

Title: Victorian Research Seminar Outline Week Twelve

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Week 12 Outline

General Thoughts on the Book

- What did people think about the book? How did you feel reading it?
- What is up with the pacing? (There's a *huge* difference between the first and second halves.) Can we describe what changes about pacing?
- Things Ana wants to talk about: Arthur being forgiven, why does George Eliot hate Hetty, and presumably not hate Dinah, (why does Hetty die at the end even after her stay of execution, is this connected to Hetty being described as childish all the time?), and the connections between Dinah and Hetty and Adam and Arthur, Ana's Invisible Man (there are lots of dudes on horseback!!)
- Chapter 17? Why does she just pause the story?
- Is there something with Hetty's name? (George Eliot *could* have read *The Scarlet Letter* and both have children out of wedlock to great social disadvantage and personal danger?)

The Natural History of German Life

- The project of "realistic" assessments of the working classes: "Our social novels profess to represent the people as they are, and the unreality of their representations is a grave evil." "We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness"
- Is that "realism"? Or is it just classism?

For context, what about her claims like: > In Germany perhaps more than in any other country, it is among the peasantry that we must look for the historical type of the national *physique*. In the towns this type has become so modified to express the personality of the individual, that even "family likeness" is often but faintly marked. But the peasants may still be distinguished into groups by their physical peculiarities.

Or

In the cultivated world each individual has his style of speaking and writing. But among the peasantry it is the race, the district, the province, that has its style: namely its dialect, its phraseology, its proverbs and its songs, which belong alike to the entire body of the people.

- Even if we accept her project, does *Adam Bede* do this? If we assume its mission was to not romanticize rural working-class life, did it succeed? If we assume its mission is to represent it realistically, did it succeed? Are those the same project? Can we know what portion of distortion, if there is some, is based in the nature of the text as a historical novel when it was written as well as in our agricultural remove from Eliot's time?
- Look back to when we read *The Order of Things*; what does it mean to produce a natural history of a modern (or relatively modern) human society? Is that a thing we can do without reducing the human to the inhuman?

Katie's Summary

- Katie, could you tell us a little about the big takeaway from this article and your summary?
- Does Eliot's essay being a review itself affect how we read and understand it?
- What's the significance of the definition of "philister" since that is one of the few places where Eliot sets herself up in opposition to Rhial?

Ana's Seminar Paper

- Ana, could you tell us a little about your paper?
- Is either of these depictions a "realistic" depiction of the social order?
- There is something very important about the fact that Arthur is the actor/instigator in the failed social mobility at his own birthday party, but Trollope's Lookalofts are potentially more successful, but also less aligned with "peasantry" in any sort of overt way than Eliot's characters, in spite of their increased caricature-ness. Discuss?
- Is the increased boundary hopping in Trollope tied to possible lesser realism?

Break, probably

The epigraph

- What do we make of the epigraph, especially given that *Lyrical Ballads* comes up in the novel itself; Captain Donnithorne discussing it with Irwine?

”Denotative, Technically, Literally”

- Willa’s Summary: What’s the most important thing we should get out of this? How does the idea that “even in the most detailed novel, the reader has to do a massive amount of inference in order to make the ‘world’ of the text into anything like a world” (qtd. in Willa’s paper) play into the idea of realism and realistic language? It seems to imply that the language might not even matter at some level.
- Ana’s experience reading *Adam Bede* twice: I constructed different “worlds” from the same text the first and second times that I read it. Does this fit in with this article? Do people have other thoughts on world-construction in *Adam Bede*?
- How do technical and literal vocabularies enter or not enter into *Adam Bede*? Are there moments of this sort of almost anti-literary opacity?
- In what ways is this applicable to the other novels we have read this semester?

“George Eliot’s Discerning Syntax”

- Rebecca’s Summary: What’s the big takeaway? How might we use the provocative reading technique that Rebecca proposes Allison advances?
- Did this pattern show up in *Adam Bede*? (The paper is working from *Middlemarch*)
- Tensions between style and content. Were there analogous moments in the novel, even if Allison’s particular pattern did not appear? ## 10-15 minute style workshop: Can we look for a similarly characteristic sentence in *Adam Bede*?

Eliot’s Style

Leila’s Close Reading

- Leila, could you elaborate on where you were going with this reading?
- How is our engagement with the affective idea of “the corpse we love” affected by narratorial distance? Are we brought in more if this is Adam’s

psycho-narration or narrated monologue versus if this is the narrator's own thoughts on Hetty's plight?

- Is there really fluid gendering happening here? Does it happen elsewhere in the novel? What effects does that have on the book as a whole.

Repetition

- The Dutch Painting Passage from 17 (Lit Lab reading)
- Hetty. She is often associated with repetitive descriptions where the same thing come up over and over again—while traveling and at trial/in prison in particular. For example, seven “warms” and two “colds” while she’s considering killing herself in “the Journey in Despair”. The circularity of her confession to Dinah. (Is there a marked physicality to her thought’s and needs? At least 12 of the 55 total forms of warm in the whole novel are directly associated with Hetty)

And then I got to Stoniton, and I began to feel frightened that night, because I was so near home. And then the little baby was born, when I didn't expect it; and the thought came into my mind that I might get rid of it and go home again. The thought came all of a sudden, as I was lying in the bed, and it got stronger and stronger... I longed so to go back again... I couldn't bear being so lonely and coming to beg for want. [. . .] I got some *warm* stuff to drink and some bread. And I walked on and on, and I hardly felt the ground I trod on; and it got lighter, for there came the moon—oh, Dinah, it frightened me when it first looked at me out o' the clouds—it never looked so before; and I turned out of the road into the fields, for I was afraid o' meeting anybody with the moon shining on me. And I came to a haystack, where I thought I could lie down and keep myself *warm* all night. There was a place cut into it, where I could make me a bed, and I lay comfortable, and the baby was *warm* against me; and I must have gone to sleep for a good while, for when I woke it was morning, but not very light, and the baby was crying. When she awoke it was deep night, and she felt chill. She was frightened at this darkness—frightened at the long night before her. If she could but throw herself into the water! No, not yet. She began to walk about that she might get *warm* again, as if she would have more resolution then. Oh how long the time was in that darkness! The bright hearth and the *warmth* and the voices of home, the secure uprising and lying down, the familiar fields, the familiar people, the Sundays and holidays with their simple joys of dress and feasting—all the sweets of her young life rushed before her now, and she seemed to be stretching her arms towards them across a great gulf. She set her teeth when she thought of Arthur. She cursed him, without knowing what her cursing would do. She wished he too might know

desolation, and cold, and a life of shame that he dared not end by death.

- She's described multiple times in a relatively narrow set of ways.

Arthur's Close Reading

- Arthur, tell us a little about your reading
- Can we elaborate on what Eliot accomplishes by having Hetty move from a glowing and hopeful landscape—one in which suffering (especially loving suffering, perhaps) is an integral part—to one where her pain is reflected by the environment directly?
- Not everyone at this point in the book may have picked up on the fact that Hetty is pregnant. How does that, given the themes of spring and Christian sin, affect a reading of this passage?

Katie's Close Reading

- Katie, what is the big takeaway from this passage?
- What's the value of using the notes (and the bible verse it refers to) in this close reading? What does that say about the role of paratext in readings?
- What is the significance of the repetition of "gulf" in this portion of the book?

The Pre-Printed Blank Book

- Does the pre-printed blank book, especially in the form of the "Index Rerum" mark a shift from borrowed books to owned books as it encourages making only a record of topic and location, rather than requiring a full excerpting of the passage?
- How do we use these records to understand Victorian research practices and the relation between research and novelistic creation?
- Does it signify that these books seem to have rarely been anywhere near filled by the time they are given to archives and libraries?
- *Bouvard and Pecuchet*; I can see them writing in these sorts of documents. Are there analogous processes within the characters and events of *Adam Bede*?