her mind, “a more solid kind of existence” (Book III, Ch. 27, 255). It remains an aerial creature, pale-lipped from strong emotion. In the chapter itself, Rosamond is unable to exert cognitive control. The narrator claims that, “her mind would act in urging her to speak” (Book VI, Ch. 59, 586) and that her “egoism” is “capable of impelling action as well as speech” (Book VI, Ch. 59, 587). Rosamond is so self-absorbed that her ego takes on a life of its own.

Do we choose our emotions? Can we hold Rosamond responsible for her jealousy? Robert Solomon claims that, “The suggestion sounds odd because emotions are typically considered occurrences that happen to us.”⁴⁵¹ *Middlemarch* is unusual in its position that

⁴⁵⁰ The image is arguably Biblical. In Ecclesiastes, gossip is forbidden and readers are warned that “a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.” Rosamond herself claims, “I have a confidential little bird.” See Ecclesiastes 10:20.

⁴⁵¹ Solomon, “Emotions and Choice,” 3.

emotions are rational: in this novel, emotions are much like actions, and can be chosen as one would choose a course of action. The problem is not that Rosamond doesn't think. In fact, she thinks too much, assimilating all other minds and plots into her own. This, argues Greiner, is what keeps her, and other characters with similar narratorial prowess, from being able to have sympathetic encounters. "Eliot's portrayal of characters bereft of sympathy," she writes, "who haven't the power to give or receive it, suggests that fellowship with others depends on our being able to think "along with" them without falling helplessly susceptible to their thoughts."⁴⁵² It also depends on our ability to witness our own thoughts without becoming, as Rosamond does, a slave to them. In this novel, learning how to think is actually learning how to exercise control over what we think. This is both the freedom, and the difficulty, of a novel like *Middlemarch*: the reader gets to decide what has meaning and what doesn't.⁴⁵³

Conclusion

In 1856, Eliot published an article entitled "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," in which she criticised the aims and moral visions of novels written by some of her female contemporaries. In this article, she remarked:

The finest effort to reanimate the past is of course only approximative — is always more or less an infusion of the modern spirit into the ancient form, —

Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst,
Das ist im Grund der Herren eigner Geist,
In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Greiner, *Sympathy Time*, 139.

⁴⁵³ David Foster Wallace's *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life* (New York: Little, 2009) helped me to think about the ways in which reading, specifically, might train us to exercise this kind of cognitive control. In the same vein, Reiner writes of sympathy as "a cognitive exercise with strong affinities to intentionality and will." See the introduction to Reiner, *Sympathetic Realism*, 1.

⁴⁵⁴ From Goethe's *Faust*, Part I, 'Nacht', 577-9. A.S. Byatt translates these lines as: "What you call the spirit of the age / Is but the Critic's spirit, in whose page / The age itself is darkly glassed."

Admitted that genius which has familiarised itself with all the relics of an ancient period can sometimes, by the force of its sympathetic divination, restore the missing notes in the ‘music of humanity’, and reconstruct the fragments into a whole which will really bring the remote past nearer to us, and interpret it to our duller apprehension, — this form of imaginative power must always be among the very rarest, because it demands as much accurate and minute knowledge as creative vigour.⁴⁵⁵

In this passage, Eliot points to the fact that criticism often says more about the historical period at the time of writing, “the modern spirit,” than about the “ancient period” in question. It also serves as an apt description of *Middlemarch*’s epigraphic project: an attempt to reanimate relics and fragments of an ancient past, to interpret them for the modern age and to reconstruct them into an organic whole. What this passage does not account for is the “imaginative power” required of the reader in this process.

While in “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” Eliot claims that “a really cultured woman . . . does not give you information, which is the raw material of culture, — she gives you sympathy, which is its subtlest essence,” this chapter has demonstrated that, in fact, Eliot used the raw material of culture to populate the margins of her novel.⁴⁵⁶ Her epigraphs, in turn, became a vehicle for sympathy, a model for the difficulties of understanding both others and oneself. In the novel, as in life, understanding is never straightforward and often fails. However, through equal parts “accurate and minute knowledge” and “creative vigour,” Eliot’s epigraphs suggest readers might come to a more sympathetic understanding of the narrative, of others, and of oneself.

Through both human and textual encounter, *Middlemarch* seeks to shape our individual ethics. The novel is attuned to both the “tears, prickles” of reading, and the mental operations

⁴⁵⁵ Eliot, “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” (*Westminster Review*, October 1856), reprinted in *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, 159.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

involved in reading, “including the formulation of complete thoughts, the performing and regretting of acts of judgement, the following and making of causal sequences.”⁴⁵⁷ Eliot’s epigraphs give us, as readers, the freedom to speculate, to gossip, to translate, and, indeed, to feel. She lets us decide what has meaning and what doesn’t. She teaches us to read between the lines. She asks us to linger in the blank space between epigraph and narrative, between one mind and another, and to be comfortable there. Most of all, she hopes we will return.

⁴⁵⁷ Stanley Fish, “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1970): 141; cited in Ratcliffe, *On Sympathy*, 215.

Chapter Six

“An Inordinate Number of Words”: Epigraphs and Contingency in *Daniel Deronda*

“The mysterious sentences, snatched from an unknown context, — like strange horns of beasts, and leaves of unknown plants, brought from some far-off region gave boundless scope to her imagination, and were all the more fascinating because they were in a peculiar tongue of their own, which she could learn to interpret. It was really very interesting, the Latin Grammar that Tom had said no girls could learn; and she was proud because she found it interesting.”⁴⁵⁸

George Eliot thus describes a young Maggie Tulliver poring over her brother’s book of Latin Grammar. Though *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) contains no chapter epigraphs, the extent to which this passage anticipates their use, their labour, and their function, is striking. As a writer, Eliot professed scepticism regarding the use of quotations, claiming to “hate a style speckled” with them.⁴⁵⁹ However, as the epigraph above suggests, she also delighted in their imaginative and interpretative possibilities. Like Maggie, she found them “so absorbing” and took pleasure in their power to transport the reader’s imagination beyond the boundaries of the page.⁴⁶⁰ Most importantly, she recognised their paratactic potential: by setting texts alongside each other, Eliot invites the reader into a “great deal of pleasant conjecture” and to make connections between them. In her novels, epigraphs are in “a peculiar tongue” the reader must learn to interpret, rather than a tool for the efficient communication of information.⁴⁶¹ The author becomes a travelling naturalist, who has brought back fragments from foreign lands to intrigue, amuse, and educate the reader. Reading epigraphs is figured both as an experience (the reader

⁴⁵⁸ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 130.

⁴⁵⁹ George Eliot to Alexander Main, April 27 1873, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 7 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-55), 5:404; hereafter cited as *Letters*.

⁴⁶⁰ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 130.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

travels beyond the boundaries of the narrative) and as an experiment (the reader must speculate on the meaning of an epigraph and must readjust her expectations once she has read the chapter). It is also gendered. In *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Gwendolen claims that, “women can’t go in search of adventures — to find out the North-West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we grow.”⁴⁶² Perhaps Eliot sought to bring a sense of adventure to the page, refusing to institutionalise cultural exclusion based on sexual difference, as Tom Tulliver would have it. The phrases “strange horns of beasts” and “leaves of unknown plants” evoke different textures, from smooth bone to rough leaf. By implication, language can be apprehended through intuition, even haptic perception: the reader is invited to feel her way among the mysterious sentences in order to decipher them.

By the time Eliot published *Daniel Deronda*, her epigraphs had grown substantially, both in number and in length. Just as modern readers have described the epigraphs in *Middlemarch* as “long,” “incomprehensible,” and “irritating,” past readers found the epigraphs in *Daniel Deronda* tiresome.⁴⁶³ “Instead of increasing our admiration for the book,” one anonymous reviewer wrote in *The Spectator*, “[they] rather overweight and perplex it.”⁴⁶⁴ Perhaps Alexander Main’s *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot* (1871), which had gone through two editions by the time *Daniel Deronda* was published, was also having an effect on public perceptions of the epigraphs.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶² George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 119; hereafter cited in the text.

⁴⁶³ See the epigraph to the previous chapter of this thesis, taken from a review of the audiobook version of *Middlemarch*. Juliet Stevenson, Review of “Middlemarch Audiobook,” Audible, <https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/Middlemarch-Audiobook/B004SH6TOW>.

⁴⁶⁴ “Review of *Daniel Deronda*,” *The Spectator* (September 1876): 1131.

⁴⁶⁵ The first edition appeared at Christmas 1871; new editions followed in 1873, 1878, and 1880, updated to include passages from each new novel. *The Wit and Wisdom of George Eliot* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873) reproduced a shorter selection from Main’s *Sayings*.

Eliot herself wrote to Main that, “it would have been better not to have made the volume of ‘Sayings’ quite so bulky.”⁴⁶⁶

A.V Dicey, writing for *Nation*, was ambivalent at best, claiming *Daniel Deronda*’s epigraphs in turn ‘adorned’ and ‘defaced’ the chapters. He stated that:

anyone who doubts that the long-winded reflections taken from the commonplace book or the unpublished works of George Eliot afford examples of the way in which a statement that has meaning may be overloaded by the conceits in which it is expressed, should examine carefully the motto to the first chapter, and consider honestly whether a rather commonplace sentiment is not beaten out into an inordinate number of words.⁴⁶⁷

The long prose epigraph Dicey refers to in his review relates to the arbitrary nature of all beginnings. Eliot writes:

Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars’ unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backward as well as forward, divides his unit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off *in medias res*. No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in heaven or on earth, it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out.

(Vol. I, Book I, Ch. 1, 3)

Epigraphs illuminate the difficulty of deciding where a narrative actually ‘begins’. They raise questions about the extent to which beginnings establish the parameters of what will follow, and whether endings determine how we retroactively understand beginnings. The epigraph to Chapter 1 enacts its own assertion: the generalisation that “[m]en can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning” becomes true of the novel’s readers. The reader must start with

⁴⁶⁶ George Eliot to Alexander Main, 4 December 1877, *Letters* 6:432.

⁴⁶⁷ A. V. Dicey, “Review of *Daniel Deronda*,” *Nation* (October 19, 1876), in *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge, 1995), 401.

this make-believe beginning, which gives the novel's first paragraph, and its famous opening line, "Was she beautiful or not beautiful?" (Vol. I, Book I, Ch. 1, 3), its full significance. The epigraph calls attention to itself as 'a make-believe of a beginning' through its marginal placement — paratext and text both have their own beginnings — and through its own fictional construct. The epigraph subsumes its literary references, thus making an implicit comment about the derivative nature of literature, and the inescapability of literary precedence. As Hugo Mallinger observes in the narrative, "One couldn't carry on life comfortably without a little blindness to the fact that everything has been said better than we can put it ourselves" (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 16, 161). (This, of course, does not preclude anyone from trying.)

In the opening paragraphs of *Daniel Deronda*, the precise two o'clock "[o]n the first of September, in the memorable year 1832" of *Felix Holt* has given way to a vague "near four o'clock on a September day" (Vol. I, Book I, Ch. 1, 3).⁴⁶⁸ While in *Middlemarch* Eliot expected her reader to know what "kind of beauty" Dorothea possesses, she now requires the reader to make aesthetic judgements. "Was she beautiful or not beautiful?" is, arguably, the novel's first sentence (Vol. I, Book I, Ch. 1, 3).⁴⁶⁹ Certainly, it is the narrative's first sentence. As we have already seen, her use of a prose epigraph as the opening to the first chapter leaves the true start open to debate. Such indeterminacy gave readers a sense of the novel having multiple possible outcomes. Readers were then frustrated when Eliot did not fulfil their expectations of the narrative. This response disappointed her, although it did not come as a complete surprise; she knew that the 'Jewish' part of the novel would not please all readers.

The novel's characters express a similar disappointment to that of Eliot's readers, as if they also refused to accept the directions embedded within the text. Gwendolen thinks of herself as, "a banished soul — beholding a possible life which she had sinned herself away

⁴⁶⁸ George Eliot, *Felix Holt, The Radical*, ed. Fred C. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1980), 13.

⁴⁶⁹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 7.

from” (Vol. IV, Book VII, Ch. 57, 653), while Daniel struggles not to resent his uncle for withholding information about his childhood. The narrator describes it as, “that futile sort of wishing — if only things could have been a little otherwise then, so as to have been greatly otherwise after!” (Vol. I, Book I, Ch. 7, 61).⁴⁷⁰ The wishing is futile because the plot has already been written. As Gillian Beer explains: “The future we are about to read has already been inscribed by author and experienced by characters. Language is reified as book.”⁴⁷¹

The notion of chance is similarly compromised within the novel. “[I]f events unfold in chapters, according to scripted narrative,” writes Jesse Molesworth, “they can hardly be said to happen by chance.”⁴⁷² Contingency, or *kontinge*, is often used as a synonym for chance but, for philosophers, it is a term used to describe “objects within the horizon of possible variations.”⁴⁷³ Its defining feature, explains Christina Lupton, “lies in the suggestion that things that have already happened might have been otherwise.”⁴⁷⁴ It differs from chance in the way it is situated in time, and can be modelled through language and form. “It’s because things have happened one way (past tense),” she writes, “that we see they might have happened in another.”⁴⁷⁵ Eliot could not altogether eliminate the “futile wishing” of her readers so, instead, used epigraphs to make contingency a part of her realist project.

⁴⁷⁰ For Andrew Miller, this statement is evidence of George Eliot’s own preoccupation with the “bitter resentment . . . of our unrealized selves.” See Andrew Miller, “Lives Unled in Realist Fiction,” *Representations* 98, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 122-23.

⁴⁷¹ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 172.

⁴⁷² Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 193.

⁴⁷³ Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz, Jr. and Dirk Baekne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 106.

⁴⁷⁴ Christina Lupton, “Literature and Contingency,” *Textual Practice: Literature and Contingency* 32, no. 3 (2018): 375.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Each epigraph carries a particular meaning and purpose, assigned to it by authorial design; but the form itself grants the reader a flexible mode of access to that meaning. It offers a process of selection, contingent in that it “draws on a reservoir of other, non-actualized possibilities.”⁴⁷⁶ In this chapter, I argue for the epigraph as the medium through which Eliot models contingency. The first section has for its focus the influence of Laurence Sterne on *Daniel Deronda*’s fragmented and digressive form. In the second section, I draw out Eliot’s debt to La Rochefoucauld, and demonstrate how she transformed the maxim into a site of play, as well as of resistance to masculine authority. I then examine the significance of the Promethean allusions that reoccur in the novel’s autographic epigraphs, relating them to the contingencies of the novel’s reception. In the next section, I turn to the novel’s poetic, allographic epigraphs; I suggest that, in recognising contingency, Eliot was able to reconcile free choice and determinism. The final section considers the allographic epigraphs quoted from various traditions of philosophical and religious writing, through which Eliot foregrounds the contingencies of interpretation. In all of these arguments, the epigraph comes into focus as a means of performing the underdetermination of real life within the strictures of novelistic representation.

George Eliot and Laurence Sterne

Although *Daniel Deronda*’s first epigraph disavows beginnings, the past plays a crucial part in this novel. Dicey was not the only reviewer to take special notice of the novel’s first epigraph. An anonymous reviewer for *The Scotsman* also singled it out:

⁴⁷⁶ David E. Wellbery, “Contingency,” in *Neverending Stories: Toward a Critical Narratology*, ed. Ingeborg Hoesterey, Ann Clark Fehn, and Maria Tatar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 249; quoted in Christina Lupton, “Contingency, Codex, the Eighteenth-Century Novel,” *ELH* 81, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 1174.

In the somewhat enigmatical motto prefixed to the first chapter it is indicated that neither a story nor anything else can be truly begun at the beginning; that a starting-point, where ever chosen, must be arbitrary; and so as it is, we presume, no longer permissible to adopt a *Tristram Shandy* method, we have Gwendolen starting forth, as Minerva did from the head of Jove, fully equipped.⁴⁷⁷

This passage suggests that *Daniel Deronda*'s daring first chapter attempted to circumvent Victorian propriety, which precluded writing about sex. What the reviewer would not have known is that Eliot, in her preparation for *Daniel Deronda*, turned to *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67) as one of the earliest novels to deal with the arbitrary nature of beginnings. *Tristram Shandy* appears under Eliot's list of what she'd 'Read since September 1872' in the form of a quotation from the novel, and in her 'Catena of Novelists' (catena being a chain or connected series) in the Pforzheimer Notebook. Lewes also records in his diary that Eliot began reading *Tristram Shandy* aloud on January 13 1873, and that she continued reading it for the next month.⁴⁷⁸

The novel seems to have served as an example for Eliot's own ambitious form. "[T]he moment of conception that starts the novel, putting into play the events that compose Tristram's life," writes Lupton, "points to all the infinite possibilities of conception, and thus all the other novels, that might well have begun in the Shandy household."⁴⁷⁹ The comedy of *Tristram Shandy* is that it can't get past its own beginning, a postponement that Edward Said has described as "a kind of encyclopaedic, meaningful playfulness."⁴⁸⁰ While *Daniel Deronda* purports to begin *in medias res*, the use of the epigraph is itself an investigation of beginnings. It also "delays one sort of action for the sake of undertaking another."⁴⁸¹ The novel's epigraphs

⁴⁷⁷ "George Eliot's New Novel," *The Scotsman* (January 29, 1876): 7.

⁴⁷⁸ See *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, ed. Jane Irwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 218; 244.

⁴⁷⁹ Lupton, "Contingency, Codex, the Eighteenth-Century Novel," 1177.

⁴⁸⁰ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 44.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

are often followed by aphorisms, which are followed by narrative, so that the chapters give the impression of beginning, and then beginning again, and again.

In a short piece titled ‘Story-telling’, first published posthumously in *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook* (1884), Eliot defends Sterne: “Why should a story not be told in the most irregular fashion that an author’s idiosyncrasy may prompt, provided that he gives us what we can enjoy?” she asked. “The dear public would do well to reflect that they are often bored from the want of flexibility in their own minds.”⁴⁸² In this piece, she reflects on the possible orders of narration, comparing early poetry and its way of “telling a daring deed, a glorious achievement, without caring for what went before” (exploiting the ‘in medias res’ she references in *Daniel Deronda*’s first epigraph) to the novel and its preference for the ‘ab ovo’.⁴⁸³ While the latter has its merits, she concludes that, “[t]he only stories life presents to us in an orderly way are those of our autobiography.”⁴⁸⁴ In other words, we chose to construct autobiography in a linear fashion because this is how we chose to make sense of our life. Life itself is not linear, but we impose retrospective order upon it, which is why it is so difficult to determine a beginning. Fiction, however, relies on the incompleteness of information.

While it is difficult to date these ‘leaves from a notebook’, the editor of the volume places them at some time between the publications of *Middlemarch* and *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879). What has gone unnoticed is that, in ‘Story-telling’, Eliot is working through the same sets of ideas that she expresses in *Daniel Deronda*’s first epigraph. For Sterne, digression allowed a more precise description of real life than the chronological. “A life’s plot so often escaped the person who was living it,” explains Adam Thirlwell, “What was a true

⁴⁸² George Eliot, *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, ed. Charles Lee Lewes (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1884), 371.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

cause, and what was an imaginary one?”⁴⁸⁵ This is a similar question to that posed in *Daniel Deronda*, whose narrative is not in chronological order. The result is such that, as Hilary Schor demonstrates, “[o]nly well into the middle of the novel [when Daniel and Gwendolen meet for the first time] are we in a position to understand the book’s beginning.”⁴⁸⁶ Note how similar this is to the nature of epigraphs, whose meaning is speculative at best until the end of a chapter or, in some cases, the end of a novel. These beginnings, in need of narrative and explanation, are therefore not beginnings at all, but sites of possibility.

While *Tristram Shandy* and *Daniel Deronda* present different models of psychology, they are unified around similar central themes and make use of the same formal tactics, including unstable chronologies, digressions, and fragments. In fact, one of *Tristram Shandy*’s earliest critics suggested the novel “has more of the air of a collection of fragments, than of a regular work.”⁴⁸⁷ Elizabeth W. Harries reads Sterne’s use of the fragment within a liturgical framework that pervaded his life and thought. “[T]he fragmentary for Sterne always had Biblical overtones,” she writes, “overtones that suggested the importance of the fragment as a gesture toward a greater fullness and as a reminder of a more perfect communion.”⁴⁸⁸ Given that Eliot used spiritual and religious writing to populate the margins *Daniel Deronda*, this context can also help us examine her use of the fragment.

Eliot used Sterne as the source for the first epigraph of the second volume of *Daniel Deronda*, quoting not from *Tristram Shandy* but from *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768): “I pity the man who can travel from Dan to Beersheba, and say, “’Tis all

⁴⁸⁵ Adam Thirlwell, *Miss Herbert* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 170.

⁴⁸⁶ Hilary M. Schor, “The Make-Believe of a Middle: On (Not) Knowing Where You Are in *Daniel Deronda*,” in *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. Caroline Levine and Mario Ortiz-Robles (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 49.

⁴⁸⁷ John Ferriar, *Illustrations of Sterne* (New York: Garland, 1971), 4.

⁴⁸⁸ Elizabeth Harries, “Sterne’s Novels: Gathering Up the Fragments,” *ELH* 49, no. 1 (1982): 47.

barren;” and so it is: and so is all the world to him who will not cultivate the fruits it offers” (Vol. II, Book III, Ch. 19, 189). In a letter in which Sterne discussed this novel, he wrote, “My design in it was to teach us to love the world and our fellow creatures better than we do.”⁴⁸⁹ This is not far off from Eliot’s own belief in the power of literature to extend our sympathies, although Sterne’s position is sentimental whereas Eliot’s position is moral. While Sterne was celebrated for his “preacher’s enthusiasm and conviction,” Eliot was accused of too much preaching and too little humour.⁴⁹⁰ Indeed, overt continuities between epigraph and chapter suggest that the relation between both might be likened to the exegesis of a religious text. Yet, this is just one aspect of Eliot’s diverse practice. The use of *A Sentimental Journey*, which is full of sexual subtext, suggests an Eliot more mischievous than we often give her credit for. Sterne’s anthologists had a hard time extracting passages from this novel because of its subtext. As Thirlwell notes, “it is not easy, turning an unserious novel into a serious extract.”⁴⁹¹

Eliot’s novels, on the other hand, lend themselves to excerption. Leah Price has argued that, following Main’s *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings*, the first edition of which was published in 1871, Eliot began to write in anticipation of excerption, which contributed to what has been seen as the sententiousness of her last novel.⁴⁹² While Eliot’s earlier novels offered ‘sententious’ passages of their own, Price shows that Main sometimes supplemented these with passages of characters’ free indirect discourse, tweaking verb tenses. Main arranged his chosen passages according to novel and speaker, including “George Eliot: *in propria persona*,” conflating Eliot with her narrators or, indeed, her characters. There is no mention of ‘mottoes’

⁴⁸⁹ Laurence Sterne, “Letters: Part II and III,” in *Works of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Wilbur L. Cross, 6 vols (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 4:191-92; cited in Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 169.

⁴⁹⁰ Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 169.

⁴⁹¹ Thirlwell, *Miss Herbert*, 171.

⁴⁹² Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 105-37.

in the *Sayings*' table of contents, although, in the collection itself, Eliot's autographic epigraphs follow on from "George Eliot: *in propria persona*" under the heading 'Mottoes'. While Main perhaps distinguished the novels' epigraphic voices from Eliot or her narrators' own, his anthologies reduce all mottoes to one, abstract speaker; although it is not clear from the novels that the mottoes are reducible to a single voice. "The prominence of Eliot's epigraphs in Main's anthologies," argues Price, "suggests . . . the confusion between quoted and quotable text."⁴⁹³ In the case of *Daniel Deronda*, from which passages were added to later editions of *Sayings*, Main's excerption of the epigraphs also obscures the relationship between the sententious and the playful. It is the placement of Eliot's epigraphs in relation to the narrative that so often opens up the possibility of linguistic play.

In Defence of Sententiousness

In 1876, Henry James published a review of *Daniel Deronda* in the *Atlantic Monthly*. This bizarre review took the form of a conversation between three characters: Theodora, Pulcheria, and Constantius. Constantius, thought to be James' spokesman, claims that, "The epigraphs in verse are a want of tact; they are sometimes, I think, a trifle more pretentious than really pregnant."⁴⁹⁴ For James, 'a want of tact' is analogous to an excess of information and control.⁴⁹⁵ In response to the dominance of 'knowing' in the nineteenth-century novel,

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁹⁴ Henry James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," *Atlantic Monthly* 38 (1876): 690. For James' initial thoughts on the novel, see [Henry James], "Review of *Daniel Deronda*," *The Nation* 23 (24 February, 1876): 131.

⁴⁹⁵ Samuel Cross, "The Ethics of Tact in *The Wings of the Dove*," *A Forum on Fiction* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 401-423.

epitomised by Eliot's narratorial omniscience ("she talks too much," he wrote in this review), James introduced techniques of narratorial reserve; and he called this restraint 'tact'.⁴⁹⁶

Sententiousness lies at the other end of the stylistic spectrum. The term 'sententious' is akin to 'pompous moralising'. A sententious style abounds in maxims, aphorisms, and generalisations. Eliot became famous for it, earning her the reputation of a sage. Barthes, for whom the struggle between textual asceticism and abundance is of central theoretical concern to short forms of writing, notes in his introduction to La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions; ou, sentences et maximes morales* (1665), "dans notre imagination collective le thème divin et le thème savant restent très proches."⁴⁹⁷ While Eliot's sententiousness didn't prove so popular in her novels, Main's *Sayings* had gone through ten British editions by 1896. Barthes opens his introduction to La Rochefoucauld with a similar sense of how context drives the reception of the excerpt. He observes that this book of maxims seems to offer two opposite projects: "ici un pour moi (et quelle adresse! cette maxime traverse trois siècles pour venir me raconter), là, un pour soi, celui de l'auteur, qui se dit, se répète, s'impose, comme enfermé dans un discours sans fin, sans ordre, à la façon d'un monologue obsédé."⁴⁹⁸ Maxims at once address and neglect the singularised reader, tending toward abstraction and grand moralisation. Ironically, one mode overlaps with the other. Although some of Eliot's readers found her narrators intrusive, they nonetheless valued the wisdom she could provide.

⁴⁹⁶ David Russell, "A Literary History of Tact: Sociability, Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-century Britain," PhD diss., University of Princeton, 2011, 17.

⁴⁹⁷ "In our collective imagination that which is divine and that which is knowledge remain very close." Roland Barthes, "La Rochefoucauld: 'Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes'," in *Le Degré Zero de l'Écriture Suivi de Nouveaux Essais Critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 74. For more on Barthes and minimalist forms, see Diana Leca, "Roland Barthes and Literary Minimalism," *Barthes Studies* 1 (2015): 100–122.

⁴⁹⁸ "Here one for me (and what an address it is! — this maxim travelling across three centuries to come and speak to me), and there: another for you, that of the author, which is said, is repeated, and which imposes itself, as if locked in a discourse without any end or order, like an obsessive monologue." *Ibid.*, 69.

The origins of Eliot's adoption of the sententious mode could be seen to lie in her taste for seventeenth-century French wisdom literature: La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, and La Bruyère, are some of the writers that she read and quoted in her epigraphs. Ruth Livesey situates *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* alongside Eliot's essay "Woman in France" (1854) in order to illustrate Eliot's positive embrace of this genre.⁴⁹⁹ I would like to suggest that her fictional experiments with wisdom literature began earlier than *Theophrastus Such*, in *Daniel Deronda*, and these had to do with Eliot's interest in contingency. Using the maxim as a particular kind of epigraph, she brushed generalisation and possibility against the grain of the singularised and given narrative. In doing so, she examined the potential of the sententious to transcend its relationship to diegesis, and deepened her awareness of its limits. Eliot's interest in maxims, which Ben Grant defines as "a short form which united brevity and wit," illuminates this problem in a particularly intriguing way.⁵⁰⁰ As Geoffrey Bennington correctly observes, "Maxims appear to offer independent assertions which can be read on their own terms [but are] also fragments of books, parts of a great 'whole'."⁵⁰¹ While maxims can be extracted with considerable ease from these aphoristic books, novelistic epigraphs are more difficult to excise, which is why it is puzzling that Main would include them in his anthology.

For the first time in *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot adopts the use of maxims as part of the novel's epigraphic form. La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions*, for instance, is quoted twice in the novel. In her article 'Woman in France', Eliot wrote of La Rochefoucauld's maxims: "as to form, they are perfect, and . . . as to matter, they are at once undeniably true and miserably false; true as applied to that condition of human nature in which the selfish instincts are still

⁴⁹⁹ Ruth Livesey, "George Eliot, Marian Evans and the Work of Sententiousness," in *The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830-1930: Authorial Work Ethics*, ed. Marcus Waithe and Claire White (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 111-126.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 80; Ben Grant, *The Aphorism and Other Short Forms* (London: Routledge, 2016), 17.

⁵⁰¹ Geoffrey Bennington, *Sententiousness And The Novel: Laying Down The Law In Eighteenth-Century French Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 22.

dominant, false if taken as a representation of all the elements and possibilities of human nature.”⁵⁰² It seems that La Rochefoucault was a little too cynical for Eliot’s liking. While she appreciated the form of the maxim (all maxims tend towards antithesis, that is to say towards symmetry), she did not find them capacious enough to encompass all of human variety — or perhaps she found them so capacious, so prejudiced, as not to allow for nuance. Indeed, in *The Mill on the Floss*, she claimed that “All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy.”⁵⁰³ From the beginning of her novelistic career, Eliot speaks of maxims in gendered terms: maxims are the realm of the masculine, a dominant culture exerting its force.⁵⁰⁴ The act of lacing ourselves up, which gestures to the maxim’s self-containment, brings to mind a corset: tight, constricting, almost violent. This image cannot be separated from the idealisation and politicisation of women’s bodies.

While it is not unusual for us to think of the aphoristic voice as analogous to divine communication, it is important to note Eliot considered it the opposite. Insight was to be found in the particular. It is this tension between the general and the particular that she explores in the epigraph to Chapter 28, the opening of Book IV, when she quotes La Rochefoucauld: “Il est plus aisé de connoître l’homme en général que de connoître un homme en particulier” (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 28, 283).⁵⁰⁵ After weeks of waiting for the next serialised number, readers

⁵⁰² George Eliot, “Woman in France: Madame de Sablé,” (*Westminster Review*, October 1854), in George Eliot *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin, 1990), 31.

⁵⁰³ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 438.

⁵⁰⁴ See Mary Jacobus, “The Question of Language: Men of Maxims and *The Mill on the Floss*,” *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1981): 207-22.

⁵⁰⁵ “It is easier to know man in general than to know a man individually.”

would have started with this quote, and then been reminded of Gwendolen's engagement to Grandcourt. In this chapter, both Gwendolen and Grandcourt make assumptions about one another's character. While Gwendolen "devised little schemes for learning what was expected of men in general" (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 28, 289), Grandcourt "believed that this girl was rather exceptional" (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 28, 293). Neither is vindicated. The conclusion to be taken from this chapter is that, as the narrator claims with bitter irony, "Suitors must often be judged as words are, by their standing and the figure they make in polite society: it is difficult to know much else of them" (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 28, 287-88). This sentence adopts the sententiousness and comparative structure of the maxim, although it is one of equivalence, as opposed to the epigraph's relationship of surplus ("plus . . . que . . .").⁵⁰⁶ Eliot's sententiousness serves as a defence of the mode: as she reminds us, characters are just words, and without the help of an intrusive and voluble narrator, both would remain opaque. As Gwendolen later concedes, "[g]eneral maxims about husbands and wives seemed now of a precarious usefulness" (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 44, 512). Eliot's use of the word 'often' also points to the limitation of the maxim as a form: all generalities have their exceptions. The chapter at once invites prediction — think, for instance, of the Rector and his "serious reflection [on] how death and other causes do sometimes concentrate inheritances on one man" (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 28, 284) — and registers the difficulty of ascertaining how the larger workings of human interaction might work out in the individual instance.

Appearances can be deceiving. This is the moral to be extracted from Eliot's second use of La Rochefoucauld, whom she quotes at the head of Chapter 52: "La même fermeté qui sert à résister à l'amour sert aussi à le rendre violent et durable; et les personnes foibles qui sont toujours agitées des passions n'en sont presque jamais véritablement remplies" (Vol. IV,

⁵⁰⁶ Barthes writes at length on the structure of the maxim, which he claims has three degrees of comparison: "more, as much as, less."

Book VII, Ch. 52, 597).⁵⁰⁷ This epigraph illustrates Daniel's conclusion: "Hans Meyrick's nature was not one in which love could strike the deep roots that turn disappointment into sorrow: it was too restless, too readily excitable by novelty, too ready to turn itself into imaginative material, and wear its grief as a fantastic costume" (Vol. IV, Book VII, Ch. 52, 602). However, it has taken Daniel a long time to realise this. Through this epigraph, Eliot is testing the general, in the form of a maxim, against the particulars of her narrative. The chapter does not disprove this general rule (the epigraph is, in fact, a rather felicitous description of Daniel and Hans); but the novel as a whole suggests that felicitous, or contingent, is perhaps all it is. Applied to Gwendolen, the first clause of the maxim becomes sinister, evoking her initial resistance to Grandcourt's offer, and the consequent (implied) violence and claustrophobia of their marriage. When the poet Don Paterson facetiously writes of the aphorism's ability "[t]o induce a horrific paralysis of boredom in the reader, in the compass of one sentence," we may be reminded of Gwendolen, whose marriage to Grandcourt leaves her "look[ing] like a melancholy statue of the Gwendolen whose laughter had once been so ready when others were grave" (Vol. IV, Book VIII, Ch. 65, 717).⁵⁰⁸ The epigraph thus demonstrates the contingencies of meaning that arise in the process of interpretation. As Maggie tells Tom, "It may mean several things; almost every word does."⁵⁰⁹ Maggie has what Mary Jacobus calls a gift for ambiguity, which is also what one needs when reading epigraphs.⁵¹⁰ What Eliot is suggesting here, through the maxim, is not the incompatibility of general laws to moral realism but, as Barthes writes of La Rochefoucauld, her desire to "retrouver l'être sous l'apparence, le

⁵⁰⁷ "The same hardness which serves to resist love also makes it violent and long lasting; and weak people who are always moved by passion are almost never really filled with it."

⁵⁰⁸ Don Paterson, *The Fall at Home: New and Collected Aphorisms* (London: Faber, 2018), 214.

⁵⁰⁹ Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, 127.

⁵¹⁰ Jacobus, "The Question of Language," 214.

réel des passions sous l'alibi des grands sentiments.”⁵¹¹ In other words, despite her own playfulness, Eliot placed more value on the moral than on the stylistic implications of the form.

Epigraphs and Entomology

The maxim is one of several short forms that has evolved along the continuum of the fragment. Others might include the aphorism and the proverb, although it is difficult to give a precise definition of these forms or an account of how each differs from the other. The fragment itself, an umbrella term of sorts, resists definition. It is used to refer to incomplete or ‘unfinished’ texts of all shapes and sizes, forms and genres. The fragment was born out of the accidental survival of Greek and Roman artefacts, both archeological and textual. The works of Sappho and Erinna, for instance, have been passed down to us in fragments, the remaining parts of a greater whole. This is different from the production of modern fragments, such as La Rochefoucauld’s maxims or Friedrich Schlegel’s *Athenaeum* fragments, although the ancient and the modern fragment go hand-in-hand. Schlegel claimed that, “A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a porcupine.”⁵¹² In other words, the fragment must be self-sufficient. One pictures the small animal turned in on itself, rolled into a protective ball. A distinction thus arises between Schlegel’s conception of the fragment and Eliot’s understanding of the epigraph, which stands apart but in relation to at least one other text. Readers of her epigraphic novels are more like classical scholars, who have to piece fragments back together to construct a whole.

⁵¹¹ “to uncover the person beneath the appearances, the real passion under the guise of grand sentiments.” Barthes, “La Rochefoucauld,” 85.

⁵¹² Friedrich Schlegel, “*Athenaeum* Fragment 206,” in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 45.

Eliot read both Sappho and Erinna in her partner G. H. Lewes' copy of Theodorus Bergk's *Poetae Lyrici Graeci* (Lipsiae, 1843). She annotated these pages, writing at the end of the section on Sappho: "Read 2nd time Feb. 1873."⁵¹³ It is likely she also re-read Erinna, before composing her own poem "Erinna" based on these verse fragments.⁵¹⁴ In a notebook, she referenced "Erinna's poem of 'the Spindle' . . . in which, says O. Müller, she probably expressed the restless & aspiring thoughts which crowded on her youthful mind as she pursued her monotonous work. Erinna died in early youth, when chained by her mother to the spinning wheel."⁵¹⁵ This passage must have affected Eliot, for when she wrote 'Erinna', she prefaced it with this same quotation from Müller. When she quoted from her poem in one of the epigraphs to *Daniel Deronda*, it was again this image she returned to:

She held the spindle as she sat,
Erinna with the thick-coiled mat
Of raven hair and deepest agate eyes,
Gazing with a sad surprise
At surging visions of her destiny —
To spin the byssus drearily
In insect-labor [*sic*], while the throng
Of gods and men wrought deeds that poets wrought in song.

(Vol. IV, Book VII, Ch. 51, 582)

The repetition of "wrought" in the epigraph's last line invites us to think of the epigraph as a skein being finely threaded, creating a comparison between male and female labour. Chained to the spinning wheel, Erinna is overcome with the realisation that her artistic output will always be confined to the domestic sphere, while men are at large in the world. The phrase "Of

⁵¹³ *The Complete Shorter Poetry of George Eliot*, ed. Antonie Gerard van den Broek, 2 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005), 2:109.

⁵¹⁴ "Erinna" was written sometime between May 1874 and June 1875. See note 12 and 23 in Bernard J. Paris, "George Eliot's Unpublished Poetry," *Studies in Philology* 56, no. 3 (July 1959): 539-558.

⁵¹⁵ Her source, here, was Karl Ottfried Müller's *History of the Literature of Ancient Greece* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1840). See Wendy S. Williams, "The Poetess Tradition," in *George Eliot, Poetess* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 28-38.

gods and men” suggests a link between Erinna and Arachne, the talented mortal weaver who challenged Athena, goddess of wisdom and craft, to a weaving contest; and was changed into a spider. The epigraph precedes the chapter in which Daniel meets his mother, the famed performer Leonora Alcharisi (or Princess Halm-Eberstein), for the first time. Now ageing and ill, she explains to Daniel that she chose a career as an actor and singer in deliberate rejection of her father’s wishes. She claims, “I had the right to seek my freedom from a bondage that I hated” (Vol. IV, Book VII, Ch. 51, 584). This bondage, tied up in her Jewish upbringing, is having been born a woman. “You are not a woman,” she tells Daniel. “You may try — but you can never imagine what it is to have a man’s force of genius in you, and yet suffer the slavery of being a girl[;] To have a pattern cut out” (Vol. IV, Book VII, Ch. 51, 588). Believing their artistic talent would be their escape, both Erinna and Leonora are confronted with the “sad surprise” that their creativity remains constrained within the paradigm of ‘mere women’s work’. In both the epigraph and the chapter, female artistic labour is figured as “insect-labour”: insignificant and unrewarded. Leonora is facing death; and there is a latent violence in Erinna’s “thick-coiled mat” of hair, as if she were being suffocated and made to spin her own shroud. Both women will fade, while men are seen to improve the world and are immortalised in poems. This is a theme Eliot returned to often throughout her career. Both her dramatic poem *Armgarth* (1870) and her novel *Middlemarch* (1872) also tell stories of talented and passionate women unable to fulfil their potential.

Many Victorians were keen entomologists, and the discourse surrounding insects and “insect-labour” in this period was wide-ranging. Social insects, such as ants, served as laudable models of hard work and task organisation, while other insects, such as butterflies, allowed entomologists to engage in contentious debates about the relative roles of instinct and reason

in animals.⁵¹⁶ Indeed, insects became the focus of religious and political questions, from social and educational reform to religious design and secular evolutionism. This cultural interest in the insect and its ideologies is present in *Daniel Deronda*. Eliot seems to have been particularly interested in protective mimicry, the evolutionary accounts for which provided strong supporting evidence for natural selection. In 1861, Henry Bates produced a paper which used Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection to explain the beauty of the colour of butterflies. In this paper, he argued for insectivorous predators as agents of natural selection. He observed that one family of butterflies (the mimics) changed across a geographical region to resemble another family of butterflies (the models) whose conspicuous coloration warned predators of their acrid taste. Importantly, Bates provided "a secular naturalistic explanation for a phenomenon traditionally celebrated as evidence of providential design."⁵¹⁷ In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot refers to this process as "the marvels of imitation in insects" (Vol. III, Book V, Ch. 40, 470). Eliot herself made extensive use of formal and stylistic mimicry in order to create her epigraphs, the maxim being only one example of her foregrounding of imitation. As Will Abberley explains, imitation in the nineteenth century was often considered to be instinctual, as opposed to cognitive, and was therefore frequently associated with primitive mindlessness. However, this view clashed with psychological theories that placed imitation at the centre of learning and selfhood.⁵¹⁸ Eliot's epigraphs are both reproductions of texts and echoes of, or replies to, them. This imitation transcends mere replication: it allows Eliot to develop a distinctive epigraphic voice, most evident in this novel's autographic prose epigraphs.

⁵¹⁶ See Charlotte Sleight, *Six Legs Better: A Cultural History of Myrmecology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007) and John Clark, *Bugs and the Victorians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁵¹⁷ Clark, *Bugs and the Victorians*, 117.

⁵¹⁸ Will Abberley, "Introduction: Replicating Bodies in Nineteenth-Century Science and Culture," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 24 (2017), <http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.789>. Also Will Abberley, *Mimicry and Display in Victorian Literary Culture: Nature, Science and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

While Eliot marvelled at insect imitation, most of the references to insects in *Daniel Deronda* posit them as undesirable templates for human life. She used them as examples of “narrow tenacity . . . unshaken by thoughts beyond the reach of their antennae” (Vol. IV, Book VII, Ch. 55, 637-38). Both Grandcourt and Gwendolen are human embodiments of this narrowness.⁵¹⁹ “Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant?” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 11, 109) asks the narrator of Gwendolen, to whom the insect represents having “no choice but to endure insignificance and servitude” (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 28, 289). Gwendolen invokes the insect often, as an example of what she fears most. When she first meets Deronda, he gives her what she interprets as an ironic smile, “but it was at least better,” she thinks, “that he should have kept his attention fixed on her than that he disregarded her as one of an insect swarm who had no individual physiognomy” (Vol. I, Book I, Ch. I, 7). Gwendolen wishes to be distinctive, to stand out from the crowd, and she does. Although her beauty is debated, everyone agrees she is striking. (A lack of protective mimicry turns out to be her downfall.) The narrator also tells the reader that Gwendolen “[was] never even as a child thoughtlessly cruel, nay delighting to rescue drowning insects and watch their recovery” (Vol. I, Book I, Ch. 3, 20). This passage does less to absolve Gwendolen than it does to illustrate the behaviour learned from these small creatures: the insect comes to stand for her fear of insignificance; of being subject to the whims of others — or becoming someone else’s whim. The childhood anecdote becomes a prophecy: before her marriage, Gwendolen tells her mother that, “I shall dream that night that I am looking at the extraordinary face of a magnified insect — and the next morning [Grandcourt] will make an offer of his hand” (Vol. I, Book I, Ch. 9, 86). His insidious past later “present[s] itself as an array of live caterpillars, disastrous

⁵¹⁹ For a different reading of insect-tenacity, see Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 190.

to the green meat of respectable people” (Vol. IV, Book VIII, Ch. 64, 703). Ultimately, Gwendolen chooses to let this particular insect drown.

If the insect is a common symbol for the human’s own narrowness and insignificance, it is also, in *Daniel Deronda*, a metaphor for the limits of what is knowable. As John Clark has shown, the struggle to understand the mental powers of insects occupied central ground in nineteenth-century entomological research.⁵²⁰ When Lush attempts to guess whether Grandcourt will make Gwendolen an offer, he reflects on Grandcourt’s tendency to “lapse hither and thither with no more apparent will than a moth” (Vol. II, Book III, Ch. 25, 261). The moth is an insect pest and therefore the mark of a threat.⁵²¹ Lush reflects:

To know Grandcourt was to doubt what he would do in any particular case . . . But Lush had some general certainties about Grandcourt, and one was that of all inward movements those of generosity were least likely to occur in him. Of what use, however, is a general certainty that an insect will not walk with his head hindmost, when what you need to know is the play of inward stimulus that sends him hither and thither in a network of possible paths?

(Vol. II, Book III, Ch. 25, 261)

Like the entomologist who must conjecture about the insect’s ‘inward stimulus’ based on outward appearances, Lush must speculate about particular instances of behaviour based on general observations. This is an issue of both form and content: implicit is a criticism of the maxim and its “general certainties.” Barthes compares the form of the maxim to the brittle casing of an insect: “La maxime est un objet dur, luisant — et fragile — comme le corselet d’un insecte; comme l’insecte aussi, elle possède la pointe, ce crochet de mots aigus qui la terminent, la couronnent — la ferment, tout en l’armant (elle est armée parce qu’elle est

⁵²⁰ Clark, *Bugs and the Victorians*, 34-53.

⁵²¹ Clark notes that “‘Pest’ is not a natural category—it refers to those species that interfere with human activities: much like gardeners refer to a weed as a plant growing where we do not want it.” See *ibid.*, 133.

fermée).”⁵²² What emerges from Barthes’ description is a careful balance of strength and vulnerability. Form is worn as a suit of armour: if it is violent, it is in order to protect itself. The form itself is a defence. (Remember Schlegel, comparing the fragment to a porcupine; and Eliot, comparing the maxim to a corset, which in retrospect suggests the possibilities of female empowerment, as opposed to male domination.) It is therefore unsurprising that the novel’s most violent character is the hardest to read. Like the maxim, Grandcourt (insectivorous predator) puts on a performance, and puts up a defence. “His soul was garrisoned against presentiments and fears,” the narrator tell us, “he had the courage and confidence that belong to domination, and he was at that moment feeling perfectly satisfied that he held his wife with bit and bridle” (Vol. IV, Book VII, Ch. 54, 633). This is an illusion of control, whereas Gwendolen later holds an actual rope: instead of throwing it to her husband, she unconsciously chooses to regain control over her life.

The novel offers numerous observations on Grandcourt’s linguistic concision — “He was not a wordy thinker” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 13, 118) — that extend analogies between Grandcourt and insects also to maxims, which Eliot used as epigraphs for her novel. We are told, for instance, that Grandcourt’s speeches are of the brief sort: “Stopping so soon, they give signs of a suppressed and formidable ability to say more, and have also the meritorious quality of allowing lengthiness to others” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 13, 117). This phrase also serves as an apt description of the maxim, as the rules or principles of behaviour which it sets forth must be tested for contingencies, and the epigraph, which must balance compression and revelation. Indeed, the epigraph’s “suppression” allows “lengthiness” to the chapter itself. For Grandcourt, however, compression and potential revelation are illusions — there is no such substrate. When Gwendolen eludes him, Grandcourt thinks “Damn her!” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 13, 118). Just as

⁵²² “The maxim is a hard, gleaming object, and fragile too, like the armoured skin of an insect; and like the insect it has a pointed end, a tentacle of sharp words that end it and crown it—and close it shut while arming it (it is armed because it is closed).” Barthes, “La Rochefoucauld,” 70.

this “explosive phrase stood for mixed impressions which eloquent interpreters might have expanded into some sentences full of an irritated sense that he was being mystified” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 13, 118), *Daniel Deronda*’s epigraphs are often puzzling and readers are trained to be their eloquent interpreters.

Eliot both quoted and mimicked maxims, making the form her own. Gillian Beer observes that, “Generalisation under the pen of Bacon, La Rochefoucauld, even Pascal, codifies and imprints. It contains truth rather than liberating it. This constraining force in the maxim is very different from George Eliot’s use of generalisation. Generalisation in her work draws in the reader, yokes diversity in unexpected kinship, but emphasises equally the extended human community.”⁵²³ In the novel’s longest epigraph, Eliot imagines an alternative to the maxim “Knowledge is power.” This phrase is a variant of Francis Bacon’s phrase “*ipsa scientia potestas est*” (or “knowledge itself is power”) which appears in his *Meditationes Sacrae* (1597). Gesturing toward Bacon’s scientific method, Eliot tests his hypothesis about power, challenging and improving upon his original idea:

It is a common sentence that Knowledge is power; but who hath duly considered or set forth the power of Ignorance? Knowledge slowly builds up what Ignorance in an hour pulls down. Knowledge, through patient and frugal centuries, enlarges discovery and makes record of it; Ignorance, wanting its day’s dinner, lights a fire with the record, and gives flavour to its one roast with the burnt souls of many generations. Knowledge, instructing the sense, refining and multiplying needs, transforms itself into skill and makes life various with a new six days’ work; comes Ignorance drunk on the seventh, with a firkin of oil and a match and an easy “Let there not be” — and the many-colored creation is shrivelled up in blackness. Of a truth, Knowledge is power, but it is a power reined by scruple, having a conscience of what must be and what may be; whereas Ignorance is a blind giant who, let him but wax unbound, would make it a sport to seize the pillars that hold up the long-wrought fabric of human good, and turn all the places of joy dark as a buried Babylon. And looking at life parcel-wise, in the growth of a single lot, who having a practiced vision may not see that ignorance of the true bond between events, and false conceit of means whereby sequences may be compelled — like that falsity of eyesight which overlooks the gradations of distance, seeing that which is afar off as if it were within a step or a grasp — precipitates the mistaken soul on destruction?

⁵²³ Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Brighton: Harvester, 1989), 19.

(Vol. II, Book III, Ch. 21, 190)

This epigraph demonstrates the competing impulses of concision and dispersal that are contained within the maxim. It proceeds through dialectical opposition: the original premise is, as Schlegel claims philosophical thoughts should be, “turned around and synthesized with [its] antipodes.”⁵²⁴ Eliot lengthens what we might think of as a maxim and alters our conception of the brevity that defines it, but she loses none of the intensity of the fragment form. “[The fragment] can be prolonged like agony,” wrote Maurice Blanchot.⁵²⁵ The epigraph itself is full of extraordinary violence, raising the stakes of ignorance through apocalyptic imagery. Eliot writes of “the burned souls of many generations,” of a world “shrivelled up in blackness,” and of “burial” and “destruction.” More generally, she demonstrates that correlation (“false conceit of means”) does not imply causation (“the true bond between events”). However, she does not do away with causation altogether. “Of a truth,” Eliot writes, “Knowledge is power,” suggesting that this is one scheme of knowledge among many. As Shuttleworth argues of Daniel, Eliot also “refuses . . . to assume that because one causal chain has been traced there cannot be another.”⁵²⁶ Just as the novel concedes that there are viable alternatives to empiricism, Eliot’s epigraphic digressions make room for contingency. By re-writing this well-known maxim, Eliot also undoes the repression of the feminine in Bacon’s scientific discourse.⁵²⁷ Advancing the cause of human knowledge should not be gendered, but open to any reader with the intelligence and dedication to contribute.

⁵²⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, “Athenäum Fragment 39,” *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 23.

⁵²⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

⁵²⁶ Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science*, 187.

⁵²⁷ The writings of Francis Bacon have been singled out as an especially egregious instance of the use of misogynous metaphors in scientific philosophy. See Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

Daniel Deronda foregrounds the conflict between Eliot's desire to transmit knowledge and her reservations about what might be lost in the petrification of experience, and insight, into maxims and other forms of quotation. In his article on Eliot's relationship to wisdom literature, Carroll states that, "living truth can so often turn into the stale aphorism."⁵²⁸ This fear, he argues, impelled Eliot to write novels as opposed to moral treatises: "She satisfied herself by smuggling nuggets of wisdom into the text in the form of mottoes."⁵²⁹ This suggests that her epigraphs were somehow self-indulgent but, as Price has also shown, Eliot turned them into the opposite use: production as opposed to consumption.⁵³⁰ Indeed, *Daniel Deronda*'s epigraphs are less prescriptive than in *Felix Holt* or *Middlemarch*, allowing the reader greater freedom amid Eliot's own sententiousness. Because epigraphs operate at the margins of what can be known, readers must use intuition and experiential knowledge, as opposed to intellectualism, in order to decipher their meaning.

While her interest in maxims was not concomitant with her use of epigraphs, it is a shame Carroll dismisses them altogether, because they illuminate the problem of conveying (without congealing) truth in a particularly compelling way. In relation to contingency, the traffic between the universal and the particular, the margins and the text, generates for the reader a sense of the novel being a combination of moveable and bound parts. The maxim, in its articulation of generalised propositions, opens up the narrative to more random kinds of interaction. The act of re-writing the maxim can be read as a form of contingency in itself, reminding us that even the words or predicaments we take as given can, and in some cases should be, questioned.

⁵²⁸ David Carroll, "George Eliot: The Sibyl of Mercia," *Studies in the Novel* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 20.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 128.

Promethean Time

If the influence of Laurence Sterne on *Daniel Deronda*'s form demonstrates that all beginnings are in fact renewals, and if Eliot's maxims present a challenge to masculine forms, these two points of interest conjoin in her use of Promethean allusion. First translated into English in 1773, Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* inspired a wide range of Romantic political readings, including radical rebel, crucified martyr, national hero, prophetic philosopher, and intellectual humanist, among others. In the Victorian period, the translation of *Prometheus Bound* also became a site of female empowerment; a critique of gender politics; or, according to Yopie Prins, a reiteration of gender politics, more than its subversion.⁵³¹ In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot draws on both the Romantic and Victorian responses to *Prometheus Bound*. She transforms Prometheus into a figure-by-analogy for the epigraph, addressing both issues of prescience and the politics of gender.

In the narrative itself, Eliot offers us a Shelleyan account of Prometheus, who brings peace to the world by warning Jupiter of the danger of consummating his marriage to Thetis. Upon entering The Philosophers Club at the Hand and Banner with Mordecai, Daniel observes its members "listening with a look of concentrated intelligence to a man . . . just finishing a quotation from Shelley," which the narrator specifies in parentheses is "the comparison of the avalanche in his 'Prometheus Unbound'" (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 42, 484). In this passage, Shelley compares social and political revolution to an avalanche, in order to highlight its inevitable and unpredictable nature. Eliot's use of this particular Promethean allusion therefore suggests that change is not the result of individual acts of rebellion but of a widespread

⁵³¹ See Lorna Hardwick, *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (London: Duckworth, 2000); Isobel Hurst, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Yopie Prins, *Ladies' Greek: Victorian Translations of Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

recognition of a cumulative pressure; in *Prometheus Unbound*, this truth allows Prometheus to bargain with Jupiter for his freedom.

Is there another purpose to such parenthetical detail? Naomi Schor reminds us that the history of the detail is inseparable from the rise of realism. Indeed, *Daniel Deronda* is often considered the pinnacle of the genre. More importantly, however, Schor argues that the detail “participat[es] in a larger semantic network, bounded on the one side by the *ornamental*, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other, by the everyday, whose “prosiness” is rooted in the domestic sphere of social life presided over by women . . . The detail does not occupy a conceptual space beyond the laws of sexual difference: the detail is gendered and doubly gendered as feminine.”⁵³² Through parenthetical and epigraphic detail, Eliot insists on the detail’s aesthetic and political value, and extends our understanding of its feminist history. Indeed, the epigraph is in itself an often neglected textual detail.

In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot draws analogies between Prometheus and the epigraph form, in order to bring into focus contingency’s relationship to time. Jean-Pierre Vernant argues that the Promethean myth shows us that there are at least three kinds of time. There is divine time, or eternity; human time, which is linear, and teleological; and finally, there is circular time. Vernant explains that Prometheus’ liver signifies “une existence semblable à la lune, par exemples, qui grandit, p  rit puis rena  t, et cela ind  finiment,” likening Promethean time to astrological movements.⁵³³ Epigraphs are also circular, generating new meaning through the inflection brought by each reader. They orient us toward the past, even as they infuse our judgements about the future. Much as Prometheus establishes the terms through which mankind can interact with the Gods, epigraphs provide readers with a framework of

⁵³² Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), xlii.

⁵³³ “An existence similar to that of the moon, by example, that grows, dies and then is reborn, and this indefinitely.” Jean-Pierre Vernant, *L’Univers, Les Dieux, Les Hommes: R  cit Grecs des Origines* (  ditions du Seuil, 1999), 88.

interpretation; and as Prometheus is autonomous, and answers to himself above all, epigraphs might also transcend Eliot's intended meaning. This is the nature of the threshold: the risk and unease of transition, and the fear of not knowing where one might end up.⁵³⁴ After all, the various translations of *Prometheus Bound* show us that it is susceptible to more than one interpretation.

While, in *Middlemarch*, Eliot placed the emphasis on re-reading and retrospection, her use of the Promethean figure in *Daniel Deronda* foregrounds the foreseeable nature of the novel form. Prometheus, significantly, means 'foresight' (as opposed to Epimetheus, his brother, and whose name means 'hindsight'). Both *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* were published in serial format, which created certain conditions of expectation for the reader. Yet, *Daniel Deronda*, more so than *Middlemarch*, prompted some readers to dictate the terms of the novel according to their own desires and to vocalise their displeasure at Eliot's chosen outcome. "People in their eagerness about my characters are quite angry, it appears, when their own expectations are not fulfilled," Eliot wrote to Blackwood as she was working on the proofs of Book 7: "angry, for example, that Gwendolen accepts Grandcourt etc. etc. One reader is sure that Mirah is going to die very soon, and I suppose will be disgusted at her remaining alive. Such are the reproaches to which I make myself liable."⁵³⁵

The novel's epigraphs suggest that Eliot anticipated the conditions of reception of her novel; the movements of her speculative readers' minds. In the epigraph to Chapter 16, Eliot wrote as if in defence of her narrative choices:

Men, like planets, have both a visible and an invisible history. The astronomer threads the darkness with strict deduction, accounting so for every visible arc in the wanderer's orbit; and the narrator of human actions, if he did his work with the same completeness, would have to thread the hidden pathways of feeling and thought which lead up to every

⁵³⁴ Subha Mukherji, *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces* (New York: Anthem Press, 2011), xvii.

⁵³⁵ George Eliot to John Blackwood, April 18 1876, *Letters*, 6:241

moment of action, and to those moments of intense suffering which take the quality of action — like the cry of Prometheus, whose chained anguish seems a greater energy than the sea and sky he invokes and the deity he defies.

(Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 16, 146)

Having established that neither astronomer nor novelist can provide an immutable starting point, she differentiates their methods: whereas the astronomer must account for all parts of a planet's orbit, the novelist must withhold information. "Curiosity becomes the more eager from the incompleteness," claims Eliot in her essay on story-telling.⁵³⁶ Indeed, in the chapter which the epigraph above precedes, Daniel becomes aware of how little he knows about himself. This causes him "moments of intense suffering" (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 16, 151) and his "inexorable sorrow" (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 16, 156) echoes the epigraph's own Promethean rhetoric of suffering. This lack of self-knowledge prompts Daniel to conjecture about his past. Similarly, the novel's serial publication format gave readers "ample time . . . for speculation as to [characters'] unrevealed past and their unreachd future."⁵³⁷

Scholars have shown Eliot's dislike of gambling but not all prediction in the novel is represented with equal distaste, suggesting that forms of speculation come with their own moral valences. "When Gwendolen gambles, it is an evil," observes Wilfred Stone, "when Deronda gambles (he risks his whole inheritance for a visionary ideal), he is blessed."⁵³⁸ This is because Daniel's motives are rooted in the social whole, whereas Gwendolen's motives are selfish in their essence. The novel itself relies on both fantastical coincidences of plot, such as Mirah's rescue, and the fulfilment of individual visions, such as Gwendolen's foresight of Grandcourt's death or Mordecai's longing for Daniel. "Prophecy and divination, whose effect depends upon

⁵³⁶ "Story-telling," in *Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, 366-71.

⁵³⁷ "Review of *Daniel Deronda*," *Examiner* (London: March 4, 1876): 265-66; cited in Carol A. Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 245.

⁵³⁸ Wilfred Stone, "The Play of Chance and Ego in *Daniel Deronda*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53, no. 1 (June 1998): 27.

our *surprise* when they are confirmed,” argues Beer, “pay homage to the uncontrollable multiformity of the future.”⁵³⁹

Eliot struggled with the problem of representing the unforeseeable or unpredictable in fiction, given her role as author and thus as originator. When Mrs Davilow calls her financial loss “the will of Providence,” Gwendolen refuses to submit: “I don’t resign myself [to Providence]. I shall do what I can against it” (Vol. II, Book III, Ch. 21, 215). However, when the Rector advises Gwendolen to accept Grandcourt’s offer, claiming that, “If Providence offers you power and position . . . your course is one of responsibility, into which caprice must not enter” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 13, 127), Gwendolen submits. For Daniel, the idea that our lives might simply be a product of chance seems peculiarly unacceptable: “He took refuge in disbelief,” we are told: “To find an Ezra Cohen when the name was running in your head was no more extraordinary than to find a Josiah Smith under like circumstances” (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 33, 363-4). However, this episode strains his, and the reader’s, credulity; although one epigraph, quoted from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, reminds us that, “This, too, is probable, according to that saying of Agathon: ‘It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen’” (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 41, 473). Adam Phillips, in his essay “Contingency for Beginners,” wonders, “why it is so difficult for us to believe — to live confidently as if — our lives are subject to accident?”⁵⁴⁰ *Daniel Deronda*’s plot of course suggests that coincidences are not accidents at all; as George Levine explains: “The feeling of coincidence is merely local. Such manipulation is a condition of storytelling, where ‘chance’ must always contradict the implications of the medium itself . . . Narrative makes chance impossible.”⁵⁴¹ Chance is created when narrative lines, distinct causal chains, cross over or conjoin.

⁵³⁹ Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, 178.

⁵⁴⁰ Adam Phillips, “Contingency for Beginners,” *Raritan* 13 (1993): 54–72.

⁵⁴¹ George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 138.

What appears to be a ‘chance’ meeting between Mordecai and Deronda at Blackfriars Bridge is in fact “made up,” as Daniel claims, “of plainly discernible links” (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 41, 478); should the reader chose to decipher them. In the epigraph to Chapter 38, Eliot writes:

There be who hold that the deeper tragedy were a Prometheus Bound not *after* but *before* he had well got the celestial fire into the $\nu\alpha\rho\theta\eta\xi$ whereby it might be conveyed to mortals: thrust by the Kratos and Bia of instituted methods into a solitude of despised ideas, fastened in throbbing helplessness by the fatal pressure of poverty and disease — a solitude where many pass by, but none regard.

(Vol. III, Book V, Ch. 38, 439)

Promethean allusion is used to bind Daniel and Mordecai’s plot lines. While, in Chapter 16, Eliot used Prometheus to illustrate Daniel’s anguish as a prompt for speculative action, here he is used to describe Mordecai and his ‘second-sight’. Mordecai, like Prometheus, has “a foreshadowing power” (Vol. III, Book V, Ch. 38, 439). In the chapter, Mordecai spots Daniel from Blackfriars Bridge, fulfilling his proleptic visions. The epigraph itself, with its allusions to the “solitude of despised ideas” and the “fatal pressure of poverty and disease,” foreshadows the chapter’s account of Mordecai’s “sentence of exclusion” and his “poverty and other physical disadvantages” (Vol. III, Book V, Ch. 38, 441). The epigraph also dramatizes contingency: the Promethean myth is what it is, although it could also have been otherwise. Prometheus was bound after he’d brought fire, agriculture, and the Greek alphabet to mankind. Mordecai, however, is bound before he is able to effect change, and his grief therefore exceeds the tragic pathos of Promethean punishment. While his experience can name injustices such as “poverty” and “disease,” it does not challenge the “instituted methods” through which these injustices are created.

Eliot's use of Ancient Greek is a gesture to the field of classical epigraphy through which the epigraph migrated to English and other European literatures. When Zeus deprived mankind of fire, Prometheus brought it back down to earth in a *váρθηξ* or hollow fennel stalk: unlike other trees, which are covered in bark and full of wet sap, the fennel plant's exterior is humid and green and its interior dried out. In the Victorian period, the politics of reading and writing Greek were gendered; and, in this context, Eliot's decision to leave the Greek word for fennel stalk untranslated becomes a small instance of Promethean rebellion. As John Kerrigan claims, "the whole enterprise [of translating Greek] was caught up in the paradox that women were acquiring knowledge identified with male authority. The more accurate their work, the more enchained it became."⁵⁴² A self-taught and dedicated classicist, Eliot acquired "a degree of learning which many a university man might have envied."⁵⁴³ In *Daniel Deronda*, Hugo Mallinger reminds us that, "unless a man can get the prestige and income of a Don and write donnish books, it's hardly worthwhile for him to make a Greek and Latin machine of himself and be able to spin you out pages of the Greek dramatists at any verse you'll give him as a cue. That's all very fine, but in practical life nobody does give you the cue for pages of Greek," although this passage must be qualified as a justification for Hugo's own classical shortcomings (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 16, 161).

While men were taught Greek and Latin, the Classics were not deemed useful for women, and more often than not women were discouraged from encroaching on what was considered the province of masculine knowledge. Thus, for women, "learning Greek could be construed as an act of gender subversion."⁵⁴⁴ When Gwendolen faces becoming a governess,

⁵⁴² John Kerrigan, "Faint Sounds of Shovelling," *London Review of Books*, 20 December 2018, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n24/john-kerrigan/faint-sounds-of-shovelling>.

⁵⁴³ Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 113.

⁵⁴⁴ Stefano Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10.

the narrator tells us, “Her griefs were feminine; but to her as a woman they were not the less hard to bear, and she felt an equal right to the Promethean tone” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 24, 257). Despite her “less expensive” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 24, 257) education, Gwendolen’s sense of entitlement becomes a tool of empowerment in the face of her male contemporaries. In a similar vein, the epigraph, which is still intelligible without a knowledge of Greek, suggests this is a limitation which can be overcome by using the imagination and finding pleasure in the strangeness of a new language. Earlier in the novel, the narrator observes that sometimes, “We recognize the alphabet; we are not sure of the language” (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 11, 98). Language, like character, can be sensed in order to be understood.⁵⁴⁵ While Eliot had already positioned epigraphic reading as embodied and peculiarly feminine in *The Mill on the Floss*, the full force of its political valence is unbound in *Daniel Deronda*.

The Telos of Poetic Epigraphs

Eliot never put the thinking behind her epigraphs into writing, except to express her regret at having chosen two lines from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855) as an epigraph in *Daniel Deronda*. In a letter to Blackwood, she wrote:

We are rather vexed, now it is too late, that I did not carry out a sort of incipient intention to expunge a motto from Walt Whitman which I inserted in Book IV. Of course the whole is irrevocable by this time, but I should have otherwise thought it worth while to have a new page, not because the motto itself is objectionable to me — it was one of the finer things which had clung to me from among his writings — but because, since I quote so few poets, my selection of a motto from Walt Whitman might be taken as the sign of a special admiration which I am very far from feeling.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁵ See S. Pearl Brilmyer, ““The Natural History of My Inward Self”: Sensing Character in George Eliot’s *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*,” *PMLA* 129, no. 1 (2014): 35-51.

⁵⁴⁶ George Eliot to John Blackwood, 18 April 1876, *Letters*, 6:241.

Gordon Haight argues that Eliot's second thoughts about the epigraph sprang from an attack on Whitman in the *Saturday Review*, which declared that "although there is a small coterie of persons in this country who are not ashamed to confess their liking for Whitman's nastiness, his own countrymen have universally repudiated him."⁵⁴⁷ In light of this backlash, Eliot feared that her use of Whitman would suggest a homoerotic element to Daniel and Mordecai's relationship. As Charles Lock asserts of epigraphs, "like a guest, a text may be offended or dishonoured by proximity to another."⁵⁴⁸ This was certainly the case for Eliot, who was concerned that the small number of poets quoted in *Daniel Deronda* might make it seem as if she had a special admiration for Whitman; an admiration she denied. However, of the novel's 74 epigraphs, almost a third are allographic poetic epigraphs, which undermines her defence. Most of these epigraphs are quoted from the Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge; but Eliot also quoted her contemporaries, such as poet laureate Alfred Tennyson, her friend Robert Browning and, much to her chagrin, Whitman.

Eliot once wrote of Wordsworth that, "What I could wish to have added to many of my favorite [*sic*] morceaux is an indication of less satisfaction in terrene objects, a more frequent upturning of the soul's eye. I never before met with so many of my own feelings, expressed just as I could like them."⁵⁴⁹ What clung to her, as in the case of Whitman, was not the poet *per se*, but a specific formulation of particular thoughts and feelings she shared with him. In Whitman's case, those were: "Surely whoever speaks to me in the right voice, / him or her I shall follow. / As the water follows the moon, silently, / with fluid steps anywhere around the

⁵⁴⁷ *Saturday Review* (March 18, 1876): 360-361. For Haight's comment, see his notes to *ibid*.

⁵⁴⁸ Charles Lock, "Epigraphs and Absences: A Comment on Rajeev S. Patke's 'Ambiguity and Ethics: Fictions of Governance in Geoffrey Hill's Mercian Hymns,'" *Connotations* 2, no. 22 (2012/2013): 322.

⁵⁴⁹ George Eliot to Maria Lewis, 22 November 1839, *Letters*, 1:34.

globe” (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 29, 271). The epigraph’s Biblical undertones foreshadow Daniel’s relationship to Mordecai, who helps Daniel embrace his Jewish heritage and sends him East to fulfil his Zionist mission; as well as describing the draw that Gwendolen feels toward Daniel. In the absence of providential logic, she wonders, “Why did she care so much about the opinion of this man?” (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 29, 304). This sense of identification is the pleasure of epigraphs, which remind us that writers are also readers, and share in the experience of encountering lines that express what readers feel but cannot articulate. In its manifold applications, the epigraph reminds us that meaning is not fixed: its formation involves selection from a wide range of possibilities.

Contingency has the quality of making events appear at once inevitable and uncertain. In the novel, Eliot achieves this through the interaction of epigraph and narrative. In the epigraph to Chapter 50, for instance, she quotes from Browning’s poem, *Paracelsus* (1835):

“If some mortal, born too soon,
 Were laid away in some great trance — the ages
 Coming and going all the while — till dawned
 His true time’s advent; and could then record
 The words they spoke who kept watch by his bed,
 Then I might tell more of the breath so light
 Upon my eyelids, and the fingers warm
 Among my hair. Youth is confused; yet never
 So dull was I but, when that spirit passed,
 I turned to him, scarce consciously, as turns
 A water-snake when fairies cross his sleep”.

(Vol. IV, Book VII, Ch. 50, 575)

Paracelsus is a five-part epic poem, which charts Paracelsus’ pursuit of knowledge: his aspirations, his failures, and his determination in the face of these failures. Each part marks a critical moment in his experience, as he reviews the circumstances which have prepared him for such a moment. This epigraph, taken from the first part of the poem, qualifies the circumstances in messianic terms — predetermined and teleological. Like Paracelsus, Daniel is searching for an ultimate truth, a quest to which he feels himself bound through intuition.

The chapter itself confirms Daniel's Jewish heritage, and therefore Mordecai's vision of him as a messianic hero. Thus, Daniel arrives at this right conclusion without having quite known he would. For Daniel, as for the reader, this outcome appears "both unavoidable and easily imaginable as having happened differently."⁵⁵⁰ Indeed, one review suggests there was an "almost universal disappointment at the *unanticipated* conclusion of the story — a conclusion which many readers have resented as though it were a personal grievance or affront."⁵⁵¹

Reading around the epigraph, outside of the diegesis, places additional emphasis on the unavoidable. In the epigraph to Chapter 66, Eliot once again quotes Browning, this time from *The Ring and the Book* (1868): "One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm" (Vol. IV, Book VIII, Ch. 66, 651). In this passage, Browning casts himself as guided to the book by a "Hand, / Always above my shoulder."⁵⁵² While Eliot quotes only the description of the day on which the book was found, the predestining hand hovers above both Browning's shoulder and Eliot's novel. It is telling, for instance, that it is a book (the autobiography of Salomon Maimon) found in a second-hand bookshop, which first leads Daniel to Mordecai.

While contingency excludes both necessity and impossibility from a given proposition, Eliot continued to probe the role of choice within a contingent world. Daniel, for instance, somewhat resists his telos before his Jewish heritage is confirmed. Prior to this revelation, Eliot quotes from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850):

"The human nature unto which I felt
That I belonged, and revered with love,
Was not a punctual presence, but a spirit
Diffused through time and space, with aid derived
Of evidence from monuments, erect,
Prostrate, or leaning toward their common rest
In earth, the widely scattered wreck sublime

⁵⁵⁰ Lupton, "Contingency, Codex, the Eighteenth-Century Novel," 1173.

⁵⁵¹ Edwin P. Whipple, "Daniel Deronda by George Eliot," *The North American Review* 124, no. 254 (January 1877): 31; emphasis added.

⁵⁵² Robert Browning, *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning* (London: Smith Elder, 1889), 3.

Of vanished nations.”

(Vol. IV, Book VIII, Ch. 69, 738)

Wordsworth writes of poetic calling in teleological terms. He suggests that the poem’s speaker “belonged [to]” and “reverenced” this calling before being aware of it (“[it] / Was not a punctual presence.”) Books are figured as “monuments” which have encouraged the speaker to find his purpose. In the chapter that follows, Daniel explains to Gwendolen his Jewish heritage, his engagement to Mirah, and his plans to travel East. However, in the absence of “strong emotional birth right and intuitive inheritance,” Daniel has needed help from Mordecai in coming to terms with both his past and future.⁵⁵³ “Something has to come from without, to begin the new Eden,” writes Ian Adam, “he does not choose, but becomes one of the chosen.”⁵⁵⁴ The epigraph invites us to consider Mordecai, now nearing death, as a monument, providing “aid” to Daniel and “leaning toward [his] common rest.” It also offers us a poetic illustration of the Jewish diaspora: “[d]iffused through time and space,” “the widely scattered wreck sublime / Of vanished nations.” In doing so, it prefigures Daniel’s commitment to fulfilling his Zionist mission. Despite his initial resistance, Daniel tells Gwendolen he is “possessed” with the idea “of restoring a political existence to [his] people” (Vol. IV, Book VIII, Ch. 69, 747), setting limits to his own agency.

Eliot was committed to a form of determinism, and saw inheritance as an important arbiter. However, she acknowledged “the tremendous sense of pressure, of frustration,” implicit in this framework.⁵⁵⁵ In the epigraph to Chapter 43, Eliot quotes Keats’s “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles” (1817):

⁵⁵³ Philip Davis, *The Transferred Life of George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 363.

⁵⁵⁴ Ian Adam, “Character and Destiny in George Eliot’s Fiction,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 20, no. 2 (September 1965): 127-143.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

“My spirit is too weak; mortality
 Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
 And each imagined pinnacle and steep
 Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
 Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.”

(Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 43, 501)

In his poem, Keats attempts to answer the question of what happens when an object is removed from its culture of origin. The poem’s awkward enjambments (“mortality / Weighs heavily on me” and “pinnacle and steep / of godlike hardship”) enact this sense of dislocation. The poem thus becomes an analogue for Eliot’s own removal and re-inscription of the cultural object, as well as a foreshadowing of Daniel’s uprooting from Jewish culture. The speaker of the poem feels oppressed in the presence of The Elgin Marbles, and reflects on his own deterioration and obsolescence. He compares himself to “a sick eagle,” recalling the eagle that devours Prometheus’ liver. Keats’ eagle, however, is restricted to land. The image of the eagle also appears in the chapter. Mordecai is described as, “capable of the unapplauded heroism which turns off the road of achievement at the call of the nearer duty . . . as the hunger of the unfledged bird to the breast of its parent” (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 43, 506). In this chapter, he tells Daniel: “You will take up my life where it was broken” (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 43, 502). Just as the speaker in Keats’ poem is faced with the fragments of a nation, so Daniel is faced with the fragment of a life, “the brief remnant of [Mordecai’s] fervid life” (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 43, 506), which he must complete. While the epigraph at first seems to suggest Mordecai’s impending death, the chapter gives it added significance: the “weight on [Daniel] which was half joy, half anxiety (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 43, 505). Through the interplay of epigraph and chapter, Eliot suggests the doom awaiting those who seek to serve their society in uncommon ways, a subject which was also given lengthy, serious treatment by Browning in *Paracelsus*.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁶ See John Woolford, *Robert Browning* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2007), 31.

By keeping in mind Eliot's interest in the study of classical epigraphy, her chapter epigraphs gain important intellectual contexts: the materiality of texts, the archiving and transmission of knowledge, and monumentalisation. Using epigraphs, Eliot recognises Browning, Wordsworth, and Keats, among other poets, as cultural monuments in their own right, and places them in her own monumentalising apparatus. Typographically, the length of *Daniel Deronda*'s epigraphs make them look like immovable poetic, or prose, monuments; and, indeed, the novel draws comparisons between architectural and poetic remains. Earlier in the novel, we are told that, "the forms of the Juden-gasse . . . set [Daniel] musing on two elements of our historic life which that sense [of union with what is remote] raises into the same region of poetry; — the faint beginnings of faiths and institutions, and their obscure lingering decay; the dust and withered remnants with which they are apt to be covered" (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 32, 337). Yet, for Daniel, these visions are a creative force, "twin green leaves that will become the sheltering tree" (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 32, 337-38); an arboreal image reminding us of the importance of inheritance and descent. Writing on death, Phillips explains that, "Because loss is endemic, retrieval is essential. But this retrieval that is a form of memory is good, not because it wishfully stops time — monumentalises the past — but because . . . it sponsors change."⁵⁵⁷ This offers a paradigm for thinking about epigraphs: imagination breathes new life into inherited forms. Fragments can be signs of permanence, even of renewal. Indeed, the 'spirit' figures which reoccur in the epigraphs from Browning, Wordsworth, and Keats, gesture towards the imaginative traditions that precede, and persist into, this novel.

"The Great Transmitters"

⁵⁵⁷ Adam Phillips, *Darwin's Worms* (London: Faber, 1999), 126.

The epigraphs in *Daniel Deronda* are less prescriptive than those in Eliot's previous novels, offering readers a greater range of possible meanings, more freedom in their interpretations, and wider scope to take a different view from the narrator. Yet, despite this underdetermination, both readers and characters are helpless to effect their desires for the narrative. "The reader is caught in a fantasy of agency," argues Debra Gattelman, "reminded (by the omnipotent author) of the poor power his wishes have over the text."⁵⁵⁸ The responses to the novel were not altogether positive. "It was hard upon [Eliot]," wrote Blackwood, "that people should be angry with her for not doing what they expected with her characters."⁵⁵⁹ In particular, readers were frustrated and disappointed when what was perceived as the two 'halves' of the novel were not conjoined through the union of Gwendolen and Daniel.⁵⁶⁰ However, close attention to the epigraphs reveals the subtle manner in which Eliot linked the two halves, enacting competing ideals of assimilation and separatism, and making visible the contingencies of the novel's reception.

At the end of the second volume of *Daniel Deronda*, in the last chapter of Book IV, Eliot began to introduce German epigraphs; a sign that she would begin to devote more space to her title character. Indeed, the novel's German epigraphs appear exclusively in its second half and are consistently placed at the head of chapters that have to do with 'the Jewish plot'. Eliot's interest in German thought and culture imbues all of her published works, and her private correspondence. Her notebooks, journals, and letters, all abound with references and quotations taken from German authors. However, German seems to have played a particularly important part in the writing of *Daniel Deronda*, and its extensive presence in the novel's epigraphs attest to its cosmopolitanism.

⁵⁵⁸ Debra Gattelman, "Reading Ahead in George Eliot," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 39, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 44.

⁵⁵⁹ John Blackwood to William Blackwood, May 18 1876, *Letters*, 6:253.

⁵⁶⁰ Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*, 211.

Eliot began learning German in 1840. “I like the language extremely,” she wrote to Martha Jackson after her fourth lesson; a few months in and she preferred it to Italian.⁵⁶¹ Indeed, Eliot began her career as a translator of German. In 1854, she and Lewes spent seven or eight months in Germany. He worked on his *Life of Goethe* and she translated Spinoza’s *Ethics*. While she was certainly steeped in Goethe’s ideas at this time, the impression he made on her seems to have been of a general, aesthetic kind.⁵⁶² She was a great admirer of his lyrical poetry, and of “the profound wisdom and the depth of love and reverence which roll like a deep river under the sparkling, dimpling surface of [his] song.”⁵⁶³ In *Daniel Deronda*, she quotes from his *West-östlicher Divan*:

Vor den Wissenden sich stellen,
Sicher ist’s in allen Fällen!
Wenn du lange dich gequälet,
Weiß er gleich, wo dir es fehlet.
Auch auf Beifall darfst du hoffen;
Denn er weiß, wo du’s getroffen.⁵⁶⁴

(Vol. III, Book V, Ch. 39, 449)

This passage evokes the quasi-religious function of the artist as a teacher of moral truth. In the chapter which follows, Mirah sings Goethe’s *Faust* (set to music by the early nineteenth-century composer Prince Radzivill) for Herr Klesmer. The epigraph then reappears in the chapter; Klesmer quotes the first line to Mirah (“Vor den Wissenden sich stellen”) and she responds with the second (“Sicher ist’s in allen Fällen”). This moment gives both characters a

⁵⁶¹ George Eliot to Martha Jackson, 6 April 1840, *Letters*, 1:49; and George Eliot to Maria Lewis, 1 October 1840, 1:69.

⁵⁶² Michael Wolff, “Marian Evans to George Eliot: The Moral and Intellectual Foundation of her Career,” PhD diss., University of Princeton, 1958, 141.

⁵⁶³ George Eliot, “Heine’s Poems,” in *George Eliot: A Writer’s Notebook (1854-1879) and Uncollected Writings*, ed. Joseph Wiesenfarth (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 256.

⁵⁶⁴ “It is safe in all cases to go to the knowledgeable one. When you have tortured yourself for a long time he knows what is wrong with you; you can even hope for applause because he knows where you were right.” See Graham Handley’s Explanatory Notes to *Daniel Deronda*, by George Eliot, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 704.

sense of communion, and the epigraph allows the reader to share in this moment. Mrs Meyrick, however, must ask Mirah to explain the quotation to her: “It means that it is safer to do anything — singing or anything else — before those who know and understand all about it” (Vol. III, Book V, Ch. 39, 455). It is safer because more truthful: Klesmer’s appraisal, and by extension the function of the artist, is at once educational and moral. The poem’s title (meaning West-Eastern collection of poems) is evocative of the novel’s own orientalism. Persia serves as a model for Mordecai’s vision of Israel. He tells Daniel: “Persia with a purified religion magnified itself in art and wisdom. So will a new Judaea, poised between East and West — a covenant of reconciliation” (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 42, 499). The cosmopolitan Klesmer, “a felicitous combination of the German, the Slave [*sic*] and the Semite” (Vol. I, Book I, Ch. 5, 41), represents an alternative to the proto-Zionist Mordecai. For Klesmer, art alone has a defining force. It should not be seen as a vocation alone, but must function for the general life of the nation. In this sense, it is a kind of priesthood.

While Eliot does not quote Hebrew text in the epigraphs, nor in the novel, it is gestured at through Jewish-German historical sources and English translations of Hebrew scripture. As Jennifer Raterman observes, “The epigraphs open a space that multiplies available meanings and connects the central narratives to textual worlds it [*sic*] cannot enter directly.”⁵⁶⁵ In her epigraphs, Eliot quotes from the Psalms, which are read out when Daniel attends synagogue. Indeed, we are told he has “looked enough at the German translation of the Hebrew in the book before him to know that he was chiefly hearing Psalms and Old Testament passages or phrases” (Vol. II, Book IV, Ch. 32, 339). The Psalm that Eliot quotes is, “Philistia, be thou glad of me!”⁵⁶⁶ When Saul and his sons were slain, David returned to the throne and claimed that the Philistines would hail him as a conqueror; a hard task for the vanquished to perform. The

⁵⁶⁵ Raterman, “Translation and the Transfer of Impressions in George Eliot,” 47.

⁵⁶⁶ Psalm 60:8.

apostrophe to Philistia is therefore ironic and defiant. However, Eliot quotes the phrase as if it were plain aphorism, disguising the ironic undertones. In the chapter itself, Grandcourt is courting Gwendolen, and there is still a large degree of uncertainty as to whether Grandcourt will propose and Gwendolen will accept his offer. Both believe in their eventual triumph. Eliot's use of the Psalms is a reminder of the maxim's liturgical lineage, and a gesture toward Hebrew scripture, which ties together the novel's two plot strands.

Scripture is claimed to contain eternal truths, and the most famous examples of wisdom literature are to be found in the Old Testament. However, Eliot instead quotes from the Book of Wisdom, which is part of the Apocrypha (meaning 'hidden') or Deuterocanonical books (meaning 'second canon'). The nation of Israel treated these books with respect but never accepted them as divinely ordained parts of the Hebrew Bible. Few Christians, except for the Roman Catholic Church, believed they belonged in the canon of Scripture, and they have since been shown to contain many historical inaccuracies and contradictions. It is powerful in and of itself that Eliot quotes from the Book of Wisdom, given her interest in hermeneutics. Eliot's translations of Strauss, Spinoza, and Feuerbach, provided her with a solid foundation in hermeneutics, and she extended her own experience of theological exegesis as "a series of misguided distortions" to all linguistic interpretation.⁵⁶⁷ In quoting from the Book of Wisdom, Eliot criticises the selective use of religious text, often used to underwrite subjective views. Her epigraphs moved hermeneutics into the secular realm, anticipating contingency as a characteristic of post-religious society.

In preparation for *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot sent Lewes in search of obscure Jewish books, and read widely in Jewish history and literature.⁵⁶⁸ The markings in her personal copies show

⁵⁶⁷ Suzy Anger, "George Eliot and Philosophy," *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 90-91.

⁵⁶⁸ Davis, *The Transferred Life of George Eliot*, 366.

how she transformed her reading into fictional form.⁵⁶⁹ One of the Jewish-German historians she read in 1876 was Leopold Zunz, who was a founder of intensive Jewish historical research. Zunz believed that a knowledge of Jewish intellectual and cultural traditions would enhance Judaism's reputation, and he devoted his life to discovering, editing, restoring, and making available neglected Jewish source materials.⁵⁷⁰ Eliot participates in this project through her German epigraphs, which disseminate and preserve Jewish intellectual and cultural traditions. Through her epigraphs, Eliot adopts the role of the 'prophet' as Zunz understands it in his *Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters* (1855). Devoted to mediaeval Jewish literature, this book distinguishes 'prophet' from 'psalmist'. While the psalmist "composes penitential prayers, *selichot*, or psalms expressing the anguish of the people amid great suffering," the prophet "composes *piyyutim* — poetic insertions — exhortations invoking the past as a constant memory."⁵⁷¹ Like the prophet figure, Eliot acts as an interpreter. Her novel is at once an interpretation of the past, and an invitation to the reader to make her own interpretations and look forward to the future.

When Eliot quotes Zunz in one of her epigraphs, her role as 'prophet' or interpreter becomes all the more apparent. The epigraph flows into the narrative, which opens with Eliot's translation of the German passage:

Wenn es eine Stufenleiter von Leiden giebt, so hat Israel die höchste Staffel erstiegen; wen die Dauer der Schmerzen und die Geduld, mit welcher sie ertragen werden, adeln, so nehmen es die Juden mit den Hochgeborenen aller Länder auf; wenn eine Literatur reich genannt wird, die wenige klassische Trauerspiele besitzt, welcher Platz gebührt dann einer Tragödie die anderthalb Jahrtausende wahr, gedichtet und dargestellt von den Helden selber?

⁵⁶⁹ William Baker, "George Eliot's Reading in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Historians: A note on the Background of *Daniel Deronda*," *Victorian Studies* 15, no. 4 (June 1, 1972): 463-73.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

“If there are ranks in suffering, Israel takes precedence of all the nations — if the duration of sorrows and the patience with which they are borne ennoble, the Jews are among the aristocracy of every land — if a literature is called rich in the possession of a few classic tragedies, what shall we say to a National Tragedy lasting for fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and the actors were also the heroes?”

(Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 42, 480)

In this epigraph, Zunz uses the image of a national literature ‘rich’ in tragedies as a reminder of Israel’s tragic exile. Historical embodiment is conflated with fictional narrative, placing emphasis on what Davis calls “felt ethics over theorised politics.”⁵⁷² Eliot, however, adds the word ‘National’ to her translation, historicising the epigraph (in other words, making it contingent) and differentiating her own views from Zunz’s assimilationism.⁵⁷³ The addition of this word and the capitals secularises and politicises the dispersion of the Israelites, neutralising the religious idea behind the factual embodiment.

Following on from Eliot’s translation, the narrator claims that, “Daniel had lately been reading that passage of Zunz, and it occurred to him by way of contrast when he was going to the Cohens” (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 42, 480). This diegetic rupture, in which Daniel is imagined reading the epigraph, is a more extreme example of that which takes place in *Middlemarch*, with Wordsworth figuring as both an epigraphic source and a minor character.⁵⁷⁴ Through this diegetic rupture, Eliot posits the relationship between epigraph and chapter as a secular version of the relationship between religious text and exegesis.⁵⁷⁵ Just as the Talmud was “the work

⁵⁷² Davis, *The Transferred Life of George Eliot*, 373.

⁵⁷³ This translation from Zunz appears in Eliot’s Berg notebook, as does an alternative translation: “If a literature is rich because it possesses a few classic tragedies on a few mythical themes, what shall we say to a tragedy which lasted for fifteen hundred years in which the poets the actors the heroes were all one?” See Irwin, *George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, 165.

⁵⁷⁴ Elaine Freedgood, *Worlds Enough: The Invention of Realism in the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 80.

⁵⁷⁵ David Higdon makes a similar argument when he states that, “The epigraphs often cite the ‘spirit’ which the chapter develops as ‘flesh’,” as this analogy itself is Biblical. See David Higdon, “George Eliot and the Art of the Epigraph,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 25, no. 2 (September 1970): 140.

that resulted from Exile when words had to take the place of a homeland,” Eliot endorses the reading and interpretation of historical texts as a means to reflecting on, and preserving, national consciousness.⁵⁷⁶ Indeed, in *Daniel Deronda*, she writes of “a Rabbi transmitting the sentences of an elder time to be registered in . . . the voluminous Babylonian Talmud” (Vol. IV, Book VIII, Ch. 62, 691). If the relationship between epigraph and chapter can be figured in this way, then it also needs to be compared with the contrast between Mordecai and the Cohens. As Daniel wonders, “was there not something typical in the fact that a life like Mordecai’s . . . was nested in the self-gratulating [*sic*] ignorant prosperity of the Cohens?” (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 42, 480). Mordecai embodies the impoverished but ennobled Jew, described in the epigraph that is nested in the larger narrative. Thus, when Daniel contrasts the Cohens to the quotation from Zunz, Eliot suggests epigraphs are to text as Mordecai’s poetic plot is to the Cohen’s prosaic one.

Zunz was a friend of Heinrich Heine, whose work Eliot reviewed for the *Leader* (1855 and 1856), *The Westminster Review* (1856), and the *Saturday Review* (1856). Heine’s *Geständnisse* (1854) is the principal text she refers to in her most important essay on Heine, “German Wit: Heinrich Heine” (1856). She also quotes from it in one of *Daniel Deronda*’s epigraphs, which suggests that it held significance for her throughout her journalistic and novelistic careers. In “German Wit”, Eliot refuses to “dwell lengthily on [Heine’s] failings” as “it is not for pigmies at their ease to criticize the writhings of the Titan chained to the rock.”⁵⁷⁷ The proleptic introduction of Heine as a Promethean figure twenty years before his (and Prometheus’) epigraphic appearances in *Daniel Deronda* establishes epigraphs as a form of

⁵⁷⁶ It was Emanuel Deutsch who introduced London’s intellectual circles to the Talmud through his 1867 *Quarterly Review* article. Eliot took Hebrew lessons from Deutsch, and Davis credits him with giving her “the Jewish idea” for her novel. See *ibid.*, 365. See also Elinor Shaffer, ‘Kubla Khan’ and ‘The Fall of Jerusalem’: *The Mythological School of Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁵⁷⁷ George Eliot, “German Wit,” in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1963), 245.

mediation, from the very beginning. In her dissertation on Heine and the Victorians, Ann Marie McMahon claims that, “Heine’s inimitable ability to bring alive in his writings the essence of the Jewish character and ethos gave [Eliot] an important insight into the way of life of the Jewish people which no amount of factual reading could rival. In this way George Eliot’s knowledge of, and affinity with, Heine played an important part in the writing of *Daniel Deronda*, and her use of epigraphs from his works certainly bears this out.”⁵⁷⁸ The German epigraphs, in *Daniel Deronda*, are therefore a means of passing on both cultural heritage and national character.

Quoting from Heine’s *Geständnisse*, Eliot likens the creation of a nation to artistic endeavour. Heine depicts the nation as art and, in quoting him, Eliot suggests art is foundational to the preservation of the nation:

“Moses, trotz seiner Befeindung der Kunst, dennoch selber ein grosser Künstler war und den wahren Künstlergeist besass. Nur war dieser Künstlergeist bei ihm, wie bei seinen ägyptischen Landsleuten, nur auf das Colossale und Unverwüstliche gerichtet. Aber nicht wie die Aegypter formirte er seine Kunstwerke aus Backstein und Granit, sondern er baute Menchenpyramiden, er meisselte Menschen Obeliskten, er nahm einen armen Hirtenstamm und Schuf daraus ein Volk, das ebenfalls den Jahrhunderten, trotzen sollte . . . er Schuf Israel.”⁵⁷⁹

(Vol. IV, Book VIII, Ch. 63, 692)

This is a secular turn from nation to art, religion to culture: Moses is no longer a prophet but an artist, and Israel is no longer land but a monument. Like Wordsworth, who writes in *The Prelude* of artistic production as the “monuments” of “vanished nations,” Heine writes of the “pyramids” and “obelisks of men” that have endured throughout the centuries despite multiple

⁵⁷⁸ Ann Marie McMahon, “Heine and the Victorians,” PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1989, 54.

⁵⁷⁹ “Moses, despite his enmity to art, was nevertheless a great artist and had the true spirit of art which, like that of his Egyptian fellow citizens, was focused on the huge and indestructible. Unlike the Egyptians, who made their work out of stone and granite, he built pyramids of men, he sculpted obelisks of men, he took a poor peasant slave and made a people that would last for hundreds of years. He made Israel.” See Explanatory Notes to *Daniel Deronda*, 712.

exiles into lands that are not their own. This epigraph recalls one of Eliot's autographic prose epigraphs, which occurs earlier in the novel, in which she likens the inheritance of art to the division of the promised land: "each has to win his portion by hard fighting" (Vol. II, Book III, Ch. 23, 232). The recurring thematic link between art and nation within both allographic and autographic epigraphs demonstrates their importance to the structure of the novel, as it conjoins the English and Jewish plots; but more importantly, it makes a bid for literature as the unifying force between individuals and within a nation. Mirah's prayer-books and Bible, for instance, allow her to feel "a closer companionship with [her] mother" and "to know a little of our religion, and the history of our people" (Vol. II, Book III, Ch. 20, 198). Daniel's manuscripts and family records "will give us a sort of communion with [the Spanish Jews]" (Vol. IV, Book VIII, Ch. 63, 696). Writing evolves from a vehicle for sympathy to a means of passing on truth.

Davis suggests that issues of unification at stake in *Daniel Deronda* are related to "the diaspora and the role of an exiled Jewish idealism, in the debate between the extremes of complete assimilation and total separatism."⁵⁸⁰ Dispersed within the novel and set at a remove from the narrative, the epigraphs enact this debate. Both a part of the text, and distinct from it, they exist somewhere between the two extremes of assimilation and separatism. Just as "the great transmitters . . . preserved and enlarged for [the Jewish diaspora] the heritage of memory, and saved the soul of Israel alive as a seed among the tombs" (Vol. III, Book VI, Ch. 42, 484), so Eliot's epigraphs preserve and enlarge a cosmopolitan cultural heritage, and plant narrative seeds for the reader that may, or may not, come to fruition. Through their typographical placement and thematic connections — across the novel itself, across time, across texts and traditions, the novel's epigraphs ask us to invest in the in-between, and to read with a greater degree of imagination.

⁵⁸⁰ Davis, *The Transferred Life of George Eliot*, 366.

Conclusion

While the epigraphs in *Middlemarch* registered the limits of our ability to know the other, those in *Daniel Deronda* acknowledges new limits to this knowledge, troubling the shape and form of the novel itself. Indeed, *Daniel Deronda* is often described as a transitional work, one that “ushers in the shift from the conventions of Victorian realism to the more radical narrative innovations that characterize the high modernist novel.”⁵⁸¹ Yet, as I have argued, the novel owes many of its supposedly radical features to the pioneering *Tristram Shandy*. “Life itself is merely a fragment,” Harries writes in relation to Sterne, “but a fragment, as the Biblical resonance of the word suggests, is also a sign of something higher, wider, and more encompassing.”⁵⁸² In a similar fashion, Eliot’s fragments of philosophical, spiritual, and religious writing expand the realm of realism, forcing readers to contemplate an order “more inscrutable and divine” than those of the ‘mere mortals’ she represents.⁵⁸³

Richard Rorty, for whom the relation of all language to the world is one of contingency, describes the quarrel between the poetic and the philosophical as, “the tension between an effort to achieve self-creation by the recognition of contingency and an effort to achieve universality by the transcendence of contingency.”⁵⁸⁴ In other words, poets attend to the contingencies of individual lives, while philosophers are more interested in the commonalities and continuities between all men. Rather than getting caught up in this quarrel which Plato began, and which moved through the Greek philosophers, the empirical scientists, and later

⁵⁸¹ Rachel Hollander, “Daniel Deronda and the Ethics of Alterity,” *LIT* 16, no. 1 (2005): 75.

⁵⁸² Harries, “Sterne’s Novels,” 44.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁸⁴ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23.

still the Romantic poets and German idealists; instead of operating at the extremes of the poetic and the philosophical, the contingent and the universal, separatism and assimilationism, Eliot found middle-ground.

While Barthes tells us, “les contingences: c’est tout ce qui dépend du hasard (et pour La Rochefoucauld, c’est l’un des plus grands maîtres du monde),” the contingency at work in *Daniel Deronda* does not preclude determinism.⁵⁸⁵ The epigraph form, I argue, allowed Eliot to deepen her alertness to the contingencies of language and interpretation, of moral judgement and behaviour, without sacrificing her commitment to a particular form of determinism, one that embraces human will and choice. Through epigraphs, she was able to maintain causal sequence as the organising principle of her moral framework and novelistic practice, while granting readers the freedom of “imaginative *reach*” — possibilities to venture outside the proper ‘within’ of narrative, to challenge its conventional delimitations, and to tear down the barrier beyond which epigraphs gain their categorisation as ornament.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁵ “The contingent: that which is subject to chance (and for La Rochefoucauld, this is one of the greatest masters of the universe).” Barthes, “La Rochefoucauld,” 74.

⁵⁸⁶ Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*, 195.

Conclusion

While the German Romantic philosopher Novalis considered the fragment form to be “prefatory to the genuine novel,” George Eliot considered it a departure from the novel, having pushed the form to its limits in writing *Daniel Deronda* (1876). In 1879, she published *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, a collection of essays in which she uses a self-conscious narrative persona to address issues of writing that she had encountered throughout her career. “*Impressions*,” writes Nancy Henry, “comes at the end of her development as a late Victorian writer of organic form, and at the beginning of what looks like early Modernist experimentation through fragmentation in form.”⁵⁸⁷ Her epigraphic novels, however, suggest this experimentation began within the perceived constraints of realism, and present a challenge to Roland Barthes’s understanding of the classic realist text. *Daniel Deronda*, in particular, anticipates fragmentation as a pervasive modernist aesthetic, as well as an aspect of *écriture féminine*.

The concept of *écriture féminine* was developed by Hélène Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975). In this manifesto, Cixous associated the repression of women’s bodies and desires with the repression of women’s language. Arguing that masculine writing is linear, representational, and disembodied, she urged women to instead embrace fragmentation and to write through the body. Eliot, I have shown, also rejected the idea of reading as an intellectual pursuit separate from the corporeal. The suggestion she makes in *Daniel Deronda*, that there may be forms, and ways of reading, that are more masculine or feminine, prefigured Cixous’s *écriture féminine* by almost a century.

⁵⁸⁷ See Kathleen M. Wheeler and David Simpson ed, *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 9; and Nancy Henry, introduction to *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, by George Eliot (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), ix.

While epigraphs became less common in Modernist novels, poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound popularised their use in poems. In his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” published in 1919 in *The Egoist*, T.S. Eliot emphasised the importance of “tradition” to the composition and study of poetry. This “tradition” had nothing to do with the canon and could not be inherited from a previous generation. It involved “the historical sense,” which he defined as “a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.”⁵⁸⁸ He argued that all past poems constitute “an ideal order” that is then modified through the introduction of a new work. His own use of epigraphs (not to mention allusion, quotation, imitation, appropriation and so on) captures the mutual influence of past and present in his poems, making him the natural inheritor of Eliot’s epigraphic form.

The novel also experienced radical fragmentation, as Modernist authors experimented with language, form, and the representation of consciousness. Virginia Woolf, for instance, used the ‘stream of consciousness’ technique in order to “achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords; showing all the traces of the mind’s passage through the world; achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments.”⁵⁸⁹ She did not use epigraphs but past literature survives within her narratives as “orts, scraps, and fragments.”⁵⁹⁰ Gillian Beer explains how Woolf reimagines this Shakespearean phrase, and uses it as a binding refrain in *Between the Acts* (1941): “Where in its original setting the strongest association of the metaphor is with the greasy remnants of a meal,” writes Beer, “Woolf . . . re-invent[s] the line so that it suggests instead archaeological findings and fragments — and the wisps of speech

⁵⁸⁸ T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” reprinted in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 106.

⁵⁸⁹ Virginia Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897–1909*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1990), 393.

⁵⁹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), 188.

over-heard.”⁵⁹¹ Woolf’s interest in material vestiges, and in gossip, recalls Eliot’s own. The images surrounding epigraphs in *Middlemarch* are those of inscriptions cut in stone and left to lie face-down on a beach, with the potential to reveal the secrets and gossip of past empires.

Eliot’s legacy has moved through Modernism and into contemporary feminism, with writers such as Kate Zambreno exploring the idea of re-reading as a form of desire, of repetition, of mourning; and reclaiming the fragment as a feminine form, amenable to writing postpartum. “Everything postpartum is a performance of the body and endurance,” she reflects in a *Paris Review* interview with fellow writer Sarah Manguso, “Which is what writing is as well. The body is so often left out of the question of writing.”⁵⁹² Zambreno is part of a larger group of female writers writing about, while living through, the material conditions of new motherhood, using the fragment form. Yet, even before she became a mother, Zambreno was drawn to smaller compositional units. In *Green Girl* (2011), for instance, epigraphs structure the novel in the absence of chapters. One critic, commenting on the relationship Zambreno builds between the epigraphs and the narrative, observes that they make “the chapters feel like a film reel unfurling.”⁵⁹³ Although film is a constant reference point in the novel, it is first and foremost metafictional, a reflection on the act of literature.⁵⁹⁴ The novel owes its title to Shakespeare’s Polonius, who tells Ophelia, “You speak like a green girl, / unsifted in such perilous circumstance.” This passage also serves as one of the novel’s epigraphs.

⁵⁹¹ Gillian Beer, “Between the Acts: Resisting the End,” in *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground: Essays by Gillian Beer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 134.

⁵⁹² Sarah Manguso, “Writing Postpartum: A Conversation between Kate Zambreno and Sarah Manguso,” *The Paris Review*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/04/24/writing-postpartum-a-conversation-between-kate-zambreno-and-sarah-manguso/>.

⁵⁹³ Jason Diamond, “An Existential Novel About Retail: Karolina Waclawiak and Kate Zambreno Discuss ‘Green Girl,’” *Flavorwire*, June 25, 2014, <https://www.flavorwire.com/464238/an-existential-novel-about-retail-karolina-waclawiak-and-kate-zambreno-discuss-green-girl>.

⁵⁹⁴ Diamond, “An Existential Novel About Retail.”

Ruth, the novel's protagonist, is a shop-girl at Harrods, selling a perfume called Desire. This motif, as James Greer has noted, underscores her ambivalent relation to the male gaze: she both wants to be, and resents being, looked at.⁵⁹⁵ The epigraphs in *Green Girl*, a collection of images and fragments of literature, are part of Ruth's feminine performance. She uses them, as well as omniscient narration, to describe herself to herself; a mode of self-representation Zambreno suggests is feminine in nature. "Sometimes she narrates her actions inside her head in third-person," the narrator tells us. "Does that make her a writer or a woman?"⁵⁹⁶ The novel's epigraphs also model the dislocation that results from such self-representation. "Sometimes she is struck by the sense that she is someone else's character," writes Zambreno, "that she is saying someone else's lines."⁵⁹⁷

Ruth is the product of what Elaine Freedgood has described as, "an internalized grammar of meaning that we have learned (as individuals, as a culture) from literary novels and from literary criticism."⁵⁹⁸ Through its epigraphs, *Green Girl* suggests that the stories we use to tell our own, both to ourselves and to others, can constrict us as much as explain us. If, as Freedgood argues, we are called upon to "write" the parts of (modernist) text that are left unwritten, the epigraphs in Zambreno's novel (indebted as it is to Western European modernism) both contextualise Ruth and condemn the discourse that has so often relegated women to the margins. "I really wanted to point to where the green girl was in literature and philosophy and where she wasn't," Zambreno explains.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁵ James Greer, "Everything is Cinema," *Bookforum*, December/January 2012, <https://www.bookforum.com/print/1804/green-girl-by-kate-zambreno-8600>.

⁵⁹⁶ Kate Zambreno, *Green Girl* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 27.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁹⁸ Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 6.

⁵⁹⁹ Kelly Roark, "Such Perilous Circumstance: Kate Zambreno on her novel 'Green Girl'," *NewCityLit*, October 26, 2011, <https://lit.newcity.com/2011/10/26/such-perilous-circumstance-kate-zambreno-on-her-novel-green-girl/>.

In her use of epigraphs, Zambreno is part of the long tradition I have sketched out, in which epigraphs were used for highly gendered purposes. Using the classical motto at the head of each issue, periodical editors such as Joseph Addison and Richard Steele perpetuated common assumptions about class and gender; in particular, that women could not read Greek or Latin. Ann Radcliffe, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, used epigraphs in English. She quoted both men and women, and composed her own epigraphs, dislodging the gender-determined criteria of cultural participation. In doing so, she claimed a place for herself and her female readership within a masculine tradition. She approached the novel form with the interests of a growing female readership in mind, using epigraphs to temper the imagination through the development of rational thought. Using the concept of forgetting oneself, she depicted concerns about women's reading and sexual transgression, which were associated with the drastic changes in the nature and size of readerships that were widespread at the time of her writing. She worked against this self-forgetfulness through her epigraphic form, advocating a moral model of reading in which the reader participates in the tracing of causal and associative connections.

Walter Scott, who followed Radcliffe in the use of epigraphs, attempted to rescue the novel from the Gothic's feminisation of the form. Despite this, he quoted both men and women in his epigraphs (although not in equal quantities) and many critics continue to view Scott as a protector of marginal figures, including of women. Scott, like Radcliffe, was interested in paratext for the work it might do to produce a more attentive, and therefore retentive, reader. He used it to protract what he perceived as fragile attention, to incite interest across lengthier reading times, and to catch out those who were reading for plot and might be tempted to skip over parts of the narrative. Instead, his epigraphs encourage readers to memorise small passages through interpretation, as opposed to reiteration, and that model the archiving of cultural and historical knowledge, giving shape to an amorphous collection of oral and print

traditions. Placing readers at the centre of his project, he probed the value of an ‘authentic’ national culture, suggesting culture can be made, and remade, as much as it can be inherited from older generations.

Eliot rarely quoted women in her epigraphs, although she wrote a large number of them herself. She did, however, challenge masculine forms. This challenge is latent in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), achieving its full significance in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Eliot’s epigraphic practice is varied, adapted to suit the particular aims of each novel. In *Felix Holt* (1867), she used epigraphs to articulate particular formal principles that were, for the Victorians, central to other spheres, such as science, politics, economics and narrative. She then turned her paratextual interests towards the use of these formal principles for the development of mental habits. In *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* (1871-1872), the epigraphs probe the extent to which we can shape our own character, and the role of reading in this equation. Eliot saw epigraphs as a controlled exercise in choice, and choice itself as having the greatest potential for growth. While, in these earlier novels, Eliot seems to want to tame her sense that life is contingent and multiple, she embraces contingency in *Daniel Deronda*. Interpretative freedom becomes the defining feature of her epigraphic form, anticipating developments in Modernist literature. In all of these novels, Eliot’s epigraphs remind us that advancing human knowledge should not be a gendered pursuit, but open to all readers willing and able to contribute.

Many contemporary authors continue to favour the less labour-intensive title-page epigraph or the epigraph placed at the head of a section.⁶⁰⁰ In Sally Rooney’s *Normal People* (2018), it is possible to see the influence of the Victorian novel’s form on her own choice of novelistic structure, narration, and characterisation, but the novel’s paratext regresses to the level of plot: “It is one of the secrets in that change of mental poise which has been fitly named

⁶⁰⁰ For novels with epigraphs at the head of a section, see Julian Barnes’ *Metroland* (1980), Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011), Donna Tartt’s *The Goldfinch* (2013), J.K. Rowling’s *Cuckoo’s Calling* (2014) and Ali Smith’s *Girl Meets Boy* (2007) and *How to be Both* (2014).

conversion,” reads the title-page epigraph, “that to many among us neither heaven nor earth has any revelation till some personality touches theirs with a peculiar influence, subduing them into receptiveness.” Quoted from Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, it simply illustrates the relationship between the novel’s two main characters, Marianne and Connell. It also suggests *Normal People* is a modern retelling of *Daniel Deronda*, albeit without the chapter epigraphs.

Despite their seeming absence from more recent novels, chapter epigraphs have experienced a revival in the last three decades, appearing in novels of various genres, from historical fiction to the more surprising science fiction, fantasy, and crime.⁶⁰¹ These epigraphs range from the fictional to the monological: each chapter of Frank Herbert’s *Dune* (1965) begins with an epigraph excerpted from the fictional writings of one of the novel’s characters, while the epigraphs in Mary Stewart’s *This Rough Magic* (1964) are all quotes from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (c. 1610-11); and Kathleen Cambor, in her novel *In Sunlight, in a Beautiful Garden* (2001), draws all of the epigraphs from the writings of Marcus Aurelius. In *The Shipping News* (1993), Annie Proulx has a passage from Clifford W. Ashley’s 1944 work *The Ashley Book of Knots* heading most chapters, with other nautical material for others. Her maritime epigraphs recall those in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), which appear as a catalogue of whaling references, although Proulx’s epigraphs are parsed throughout the novel, as opposed to grouped together at the beginning or end of it.

Proulx has expressed her doubts about the efficacy of the epigraph. “Nobody reads epigraphs,” she claimed in an interview with *The Guardian*, “which is fine by me.”⁶⁰² Indeed,

⁶⁰¹ Recent anglophone novels with chapter epigraphs include Mary Stewart’s *This Rough Magic* (1964), Frank Herbert’s *Dune* (1965), Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* (1966), John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969), Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* (1972), Colin Dexter’s Inspector Morse series (1975-1999), Carl Sagan’s *Contact* (1985), A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990), Annie Proulx’s *The Shipping News* (1993), Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace* (1996), Deborah Moggach’s *Tulip Fever* (1999), Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees* (2001), Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods* (2001), Kathleen Cambor’s *In Sunlight, in a Beautiful Garden* (2001), Jasper Fforde’s *The Eyre Affair* (2001), Joseph O’Connor’s *Star of the Sea* (2002), Kate Zambreno’s *Green Girl* (2011), J.K. Rowling’s *The Silkworm* (2014), and Tony Tulathimutte’s *Private Citizens* (2016).

⁶⁰² Lucy Rock, “Annie Proulx: ‘I’ve had a life. I see how slippery things can be,’” *The Guardian*, 05 June, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jun/05/annie-proulx-ive-had-a-life-i-see-how-slippery-things-can-be>.

the acknowledgments to *The Shipping News* seem to suggest that its epigraphs were more important for Proulx in the composition the novel than for her audience in the reading of it: Proulx credits *The Ashley Book of Knots* as the inspiration behind the novel, without which “this book would have remained just the thread of an idea.”⁶⁰³ Nevertheless, the novel’s epigraphs have structural as well as metaphoric importance. In piecing together these enigmatic fragments, readers experience the same gropings, hesitations, and false starts as the novel’s characters.⁶⁰⁴ It is Proulx’s deep-held belief that “a book is a collaboration” and the novel’s epigraphs serve as a prime example of the reader’s participation.⁶⁰⁵

Eighteenth-century, Romantic, and Victorian authors have offered those writing in the modern and post-modern periods a diverse range of forms and methodologies to examine, such as the use of the fragment in the novel. The impulse in *The Shipping News* is also towards fragmentation, but with the post-modern use of mixed-media.⁶⁰⁶ The novel’s paratext includes illustrations or diagrams of knots, visual representations of the novel’s human entanglements.⁶⁰⁷ These pictorial representations also appear within the narrative, fragmenting the chapters into smaller units. Even the novel’s language is knotted. Proulx often omits pronouns, and Tracy Whalen notes her use of the asyndeton, a rhetorical device that omits conjunctions between the different parts of a sentence. She describes its use in *The Shipping News* as “a form of syntactic ellipsis that results in a highly paratactic style emphasizing

⁶⁰³ Annie Proulx, *The Shipping News* (London: 4th Estate, 2019), x. Hereafter cited in the text.

⁶⁰⁴ Alike Varvogli, *Annie Proulx’s The Shipping News: A Reader’s Guide* (Continuum: New York, 2002), 43.

⁶⁰⁵ Annie Proulx, interview with James Naughtie, “Bookclub,” *BBC*, 03 June, 2001, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p00fpwdg>.

⁶⁰⁶ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 123.

⁶⁰⁷ The pictorial epigraph was not Proulx’s innovation, nor was it even a novelistic one. In W. E. B. Dubois’ collection, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), each essay begins with both a verse epigraph and a musical notation; “[t]he ‘device’ of the double epigraphs . . . indicating the inadequacy of standard literacy and pointing readers in the direction of a yet-to-be-attained goal of multicultural awareness.” See Dale E. Peterson, *Up from Bondage: The Literatures of Russian and African American Soul* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 74.

fragments of experience.”⁶⁰⁸ These interruptions are part of the process of reading the novel. Just as the main character, Quoye, is on “an arduous spiritual journey to replete the self, to give it wholeness, to provide subject,” readers of Proulx’s epigraphic novel are impelled to construct the whole from the part, to give each epigraph its significance.⁶⁰⁹ Unlike other post-modern novels, *The Shipping News* does not evince a distrust of wholeness but strains toward closure and completion, ending with an illustration of a ‘decorative terminal knot’.

Through her epigraphs, Proulx engages with the paratextual practices of Radcliffe, Scott, and Eliot. Through her epigraphs, as well as her descriptions of unusual rituals and enigmatic proverbs, she makes Newfoundland “an enchanted, magical place.”⁶¹⁰ This recalls Radcliffe’s own use of epigraphs, as well as her ‘explained supernatural’. Indeed, in *The Shipping News*, all mysteries are eventually solved. Proulx, moreover, uses riddles and sea shanties in her epigraphs, harkening back to the investigative work that Scott required of his own readers, and to the border ballads he used in his epigraphs. Both are interested in the preservation of oral traditions and dialects, and in “the individual, or group, or region, or place, or time that’s caught in change, that’s caught in flux, that balances on some kind of edge that’s either disintegrating or coming together or both.”⁶¹¹ The novel, as a whole, represents the threat of social, economic, and ecological change to the rural communities of Newfoundland, and the novel’s margins offer a space in which to safeguard traditions, memories, and knowledge that might otherwise disappear. In and through her epigraphs, Proulx preserves antique technologies that continue to serve us long after their presumed obsolescence.

⁶⁰⁸ Tracy Whalen, “‘Camping’ with Annie Proulx: *The Shipping News* and Tourist Desire,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 82 (2004): 61.

⁶⁰⁹ Louise Flavin, “Quoye’s Quest: Knots and Fragments as Tools of Narration in *The Shipping News*,” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 40, no. 3 (1999): 241.

⁶¹⁰ Varvogli, *Annie Proulx’s The Shipping News: A Reader’s Guide*, 43.

⁶¹¹ Suzanne L. MacLaughlin, “The Life of an Author in Demand,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 22, 1994: 14.

Readers of Proulx's novel may choose to engage with the epigraphs, to bring epigraph and narrative together, or to skip them altogether. The novel's title-page epigraph tells us that a knot of eight crossings, an average-size knot, has 256 different arrangements: "Make only one change in this 'over-and-under' sequence, and either an entirely different knot is made or no knot at all may result."⁶¹² Given their optional nature, the epigraphs seem to advocate for a way of reading that, itself, seems to exist at the edges of discursive practice. Indeed, the paratext of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel now seems under threat: mass digitisation has not been kind to title-pages, prefaces, and footnotes, although chapter epigraphs tend to be spared because they are part of the chaptering apparatus.

Proulx's penchant for detail recalls Eliot's own immersion in the culture and practices of those she represented, as well as her scrupulous attention to contexts, settings, and historical backgrounds. She recalls having read 50 or 60 sociological, folkloristic and historical studies of Newfoundland before she sat down to write a single word.⁶¹³ Eliot quoted other writers in her epigraphs, or composed her own, whereas most of Proulx's epigraphs are taken from reference works. However, both writers use epigraphs as hints and clues to their chapters. Often, the metaphoric meaning of Proulx's definitions cannot be grasped until the chapter has been read. In some cases, Proulx uses the epigraphs to foreshadow narrative developments, but at such narrative distance that the significance is lost until the novel has been read twice.⁶¹⁴ Proulx therefore uses epigraphs to give her narrative a circular form, a structural technique first used by Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss*, whose title-page epigraph also serves as the last lines of the novel.

⁶¹² Annie Proulx, *The Shipping News*, front matter.

⁶¹³ Geraldine Baum, "A Mind Filled with Stories," *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1993: E1.

⁶¹⁴ In the epigraph to Chapter 13, for instance, we are told that, "A cringle will make an excellent emergency handle for a suitcase." In the chapter itself, Quoye meets the Melvilles aboard their yacht. Only eight chapters later does he find Mr. Melville's decapitated head in a suitcase.

In this thesis, I have argued that, although Radcliffe, Scott, and Eliot used chapter epigraphs to different ends, consistent with the content and aims of their own genres, all three authors attempted to correct some version of exclusionary politics, be it gender, nation, or class. Proulx's novel follows in their footsteps, using epigraphs to call attention to communities at what she has called "the fringe-edges of dissolution" and to preserve their traditions.⁶¹⁵ Her epigraphs also highlight the enduring constraints of gender. "In rural communities there is a division of labour," Proulx claimed in one interview. "Women are in the house doing household things, generally. Men are outside doing the interesting things, generally."⁶¹⁶ While Radcliffe and Eliot attempted to shift gendered practices, Proulx has argued that gender issues do not inform her technique. "If the information age has done nothing else," she has argued, "it has made us aware of the complexities of categories, the infinite possibilities of sub-heads and cross-indexing."⁶¹⁷ Perhaps, then, the abundant and diverse sub-heads in *The Shipping News* — titles, epigraphs, illustrations — work to remind us that it is possible to be several things at once.

Proulx's post-modern novel differs from its predecessors in that its paratext is neutral: she quotes in large part from works of reference, such as encyclopaedias and dictionaries, keeping readers within the bounds of the novel's pages. This neutral stance is political in itself: the "cultivated reader" is at no advantage here, in contrast to the modernist novel. Most of the novel's epigraphs are definitions, descriptions, or illustrations of knots, and Proulx names her sources so there is no need to go searching for them. This eliminates the intertextual aspects of the epigraph, and demands a formalist approach. The requirements are more practical than

⁶¹⁵ Mark Asquith, *Annie Proulx's Brokeback Mountain and Postcards* (London: Continuum, 2009), 9.

⁶¹⁶ John Detrixhe, "An Interview with Annie Proulx," *Bookslut*, December 2005, http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005_12_007310.php.

⁶¹⁷ Annie Proulx, "Tell it Like a Person," *The Observer* (2007); cited in Varvogli, *Annie Proulx's The Shipping News: A Reader's Guide*, 16.

intellectual: her fragmented form demands a sustained reading practice, as she battles distraction and impatience with the slow work of the novel.

Through both her prose and her paratext, Proulx attempts to slow the pace of reading. “Read fast, in snatches, some modern text,” writes Barthes in *The Pleasures of the Text* (1973), “and it becomes opaque, inaccessible to your pleasure.”⁶¹⁸ Instead, the reader of the modern text should read without haste, weighing each aspect of, and sticking to, the text. The classical narratives of the nineteenth century, Barthes argues, do not lend themselves to this applied reading. In fact, he warns that the slow and comprehensive reading of such a narrative will induce terrific boredom in the reader. Describing his own reading of these novels, he explains: “I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again.”⁶¹⁹ While Barthes claims that readers of the modern novel, specifically, should aim, “not to devour, to gobble, but to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover . . . the leisure of bygone readings: to be *aristocratic* readers,” this thesis has shown how novelists throughout the ages have been concerned with pace and attention, using epigraphs to moderate both of these aspects of the reading experience.⁶²⁰

German historian Rolf Engelsing has argued that, until about 1750, most reading was ‘intensive’.⁶²¹ Books were scarce and expensive, and were read several times over, often out loud to friends and to families. When print culture expanded, reading, in turn, became more ‘extensive’. Reading materials, such as books, newspapers, periodicals, and other ephemera, proliferated. These were read once, at a faster pace and often alone. Both intensive and extensive reading have co-existed throughout the centuries and continue to do so, although extensive reading now seems to dominate the reading landscape. Through epigraphic form,

⁶¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Millar (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 12.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁶²¹ Rolf Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500-1800* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974).

authors have attempted to make the novel the focus of more careful contemplation, to enlist the reader's participation. Unlike its other iterations, such as the title-page or poetic epigraph, the purpose of the chapter epigraph has not been to abstract and to summarise but to allow more room for the reader to think, to write themselves through the process of interpretation. The idea that life is experienced in fragments, a series of interruptions, unexpected turns, and continuations, permeates the epigraphic novel.

While the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century epigraph may have demanded education, and further development, from its readers, the post-modern epigraph requires a different kind of literacy. Authors such as Proulx and Margaret Atwood have used pictorial, as well as linguistic epigraphs, at the head of their chapters. Zambreno's epigraphs remain linguistic, although she draws from a range of media. She cites from religious and mystical texts, poetry, novels, notebooks, biography, philosophy, theory, sociology, music, film, filmmakers, and other visual artists. She quotes writers, quoting other writers. Just as Eliot's were, her novels are seeded out of her reading and her notebooks. Zambreno moves between prose, verse, and dialogue; between centuries, reaching back to Biblical times; between languages, although, unlike Eliot's epigraphs, all of Zambreno's appear translated into English. Zambreno does not refer to Eliot but an epigraph, taken from St. Teresa of Avila, to whom Eliot alludes in the prelude to *Middlemarch*, tenuously connects their epigraphic projects.

When asked about her influences, Zambreno claims, "I didn't get into the nineteenth-century novel until after I wrote and published *Green Girl*."⁶²² Instead, she cites Barthes's *The Death of the Author* (1967) as one of her main sources. In this essay, Barthes laid out his vision for a new kind of text: "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres

⁶²² Kate Zambreno, e-mail message to author, July 17, 2020.

of culture . . . The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings.”⁶²³ To Eliot, so particular about interpretations, an author was more than a recombiner of older materials. Freedgood, using ideas and terms set forth in Barthes’s *The Pleasures of the Text* and *S/Z* (1970), argues that *Middlemarch* is “the readerly text in the process of becoming a writerly one, that is to say, this is a text that teaches readers how to rightly “write” that which is unwritten in literary language.”⁶²⁴ *Green Girl* comes closer, perhaps, but its epigraphs still require readers to bring historical, cultural, and linguistic knowledge to the task, not to mention a keen visual sense and an ear for dialogue.

Barthes is in part responsible for the celebration of the modernist and post-modern form as realism’s antithesis in the *scriptable* text. Certain critics, influenced by his claim that all classic texts are *lisible*, have identified Eliot’s work as such.⁶²⁵ In my account of it, the epigraphic novel cannot be *lisible* and will never be entirely *scriptable*. Reading an epigraphic novel is, to a certain extent, a creative act; thus, the epigraphic novel cannot be *lisible*. Its reader is neither idle, nor intransitive. Yet, because it is not created *entirely* anew each time it is read, it also does not quite fit what Barthes describes as *scriptable*. The epigraphic novel creates a partnership, or a collaboration, between author and reader, in which the reader is not granted unfettered freedom but given limited and directed opportunities to uncover meaning. “Not a refusal of meaning then,” writes Zadie Smith, “but a quest for it.”⁶²⁶ In following all of its threads, in pursuing each of its references, the reader of the epigraphic novel is afforded, not just the pleasure of her own interpretations, but a share in the intellect and the emotion, as well as the passions and the humours, of its creator.

⁶²³ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image – Music – Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 146.

⁶²⁴ Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things*, 6.

⁶²⁵ See, for instance, Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

⁶²⁶ Zadie Smith, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), 53.

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