Literature & Theology, Vol. 15. No. 1, March 2001

THE CRITIQUE OF ANGLICAN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN GEORGE ELIOT'S *MIDDLEMARCH*

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Abstract

George Eliot early repudiated supernatural Christianity, but she continued to regard the Bible as an irreplaceable cultural repository and ethical source; enthusiastically embracing the new historical critical method, and viewing with repugnance the reactionary apologetics offered by Anglican scholars in support of the doctrine of biblical infallibilism. The extent of Eliot's interest in and knowledge of these matters has not, for the most part, been fully realised. Eliot was a biblical scholar in her own right; proficient in Greek, Latin and German, and well-versed in the intersecting disciplines of philology and mythography. This expertise finds a fictional outlet in *Middlemarch*. The Reverend Edward Casaubon is engaged in researches the aim of which is to prove etymologically the priority and historical accuracy of Genesis as over against the legendary accounts of other ancient civilisations; a project which to a large extent controls the action of the novel. Eliot's relentless critique of his 'Key to All Mythologies' amounts to an extremely informed debunking of the infallibilist position.

1. INTRODUCTION

> 'Science is properly more scrupulous than dogma. Dogma gives a charter to mistake, but the very breath of science is a contest with mistake, and must keep the conscience alive' (*Middlemarch*, p. 729).[1]

GEORGE ELIOT'S *Middlemarch* contains two moments of dramatic crescendo, which occur in Chapters XLVIII and LXXXI. The latter chapter depicts the defining crisis in the heroine's love life; a not unusual occurrence in a Victorian novel. The former chapter, however, tells the story not of a romantic crisis, but rather one in which the heroine's intellect is involved, when Dorothea is forced to decide whether to accede to her husband's wish that she continue his work in the event of his demise. This narrative focusing makes knowledge of the nature of the Reverend Edward Casaubon's scholarly enterprise crucial to a full understanding of what Virginia Woolf characterised as one of the few novels written for adults.

The covert question that Casaubon's researches so inadequately address is nothing less than, What is the Bible? What sort of text is it, and what are the appropriate methods to use in studying it? Scholars and theologians in nineteenth century Great Britain agreed in characterising the Bible as a collection of ancient documents. But is this collection a supernatural product, verbally inspired throughout by the Holy Spirit, and absolutely inerrant in consequence (the infallibilist position); or is it a number of early texts in many respects similar to other early documents, which record the histories, legends and stories of ancient cultures (the new critical position)?

Normal critical evaluation of early texts—whether the focus is historical, linguistic or literary—is based on textual comparison. Similarities and differences between the subject document and other texts can reveal information about its age, nature, vocabulary and provenance. But if the Bible is inspired and inerrant, then it is different from all other texts—*sui generis*—and the comparative method, the fundamental method of scientific inquiry, cannot be applied. The great biblical debate of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was over the legitimacy of using the same methods to study the Bible that are used to study the early narratives of other traditions. Since Eliot's disavowal of the infallibilist position and endorsement of science are well known, it is not the purpose of this paper to argue the case *per se*. My goal is rather to bring to the reader's attention the fact of the presence of the debate in what many consider to be the greatest work of English fiction, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*; a presence which seems to have been given no thorough notice and no detailed examination in the annals of Eliot scholarship.[2]

The perennial 'work in progress' of *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon is called 'The Key to all Mythologies.' It is a topic which appears very early in the novel, when Casaubon explains it to his adoring wife-to-be, Dorothea:

> [H]e had undertaken to show (what indeed had been attempted before, but not with that thoroughness, justice of comparison, and effectiveness of arrangement at which Mr Casaubon aimed) that all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed (p. 23).

We learn more about Casaubon's work from Will Ladislaw, Casaubon's second cousin and secretary for a brief and mutually unsatisfactory time. Will informs Dorothea that his cousin's effort is really just 'crawling a little way after men of the last century—men like Bryant' (p. 217). Since Casaubon doesn't claim originality of conception ('what indeed had been attempted before') we know that his project is substantially the same as Bryant's.

Jacob Bryant's best known work is *A New System, or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology*, published 1774–76. Bryant received a BA and an MA from King's College, Cambridge, and then became a fellow of his college. He left that position to serve the Duke of Marlborough, acting first as tutor and later

secretary. He was given the use of the huge Marlborough library, and time to pursue his researches. The 'new system' he devised was based on etymological analyses of the names of individuals and places occurring in the histories and mythologies of the ancient world. Bryant first etymologically reduces all these names into 'radicals'—usually one or two syllable pieces of words containing two, three or four letters. The radicals are then phonetically compared to names and places in Genesis. Any similarity, no matter how weak and farfetched, is used to 'prove' that the names in the narratives of other cultures are really simply corruptions and fragments of the Mosaic account. Such a demonstration preserves the priority and unique revelatory status of the Genesis account—'the tradition originally revealed,' as Casaubon puts it—among all the mythologies of the world.

A New System was very popular; so much so that a synopsis in the form of a dictionary was compiled by an admirer, William Holwell. Holwell acknowledges in his preface 'that several learned persons differ from Mr Bryant as to some of his positions and Etymologies.' But he is nonetheless certain that 'All ... who have a real regard for the Sacred Writings, and the truths therein contained, must surely feel themselves highly indebted to Him: as he omits no opportunity of confirming their authenticity.'[3] Eliot disagreed, viewing Bryant as a practitioner of the worst kind of prejudiced and uncritical scholarship being produced by the English clergy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In *Middlemarch*, she set about the task of exposing the pseudo-scientific nature of this kind of scholarship.[4]

There are three different but intersecting disciplines involved in the Bryant/Casaubon enterprise: theology, since the goal of the project is to prove the accuracy and thus superiority of Genesis over the narratives deriving from and featuring other religions; philology, since that superiority rests on an historical priority which is to be proved etymologically; and mythography, since the historicity of Genesis is to be demonstrated as over against the mythologies of other cultures. These three areas were of great interest to Eliot, and her knowledge of them was considerable. Her critique in *Middlemarch* centres upon what she perceived to be the problematic nexus of these disciplines, in which there appeared to her to be an improper subordination of purportedly independent areas of scholarship to religious orthodoxy.

II. THE ANGLICAN DEFENCE OF BIBLICAL INFALLIBILISM

The nineteenth century infallibilist position that the Bible is divinely inspired and inerrant throughout and the new critical position that it is an entirely human product were really only termini in a spectrum of opinion that included various compromises. Coleridge, for instance, believed only those parts of the Bible to be supernaturally inspired which specifically made that claim for themselves. He agreed with the Anglican latitudinarians that the general superintendence of

the Holy Spirit insures accuracy in all matters crucial to salvation; but that the Holy Spirit did not concern himself with other matters: 'I ... hold that the Bible contains the religion of Christians, but [I] dare not say that whatever is contained in the Bible is the Christian religion ...'[5] The non-heterodox nature of this position is apparent in its complete agreement with Article VI of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which states simply that the Bible 'conteyneth all thinges necessarie to salvation'. The article does not say that all things in the Bible are necessary to salvation, which would seem the requisite postulate for a mandate of Infallibilism. And, in fact, the Ecclesiastical Court of Arches and the Judicial Committee of Her Majesty's Privy Council both ultimately ruled in favour of the more moderate position: 'The doctrine that every part of Scripture was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and is the word of God, is not involved in the statement of the sixth article ...'[6]

But the advent of historical criticism seemed, at least until the 1860s, to make most Anglican theologians feel under assault, and they entrenched themselves in the doctrine of biblical Infallibilism. The furore created by the publication of the famous (or infamous, depending on one's theological perspective) collection of liberal articles, *Essays and Reviews*, in 1860 serves to indicate both the hostility and the continued influence of the infallibilists. The seven contributors, all of whom questioned or denied the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy, were called by their conservative opponents, 'Septem contra Christum'. Two were condemned for heresy by the Ecclesiastical Court, though the verdict was later reversed by the Privy Council.

Eliot considered the infallibilist doctrine of scripture as more than merely an incorrect opinion; she thought it obstructive and pernicious, because it hindered legitimate biblical investigations. The doctrine of verbal inspiration, she wrote, is 'a formula imprisoning the intellect, depriving it of its proper function—the free search for truth—and making it the mere servant-of-all-work to a forgone conclusion'.[7] This view was shared by her friend and correspondent, Benjamin Jowett, who contributed the last and most important essay to *Essays and Reviews*, 'On the Interpretation of Scripture.' In this essay, Jowett describes the Bible as a wonderful book banished by orthodoxy to a doctrinal limbo where its words are given technical definitions developed long after they were written. The new criticism, says Jowett, can restore the Bible to the real world, by helping to recapture the original meanings of words and by providing them with an historical context. To adhere to the infallibilist position is to continue a perennial anachronism alienating to the intellect, which 'can only end in the withdrawal of the educated classes from the influence of religion'.[8]

III. RATIONALISM IN ENGLISH THEOLOGY

The doctrine of infallibilism in England took shape in the eighteenth century. An excellent overview of the period is provided by another friend of Eliot's,

Mark Pattison, in his influential contribution to *Essays and Reviews*, 'Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688–1750.' It reviews not just the period which figures in the title, but also offers an analysis of how it influenced the theology of the period immediately succeeding it, 1750–1830. Since *Middlemarch* opens in 1829, and since Eliot's Casaubon is shown in the course of the novel to be hopelessly out of date as a scholar, the essay is very useful in understanding the novel's theological milieu.

The two periods, 1688–1750 and 1750–1830, together make up the 'theological eighteenth century', which in Pattison's scheme begins with the advent of William and Mary and ends with the publication of the first of the *Tracts for the Times*. This constitutes the Age of Rationalism in English theology, which Pattison characterises as the 'growth and gradual diffusion through all religious thinking of the supremacy of reason'.[9] But according to Pattison, while virtually all the religious literature produced throughout the entire period engaged in a strenuous effort to 'prove' the truth of Christianity, the type of proof adduced before and after 1750 was different. The controversialists of the earlier period drew from the Bible to demonstrate the 'reasonableness' of Christianity; i.e. they used internal evidence. Locke's religious essays are premier examples of this sort of argument. In contrast, the theologians of the Georgian period directed their efforts towards proving the accuracy of the Bible from extra-biblical sources. *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon and his prototype, Jacob Bryant, are engaged in this latter kind of scholarship. As Pattison points out, 'Neither branch of the argument can claim to be religious instruction at all'; but at least arguments based on internal evidence did 'enter incidentally upon the substance of the Gospel'.[10] But those who, like Casaubon, seek to validate Christianity on the basis of extra-biblical historical evidence have as their topic and goal something totally removed from the spiritual lessons at the heart of the gospel.

IV. THE RECEPTION OF THE NEW CRITICISM IN ENGLAND

The ill-preparedness of the Georgian theologians to the task of demonstrating the historical accuracy of biblical accounts is painfully obvious to a reader of their literature. Critical research of antiquity was not even part of the university curriculum. Though a certain paucity of material no doubt existed, England was no worse off than Germany and France, where classical and biblical scholars developed critical methods which enabled them to extract from the available materials a new store of knowledge. Far from contributing to this new store, English theologians declined even to share it. There were of course exceptions, such as Herbert Marsh, who translated Johann David Michaelis's *Introduction to the New Testament* in 1793 (making it an available source to *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon). In his preface, Marsh quotes a letter from Michaelis in which he compares the present fifth edition to the first edition of 1750: 'The republic of

letters is at present in possession of knowledge, of which it had no idea in the middle of this century; ... The system of biblical criticism has been placed in a new light ...'[11] These were the advances in knowledge that Anglican scholars and their fictional counterpart Casaubon steadfastly ignored; depending instead on scholarship that had long been debunked.

It is difficult to overestimate the seriousness of this English recalcitrance. In an essay in the *Westminster Review* in 1857 entitled the 'Present State of Theology in Germany,' Pattison calls the critical revolution the 'theological movement of the age'; belonging not to Germany but to all Christendom. It is the fourth great 'Epoch' in Church history, and equal in importance to its predecessors: the speculative Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries; the rise of speculative Latin theology in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries known as Scholasticism; and the Reformation controversies.

There were many factors contributing to the English reluctance to appropriate the new methodology, including 'a general indifference to learning on the part of the clergy' and the effect of the French Revolution in rendering all innovation suspicious.[12] It is also frequently the case that the closed-mindedness of orthodoxy becomes a breeding ground for insularity. Eliot's negative portrait of Casaubon the scholar is in part a faulting of Anglican theologians for their reactionary dislike of Continental innovations in scholarship. *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon is typical in caring nothing for the reception of his only published works—his 'Parerga,' disparagingly described by the narrator as the 'small monumental record of his march' towards his 'Key to all Mythologies' (p. 273)—by anyone outside the narrow confines of Establishment Anglicanism. All his 'painful doubt' is focused on 'what was really thought of them by the leading minds of Brasenose;' and he is unhappy because he 'suspected the Archdeacon of not having read them' (*ibid.*). Casaubon's new 'Parergon' is a commentary on Bishop Warburton, an eighteenth century Anglican divine; and again his only concern is for its reception within a small circle of Oxford scholars.

Another obvious impediment is explicitly stated in *Middlemarch*, when Will explains to Dorothea, 'If Mr Casaubon read German he would save himself a great deal of trouble' (p. 202). Casaubon's abhorrence of things German is pointed to throughout the novel. For example, he is disappointed that Will took the 'anomalous course of studying at Heidelberg' rather than choosing an English university (p. 79). Even English spoken with a German accent is 'disgusting' to him (p. 209). But in this antipathy to German culture and scholarship, Casaubon is purely representative of the clerical body to which he belongs. As Connop Thirlwall writes in the introduction of his 1825 translation of Schleiermacher's *A Critical Essay on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, 'It would almost seem as if at Oxford the knowledge of German subjected a divine to the same suspicion of heterodoxy which we know was attached some centuries back to the knowledge of Greek.'

This suspicion, of course, is not the result of mere ignorance of the language. Pattison quotes Pusey as saying in a lecture that the German critical theories originate in a desire to pull to pieces 'what has been received for thousands of years'.[13] It is the direction or tendency of German scholarship that is objectionable and threatening to the fictional Casaubon and his historical compatriots:

> 'I merely mean,' said Will, in an offhand way, 'that the Germans have taken the lead in historical inquiries ... When I was with Mr Casaubon I saw that he deafened himself in that direction: it was almost against his will that he read a Latin treatise written by a German (p. 202).

The Latin treatise is not named, but it is possible that Eliot had in mind F.A. Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum*. In a journal entry dated 2 December 1870, she wrote that she was 'experimenting with a story;' namely 'Miss Brooke,' which was soon to become part of *Middlemarch*. In the same entry, Eliot noted, 'I am reading Wolf's Prolegomena to Homer.' She still had the London Library's copy of the *Prolegomena* as late as the summer of 1871. Furthermore, Eliot had read Pattison's article on Wolf in the *North British Review*, June 1865.[14]

The *Prolegomena* was published in 1795, and proposed the seemingly harmless thesis that the works attributed to Homer are not the work of a single blind bard, but rather fragments from various sources pieced together over time and at some point preserved in manuscript; i.e., a written version of the legendary history of an oral culture. Eliot made her position clear in a discussion she had with a visiting American specialist on Homer, John Fiske. In a letter dated 23 November 1873, Fiske wrote that he had found Eliot to be 'a strong Wolfian! ... I found her thoroughly acquainted with the whole literature of the Homeric question; and she seems to have read all of Homer in Greek, too'.

The unexpected tumult that followed the *Prolegomena*'s publication had its source in the obvious possible parallel between the Pentateuch and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In both cases the texts were the premier traditionary annals of their respective cultures, and invested with regulatory authority; and a long tradition of single authorship obtained in both cases. The challenge to single authorship of the Greek texts could, it was feared, metamorphose into a challenge to Moses' single authorship of the Pentateuch. Since Mosaic authorship is claimed in the Bible itself, any such challenge constitutes a presumption of error in the biblical record, thus threatening the infallibilist position. The perception of looming danger was such that acceptance of Wolf's thesis came to be known as 'Homeric atheism'.[15]

V. THE ETYMOLOGICAL VOGUE

In her journal entry for 23 January 1869, Eliot wrote that she had 'made a little way in constructing my new Tale' [*Middlemarch*] and that she had 'been reading

a little philology.' Eliot's interest in philology can hardly be overstated. There are about twenty entries concerning philology in the three notebooks she used during the writing of *Middlemarch*; many quite long and detailed, and one taking up fourteen pages. There are also frequent references to philology in her journals and letters, and she counted many philologists among her friends: Max Muller, a specialist in Sanskrit; John W. Donaldson, author of *The New Cratylus*; and Henry Wedgewood, author of the *Dictionary of English Etymology*, among others.

The most popular sort of philological study in England and France during the eighteenth century was etymology. It was the method of choice for two different lines of inquiry: to find the origin of language and to determine the original language. Both were involved in the defence of biblical inerrancy, since the Bible describes the origin of language (as divine donation) and gives the original language (everybody spoke Hebrew in the Garden of Eden). Because they are seeking to prove the historicity of the Genesis account by proving the priority of Hebrew nomenclature, Jacob Bryant and the Eliot's Casaubon are involved with the second line of inquiry. Hebrew had been overwhelmingly accepted as the first language throughout church history. Max Muller notes that according to St. Jerome, 'The whole of antiquity (universa antiquitas) affirms that Hebrew, in which the Old Testament is written, was the beginning of all human speech.'[16] Muller also gives the opinion of Origen, that Hebrew was 'originally given through Adam, [and] remained in that part of the world which was the chosen portion of God.'[17] Belief in the primogeniality of Hebrew remained pretty much undisturbed until the time of Leibniz. Referring to the silly nationalistic assertion of a Dutchman named Goropius, that Dutch was the Edenic language, Leibniz wrote, 'There is as much reason for supposing Hebrew to have been the primitive language of mankind, as there is for adopting the view of Goropius.'[18] But Leibniz was ahead of his theological time in believing that 'Divine wisdom' did not require Hebrew to be the original language. Most churchmen continued to believe that Hebrew was the primeval tongue; an opinion upheld by etymological disquisitions such as Bryant's.

VI. A NEW SYSTEM

The demonstration of the theory that Genesis tells the only true story of the creation and early history of mankind, and that all other stories are merely spurious versions of Genesis history—or, as Casaubon describes it, 'corruptions of a tradition originally revealed'—requires that the legends of other cultures be collapsed until they are in agreement with the Mosaic account. Clearly, this is a vast reductionist project, requiring some method; which, as has been noted, Bryant found in the idea of verbal radicals to be arrived at etymologically. All names which appear in the mythologies of other nations are manipulated and reduced until they sound (however remotely) like names occurring in Genesis.

Take for instance the name of the Egyptian deity, Amon. Amon occupied a place in the Egyptian pantheon analogous to that of Zeus in Greek mythology. He later became identified with the sun god, Re, and as Amon-Re was revered as the chief god of Egypt. Bryant deals with him in the following fashion:

> Amunus, I make no doubt, is Amun, or Ham, the real father of Misor, from whom the Mizraim are supposed to be descended. By Magus probably is meant Chus, the father of those worshipers of fire, the Magi: the father also of the genuine Scythae, who were stiled Magog.[19]

In *Middlemarch*, we find Casaubon engaged in making 'bitter manuscript remarks on other men's notions about the solar deities;' apparently trying to disprove the separate mythological existence of Amon-Re in order that he may be identified as Ham. But as Eliot's narrator notes, Casaubon's method, like his mentor Bryant's, is 'a method of interpretation which was not tested by the necessity of forming anything which had sharper collisions than an elaborate notion of Gog and Magog' (p. 460).

Bryant was not alone in practising unscientific and unregulated etymologising. The most famous of all the English philologers who used personal ingenuity rather than historical documentation to develop their etymologies was John Horne Tooke, author of the wildly popular book, *The Diversions of Purley*. As a purely speculative etymologist, Tooke is a methodological ancestor to the fictional Casaubon, even though Tooke was not concerned with theological matters. Take, for example, Tooke's thesis that some of the many changes a language undergoes are generated by a movement of elision, which he calls 'subaudition.'[20] This is apparently a principle embraced by *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon. To clear up the thorny question of whether Henry IV of France had specifically wished the poor people of his realm to have fat fowls, or whether he might in fact have been perfectly content if they had only the skinny fowls which Mr Brooke says are characteristic of France, Mr Casaubon offers the following possible explanation to Celia: 'Yes, but the word [fat] has dropped out of the text, or perhaps was *subauditum*; that is present in the king's mind, but not uttered' (p. 76).

Tooke maintained that the etymologist need not be dismayed by the dissimilarity in words he wishes to relate, since 'Letters, like soldiers [are] very apt to desert and drop off in a long march.'[21] He unfortunately produced many epigones like Samuel Henshaw, a fellow of Brasenose, who informs his readers that 'the omission of a letter ... is sometimes not to be much regarded'.[22] Another was Walter Whiter, a fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, who produced the three thousand page *Etymologicon Universale* in which he proposed a general law that would be valid for all languages in all historical times. The 'law' he claimed to have discovered was that the necessary rudimentary ideas

of human beings are conveyed in the same consonants in all languages. These consonants were divided into three groups, the individuals of each group being somewhat fluid and able to change into another of the same group. Furthermore, the consonants of one group might pass into those belonging to another group. In other words, anything can happen to any consonant.[23] This is the kind of speculative etymologising that Eliot's narrator has in mind when characterising Casaubon's theories as 'float[ing] among flexible conjectures ... as free from interruption as a plan for threading the stars together' (pp. 469–70).

Among the German scholars Casaubon refuses to read are Jacob Grimm and Franz Bopp. Jacob Grimm's discovery was of immense importance, and concerned the regular manner in which linguistic change occurs, making it possible to trace the true etymology of a word. Eliot was so interested in Grimm's discoveries that she copied different versions of 'Grimm's Law' into all three of her *Middlemarch* notebooks. The law states the nature of intra-familial consonantal change from older to newer dialects. For example, the Greek and Latin *f* yields a Gothic *b* which yields a German *p*; Greek and Latin *p* yields a Gothic *f* which yields a German *v*; etc. Thus, Latin *frater* becomes Gothic *brother* which becomes Old High German *pruoder*.

This discovery completely overturned the old etymological method. Linguistic descent was now seen to cause a certain non-reciprocity among consonants of different dialects. For example, the Greek *tau* changes into a Gothic *th*, but the Gothic *t*, instead of requiring a Greek *theta*, requires a *delta*. Casaubon's ignorance of Grimm's work is highlighted in a specific though oblique reference in *Middlemarch*, when the narrator describes his etymologies as seeming 'strong because of likeness in sound, until it was shown that likeness in sound made them impossible' (pp. 469–70).

In 1816, Franz Bopp published *A Comparative Grammar of the Sanscrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, Gothic, German, and Slavonic Languages*. With the addition of Celtic and Albanian, Bopp named the group the Indo-European family of languages, and theorised that the similarities manifested by these languages meant common descent from a Proto-Indo-European language. Bopp's work was based on the discovery of Sanskrit by Sir William Jones. In the same year that Tooke published the first volume of *The Diversions of Purley* (1786), Jones delivered a famous address to the Asiatick Society of Calcutta, in which he extolled the beauty and sophistication of the Sanskrit language, and proposed the revolutionary theory that Sanskrit is genealogically related to Greek, Latin, Gothic and Persian.

Eliot was familiar with Jones through the work of Muller, and her interest in Sanskrit was probably heightened by the fact that her stepson was studying it as a requirement for the India Service. Unlike her creation Casaubon, who is 'not an Orientalist, you know' (p. 216), Jones was an Orientalist of the first calibre.

Sir William has an important particular connection with *Middlemarch*, in that he provided a contemporary refutation of the etymological theories of Bryant's *A New System*:

> [W]hen we derive our *hanger*, or short pendent sword, from the Persian, because ignorant travellers thus misspell the word *khanjar*, which in truth means a different weapon, or *sandal-wood* from the Greek because we suppose, that *sandals* were sometimes made from it, we gain no ground in proving the affinity of nations, and only weaken arguments, which might otherwise be firmly supported ... Etymology has, no doubt, some use in historical researches; but it is a medium of proof so very fallacious, that where it elucidates one fact, it obscures a thousand, and more frequently borders on the ridiculous, than leads to any solid conclusion.[24]

Though Sir William thus early showed the incorrect and misleading nature of Bryant's etymological method, it was not until many years later that it was completely discredited in England. In the March 1830 issue of the *Foreign Review*, the Danish philologer Rasmus Rask chastised English scholars for remaining out of touch with important new developments in comparative and historical linguistics; developments which were 'of such interest to every people, aspiring to the honour of a continuity of literature and mental civilisation.' This is the kind of ignorance Eliot seeks to expose with the character of Casaubon; an ignorance in large part due to the infallibilist prejudices of an overwhelmingly conservative Anglican clergy.

VII. MIDDLEMARCH AND MYTHOGRAPHY

The case against the importation of theological prejudice into mythological investigations was further strengthened by the publication in 1825 of Otfried Muller's *Introduction to a Scientific System of Mythology*. Eliot's dislike of Bryant and endorsement of Otfried Muller are both apparent in her early review of R.W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*:

> The introduction of a truly philosophic spirit into the study of mythology—an introduction for which we are chiefly indebted to the Germans—is a great step in advance of the orthodox prepossessions of writers such as Bryant, who saw in the Greek legends simply the misrepresentations of the authentic history given in the book of Genesis ... O. Muller says, obviously enough ... while the mythology of one nation is studied apart from that of others, or while what is really mythology in the records of any one nation is not recognised as such, but though it presents ordinary mythical elements, is accounted for by a special theory; we shall never arrive at a just and full estimate of this phase of man's religious tendencies.[25]

Religious doctrine and scientific inquiry, says Eliot, are incompatible because there is no place in science for 'orthodox prepossessions' and 'special theories'.

The Bible, she implicitly states, presents 'ordinary mythical elements,' and should be treated just like the mythologies of other cultures.

Like Sir William Jones, Otfried Muller completely undermined Bryant's etymological demonstrations. First, Muller faults mythographers such as Bryant for misunderstanding the nature of mythological language. In any mythic narrative there are likely to be grains of historical truth; 'a chain of facts leading from history to mythology'.[26] Instead of recognising this blending of materials in both the Bible and other ancient narratives, mythographers such as Bryant and *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon consider the Bible all history and other texts all mythology.

Secondly, Muller is extremely sceptical of any grandiose attempt at cross-cultural unification of myths through some speculative organisational principle (e.g. the Bryant/Casaubon idea that 'all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed'). Indeed, Muller warns against even an intramural attempt in the case of the numerous Greek tribes:

> [A]ny attempt to explain these mythi in order ... as a system of thought and knowledge, must prove a fruitless task. Such a systematic coherence could, at most, extend merely to smaller portions originally connected.[27]

The greater Bryant/Casaubon scheme to organise all mythologies according to a preconceived plan of subordination to biblical accounts is an effort that can only produce an outcome even more 'fruitless.' This certainly is what Dorothea feels, when she likens the continued effort spent on her husband's 'Key to all Mythologies' to working 'a treadmill fruitlessly' (p. 470). A fruitful outcome can be reached only by studying myths on a case by case basis, without trying to impose a grid supplied by a speculative presupposition. As Muller notes, such a grid will most certainly cause 'the interpretation, as a whole, to be forced, frigid, and unsatisfactory;' words which perfectly describe Casaubon's 'Key.'[28]

Bryant in no way attempts to conceal his scholarly predisposition towards an orthodox explanation of myth. All investigations are to be founded on the assumption that Genesis alone gives an accurate 'account of the first ages; and of the great events, which happened in the infancy of the world'. As long as Bryant 'finds [Moses] engaged in the general history of mankind', Genesis is to be the basis and touchstone of all accounts; for it is impossible that there should be any mistake made by 'the sacred Penman'. But Moses does not tell the whole story; it is necessary for Bryant 'to shew, what was subsequent to his account after the migration of families, and the dispersion from the plains of Shinar'.[29] Gentile accounts (primarily Greek) are to be accepted only insofar as they validate Genesis, or deal with matters not recounted in the biblical narrative.

Bryant's innovative hypothesis was that a particular family went all over the world, taking with them their religion and customs (a theory sturdily backed by the assertion, 'It has been observed by many of the learned'). This 'wonderful people' are the descendants of Chus, called Cuthites or Cuseans. They were joined by other nations, in particular the 'collateral branches of their family, the Mizraim, Caphtorium, and the sons of Canaan'.[30] That *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon is indeed pursuing the same line of inquiry is clear from his hurry to return to 'the library to chew a cud of erudite mistake about Cush or Chus and Mizraim' (p. 318).

These Cuthites were of the line of Ham, whom, we have seen, was identified by Bryant and Casaubon as the real personage mistakenly worshiped as the Egyptian deity, Amon-Re. These Cuthites thus came to be called Amonians, a group which included Egyptians, Syrians, Phoenicians and Canaanites. Thus, all these peoples were shown to be descendants of Ham, and so descendants of Noah. This means that the stories, memorials, pillars, hieroglyphics, etc., of these diverse peoples really all describe the history of Noah's progeny. Bryant confidently concludes, the 'latent truth' of all particular tribal or national myths and legends is that, 'under whatever title he may come ... the first king in every country was Noah'.[31] The 'orthodox prepossessions' of this researcher are obvious; the mythologies of other traditions are only of interest and use to him to establish the authenticity of his own 'Sacred Writings'.

VIII. SCHOLARLY RACISM

Sir William Jones's theories concerning the common heritage of the languages of ancient India, Greece and Rome met with substantial opposition in England. The Scottish philosopher, Dugald Stewart (a disciple of Adam Smith and Thomas Reid) had early recognised that philology was properly a comparative and historical rather than a speculative science; but racism warped his ability to draw the necessary conclusions. Eliot's friend, Max Muller, outlines the problem:

> No doubt it must have required a considerable effort for a man brought up in the belief that Greek and Latin were either aboriginal languages, or modifications of Hebrew, to bring himself to believe in the revolutionary doctrine that the classical languages were intimately related to a jargon of mere savages; for *then* all the subjects of the Great Mogul were supposed to be.[32]

Stewart's resolution of the problem was to deny that Sanskrit, as an ancient language, existed; insisting that it had been concocted by 'those arch-forgers and liars the Brahmins', who used Greek and Latin as their models.[33] Muller goes on to describe:

> how violent a shock was given by the discovery of Sanskrit to prejudices most deeply ingrained in the mind of every educated man. The most absurd arguments

> found favour for a time, if they could only furnish a loophole by which to escape from the unpleasant conclusion that Greek and Latin were of the same kith and kin as the language of the black inhabitants of India.[34]

Theological as well as philological racism was an impediment to English scholarship, and both were involved in doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. This is apparent in a contemporary review of *Essays and Reviews* written by an acquaintance of Eliot's, Frederic Harrison. Harrison acknowledges the importance of the book: '[T]his question of inspiration, which is the leading subject of this book ... is the critical question of the time.'[35] But he views the application of the new critical method to the Bible as a dangerous innovation. If, for example, it were to be applied to the Old Testament, that inspired and holy narrative would be reduced to nothing more than 'a very fragmentary and very untrustworthy collection of the literature of a certain Arab race'.[36] Eliot's response to the article in a letter to a mutual friend was a polite, 'I don't quite agree with his view of the case.'[37]

IX. THE METHODOLOGY OF ORTHODOXY

The cause to which Eliot devoted her life and art was the search for truth; a search for understanding of the way things and people really are. Her rejection of religious orthodoxy was a direct consequence of her adherence to this cause. As she writes in an explanatory letter to an evangelical friend and erstwhile religious mentor, Maria Lewis, 'My only desire is to know the truth, my only fear to cling to error' (13 November 1841).

Error is of course forgivable, since knowledge is always incomplete, as long as the desire to know the truth is present in the erring individual. Such a desire is inseparable from an open-mindedness and willingness to change a position or a belief if necessary. These are traits Eliot loved in her companion of twenty-five years, George Henry Lewes, whom she described as always 'ready to admit another's argument is stronger, the moment his intellect recognises it'.[38] This is also an important characteristic of *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea, whose attitude is nicely summed up in a response to her sister Celia: 'Where am I wrong, Kitty?' said Dorothea, quite meekly (p. 480).

It is for his disinclination to pursue all available avenues for arriving at the truth, for his choice rather of paths that have already been found to lead nowhere, that Eliot faults the biblical scholarship of her creation Casaubon. The problem is not simply that he has reached erroneous conclusions concerning the Bible, but rather that his conclusions were forgone. As in the case of his historical prototype Jacob Bryant, Casaubon's conclusions are supplied proleptically by the presuppositions of orthodoxy. The very propositions that need to be investigated—is the Bible divinely inspired, is it uniquely superior to other ancient narratives, are the mythologies of other cultures derivative and spurious

versions of biblical history—are those which are premised; severely skewing and rendering unsound all subsequent researches.

The debate over the Bible in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was no less a debate about method than it was about religious propositions. On one side were scholars like *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon, whose a priori method called for the continual overruling of ideas yielded by the observable historical world by traditionally received speculative concepts derived from some unobservable supernatural realm. On the other side were scholars who favoured *a posteriori* method in which postulates are formed on the basis of facts and artifacts that may be examined and verified.

Historically, theology has been a discipline where the *a priori* method has held great sway. Theological *a priori* are especially problematic because the postulates are removed from their natural (i.e., historical) context and invested with a supernatural authority that makes them exempt from criticism. As Jowett writes,

> In natural science it is felt to be useless to build on assumptions; in history we look with suspicion on a priori ideas of what ought to have been; in mathematics, when a step is wrong, we pull the house down until we reach a point at which the error is discovered. But in theology it is otherwise; there the tendency has been to conceal the unsoundness of the foundation under the fairness and loftiness of the superstructure ... And thus many principles have imperceptibly grown up which have overridden facts.[39]

This question of method also figured in Jones's refutation of Bryant:

> We know *a posteriori*, that both *fitz* and *hijo*, by the nature of two several dialects, are derived from *filius*; that *uncle* comes from *avus*, and *stranger* from *extra*; ... which etymologies, though they cannot have been demonstrated a priori, might serve to confirm ... a connection between the members of one great Empire.[40]

There can be no doubt that Eliot was in complete agreement with Jowett and Jones, and thoroughly opposed to scholarship based on *a priori* reasoning. Her position is clearly stated in a letter in which she takes exception to her friend Sara Hennell's dependence on *a priori* in her book, *Thoughts in Aid of Faith*:

> I think we have not the slightest a priori ground for supposing that an all-wise Being would not will 'man to be an essentially different nature from all other creatures'. The *a posteriori* argument, that he has not willed it, is the only firm standing ground (9 October 1856).

Since the theological *a priori* method is based on authoritative statements and judgements, it often proceeds by way of citations, which constitute appeals to

various authorities. The various demonstrations that *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon believes add up to proof of the correctness of his opinions are in fact mere masses of citation. He spends his honeymoon in Rome in the Vatican Library perusing texts from which he might garner useful citations. In writing his 'Parerga', Mr Casaubon actually suffers from indigestion, brought on 'by the interference of citations' (p. 275). His preparatory notes, innocently referred to by Dorothea as '[a]ll those rows of volumes' (p. 194), are really nothing more than an ever-increasing body of citations. The explanation of his scholarly method to Dorothea (reluctantly given only so that she will be able to continue his work in the case of his death) demonstrates how imperative citation is to the overall plan for his 'Key to all Mythologies':

> But you observe that the principle on which my selection is made, is to give adequate, and not disproportionate illustrations to each of the theses enumerated in my introduction, as at present sketched. You have perceived that distinctly, Dorothea? (p. 468).

But neither *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon nor his historical predecessor Bryant are able to progress beyond citation. The enormous resources at their disposal (the Vatican and Marlborough libraries respectively) become in their hands a mere scholarly smorgasbord from which to choose references that conform to their premises. They do not possess the necessary critical attitude—what Goethe called a *tatige Skepsis*—which allows the true scholar to evaluate sources in a constructive fashion.

X. CASAUBON'S SCHOLARSHIP AND THE NARRATIVE

The importance assigned to Casaubon's work by Eliot may be gauged narratologically; that is, by the degree to which it influences the action of the novel. Since it is what attracts Dorothea to Casaubon in the first place, it may be seen as that which precipitates the main action of the novel. Dorothea is drawn not to the man but to the scholar. She is pointedly described as feeling 'some venerating expectation' at the prospect of meeting Casaubon, because he was 'noted in the county as a man of profound learning' (p. 11); and upon meeting him, it is 'the wide embrace of his conception' rather than the man himself which 'altogether captivated' her (p. 24).

There are two distinct aspects to the fulfilment Dorothea hopes for and expects from her marriage to Casaubon, and both are directly tied to his scholarship. The first is intellectual. To Dorothea, whose girls' finishing school education is described by the narrator as having provided her with 'a thimbleful of matter in the shape of knowledge', Casaubon appears to be incredibly knowledgeable: '[H]e thinks a whole world of which my thought is but a poor two-penny mirror' (p. 24). Casaubon's purported knowledge is largely

historical, and a knowledge of history is mentioned in particular as lacking in Dorothea's education; something which she hopes to correct by marrying Casaubon: 'For to Dorothea, after that toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies which had made the chief part of her education, Mr Casaubon's talk about his great book was full of new vistas' (p. 84). For Dorothea, the prospect of marriage to this great scholar means the chance to 'learn everything' (p. 28).

Dorothea also believes that her marriage will bring spiritual fulfilment; that in Casaubon she will find 'a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion' (p. 22). Dorothea's sister Celia asks early on (with a touch 'of naive malice'), 'Has Mr Casaubon a great soul?' Dorothea responds, 'Yes, I believe he has ... Everything I see in him corresponds to his pamphlet on Biblical Cosmology' (p. 20). The exchange points to the direct correlation between Dorothea's appraisal of her future husband's spirituality and her appraisal of his scholarly work.

Dorothea's interest in Casaubon's pamphlet on 'Biblical Cosmology' indicates the presence of a specifically religious element in Dorothea's quest for spiritual self-realisation. Dorothea is, in fact, described as having an 'intens[ely] ... religious disposition', which exercises 'coercion ... over her life' (p. 28). This disposition has been formed by her extensive reading of the great Christian thinkers and scholars of the past; Pascal, Milton, Hooker and Taylor are mentioned among others. Her marriage, she believes, will give form, substance and direction to her religious impulse. In Casaubon, she sees 'a living Bossuet, whose work would reconcile complete knowledge with devoted piety; ... a modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint' (p. 24).

We should note that Dorothea's interest in religion, unlike Casaubon's, is not only academic; rather, it carries a pressing practical moral imperative. For example, when the book opens, Dorothea's consuming interest is in building new cottages for the poor. The specifically Christian aspect and source of this altruism is made clear, when she uses Jesus' Cleansing of the Temple and the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus in trying to persuade Sir James of the importance of good housing for his tenants:

> I think we deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords—all of us who let our tenants live is such sties as we see round us ... I think, instead of Lazarus at the gate, we should put the pig-sty cottages outside the park-gate (p. 31).

Dorothea is a little disappointed because Casaubon 'apparently did not care about building cottages' (p. 33); but she is nonetheless certain that he will help her 'judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian' (p. 63).

At the centre of the story of *Middlemarch* is the story of Dorothea's emergence from a state of ignorance into a state of knowledge. Part of the importance of Casaubon's work to the narrative lies in the fact that Dorothea's development is in large part phenomenologically recorded in her changing responses to her husband's scholarship. The narrative documents the gradual metamorphosis of her admiration into disenchantment; which, like her initial attraction, is both intellectual and spiritual. With the gradual increase of her own knowledge, Dorothea becomes aware that Casaubon's knowledge is illusory; based on incorrect, incomplete and improperly interpreted information. In Dorothea's revised appraisal, Casaubon's biblical researches are recognised for what they are: mere 'mixed heaps of material, which were to be the doubtful illustration of principles still more doubtful' (p. 469). And since her belief in Casaubon's 'great soul' was the result of her ignorant judgement of his biblical researches, Dorothea's new found intellectual independence from Casaubon brings in its wake spiritual independence. This is evident in her reaction to the 'Synoptical Tabulation' Casaubon has left her as an aid to the completion of the 'Key to all Mythologies'. Dorothea writes a note to her dead husband: 'I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I had no belief in?' (pp. 526–7).

Since Casaubon's efforts are directed toward proving the literal truth of the biblical narrative, the change in Dorothea's opinion of his work is nothing less than a change in her ideas about the Bible and what constitutes biblical religion. At the beginning of the novel, Dorothea presumably believes with the orthodox majority that the Bible is inspired and inerrant, since she is favourably impressed by Casaubon's pamphlet on 'Biblical Cosmology.' Will Ladislaw is the first to challenge these beliefs, and to tell her about German historical criticism. Dorothea seems to have an intuitive appreciation for this new approach in which the Bible is allowed to take a place and have an active role in human history.[41] Her own natural and organic use of the Bible as an existential referent is apparent in passages such as the one quoted above, concerning the need for better housing for the poor. She comes to see in the course of the novel that her husband's orthodox scholarship is utterly disengaged from the profound and unchanging aspects of biblical religion; occupying itself with accidents, technicalities and demonstrations of the truth of doctrines no longer spiritually useful, whatever they might have been in the past.

The crisis framed by Chapter XLVIII is finally resolved when Dorothea returns to Lowick after Casaubon's death. When she enters the library and opens the shutters it seems to her that the sun coming in through the library window is 'shining on the rows of note-books as it shines on the weary waste planted with huge stones, the mute memorial of a forgotten faith' (p. 526). Dorothea has come to a full understanding of the anachronistic futility of her husband's biblical

researches: they are no more pertinent to the contemporary state of religion than the monoliths of Stonehenge.[42]

The Stonehenge metaphor speaks to Eliot's fear that Anglican biblical scholarship, which was promoting and underwriting a kind of religion based on an archaic system of doctrines, was dooming the Bible to obsolescence, and Christianity to the fate of a dead and forgotten religion. The ethical messages which she felt were at the heart of the Bible would be lost in an inevitable rejection of irrelevant formulations. Eliot early repudiated supernatural religion; but this in no way involved a repudiation of the Bible. All her writings—fiction and non-fiction, correspondence and journals—are replete with biblical references; many of which demonstrate Eliot's high regard for the Bible as a principal, indeed irreplaceable, source for ethical discussion. As she writes to Sara Hennell, 'I suppose no wisdom the world will ever find out will make Paul's words obsolete Now abide etc. but the greatest of these is Charity' (26 December 1862). By 'charity', Eliot explains to John Bray in a letter dated three days later, she means what the translators of the Authorised Version 'meant in their rendering of the XIIIth chapter of I Corinthians—*Caritas*, the highest love or fellowship, which I am happy to believe no philosophy will expel from the world.' The Bible was for Eliot a dear friend and life-long companion; its inestimable value wryly noted in an amused comment in the letter to Sara:

> If my bookmarker were just a little longer I should keep it in my beautiful Bible in large print, which Mr Lewes bought for me in provision for my old age. He is not fond of reading the Bible himself but 'sees no harm' in my reading it.

The efforts of Anglican theologians to encapsulate this beloved book and keep it apart from the stream of human history were necessarily anathema to Eliot; in *Middlemarch*, she engages in an informed effort to separate it from all such false and misleading constructions.

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[2] W.H. Harvey writes very briefly about the mythological aspect of Casaubon's work in an essay entitled 'The Intellectual Background of the Novel'. See *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel*, B. Hardy (ed.), (New York: Oxford UP, 1967) pp. 34–5.

[3] W. Holwell, *A Mythological, Etymological, and Historical Dictionary; Extracted from the Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (London: C. Dilly, 1793).

[4] Twenty years before writing *Middlemarch*, Eliot mentions Bryant with dislike in a review of R.W. Mackay's *The Progress*

of the Intellect, written for the *Westminster Review* during her tenure as editor. See R. Ashton (ed.), *George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) p. 26.

[5] S. Taylor Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit (Letters on the Inspiration of Scriptures)*, (London: George Bell, 1884) p. 315.

[6] S. Davidson, *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1868) p. xii.

[7] Ashton, p. 145.

[8] *Essays and Reviews*, 12th edn, (London: Longman, 1865) p. 454.

[9] *The Essays of the Late Mark Pattison*, H. Nettleship (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889) vol. 2, pp. 45–6.

[10] Pattison, p. 49.

[11] J.D. Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. H. Marsh (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1793) p. iv.

[12] V.F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 1800–60* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1913) p. 177.

[13] Pattison, p. 213.

[14] *The George Eliot Letters*, G.S. Haight (ed.), (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955) vol. 5, p. 124, n. 6.

[15] R. Bentley (1662–1742), who served as Royal Librarian and Master at Trinity, actually anticipated Wolf's thesis; proposing that the Pentateuch, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were redactions of earlier traditionary materials. The idea that the present form of the Pentateuch is in fact a late redaction was also proposed during the last decade of the eighteenth century by Alexander Geddes, a Scottish Roman Catholic priest.

[16] F.M. Muller, *The Science of Language*, First Series (New York: Charles Scribner, 1869) p. 132. This book was read and re-read by Eliot, who describes it as 'great and delightful' in a letter to Sara Hennell (13 January 1862).

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 132–3. The Quotation is from Origen's *Eleventh Homily on the Book of Numbers*.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 135. There were some dissenting opinions. St. Basil was accused by Eunomius (who was himself later condemned for Arianism) of denying divine providence because he asserted that God had not created the names of all things, but rather had only given the linguistic faculty to man. Gregory of Nyssa defended St. Basil: 'Though God has given to human nature its faculties, it does not follow that therefore He produces all the actions which we perform' (*ibid.*, p. 40, n. 2).

[19] J. Bryant, *A New System, or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (New York: Garland, 1979) vol. 1.

[20] H. Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967) p. 64.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[23] M. Muller gives Voltaire's opinion of this kind of 'scientific' etymologising: 'L'etymologie est une science ou les voyelles ne font rien, et les consonnes fort peu de chose.' See *The Science of Language*, Second Series (New York: Charles Scribner, 1869) p. 254.

[24] Aarsleff, pp. 128–9.

[25] See n. 4 above.

[26] K.O. Muller, *Introduction to a Scientific System of Mythology*, trans. J. Leitch (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1844) p. 9.

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[29] Bryant, vol. 1, p. 5.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. vi.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

[32] *The Science of Language*, First Series, p. 164.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] 'Neo Christianity', *Westminster Review* (October 1860) p. 166.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] To Mrs Richard Congreve (16 October 1860).

[38] From a letter to Sara Hennell (13 November 1860).

[39] *Essays and Reviews*, p. 414.

[40] Aarsleff, p. 128.

[41] That Dorothea realises that no approach to religion—including the new criticism—is immune to the danger of spiritual disengagement seems indicated in an interesting exchange she has with Will, in which

she tries to explain her evolving personal religion. Dorothea describes it as 'desiring what is perfectly good,' which makes one 'part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower.' Will responds, 'That is a beautiful mysticism—it is a—' 'Please not to call it by any name,' said Dorothea, putting out her hands entreatingly. 'You will say it is Persian, or something geographical. It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it ...' The passage perhaps hints at some dissatisfaction with Will's disposition to classify her religious beliefs (presumably, as some form of Zoroastrianism). Dorothea appears to fear a depersonalisation of her spiritual experience. Will, no less than Casaubon, seems inclined to deal with the religious impulses of humanity by putting them '[i]n pigeon holes' (Casaubon's response to Mr Brooke's question, 'But now, how do you arrange your documents?', p. 19).

[42] Though Eliot did not visit Stonehenge until 1874 she had doubtless seen pictures and read and heard descriptions of the famous site. See G. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (London: Penguin, 1992) p. 475.