Victorian Literature and Culture (2011), **39**, 483–498.
© Cambridge University Press 2011. 1060-1503/11 $15.00
doi:10.1017/S1060150311000106

WAKING DREAMS: GEORGE ELIOT AND THE POETICS OF DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

By Beth Tressler

> Alas for the fate of poor mortals which condemns them to wake up some fine morning and find all the poetry in which their world was bathed only the evening before utterly gone – the hard angular world of chairs and tables and looking-glasses staring at them in all its naked prose.
>
> —Eliot, *Letters* 1: 264

IN A LETTER THAT SHE WROTE to her childhood governess and religious mentor Maria Lewis in 1839, George Eliot describes a pervading and distressful mental anxiety – one that would come to greatly influence both the constitution and development of her fiction. Still within the throes of her evangelical ardor, Eliot laments in this letter that the "disjointed specimens" of history, poetry, science, and philosophy have become "all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast thickening every day accession of actual events, relative anxieties, and household cares and vexations" (Eliot, *Letters* 1: 29). The letter illustrates more the disjointed nature of Eliot's own mind than the disjointed nature of the things occupying it. Apparently under the weight of some religious guilt, she retracts this complaint and apologizes for it; but, then she immediately contradicts her retraction and defends her struggle by expanding her own individual failure into the larger realm of universal human failure:

> How deplorably and unaccountably evanescent are our frames of mind, as various as the forms and hues of the summer clouds. A single word is sometimes enough to give an entirely new mould to our thoughts; at least I find myself so constituted, and therefore to me it is pre-eminently important to be anchored within the veil, so that outward things may only act as winds to agitating sails, and be unable to send me adrift. (*Letters* 1: 30)

Possibly fearing a rebuke from Lewis, Eliot finds it necessary to call upon the evanescence of "our frames of mind" to characterize her early struggle with the painful inconsistency of her own consciousness. On the one hand, Eliot feels a sense of evangelical guilt that her consciousness can be so influenced by "a single word" that her household duties and her spiritual life suffer. She equates this aspect of her mind to a deplorable, moral failing that threatens to set her adrift from her religious foundation. But on the other hand, Eliot

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contradicts this sense of failure with her resentment at the household anxieties and everyday vexations that are able to smother and petrify the extraordinary workings of her mind. To prevent herself from "saying anything still more discreditable to my head and heart," she imagines herself as a child "wand'ring far alone, / That none might rouse me from my waking dream" (*Letters* 1: 30). But Eliot awakes from this dream to the disheartening revelation of "life's dull path and earth's deceitful hope" (*Letters* 1: 30). For a time, this painful deceit compels her to remain solidly within the confines of her duty and faith, but it simultaneously begins to unravel the binding that so ardently holds her.

As it is commonly known, Eliot became avidly engaged with both the philosophical and the scientific discourse of her time, reading widely and voraciously the works of her contemporaries, including many writers in the mental sciences.[1] On account of her deep and consistent intellectual engagement, Eliot's views concerning human consciousness evolved from her early evangelical moralism to a view that tended to fall between idealism and more materialist, evolutionary views. Knowing firsthand the painful burden of seeing oneself defined by the dictates of a divided consciousness, Eliot rejected the moralistic, split notions advocated by some of her contemporaries, like the physician A. L. Wigan and the elder John Addington Symonds. Instead she aligned herself closer to theories commonly associated with Herbert Spencer and Henry Holland, who both viewed consciousness in terms of a fluidity whereby various states were maintained in terms of an interpenetration. It is likely that George Eliot knew of these writers' theories either from her own reading or from George Henry Lewes. In any case, their preoccupation suggests an issue largely in the air during Eliot's time, which is much developed, as we shall see, in *The Mill on the Floss.*

Like many popular Victorian novelists, namely Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, Eliot was particularly interested in the boundary between the waking state and the semi-conscious state of reverie – often termed double consciousness – and very often employed and explored its parameters within her fiction. Jenny Bourne Taylor writes that often for these authors, "[n]egotiating and dramatizing complex contemporary discourses on the unconscious was a vital way of generating narrative suspense, and novelists used them to extend and question the boundaries of realism – without abandoning them" ("Locating" 141). I intend to examine Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) in the context of the nineteenth-century discourse on double consciousness in order to illuminate the link between the realism of Eliot's literary practice and alternative states of consciousness. In my examination of this novel, I will be using the term "double consciousness" to designate the state of semi-conscious reverie in which conscious thought is temporarily suspended. The novel's predication upon this nineteenth-century concept is manifest in the simultaneity of the narrator's employment of alternative states and Maggie's continual punishment for exhibiting them. Moreover, this analysis liberates both the text and Maggie herself from the either/or paradigm that consistently plagues the novel's criticism: the renunciation of Stephen as either the author's condemnation or affirmation of self-sacrifice, both of which advocate Maggie's act as a morally driven one.[2]

Double consciousness and the distempered imagination

THE FIELD OF PHYSIOLOGICAL psychology in the mid-nineteenth century sought a theory of the mind to explain the varying and often troubling states of consciousness. "Double consciousness" became the nineteenth-century catchphrase for what many understood as the

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often fluctuating or contradictory nature of an individual's mental states. Although the famous case of Mary Reynolds's dual personalities popularized the concept, the term itself was fluid, and its meaning varied according to the individual defining it.[3] "Double consciousness" applied to a widely diverse spectrum of mental states that stretched from dual personalities to the sleeping state to mesmerism to reverie to somnambulism, with many variations in between. Often in a sweeping gesture, the writings of physicians and intellectuals would conflate these distinct states and make "double consciousness" as hazy and unidentified as the condition it sought to characterize.

In her earliest views, prior to her religious (and thus intellectual) turn, Eliot seemed to view these "wayward" states of consciousness as troubling and immoral, a view also held by A. L. Wigan and the elder John Addington Symonds. Both Symonds and Wigan declared that these other states of consciousness (the ones associated with double consciousness) were essentially immoral and needed to be controlled by the rationality and morality of the higher, waking state. Due to the imagination's intimate association with dreaming and thus sleeping, it often came under intense moral scrutiny in these writers' works.

Wigan's work, *A New View of Insanity* (1844), which he dedicated to Sir Henry Holland, argued that the human mind is physically split between competing physical and moral brains, setting up a physically divided moral dichotomy: "each cerebrum is capable of a distinct and separate volition . . . in the healthy brain, one of the cerebra is almost always superior in power to the other, and capable of exercising control over the volitions of its fellow" (26). As Taylor explains, Wigan's "rigidly divided physical model . . . is made up not simply of two localized modes of consciousness, but of two distinct and often competing selves" ("Locating" 149), an image which is quite reminiscent of Eliot's letter to Maria Lewis. Wigan advocated a constant vigilance to control the "mere instincts and propensities," which could be "partially or wholly lost by desuetude or neglect; or, from depraved habits and criminal indulgence in childhood" (28). The possibility that the wayward cerebrum might overpower the higher organ situated the individual at the borders of criminality, immorality, or insanity.[4] The darker side of consciousness, housed in the wayward brain, is thus the dark, disorderly self out of which arises all manner of deviation, abnormality, and derangement.

The elder John Addington Symonds, a contemporaneous physician, in his work *Sleep and Dreams* (1851) defined double consciousness in similar, though more disturbing moral terms than Wigan. Although Symonds did not advocate a physical, materialist split between sides of consciousness, morality similarly became the standard by which Symonds defined states of consciousness. Thus when discussing sleep, Symonds calls it "a negative state of the living body . . . [t]o sleep perfectly is, – not to see, not to hear, not to smell, not to taste, not to touch, not to speak, not to move; in short, not to exercise one of the faculties which characterize a human being" (2). Symonds notes that not all forms of sleep are so intense as to suspend the defining attributes of an individual's humanity, but what links his discussion of sleep to his later discussion of double consciousness, blurring the lines between the two, is his consideration of incomplete sleep. He defines incomplete sleep as the state of sleep in which one or more of the five senses are semi-conscious or partly aware of external stimulus. He explains how "the organ of hearing," for example, "is often sufficiently impressible to convey sensations to the sleeper, which are mingled with the ideas of his dreams and suggest new scenes, and often with the greatest rapidity" (16). He even provides his reader with several examples in which bodily senses external to the sleeper's dream constitute the most preposterous internal images and sensations: an uncomfortable blister becomes

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a deadly scalping by Indians, damp sheets become a stream, nightcap strings become the strangulation of a deadly, venomous snake (16–17). When Symonds reaches his discussion of double consciousness, he claims, "double consciousness, then, is only the alternation of healthy and morbid conditions of mind (lucid and insane oscillations)" (27).

What underlies sleeping for Symonds is that the negative or deathlike state of the living body in double consciousness is both a physical and moral suspension of "the faculties which characterize a human being." As in Wigan's writings, we see here the alliance of insanity with alternative states of consciousness, but what stands out in Symonds's move from sleeping to double consciousness is his claim that the same process governs how the dreams of the sleeper or the fancies of the morbid mind integrate outward sensations into new, imaginative scenes. Symonds claims that when the individual is in the throes of the other side of consciousness,

> he looks out on a new world projected from his own inner being. By a melancholy power, a fatal gift, of appropriating and assimilating the real objects perceived by his senses, he takes possession of them, nay disembodies them, and fuses them into his imaginary creation. And as for those beloved beings who fondly think themselves linked with all his strongest and most tender memories, he takes no more note of them than as they swell that strange fantastic pageant which floats before his bewildered fancy; they are mere *dramatis personae* in the mad farce or tragedy which his poor brain is weaving. They are all shadows; no more the dear flesh-and-blood realities of his heart; they are metamorphosed into the unsubstantial figments of a distempered imagination. (24–25)

Symonds develops the implications of the alliance of insanity and alternative consciousness further by clearly accusing this state of consciousness with the unethical disregard of others. Double consciousness in Symonds's estimation, then, is a fatal and unethical tool, which erases the consciousness and identities of others by disembodying them and reducing their human complexity to characters or figments. This "melancholy power" transforms flesh and blood realities into deceptive, ephemeral shadows on the wall of an imaginary construction.

What would have disturbed a passionate artist like Eliot would have been Symonds's unconditional alignment of the creative imagination with insanity and immorality. Symonds states as much quite blatantly when he discusses the creative artist's actual use of double consciousness to constitute his art. He writes,

> [double consciousness] is a frightful excess of what, to a certain extent, is often taking place in healthy but powerful minds, which impress their own individuality on the external world.. . . So, also is the creative artist, who does not content himself with barely imitating nature, but who looks at nature through the media of his peculiar faculties, and having invested the objects with a beauty and sublimity derived from his own mind, represents them with those forms and colours on the canvas or marble. His own subjectivity is first thrown upon the outward world, and then by his art made objective to other eyes. (Symonds 26)

According to Symonds, the creative artist refuses to content himself with mere imitation and thus uses double consciousness to imbue objects with attributes derived from his own mind, falsely masquerading them for his audience under the guise of an un-biased and truthful objectivity.

Later theories of double consciousness most likely familiar to Eliot were those found in the works of Sir Henry Holland and Herbert Spencer, an intimate acquaintance of Eliot's

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begun during her time as editor for the *Westminster Review*. Holland's *Chapters on Mental Physiology* (1852) blatantly discounts Wigan's work and his "theory of a real *doubleness* or duality of the mind" (186). Although Holland views human consciousness in terms of a fluidity, he still maintains the complicity of double consciousness in various forms of mental pathology. He comments that "it has been a familiar remark that in certain states of mental derangement, as well as in some cases of hysteria which border closely upon it, there appear, as it were two minds; one tending to correct by more just perceptions, feelings, and volitions, the aberrations of the other" (185). Although Holland employs a fluid model of consciousness, he still associates derangement and aberrations with alternative states and morality hovers in the margins of his theory. Even so, Holland completely discounts split views of consciousness and defines the actual state of double consciousness as the mind passing

> by alternation from one state to another, each having the perception of external impressions and appropriate trains of thought, but not linked together by the ordinary gradations, or by mutual memory. . . . Their relations to the phenomena of sleep, of somnambulism, reverie, and insanity, abound in conclusions, of the deepest interest to every part of the mental history of man. (187)

Holland refrains from reducing the complexity of double consciousness to a split moralism, but he does note the relation between sleep, sleepwalking, reverie, and insanity. Unlike Wigan or Symonds, each of these phenomena exists for Holland as a component of "the conscious individuality of the being" rather than an alternative consciousness or an alternative being (189). Part of the relation between these phenomena includes Holland's discussion of dreaming and, by extension, the imagination. It is in his discussion of the dreaming state and the imagination's role in that state where we can see his closest relation to Eliot. Holland describes the dreaming state as the state "where the fancy works variously and boldly, creating images and impressions which are carried forwards into waking life, and blend themselves deeply and strongly with every part of our mental existence" (78). Here Holland espouses the inextricability of states of consciousness and their constitutive role in human existence. Furthermore, the imagination appears to be the tool whereby the images of dreams intertwine "themselves deeply and strongly" with a total human consciousness.

Likewise, Eliot seems to have gravitated towards a fluidity comparable to Herbert Spencer's model of consciousness, which works in a quite similar way to this particular aspect of Holland's. Spencer examines consciousness from an evolutionary standpoint in which the variations of unconscious states underpin consciousness itself. He claims in *The Principles of Pschology* that "consciousness can neither arise nor be maintained without the occurrence of differences in its state. It must ever be passing from some one state into a different state. In other words – there must be a *continuous differentiation* of its states" (300). For Spencer, the integration and classification of these states becomes the key to understanding human existence.

What seems specifically essential in Spencer's theory, which Eliot's fiction takes up, is the necessity of a "continuous differentiation" of conscious states in conjunction with the imagination's rendering of these states as inextricable from one another. The author Eliot, unlike the evangelical Mary Ann, recognizes that the human mind hinges upon the interpenetration of conscious and unconscious states, which are not separable or always controllable entities. To divide them into a moral dichotomy in the fashion of Wigan, or most

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particularly Symonds, creates an unbearable situation with often devastating results – as in the tragedy of Maggie Tulliver.

After struggling against this once-held assumption, Eliot appears to both confront and dismantle false moralism within her fiction, and her narratives seem to challenge this moralism's rigid and traditional opposition to sympathy (and by extension, the imagination and authorship). In developing her views of consciousness similarly to those of Holland and Spencer, Eliot would have found Symonds's moral attack on the artist flawed and misguided. Symonds's reference to the objectivity lacking in the creative artist, who cannot "content himself with barely imitating nature" insinuates contemporary discussions of realism and its aspiration to aesthetic verisimilitude. In Symonds's estimation, double consciousness becomes the specific means by which the aesthetic object alarmingly reflects the forms and colors of the artist's mind, which then makes double consciousness the particular practice of the realist artist. Eliot herself says as much in *Adam Bede* (1859), published eight years after Symonds's work, when she defines the realist project as an aspiration "to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused" (177; bk. 2, ch. 17). In a statement, which claims the inextricability of art and the defective mirror, Eliot confirms the artist's employment of double consciousness but simultaneously overturns an immoral interpretation of it. "[B]ut I feel as much bound to tell you," Eliot writes, "as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath" (*AB* 177; bk. 2, ch. 17). Eliot markedly pushes against a view such as Symonds's by reinterpreting the artist's "immorality" as, in fact, a bounded, moral oath and civic duty pressing against her and compelling her to speak. The practice that Symonds condemns Eliot reconfigures, and she thus defines her realism in terms of a necessary and ethically bound double consciousness.

Reverie and dreaming

The Mill on the Floss IS A TEXT MARKED by Eliot's investigation of the relation between realism and the states of reverie. *The Mill on the Floss*'s engagement with scientific discourse and imaginative reverie has often been noted by critics but generally read in two particular ways. In terms of scientific discourse, criticism tends to read the novel and its use of reverie through an evolutionary lens, supplied either by the works of Darwin or Spenser; or, if the criticism engages anything remotely similar to the imaginative reverie contained within the novel, it rarely takes into account scientific discourse and focuses primarily on Maggie's problematic ways of reading.[5] I want to argue that understanding *The Mill on the Floss* in terms of double consciousness specifically illuminates the link between Eliot's literary practice and reverie, providing a unique analysis of her use of aesthetic absorption to portray the role of the realist observer within her fiction.

The Mill on the Floss begins in the middle of a sensorial reverie imbued with a complexity that exceeds current formulations of sense perception and reverie, including those of her partner George Henry Lewes.[6] Eliot's narrator walks along the Floss and observes "[a] wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace" (*MF* 7; bk.1, ch. 1). The very first lines of the novel depict the narrator both observing her external surroundings and engaging in imaginative reveries apparently resulting from those observations. The sound

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of the river appears to initiate the content of the narrator's reverie and then become internal to it, much as if it were a character in the narrative.[7] The reverie hinges upon the river's paradoxical creation of an ensuing, luxurious silence, which in turn creates another alternate sound: "[t]he rush of the water, and the booming of the mill, bring a dreamy deafness, which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene. They are like a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond. And now there is the thunder of the huge covered waggon coming home with sacks of grain" (*MF* 8; bk.1, ch. 1).

The complexity of the reverie in these opening pages, in fact, underpins the entire first chapter of Eliot's novel. At first, the narrator describes her sensorial reverie as a "dreamy deafness" that heightens and intensifies the content of her reverie – "the peacefulness of the scene" – while simultaneously excluding any intrusive, external reality. Then, the sound of the wagon and horses coming over the bridge seemingly disrupts the narrator and diverts her attention from the river into a new imaginative scene. Immediately her reverie seems to take on a new shape as she constructs an entirely new narrative out of this aural transformation: "That honest waggoner is thinking of his dinner, getting sadly dry in the oven at this late hour; but he will not touch it till he has fed his horses, – the strong, submissive, meek-eyed beasts, who I fancy, are looking mild reproach at him from between their blinkers, that he should crack his whip at them in that awful manner, as if they needed that hint!" (*MF* 8; bk.1, ch. 1). As soon as the waggoner and his horses disappear and their sound is no longer heard, the narrator shifts her attention again but this time to the young form of Maggie Tulliver. These seemingly distinct reveries of river, waggoner, and Maggie are actually one, singular reverie, modeling the multiple variations that often occur within a singular dream, while being induced through the medium of sound.[8]

The reverie of Eliot's narrator marks the narrator's movement between sensations and images which do not disrupt the imaginative story contained within her reverie but rather transform it. The narrator appears to have already started telling the story of the Tullivers, and the mill on the river within her story, coupled with her pressing of her arms into her chair, lulls her into a dreamy deafness, a state which persists almost through the entire first chapter:

> [i]t is time, too, for me to leave off resting my arms on the cold stone of this bridge.. . . Ah, my arms are really benumbed. I have been pressing my elbows on the arms of my chair, and dreaming that I was standing on the bridge in front of Dorlcote Mill, as it looked one February afternoon many years ago. Before I dozed off, I was going to tell you what Mr and Mrs Tulliver were talking about. . .on that very afternoon I have been dreaming of. (*MF* 8–9; bk.1, ch. 1)

Therefore it is not the sound of the river that initiates the narrator's "dreaming," as previously assumed, but the sound of the narrator's own voice invokes the rush of the river and the ensuing observations. In Eliot's novel, the figurative image of the river, the sound of the narrator's voice, and her state of mind converge, heightening and intensifying the continual streams of both imaginative as well as physical sensation pouring into, mixing with, and altering this amalgamation of sensation and memory.

In what calls to mind the previously discussed conflicts in Eliot's youth, George Henry Lewes claims that the waking state can just as easily be interrupted and diverted, and "even the energetic resolution which a strong motive will give, will not prevent the most steadfast mind from continually wandering, although the mind may be recalled from its wanderings" (311).

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Within her novel, Eliot extends the fluidity of consciousness, designated by its propensity to continual "wandering," along with her constitution of sense perception into the realm of realist poetics. As George Levine has observed, to Eliot realism is "a kind of authenticity, an honest representation of one's own feelings and perceptions" (7). Levine pinpoints realism's predication upon the author's feelings and perceptions, for without this authenticity he claims that "accuracy of representation would itself be impossible" (7). Yet Eliot does not see realism as merely a projection of her own mental state upon her readership; rather, it is a truthful portrayal of consciousness itself that does not stem from objectivity or impersonality. In her essay "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young," she argues that "[t]he fantastic or the boldly imaginative poet may be as sincere as the most realistic: he is true to his own sensibilities or inward vision, and in his wildest flights he never breaks loose from his criterion – the truth of his own mental state" ("Worldliness" 45). Truthful representation is, paradoxically, predicated upon the "waywardness" of consciousness – its inability to be controlled, objectified, or classified. Therefore, if we consider this opening chapter as exemplifying Eliot's notion of realism, the narrator provides authenticity by constructing a realist narrative through her dream narrative. The honest waggoner and his meek-eyed horses are not real objects – they only exist within the content of her reverie. But according to Eliot, what derives from these imaginative acts is no less a sincere realistic representation, since the inward vision in all its contradictory and fanciful states is precisely what constitutes the novel's creation in the first place.

To depart further from Levine's definition, the objects within realist fiction are more than an external representation of authorial feelings or perceptions; they are the narrative constructs of these feelings constituted by what are clearly marked as semi-conscious states. What then appears detached and external to the narrator is created by and inextricable from the narrator's double consciousness. The narrator – modeling the writing process – thus exhibits the fluidity of consciousness necessary for a realist aesthetic, illuminating the claim by Taylor that double consciousness designates "a particular kind of mental state, a condition in which two realities may co-exist simultaneously" ("Locating" 138). Much like Symonds, then, Eliot affirms that double consciousness constitutes the aesthetic, but she undercuts the claim that it is only through a destructive excess that the realist artist casts his subjectivity upon the world. Eliot's fiction challenges and unravels Symonds's claim that reverie is essentially immoral, for as we will see, the distinction Eliot draws between her narrator and Maggie shows how the possibility for moral change lies, albeit paradoxically, within the wake of the aesthetic reverie – an altered affective space, which allows for contemplation and the potential to change based on that contemplation. For one's own consciousness to be swept up into the current of what is apart from the self brings with it, however slight, the prospect of an alteration of consciousness. Creating aesthetic absorption, therefore, through the inducement of reverie within a structure of double consciousness enables Eliot to open out the boundaries of the realist narrative to take into account the fluidity and complexity of the human mind.

The tragedy of split consciousness

ELIOT'S CRITIQUE OF THE SPLIT, moralist theory of double consciousness achieves its fullest representation in *The Mill on the Floss* through her characterization of Maggie Tulliver. Maggie continually oscillates between trance-like states and states of acute, painful

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consciousness. Like the young George Eliot, Maggie mistakes intrusive, divisive moralism for the moralism contingent upon the ethical care for the other.[9] As I will argue, considering the novel in conjunction with the previous discourse on double consciousness disentangles Maggie from the critical conflict over whether she exhibits a high-minded, ethical self-sacrifice or a problematic, self-induced masochism.

An almost unbearable emotional upheaval underpins one of Maggie's earliest, most violent shifts in consciousness. Her mother's declaration that no one will love Maggie anymore hurls her into the throes of uncontrollable impulse, and she punishes a wooden doll – the Fetish – with all the ferocity her thunderous passions can muster. Maggie soothes "herself by alternately grinding and beating the wooden head against the rough brick of the great chimneys" (*MF* 28; bk. 1, ch. 4). The initial sensation of such intense, heart- wrenching pain fuses into the furious passion by which she grinds the doll into the hard surfaces of the attic. This phantasmatic punishment creates a semi-conscious state that, Eliot writes, "expelled every other form of consciousness – even the memory of the grievance that had caused it" (*MF* 28; bk. 1, ch. 1). The violent, erotic physicality of grinding and beating the doll enables Maggie to enter a state of reverie, whose content consists of an alternative narrative in which the doll becomes Aunt Glegg or her mother – while expelling all that lay outside the reverie's temporal frame. Lewes himself writes "[d]uring reverie we are not only 'unconscious' of the presence of external objects, but of our own state" (169).

What is particularly interesting about the movement of this aesthetic forgetfulness is that it is not cyclical. Holland had asserted that alternate states of consciousness were not linked by mutual memory, and therefore – as in the case of Mary Reynolds – one's knowledge of one's actions in one state could not be recalled while in another state. However, by confining the reverie's forgetfulness to the temporary shutting out of the external world, Eliot gives Maggie that capability.[10] Once Maggie comes out of her Fetish-grinding reverie, she immediately "reflected that if she drove many nails in, she would not be so well able to fancy that the head was hurt when she knocked it against the wall, nor to comfort it, and make believe to poultice it, when the fury was abated" (*MF* 28; bk. 1, ch. 4). In this reverie's wake, Maggie is able both to contemplate her actions of knocking the Fetish against the wall and modify those actions based on that contemplation, since driving too many nails into its head would hinder the affective intensity and ruin the reverie altogether. What the reverie initially enables for Maggie is an emotional recovery from the harsh words of her mother. For soon afterwards, she "throw[s] away the Fetish and run[s] to the window. The sun was really breaking out: the sound of the mill seemed cheerful again" (*MF* 28; bk.1, ch. 4). As evidenced by Maggie's dramatic shift from dark rage to cheerfulness and from furious punishment to comfort, Eliot portrays Maggie's early reveries as promising moments in Maggie's moral growth by enabling her to negotiate her pain through key moments of subsequent reflection.

Shortly after this scene in the attic, for example, Maggie goes inside the mill and observes the spiders, which are a favorite "subject of speculation with her. She wondered if they had any relatives outside the mill, for in that case there must be a painful difficulty in their family intercourse – a fat floury spider, accustomed to take his fly well dusted with meal, must suffer a little at a cousin's table where the fly *was au naturel*, and the lady-spiders must be mutually shocked at each other's appearance" (*MF* 29; bk. 1, ch. 4). On one level, the spiders here represent Maggie's awareness of the conflict existing between her own immediate family and her mother's relations – the floury, bourgeoisie spider suffering the "*au naturel*" fare when

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dining at the Tullivers' table. Maggie intelligently creates a narrative for the spiders that re-enacts the class tensions plaguing her family, allowing her to both perceive the conflict as well as to see its inherent ridiculousness.

But underneath this reference to her external familial conflict is Maggie's recognition of her own position. Maggie's distinctiveness from her own immediate family must mark her as shockingly as the mill-spider's dusting of flour does to his *au naturel* relations. Maggie's unique imagination fashions the mill into an imaginative space for her reveries, and for her family, these encounters with "the presence of an uncontrollable force" dusts her with an incomprehensible and appalling marking, which powders her black hair "to a soft whiteness that made her dark eyes flash out with new fire" (*MF* 29; bk. 1, ch. 4). The "new fire" of these early possibilities does not reach fruition; instead, Maggie comes to see her tendency for reverie as an obstacle to moral growth rather than the foundation for it.

As a result, Maggie's ensuing conflicts derive not from her moments of reverie but from the troubling moralism that comes to intrude and replace her contemplative space. One telling scene occurs when Maggie shares unequal halves of a jam puff with her brother Tom. Tom commands Maggie to choose a half with her eyes shut or "else you shan't have any" (*MF* 45; bk. 1, ch. 6). Blindly, Maggie chooses the bigger half and then begs Tom to take it, but he refuses: "Maggie, thinking it was no use to contend further, began too, and ate her half puff with considerable relish as well as rapidity.. . . Maggie didn't know Tom was looking at her; she was seesawing on the elder bough, lost to almost everything but a vague sense of jam and idleness" (*MF* 46: bk. 1, ch. 6). Here, the delicious pleasure of the puff creates Maggie's sensorial reverie as she is swept up and lost in this pleasing tide of "jam and idleness." The sensory pleasure of the jam both constitutes and becomes coextensive to a semi-conscious, sugary sweet idleness that shuts out both Tom and external reality. The "dreamy deafness" of her reverie is hindered by Tom's assertion that Maggie has committed a transgression: "O you greedy thing!" (*MF* 46; bk. 1, ch. 6). Tom reads Maggie's half-conscious, jam-filled reverie as greed, selfishness, and depravity. By interpreting her aesthetic pleasure as an all-encompassing, narcissistic and greedy exclusion, it is as if Tom replaces Maggie's consciousness with the unequal halves of the jam puff. Tom's interpretation of Maggie's reverie intrudes upon her ability to contemplate the meaning of the reverie for herself. Thus she comes to consistently read her own falling into semi-consciousness through the guilt that Tom's judgment constructs. In subsequent moments – in the affective space following each of her reveries – she can only see them, and by extension her own consciousness, through the lens of the divided puff. Each and every struggle Maggie endures throughout the remainder of the novel, especially her renunciation of Stephen's proposal, enacts the same pattern: a state of reverie followed by guilt and a perceived moral failure in having relished the wayward side of her consciousness. Surrendering to Tom's misguided moralism, Maggie misperceives her own consciousness as split into two irreconcilable and warring selves, quite analogous to Wigan's double cerebrum. And the painful tragedy that so overwhelmingly ensues acts as Eliot's forceful condemnation of such an erroneous interpretation of human consciousness.

As for the young Eliot writing to Maria Lewis, "life's dull path and earth's deceitful hope" continue to greet a painfully divided Maggie in the often unhappy arousal from her waking dreams. Maggie desperately clings to privation, depriving herself of the imaginative beauty of aesthetic pleasures, such as books and music, in hopes that it will grant her moral self-control over her wayward self and prohibit any more lapses of proper judgment. However, the abundance of music that Maggie finds during her stay in her cousin Lucy's house "could

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hardly be without some intoxicating effect on her, after years of privation; and even in the first week Maggie began to be less haunted by her sad memories and anticipations" (*MF* 401; bk. 6, ch. 6). Similar to Maggie's emotional restoration after punishing the Fetish, her absorption into the intoxicating power of music begins to overcome her deep-rooted sadness. An aural form of jam and idleness, music initiates a powerful reverie for Maggie: the narrator distinguishes between a simple "enjoyment of music" that "indicates a great specific talent" and Maggie's overwhelming "sensibility to the supreme excitement of music [which] was only one form of that passionate sensibility which belonged to her whole nature, and made her faults and virtues all merge in each other" (*MF* 401; bk. 6, ch. 6). Music is thus not only the driving force of Maggie's reveries, but one form of that aesthetic sensibility that is inextricable from her whole consciousness.[11] Music provides a momentary wholeness to her warring halves, and she is swept up in an ecstasy that induces a half-consciousness in which Maggie and music merge and become coextensive aspects of a single aesthetic temporality.

Initially, Maggie connects Stephen's voice, and by extension his self, with this supremely ecstatic pleasure of music. It is this early association that so deeply entangles Stephen within Maggie's experience of her own "wayward" consciousness. One passage in particular calls attention to this association. Still within the half-conscious state induced by the music she has been hearing:

> Her eyes and cheeks had an almost feverish brilliancy; her head was thrown backward, and her hands were clasped with the palms outward, and with that tension of the arms which is apt to accompany mental absorption. . . . She had been hearing some fine music sung by a fine bass voice.. . . It was not that she thought distinctly of Mr. Stephen Guest, or dwelt on the indications that he looked at her with admiration; it was rather that she felt the half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight, made up of vague, mingled images from all the poetry and romance she had ever read, or had ever woven in her dreamy reveries. (*MF* 384; bk. 6, ch. 3)

Stephen's "fine bass voice" intertwines with the music, initiating an almost frenzied rapture for Maggie that extends beyond her actual hearing of his voice. Her head is thrown back, her faces blooms with color, and long after the singing and playing has stopped, "[t]he music was vibrating in her still" (*MF* 385; bk. 6, ch. 3). Here Eliot imaginatively recasts the aural-induced reverie. In Lewes's view, if the sound were to cease, then the reverie itself would also cease, but for Maggie, the music continues to vibrate within her even after the sound of the song has ended. Eliot also considers the full extent of the power wielded by these initiating sensations, and what it means for them to merge with "the general sum of sensations which make up our total Consciousness" (Lewes 58). Eliot demonstrates how the intensity of an aesthetically charged reverie can move beyond the boundaries of the material object, emotion, or sound inducing it and become inseparable from one's own consciousness. The music and voice mingle with every aesthetic image or dreamy reverie lodged within Maggie's consciousness, and they continue to enrapture her with "a brighter aerial world" (*MF* 385; bk. 6, ch. 3).

Eliot fully develops the mingling of reverie and consciousness in the scenes surrounding Maggie and Stephen's elopement. As Stephen steers Maggie into the boat, Maggie feels as if she were being led "by this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will, like the added self which comes with the sudden exalting influence of a strong tonic – and she felt nothing else. Memory was excluded" (*MF* 464; bk. 6, ch. 13).[12] Moving

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her into an exalted semi-consciousness, Stephen's quiet, entreating murmurs, coupled with their mutual erotic passion forms a powerful elixir capable of excluding Maggie's emotional and familial ties to Tom, Lucy, and Philip. Here again Maggie exists only within the affective temporality of the boat and Stephen's voice. In the same structural movement of consciousness, which characterizes her previous reveries, the ecstatic aesthetic plunges Maggie into the intensity of

> [t]he breath of the young, unwearied day, the delicious rhythmic dip of the oars, the fragmentary song of a passing bird heard now and then, as if it were only the overflowing of brim-full gladness, the sweet solitude of a twofold consciousness that was mingled into one by that grave untiring gaze which need not be averted . . . they spoke no word; for what could words have been but an inlet to thought? and thought did not belong to that enchanted haze in which they were enveloped – it belonged to the past and the future that lay outside the haze. (*MF* 464; bk. 6, ch. 13)

Unlike Tom's intrusive, judgmental gaze, Stephen's gaze is not external to Maggie's reverie; rather, it is internal to it, and thus it "need not be averted." Maggie experiences Stephen's presence as she does jam or music. The sensations he produces within her initiate an overwhelming ecstasy in which even the external sound of the birds or the dip of the oars becomes internal to the haze itself. Thus without an intrusive gaze, Maggie is able to once again, though temporarily, experience her consciousness as a dreamy fluidity rather than a ragged division.

Stephen has become so intertwined with the content of her reveries that Maggie eventually associates him entirely with the jam and idleness of a benumbed moral conscience that she must fight against. He compels her to experience consciousness and unconsciousness as an uncontrollable current flowing in and out of one another. Even in the moment in which she rejects Stephen, Maggie

> was not conscious of a decision as she turned away from that gloomy averted face, and walked out of the room; it was like an automatic action that fulfils a forgotten intention. What came after? A sense of stairs descended as if in a dream – of flagstone – of a chaise and horses standing – then a street . . . and the darting thought that the coach would take her away, perhaps toward home. (*MF* 479; bk. 6, ch. 14)

Maggie's apparently moral decision to sacrifice herself is reduced to the "forgotten intention" of a semi-conscious state. Whereas Maggie believes that her half-conscious or benumbing states set her adrift into irrevocable wrongdoing, here she rejects Stephen in just such a benumbed state. Eliot immediately problematizes Maggie's so-called moral choice by presenting it as an act committed without conscious will.[13] Eliot's narrator says as much when she asserts that "[t]he great problem of the shifting relation between passion and duty is clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it . . . 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" (Eliot, *MF* 497–98; bk. 7, ch. 2). Eliot is not championing each and every occurrence of half-consciousness; she is depicting the failure of maxims or split, moralistic notions of consciousness to account for the "mysterious complexity" of human life. To rely on such accounts represses aesthetic inspiration and sympathy (necessary components of

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her poetics), both of which proceed from the complex fluidity of consciousness. Maggie's tragic misperception of Tom's intrusive moralism prevents her from seeing the mysterious complexity of her own life as well as the lives of those around her, and thus her misperception ultimately leads to an arbitrary self-sacrifice.

In contrast to the narrator, who illuminates both the fluidity of the author and the rigidity of Maggie, Maggie may then represent Eliot's vision of her younger self and the tragic implications of maintaining a divided consciousness.[14] Maggie's penchant for reverie does not lead to either a moral or aesthetic liberation from her own sorry plight; rather it serves to illustrate Eliot's more mature aesthetic vision of the human mind in all of its contradictions and complexities. This "brighter aerial world" of Eliot's aesthetic thus works in tension with the hard realist vision, ultimately underlying her fictional practice. The agonizing impasse in which Maggie is consistently caught – the incongruity of her aesthetic inward impulse and her dreary outward fact – moves the narrator to comment that it is "[n]o wonder" that when there is such a "contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it" (Eliot, *MF* 235; bk. 3, ch. 5). This painful collision alludes to the structure of the novel as a whole and simultaneously reflects Eliot's early struggle with the aesthetic and its opposing, hard, and unyielding reality.

What then appears to drive the realism of Eliot's fiction is the bringing together of the "brighter aerial world" and "the hard angular world." Rather than reproducing the painful strictures of either sacrifice or masochism, the novel instead becomes a rewriting of Eliot's early letter to Maria Lewis that praises what was once condemned:

> How [marvelous and powerfully] evanescent are our frames of mind, as various as the forms and hues of the summer clouds. A single word is enough to give an entirely new mould to our thoughts; at least I find myself so constituted, and therefore it is pre-eminently important [that outward things act as winds to my sails and set me adrift in the reverie of my waking dream]. (*Letters* 1: 30)

And it is on account of art's ability to mingle with one's consciousness through reverie that constitutes Eliot's realism as the interpenetration of art and life. Thus the author, much like her narrator, wanders in the fundamental reverie of realism's waking dreams in order to expose the mysterious complexity of the human mind: a complexity that allows for her novels' inception as well as their reception – that readers "should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring human creatures" (Eliot, *Letters* 3: 111). *The Mill on the Floss* embodies more than an autobiographical or infantile rewriting of Eliot's painful youth and her shattered familial relations. Instead, Eliot both constructs a novel and highlights a poetics predicated upon the precise thing that she once sought to prevent.

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NOTES

1. Besides what she would have read during her time as editor for the *Westminster Review*, Baker's annotated catalogue, *The George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Library*, lists Eliot's and Lewes's ownership of various texts by contemporaneous physiological psychologists. They owned William Benjamin Carpenter's *Principles of Human Physiology, with their chief applications to pathology,*

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hygiene and forensic medicine (1844) as well as the third edition of Sir Henry Holland's *Medical Notes and Reflections* (1855), with the following inscription: "G. H. Lewes Esq. With the Author's best regards" (Baker 98). Earlier editions of this work by Holland included much of the same discussion of double consciousness as Holland's *Chapters on Mental Physiology*. The 1852 edition of this work overtly takes on A. L. Wigan's theory, since Wigan had dedicated his *A New View of Insanity* to Holland. The catalogue also lists their ownership of a lecture by the elder John Addington Symonds, "Habit – Physiologically Considered," dated 1853. These holdings suggest their familiarity with these contemporaries as well as a possible intellectual discourse.

2. Szirotny argues that George Eliot "is chiefly trying to discover the relative importance of her [own] self-fulfillment and of the acceptance that comes only by self-denial, rather than the relative good that fulfillment and denial do to others" (194). Hardy finds that Maggie rejects the "opiates of daydream, literature, and religion" and finds "a new and more subtly effective drug in the religion of self-denial" which is "finally triumphed over in the renunciation of Stephen: Maggie emerges from illusion and self-love" (65, 69). In his discussion of the critical debate, Loesberg notes how both "positions at least agree that Maggie was morally right in returning" (136).
3. The case of Mary Reynolds was originally published in the *Medical Repository* in 1816 by Dr. S. L. Mitchell (qtd. in Taylor and Shuttleworth 123), and this particular American woman became the central figure in discussions over double or divided consciousness. Apparently after a very deep sleep, she awoke as a completely different personality with absolutely no previous conception of her other self or anything or anyone in relation to that other self. Throughout her life, she continued to oscillate between these two personalities. Either personality did not seem to have any knowledge of its counterpart.
4. "That when the disease or disorder of one cerebrum becomes sufficiently aggravated to defy the control of the other, the case is then one of the commonest forms of mental derangement or insanity; and that a lesser degree of discrepancy between the functions of the two cerebra constitutes the state of conscious delusion" (Wigan 26).
5. See Davis, which focuses on "the problematic relationships between society, heredity, and the self" (56). Also Da Sousa Correa interprets Maggie's dreamy reveries in terms of a biological musical memory tied to the theories of both Darwin and Spenser. For discussions of Maggie's ways of reading, see Hottle, which claims that Maggie's incomplete knowledge and flights of fancy work as Eliot's exploration of "the relationship between 'book learning,' knowledge drawn from experience, and creative intelligence" (37), and also Alley discusses Maggie's propensity to absorb texts "without assimilation" (190).
6. Lewes wrote his *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859–60) while she was writing *The Mill on the Floss*. Although Lewes and Eliot were both invested in one another's work as well as engaged in similar endeavors (both mutually address the sound of the mill-wheel, and he accompanied her on her trip to Dorsetshire to study mills), Lewes's discussion of sense perception does not depict the layered complexity conveyed by Eliot in her opening chapter. Lewes notes that while listening to an unmistakable sound, such as that of a mill-wheel, we often cease to "hear" it as if it has actually ceased. Lewes argues that the sound, after influencing our thoughts in a certain way, stops being noticeable or ceases to stimulate what he calls "reflex-feelings" (57–58). Eliot's opening chapter explores the way in which an unmistakable sound transforms into other sounds as the reverie's content also changes.
7. The narrator even refers to the river as "such a companion," describing the river's currents in terms that strangely suggest the dark, unruly nature of Maggie Tulliver's hair: "[h]ow lovely the little river is, with its dark, changing wavelets" (*MF* 7; bk. 1, ch. 1).
8. Lewes discusses the similarities between reverie and dreaming, noting how the incoherent train of thought within both "results from this train being interrupted or diverted from its course by the suggestion of some other train, either arising by the laws of association, or from the stimulus of some new sensation" (310). We accept the new sensations in dreams, he argues, and quite contentedly go on with them, "just as in reverie the mind passes instantaneously from London to India, and the persons vanish to give place to very different persons, without once interrupting the imaginative story" (311).

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9. Purdy claims that Eliot has embedded Maggie “in a thoroughly rational psychology” thwarted by Maggie’s romanticism (126). Maggie’s romanticism in his estimate is actually a negative romanticism espoused by Eliot as a response “to the sexual realities of nineteenth century England” (125). While various components of his argument seem true, his argument maintains a sweeping generality in which Maggie’s semi-conscious states become a romantic egoism in an otherwise rational psychology. Eliot problematizes such a rational estimation of Maggie by continually connecting her choices to semi-consciousness.
10. Da Sousa Correa attributes this movement between consciousness and oblivion as predicated upon evolutionary biology lodged within musical memory. For her, “musical memory conspicuously dissolves categories of time and individuality” in its erosion of the distinctions dividing consciousness from oblivion (542). While insightful in many respects, this argument does not take into account two very important moments in the text where this same movement occurs without music: the punishing of the Fetish and the jam puff scene.
11. Da Sousa Correa notes that “[m]usic’s power over Maggie’s memory is highly ambivalent: a transcendent yet perilous influence” (544). In reading these moments of reverie through a traditionally moral lens, she asserts that music erases consciousness in a combination of “Romantic exaltation, magnetism, physiology, and physics,” and it is this erasure which for her becomes perilous to Maggie’s moral position (544). What she does not address is how Maggie is often able to contemplate her reveries through remembrance, which a total loss of consciousness would nullify.
12. As in Maggie’s childhood reveries, memory here is only temporarily excluded. Maggie is able to reflect afterwards, but her reflection is filtered through the lens of Tom’s moralism, as she reenacts the jam puff scene: “She had made up her mind to suffer” (*MF* 474; bk. 6, ch. 14).
13. Maggie’s contemplation and regret comes “in the gloomy bedroom of the old inn” where she “saw Stephen’s face turned towards her in passionate, reproachful misery; she lived through again all the tremulous delights of his presence . . . the love she had renounced came back upon her with a cruel charm, she felt herself opening her arms to receive it once more; and then it seemed to slip away and fade and vanish, leaving only the dying sound of a deep thrilling voice that said, “Gone – for ever gone” (*MF* 479–80; bk. 6, ch. 14).
14. In her final work *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot clearly connects the reveries of half-conscious states to the act of writing. The author Theophrastus “imagine[s] a far-off, hazy, multitudinous assemblage, as in a picture of Paradise, making an approving chorus to the sentences and paragraphs of which I myself particularly enjoy the writing. The haze is a necessary condition. If any physiognomy becomes distinct in the foreground, it is fatal” (*Impressions* 12). Here we can clearly see the artist’s dependence upon semi-conscious states, which exemplifies authorship’s employment of and predication upon double consciousness. Furthermore in this text, Eliot demonstrates a writing process that does not depend upon objective, rational thought but revels in a hazy pleasure, a luxurious silence, like the dreamy deafness experienced by *The Mill on the Floss*’s narrator.

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