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## EDWARD CASAUBON AND HERBERT SPENCER

by June Skye Szirotny

Identifying the originals of George Eliot's characters has always fascinated readers. And none of her characters has inspired speculation about an original more than Edward Casaubon, George Eliot's scholar and clergyman in *Middlemarch*. In 1973, Richard Ellmann published an essay, 'Dorothea's Husbands: Some Biographical Speculations',<sup>1</sup> re-examining the claims made for various persons George Eliot had known, as the original of Casaubon: Mark Pattison, Herbert Spencer, Dr. Robert Herbert Brabant, Jacob Bryant, Robert William Mackay, and George Eliot herself. Since then readers have focused on other contenders, mostly literary figures.<sup>2</sup> Of the traditional contenders, Mark Pattison, a scholar who wrote the *Life of Isaac Casaubon* and married one twenty-seven years younger than himself, has been the most hotly contested candidate,<sup>3</sup> and D. B. Nimmo's thorough examination of the case has left him a credible candidate.<sup>4</sup> Gordon S. Haight makes a plausible case for Dr Brabant; probably only his view, repeatedly set forth, that Brabant is the *most* likely candidate can be challenged.<sup>5</sup>

No one, however, has seriously considered Herbert Spencer as a contender for the dubious honor of the original of Casaubon. Neither the aged husband of a young girl nor a mere pedant – praised by George Eliot in 1853 as one 'for whose moral as well as intellectual character I have a very high respect'<sup>6</sup> – Spencer has been seen as resembling Casaubon in only one respect. As Ellmann writes, 'For sexual low pressure, Herbert Spencer was probably the best example'. But Ellmann typically dismisses him as a likely candidate, saying that George Eliot was not in doubt about Spencer's ability.<sup>7</sup> Even in a recent book exploring the relation between George Eliot and Spencer, the author never makes the connection between Spencer and Casaubon.<sup>8</sup> Yet we cannot ignore the fact that Beatrice Potter Webb, whom Spencer called his 'oldest and dearest friend',<sup>9</sup> referred to him as Casaubon.<sup>10</sup>

Marian Evans, as George Eliot called herself before 1857, knew Spencer well. In love with him in 1851-52, she maintained friendly relations with him to the end of her life. He frequently took advantage of the standing invitation he had to lunch with the Leweses,<sup>11</sup> and he often appears in the lists of their guests on more formal occasions. If her long relationship with him left him 'our good friend Mr Spencer' (*GEL*, IV:30), it also exposed one who, like Casaubon, 'was not unmixedly adorable'<sup>12</sup> – one whom we can see George Eliot caricaturing in Casaubon.

There is no doubt that Spencer shared with Casaubon his 'sexual low pressure'. Casaubon, like Spencer, is a bachelor by nature, though one who marries late in life, feeling societal pressures to conform and imagining that he will 'adorn his life with the graces of female companionship' (vii, 62). '[H]e determined to abandon himself to the stream of feeling, and perhaps was surprised to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it was' (vii, 62). Thus, even before marriage, he discovered 'that though he had won a lovely and noble-hearted girl he had not won delight'. '[H]e was in danger of being saddened by the very conviction that his circumstances were unusually happy: there was nothing external by which he could account for a certain blankness of sensibility which came over him just when his expectant gladness should have been most lively' (x, 83, 84). Totally inadequate as a lover, he enters into marriage that leaves

him as lonely as before – marriage that, in fact, is a horror for both him and his wife. Asked what she thought of a honeymoon in Rome, Dorothea inwardly says, ‘No one would ever know what she thought of a wedding journey to Rome’ (xxviii, 270).

[S]he had ardour enough . . . to have kissed Mr Casaubon’s coat-sleeve, or to have caressed his shoe-latchet, if he would have made any other sign of acceptance than pronouncing her, with his unfailing propriety, to be of a most affectionate and truly feminine nature, indicating at the same time by politely reaching a chair for her that he regarded these manifestations as rather crude and startling (xx, 192).

Spencer, who never married during his long lonely life, told Beatrice Webb ‘that he wondered at the weakness of his feelings even of friendship, and towards old friends and relations’.<sup>13</sup> George Eliot, who said ‘his feelings are never too much for him’ (*GEL*, IV:489), called him ‘a poor shrivelled-hearted bachelor’ (*GEL*, IV:71). It is no coincidence that she makes Casaubon, like Spencer, suffer from heart trouble.

Scholarly work had made ‘the ambition and the labour of [Casaubon’s] life’; it ‘ha[d] been all the significance of [his] life’ (xlvi, 469; xlii, 413). Spencer wrote that his books had been ‘the chief occupation of my life’.<sup>14</sup> But Casaubon, who, never having brought himself to write his opus, ‘achieved nothing’ (xlii, 408), would seem to have little in common with Spencer, the prolific author who in his time enjoyed among many extravagant fame.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, the work of both had the same fatal flaw. Casaubon, thinking, in his ‘Key to all Mythologies’, to trace the origin of all myths to a single culture, but not able to read the necessary German works, produces only a theory that ‘floated among flexible conjectures no more solid than those etymologies which seemed strong because of likeness in sound, until it was shown that likeness in sound made them impossible’ (xlvi, 469-70). Likewise, Spencer, who, as George Eliot recognized, was not a great reader (*GEL*, III:338), based his *Synthetic Philosophy*, another ambitious synthesis of knowledge, largely on *a priori* assumptions. Huxley quipped, ‘Spencer’s idea of a tragedy is a deduction killed by a fact’.<sup>16</sup> With little tolerance for knowledge not rooted in facts, George Eliot repeatedly complained of Spencer’s disposition to generalize without sufficient regard for verifiable evidence. In 1852, describing what she called ‘a *proof*-hunting expedition’ on which she accompanied him, she wrote, ‘Of course, if the flowers didn’t correspond to the theories, we said “*tant pis pour les fleurs*”’ (*GEL*, II: 40). The following year, George Eliot, writing Cara Bray after Spencer’s visit to Rosehill, joked, ‘I hope you are likely to survive the heavy dose of theories you have had’ (*GEL*, II:119). In 1877, she complained that ‘his mind both “spontanément and systématiquement” rejects everything that cannot be wrought into the web of his own production’ (*GEL*, VI:426). Writing her friend Sara Hennell in 1862 about a conversation she had had with her, George Eliot regretted that she ‘as usual had been too ready to find fault with the excellent champion of heterogeneity. I get a little impatient sometimes with his contentment in abstractions, and allow myself to look at the seamy side of an old friend’s mind more than is kind or right’ (*GEL*, IV:66-67).<sup>17</sup>

Both Casaubon and Spencer evince their *a priori* thinking in their view of women as inferior.

When Casaubon tells Dorothea, 'The great charm of your sex is its capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own' (v, 50), he is arguing from an *a priori* assumption about the subordinate function of women. Actually, the evidence of his senses should have told him that women are the equals of men. 'I have discerned in you', he had written Dorothea, 'an elevation of thought and a capability of devotedness, which I had hitherto not conceived to be compatible either with the early bloom of youth or with those graces of sex that may be said at once to win and to confer distinction when combined, as they notably are in you, with the mental qualities above indicated' (v, 42-43). But the testimony of his senses counts for nothing against the sexist assumptions that determine his conduct, as we will see. Similarly, Spencer had plenty of evidence that George Eliot was, as he wrote in 1852, 'the most admirable woman, mentally, I ever met'.<sup>18</sup> And yet the philosopher, who prided himself on his originality, adhered to the conventional view of women's inferiority, even though it meant adopting an absurd interpretation of the evidence. Just as society regards George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver as a 'mistake of nature'<sup>19</sup> because she does not conform to its notion of womanhood, so 'Spencer always regarded [George Eliot] as something of a freak, too clever to be naturally a woman'.<sup>20</sup> Apropos of an article Sara Hennell wrote attacking Spencer's sexism, George Eliot wrote her, 'I am not sorry that there should be a little boiling of the peas shot at poor Mr Spencer just now' (GEL, VI:15).

Even more damning than his *a priori* reasoning is Casaubon's lack of enthusiasm, his 'blank absence of interest or sympathy' (xx, 191).<sup>21</sup> Of the author who says, 'I feed too much on the inward sources; I live too much with the dead', George Eliot says that 'such capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by the general life of mankind had long shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalment of knowledge' (ii, 17; xx, 191). Similarly, she depreciates Spencer's work as proceeding from reason unmixed with passion. In 1853, she said she has found in Sainte-Beuve words that fit Spencer: 'Quand j'ai dit qu'il n'avait jamais eu de passion et d'excès, je me suis trop avancé; il a eu un excès de raison' (GEL, II:128). Always striving to be fair to Spencer, for whom she told Lady Ponsonby she had 'the greatest respect', she nevertheless warned her friend in 1875 that

in studying his works you must bear in mind that his share of human fallibility depends in a high degree on an inadequate endowment of emotion. (I except the emotions which sustain an energetic antagonism). Hence in spite of his eminent powers, his integrity, & his elevation of purpose, there is a vast amount of human experience to which he is as good as dead. Few men seek more than he does after the things that make for truth & rigid justice, few are freer from any stain. But his theorizing, & his mode of pursuing arguments, are often injuriously affected by the negation I have mentioned.

She continues, saying that the life of nations cannot be understood 'without the inward light of poetry – that is, of emotion blending with thought'.<sup>22</sup> To Sara Hennell, George Eliot was more candid, writing of his projected work in 1862, 'To me those future *unabsehbare* volumes would be misery and madness' (GEL, IV:57) – words that accurately describe her view of Casaubon's unwritten work. In both cases, she is reacting to the futile scholarship of men reputedly learned (Casaubon was 'conscious that he was expected to manifest a powerful

mind' [xxix, 272]). Preoccupied with the proneness to err of even famous men, as her reading notes show, she evidently thought of writing an article on the superstitions of great men.<sup>23</sup>

Despite her reservations, George Eliot appreciated Spencer's 'mental force' (*GEL*, VI:310-11). Carefully studying his works, many of which she and Lewes owned,<sup>24</sup> she sometimes praises these highly, predicting in 1854 that a century hence he would stand in biographical dictionaries as 'an original and profound philosophical writer', whose 'great work x x x . . . gave a new impulse to psychology and has mainly contributed to the present advanced position of that science' (*GEL*, II:165). In 1880, she tried to persuade Sara that he has 'much teaching which the world needs' (*GEL*, VII:344).<sup>25</sup> She enjoyed his 'clever talk' except when it turned to art and classical literature (*GEL*, II:405; III:469). '[T]here is no one like him for talking to about certain things' (*GEL*, IV:57). If it is hard to see how one for whose intellect George Eliot had such respect could be the model for Casaubon, the editors of her *Middlemarch* Notebooks, directing our attention to her interest in portraying Casaubon, may furnish an explanation: 'In the creation of Edward Casaubon, George Eliot was concerned with something much more fundamental than caricaturing certain unpleasant acquaintances and events in her life; she was portraying a whole set of prevailing attitudes and ideals, ideals that to her mind were hindering rather than furthering the search for truth'.<sup>26</sup>

But Spencer resembles Casaubon morally even more than intellectually. George Eliot emphasizes the moral rectitude of each. Proposing marriage, Casaubon boasts of a life that 'has no backward pages whereon . . . you will find records such as might justly cause you either bitterness or shame' (v, 43). For he 'had many scruples: he was capable of a severe self-restraint; he was resolute in being a man of honour, according to the code; he would be unimpeachable by any recognized opinion' (xxix, 273).<sup>27</sup> As the Reverend Mr Cadwallader says, apropos of Casaubon's assuming responsibility for educating his hated cousin at whose expense he has profited, 'Casaubon acts up to his sense of justice. . . . Every man would not ring so well as that, if you tried his metal' (viii, 68). Moreover, self-denying, not caring for money (xliv, 432-33), he devotedly pursues his research, working unceasingly, even on his honeymoon and after the illness that should have made him shorten his working hours. Similarly, as we have seen, George Eliot admired Spencer's 'rigid justice' and truthfulness. Writing Sara in 1868, she said that his friendship 'wears well, because of his truthfulness: that makes amends for <other> many deficits' (*GEL*, IV:489). In 1854, Spencer's insistence that he would acknowledge George Eliot's help in formulating an idea impels her to say he is 'a dear bit of conscientiousness and scrupulosity' (*GEL*, II:145).<sup>28</sup> Like Casaubon, Spencer, not tempted by luxury, led a frugal existence in order to have the freedom to write and the money to publish many of his writings. Often too ill to work after his breakdown in 1855 – like Casaubon, who 'had never had a strong bodily frame' (xxix, 273), he was a valetudinarian – he made every effort to keep himself well enough to work.<sup>29</sup>

But both men's righteousness is the 'mere rectitude' that Casaubon ironically affects (ix, 80) – the 'mere rectitude' that is all that 'recognized opinion' requires. For both men's virtue is what George Eliot calls Casaubon's 'egoistic scrupulosity' (xxix, 273) – scrupulosity pursued in the interest of self. Preoccupation with their work requires self-denial, but this preoccupation is motivated by what George Eliot calls Casaubon's 'passionate egoism' (xlii, 413). This

is evident in the exaggerated importance both men attach to their work. Regarding authorship, like marriage, as ‘an outward requirement’ by which he ‘always intended to acquit himself’ in the eyes of the world (xxix, 274, 272),<sup>30</sup> Casaubon struggles with a mind ‘weighted with unpublished matter’ (xx, 192). Aspiring to the fame of one who will bring in a new millennium for humanity, Spencer thought that ‘a natural history of myself would be a useful accompaniment to [my] books’.<sup>31</sup> And hence we have his *Autobiography*. Nearly a thousand pages, not counting those of numerous appendices, drearily recount his every thought and movement – a monument to egoistic delusion.<sup>32</sup> Ridiculing him, George Eliot says in 1859 that he has ‘eleven volumes at present imprisoned in his brain’ (*GEL*, III:200), and in 1874 that he is suffering from criticism of his “‘Sociological Tables” on which he has already spent £500, in the hope that he is doing the world a service’ (*GEL*, VI:15).

Determined to predominate, each man tries to force others to do and think as he likes. Casaubon is so dictatorial that Dorothea ‘shut her best soul in prison’ (xlii, 417). Attempting to rule her from the grave, he tries to secure a promise from her that she will fulfil his wishes after his death, wishes the nature of which she can learn only after his death. George Eliot, writing Sara about the medical advice Spencer urged on his friends, comments ironically on his dogmatism: ‘They are required now to take *nux vomica* on pain of his contempt – the ground therefor being that he took it himself and got a bad cold by it – also, that he drank an extra cup of coffee in consequence’ (*GEL*, III:49). His *Autobiography*, written after George Eliot’s death, and published posthumously when all the manuscripts upon which it was based had disappeared, illustrates his dogged attempt to ensure that posterity would view him as he wished.<sup>33</sup>

Unable to tolerate criticism, Casaubon broods over the indifference or ridicule of such as Carp, Pike, and Tench (xx, 192; xxix, 273, 275; xlii, 411); and Spencer, always critical, ‘prais[ing] but upon compulsion’ (*GEL*, II:140), was, like Isaac Casaubon, disputatious.<sup>34</sup> Bent on predominating, neither man faces his own deficiencies. Perceiving that marriage would not be as blissful as he had imagined, Casaubon thought that possibly there was some deficiency in Dorothea to account for his depression, but, unable to discern the deficiency, ‘he concluded that the poets had much exaggerated the force of masculine passion’ (vii, 62). Despite his thinking Marian Evans ‘the greatest woman that has lived on the earth’ (*GEL*, V:465) and keeping a photograph of her,<sup>35</sup> Spencer rationalized that her lack of beauty was an obstacle to marriage with her. ‘Physical beauty is a *sine quâ non* with me; as was once unhappily proved where the intellectual traits and the emotional traits were of the highest’.<sup>36</sup> Always struggling against a world not made to his order, Casaubon suffers from ‘that melancholy embitterment which is the consequence of all excessive claim’ (xxix, 273). And the same might be said of Spencer, who became bitter in old age that he was not more appreciated.

Masterful and self-absorbed, both men are incapable of sympathy for others. ‘[L]iable to think that others were providentially made for him’ (x, 83), Casaubon thinks only of how his wife will make him happy, not at all of his fitness to make her happy. Wanting to be master, he determines to choose ‘a blooming young lady – the younger the better, because more educable and submissive’. And wanting adulation, he counts on marrying one who will have ‘the purely appreciative, unambitious abilities of her sex’ that will make her ‘sure to think her hus-

band's mind powerful. Whether Providence had taken equal care of Miss Brooke in presenting her with Mr Casaubon was an idea which could hardly occur to him' (xxix, 272). Consequently, Dorothea complains that Casaubon never knows what is in her mind – never cares (xlii, 416). Marian's love letter to Spencer in 1852, pleading that he never forsake her, suggests that, as husband, he would have played the master also. 'I would be very good and cheerful and never annoy you' (*GEL*, VIII:57), she wrote, doubtless perceiving that he would require a Dorothea's Griselda-like submissiveness. Dorothea tells Casaubon, 'I will not trouble you too much' (v, 50). In 1877, George Eliot wrote Sara that she 'must not regard [Spencer] in the light of a person who will be moved by sympathies. We have long given up vain expectations from him . . . . He comes and consults us about his own affairs, and that is his way of showing friendship. We never dream of telling him our affairs, which would certainly not interest him' (*GEL*, VI:426).

Without sympathy and determined to predominate, both men were given to jealousy. Throughout the novel, Casaubon is jealous of his more attractive young cousin, Will Ladislaw. After the publication of *Adam Bede*, Lewes wrote in his Journal that Spencer's 'jealousy, too patent, and too unequivocal, of our success, acting on his own bitterness at non-success, has of late cooled him visibly. He always tells us the disagreeable things he hears or reads of us and never the agreeable things. His jealousy of me has been growing these last two years; and it is more excusable than his jealousy of [Polly]' (*GEL*, III:49 n. 6).

Possibly the single most telling evidence for the contention that Casaubon is modelled on Spencer lies in the fact that both men wield a jealous and ignominious 'dead hand' (title of Bk. V) over women close to them.

Foreseeing that his young cousin may supplant him in Dorothea's affections after his death, Casaubon adds a codicil to his will decreeing that Dorothea loses part of her inheritance if she marries Will Ladislaw. Dorothea is disillusioned and others are shocked. George Eliot comments that in Dorothea's mind 'there remained only the retrospect of painful subjection to a husband whose thoughts had been lower than she had believed, whose exorbitant claims for himself had even blinded his scrupulous care for his own character, and made him defeat his own pride by shocking men of ordinary honour' (I, 484).

In Casaubon's betrayal of Dorothea, George Eliot created a situation that is a sort of objective correlative for the act by which Spencer posthumously likewise did not scruple to sacrifice one close to him. The world now knows, what George Eliot could not have known – though she knew Spencer well enough to have been prescient<sup>37</sup> – the ugly business of his determination to salvage his reputation by proving the falsity of rumours that she had jilted him. (Ironically, posterity would have thought better of him as having been jilted by Marian than as having jilted her.) Having failed to persuade her widower and biographer to publish the fact that he was not a disappointed lover, he wrote it into his will that George Eliot's pathetic letter proposing to him (*GEL*, VIII:56-57) should eventually be published. Yet he must have known that Marian was reticent to reveal herself to any but a few<sup>38</sup> and that she was strongly opposed to having her letters published. In 1876, she refused an admirer's request to publish her letter to him on grounds that, letters being made 'matter of gossip for the emptiest minds', she could not consent to the publication of her letters at all (*GEL*, VI:289). In 1874, apropos of the pub-

lication of Dickens's letters, she indignantly wrote that the idle public's raking of a celebrity's letters, after his death, is disgraceful, 'something like the uncovering of the dead Byron's club foot' (*GEL*, VI:23).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Spencer disliked having his letters handed about. In 1855, sending Sara a letter from Spencer, Marian wrote, 'Burn the letter when you have read it and please not to shew it to other people, as, though there is nothing important in it, I know the idea of his letters being shewn would be disagreeable to him' (*GEL*, II:223). Thus, he betrayed one who had loved him – committing the sin for which George Eliot damns Matthew Jermyn in *Felix Holt*. Beatrice Webb, who recognized Spencer's poisonous self-absorption,<sup>40</sup> perhaps had his jealousy in mind when she cited 'the pettiness of some of his little ways'.<sup>41</sup>

The similarity of Dorothea, enthralled at the thought of assisting one writing a 'great work' (iii, 23), to Marian Evans, yearning to assist another writing important works, adds weight to the notion that George Eliot's mind went back to early memories of Spencer's companionship when she created Casaubon. Marian's letter proposing to Spencer is the desperate cry of a lonely, ardent woman who 'despair[s] of achieving anything worth the doing', who feels it 'of so little consequence where I am or what I do' (*GEL*, II:156, 93). If the novelist cannot visualize Dorothea carving out a career for herself, no more could Marian see herself except as the lamp-holder for another that Dorothea aspires to be (ii, 18). In 1849, Marian wrote that 'the only ardent hope I have for my future life is to have given to me some woman's duty, some possibility of devoting myself where I may see a daily result of pure calm blessedness in the life of another' (*GEL*, I:322). Having served as her father's housekeeper and nurse from the age of seventeen to twenty-nine, having been a helpmate to Dr Brabant, John Chapman (*GEL*, II:31, 48), Spencer, and George Henry Lewes, she did not conceive of an independent vocation for herself before 1856. Indeed, in her 1855 essay on Madame de Sablé, she seems to think woman's glory lies in her devotion to a man.<sup>42</sup> With little experience and less learning, Dorothea sees that the only acceptable channel for aspirations to make her life meaningful is marriage. And supposing both that knowledge must provide the lamp by which 'her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent', and that 'learned men kept the only oil' (x, 85), she was attracted to 'the most interesting man' she had known; 'the radiance of her transfigured girlhood [like that of Marian] fell on the first object that came within its level' (ii, 18; v, 44).

The difference between Marian's and Dorothea's experience is that Dorothea, nineteen or twenty when she marries sickly, aging Casaubon,<sup>43</sup> enters into a January-May relation, whereas no such relation was possible to Marian and Spencer, who were both thirty-two in mid 1852 when she proposed to him. Close to fifty years of age, Casaubon, lonely and having deferred matrimony (xxix, 272), proposes because he had decided that it was time to secure 'the solace of female tendance for his declining years' (vii, 62); but Spencer, 'in the really young, happy time of fresh discussion and inquiry' (*GEL*, IV:489), felt no temptation to marry, though, like Casaubon, he was attracted to the idea of marriage as a 'distraction'.<sup>44</sup> Had Casaubon not proposed, we can imagine Dorothea writing him such a letter as Marian wrote Spencer. For she is so smitten with her imaginary view of a suitor so greatly her superior that she does violence to her own reason rather than see the self-centeredness in his letter of proposal. She at first idealized Spencer, just as Dorothea, only briefly acquainted with Casaubon, idealizes him. But ultimately Dorothea sees Casaubon for the small-souled person he is, just as George Eliot



came to see Spencer for the very limited human being that he was.

And the view that George Eliot came to have of Spencer is similar to her view of Casaubon. Critical of Casaubon, she is also critical of Spencer. Just how critical she was of Spencer we cannot know. Determined to be just, she rarely wrote candidly about him to anyone but Sara Hennell, who shared some of George Eliot's strictures about him. In fact, angry over his betrayal of her anonymity and his initial coolness over *Adam Bede*, she wrote Charles Bray that she and Lewes 'shall be doubly careful to speak only of what we admire in him to the world generally' (*L*, III:111). But she had serious reservations about both his work and character, and her forbearance of him is often obvious. That she felt no intimacy, especially after his betrayal of her authorship, that her admiration was chiefly for his intellect, is clear from the fact that, emotionally bruised after Lewes's death, she once refused to see him when he called<sup>45</sup> and did not confide in him at the end of her life when she was considering marrying John Walter Cross (*GEL*, VII:284). Certainly, her critical view of him was mixed with compassion. Just as the author who claimed kinship with Casaubon<sup>46</sup> pities 'poor Mr Casaubon', so she pities 'poor Mr Spencer'.<sup>47</sup> Mindful of her own 'hungry ambition', which made her write that '[t]here are still things to be done that oblige me to take care of myself' (*GEL*, V:125; IV:33), she wrote, without irony, in 1862, when Spencer was working on *First Principles*, that 'it is touching to see how his whole life and soul are being poured into this book and into keeping himself well that he may write it' (*GEL*, IV:9). Still, her feelings were usually mixed and perhaps best expressed when she referred to him as 'poor, dear, great Herbert Spencer' (*L*, III:97). Of course, she would not have referred to Casaubon as 'great'. Compassion does not keep her from damning Casaubon.

Professor Haight insistently argues that Dr Brabant is Casaubon's original because he was a pedant and a man old enough to be Marian's father with whom she became intimate in 1843 for a few weeks. Because Mrs Brabant consequently expelled Marian from her house, Haight conjectures that in the pain and humiliation of this episode is the venom that produced Casaubon. Certainly, Dr Brabant may have entered into the experiences that produced Casaubon. But Spencer tells us that Marian was 'very desponding' after his rejection of her in 1852 (*GEL*, VIII:43 n. 5); there is no doubt that his rejection of her affection, which had grown over a period of some months and which she hoped would be fulfilled in marriage, was far more searing than Brabant's.<sup>48</sup> And continuing to number him among her friends throughout her life, she was more likely to think of him in drawing her most powerful version of a character whose righteousness conceals the egoism and fallacious reasoning that she ever saw as causing misery.

Of course, George Eliot may have had several persons in mind when she created Casaubon. The editors of her *Middlemarch* Notebooks write that she 'was quite aware of nearly every contemporary attempt to discover various keys to the meaning of history'.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, protesting against those who think they can furnish a key to the originals of those in her first work of fiction, she wrote the familiar words 'That is amusing enough to the author, who knows from what widely sundered portions of experience – from what a combination of subtle shadowy suggestions with certain actual objects and events, his story has been formed' (*GEL*, II:459).<sup>50</sup> We can never know who most inspired George Eliot to create Casaubon. If

she had her revenge on Spencer by modelling Casaubon on him, she was at least discreet enough that she made it impossible to prove the identity of the person who sat for Casaubon. But it seems hardly likely that Spencer was not distinctly in her mind when she drew Casaubon. If he is not an exact portrait of Spencer, any more than he is an exact portrait of anyone else who has been named as the original of Casaubon, he has the same relation to Spencer as George Eliot always maintained there may be between two people who superficially are quite dissimilar. In *Middlemarch*, reflecting on 'the means of elevating a low subject', she observes that –

since there never was a true story which could not be told in parables where you might put a monkey for a margrave, and vice versa – whatever has been or is to be narrated by me about low people, may be ennobled by being considered a parable; so that if any bad habits and ugly consequences are brought into view, the reader may have the relief of regarding them as not more than figuratively ungenteel . . . . Thus while I tell the truth about loobies, my reader's imagination need not be entirely excluded from an occupation with lords (xxxv, 332).<sup>51</sup>

If George Eliot puts insignificant Casaubon for 'the immortal philosopher' (GEL, IV:390), she is only showing us the reality fame has concealed.

#### Notes

1. Richard Ellmann, 'Dorothea's Husbands: Some Biographical Speculations', *Times Literary Supplement* 72 (16 Feb. 1973): 165a-68e; revised in 'Dorothea's Husbands', *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations* (New York and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 17-38, 172-73.
2. Philip Collins, 'To the Editor', *Times Literary Supplement* 72 (May 18, 1973): 556e-57a; Frederick R. Karl, *George Eliot, Voice of a Century: A Biography* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1995), 458; Margaret Maison, 'To the Editor', *Times Literary Supplement*, 72 (March 16, 1973): 296c-e; K. M. Newton, 'Historical Prototypes in *Middlemarch*', *English Studies* 56 (Oct. 1975): 403-4; D. B. Nimmo, 'Mark Pattison, Edward Casaubon, Isaac Casaubon, and George Eliot', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, Literary and Historical Section* 17 (Oct. 1979): 88-91; John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt, eds., *George Eliot's 'Middlemarch' Notebooks: A Transcription* (Berkeley and London: Univ. of California Press, 1979), xxxviii; Sara M. Putzell-Korah and Martine Watson Brownley, 'Dorothea and Her Husbands: Some Autobiographical Sources for Speculation', *Victorian Newsletter* 68 (Fall 1985): 15-19; George Schlesinger, 'A Tale of Two Cuckolds', *Durham University Journal* 79 (Dec. 1986): 51-58; Robert K. Wallace, 'A Probable Source for Dorothea and Casaubon: Hester and Chillingworth', *English Studies* 58 (Feb. 1977): 23-25; Katarina M. Wilson, 'The Key to All Mythologies – A Possible Source of Inspiration', *Victorian Newsletter* 61 (Spring 1982): 27-28. I want to note that Professors Pratt and Neufeldt, writing in their *Notebooks* on Becker's

*Charicles*, specify 'Phorion' as an original of Casaubon, but, as Professor Neufeldt acknowledges in a letter to me of September 23, 2000, 'Phorion' is a mistake for 'Polycles'.

3. In the late sixties, John Sparrow, identifying Casaubon with Pattison (*Mark Pattison and the Idea of a University*, The Clark Lectures, 1965 [Cambridge: University Press, 1967], 9-18), provoked Gordon S. Haight's attack on his identification (rev. of John Sparrow's *Mark Pattison, Notes and Queries* 213 (May 1968):191-94; *Notes and Queries* 213 (Nov. 1968): 435; 'To the Editor', *Times Literary Supplement* 72 (1 June 1973): 616b-17b), mainly on grounds that Pattison, unlike Casaubon, was a reputable scholar. Haight had previously argued against the identification of Pattison with Casaubon in 'George Eliot's Originals', in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse*, ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1958), 191; and in *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 448-49, 563-65.
4. Nimmo, 79-100.
5. Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot and John Chapman, with Chapman's Diaries* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940), 23-25; 'George Eliot's Originals', 191; rev. of John Sparrow, *Mark Pattison; and the Idea of a University, Notes and Queries* 213 (May 1968): 194; *George Eliot*, 50-51, 449-50; 'Poor Mr Casaubon', in *Nineteenth-Century Literary Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Lionel Stevenson*, ed. Clyde de L. Ryals, with John Clubbe and Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (Durham, N. C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1974), 268-70.
6. *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1954-55, 1978), VIII:81. Henceforth, references to this work, abbreviated *GEL*, are in the text where appropriate.
7. Ellmann, 'Dorothea's Husbands', 165c.
8. Nancy L. Paxton, *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991).
9. Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (New York and London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926), ch. i, p. 36.
10. Ellmann, 'Dorothea's Husbands', 165c.
11. Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), 'Developing the *Psychology*', II:202.
12. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll, The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of George Eliot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), ch. xlii, p. 409. Henceforth, references to the novel, citing chapter and page, are in the text where appropriate.
13. Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, ch. i, p. 31.

14. Spencer, *Autobiography*, 'Preface', I:vii. Dorothea says Casaubon minds about nothing besides his work (xxx, 283). According to his biographer, David Duncan, *The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer* (London: Methuen and Co., [1908]), p. 356, Spencer wrote that he should be content to die had he finished his work.
15. See Grant Allen, 'Personal Reminiscences of Herbert Spencer', *Forum* 35 (April-June 1904): 610-28, who declares that he thinks 'Herbert Spencer possessed the finest brain and the most marvellous intellect ever yet vouchsafed to human being' (610).
16. Spencer, *Autobiography*, 'A More Active Year', I:403. In 1853, Marian was 'dying with laughter' over a passage that she said was made for Spencer, 'No doubt there is some reason why negroes have woolly hair (and if you look into a philosophical treatise, no doubt you will find that the author could have made out that it would be so, if he had not, by a mysterious misfortune, known from infancy that it was a fact) – still one could not have supposed it oneself' (*GEL*, II:114).
17. See also Spencer, *Autobiography*, 'Developing the *Psychology*', II:203. Perspicacious Edith Simcox wrote that George Eliot 'thought there was a dangerous tendency among second and third rate thinkers to go on inventing something that shall catch disciples without any strong preliminary conviction', conjecturing that, when George Eliot instanced 'a man for whom she had a great respect', she meant Spencer (*A Monument to the Memory of George Eliot: Edith J. Simcox's 'Autobiography of a Shirtmaker'*, ed. Constance M. Fulmer and Margaret E. Barfield, *Literature and Society in Victorian Britain*, vol.4; *Garland Reference Library of the Humanities*, vol. 2054 [New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998], 27).
18. Spencer, *Autobiography*, 'A More Active Year', I:394.
19. George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, Bk. I, ch. ii.
20. David Wiltshire, *The Social and Political Thought of Herbert Spencer*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), 114. Cf. James Collier, 'Reminiscences of Herbert Spencer', in Josiah Royce, *Herbert Spencer: An Estimate and Review* (New York: Fox, Duffield and Co., 1904), 225.
21. 'Doubtless a vigorous error vigorously pursued has kept the embryos of truth a-breathing: the quest of gold being at the same time a questioning of substances, the body of chemistry is prepared for its soul, and Lavoisier is born', the narrator of *Middlemarch* comments (xlviii, 469).
22. *The Letters of George Henry Lewes*, ed. William Baker, 3 vols., English Literary Studies Monograph Series, nos. 64, 65, and 79 (Victoria, B. C.: Univ. of Victoria, 1995, 1999), III:83.
23. *George Eliot, A Writer's Notebook, 1854-1879, and Uncollected Writings*, ed. Joseph Wiesenfarth (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1981), p. 19, entry 42.
24. William Baker, *The George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Library: An Annotated*

*Catalogue of Their Books at Dr Williams's Library, London* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), pp. 191-92, nos. 2057-66, 2068; William Baker, *The Libraries of George Eliot and George Henry Lewes*, English Literary Studies Monograph Series, no. 24 (Victoria, B. C.: Univ. of Victoria, 1981), p. 109, nos. 853-60.

25. She praises his writings also in *GEL*, II:118, 319, 341, 422; III:358, 364, 367; VIII:172, expressing reservations about others in *GEL*, II:54, 219; IV:9; VIII:46. For Lewes's appreciation of Spencer's works, see William Baker, "'A Problematical Thinker" to a "Sagacious Philosopher": Some Unpublished George Henry Lewes-Herbert Spencer Correspondence', *English Studies* 56 (June 1975): 217-19.
26. *George Eliot's 'Middlemarch' Notebooks*, 'Introduction', li.
27. Cf. *Middlemarch*, xxii, 221; xxix, 274; xxxvii, 351, 368; xlii, 411.
28. In 1853, George Eliot wrote that Spencer 'has so rigid a conscientiousness that I am more sure of him than of myself' (*GEL*, VIII:79).
29. Spencer's secretary tells us that in his old age, when Spencer could work very little, he greatly enjoyed having *Humphrey Clinker* read to him (William Henry Hudson, 'Herbert Spencer: A Character Study', *Fortnightly Review* 81 [1 Jan. 1904]: 22). Collier says that the only literary work Spencer owned was 'a much prized copy of "Tristram Shandy"' ('Reminiscences', 212). After Casaubon's attack of illness, Mr Brooke suggests that he seek amusement by getting Dorothea to read him *Humphrey Clinker* (xxx, 280).
30. Casaubon 'had perhaps the best intention of acquitting himself worthily, but only of acquitting himself' (xx, 191).
31. Spencer, *Autobiography*, 'Preface', I:vii.
32. Edith Simcox predicted that the *Autobiography* would be 'entertainingly wooden and arrogant' (*A Monument to the Memory of George Eliot*, 24).
33. *GEL*, VI:310-11 n.1; Haight, *George Eliot*, 120.
34. In criticizing Edward Casaubon's work, George Eliot is making her pedant a caricature of both Spencer and the famous classical scholar and theologian, Isaac Casaubon, for whom Edward is named. That George Eliot clearly had Isaac Casaubon in mind is evident from her writing 'the Reverend Isaac Casaubon' in the manuscript when she first mentions her own classical scholar and clergyman (i, 11 n. 1), a slip followed by the sentence 'His very name carried an impressiveness hardly to be measured without a precise chronology of scholarship' (i, 11). If, as Newton suggests, the historical Casaubon may have served as a model for Edward Casaubon – like the author of the 'Key to all Mythologies', he completed only a fragment of his greatest undertaking ('Historical Prototypes', 403-4) – that may explain the seeming depreciatory note in her Notebook: 'Curious to turn from Shakespeare to Isaac Casaubon, his contempo-

rary' (George Eliot's *'Middlemarch' Notebooks*, p. 85, MS p. 160 n. 4).

35. *Home Life with Herbert Spencer; by Two* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1906), 191.
36. Spencer, *Autobiography*, 'Reflections', II:445; cf. 'Eighteen Months Lost', I:478.
37. Spencer's betrayal of the secret of her authorship may have enlightened George Eliot as to his duplicity. Alluding to his betrayal of her anonymity, she wrote Charles Bray words that sound ominous: 'I beg you not to regard the last thing Mr Lewes told you about Herbert Spencer, as a thing incapable of being so explained as to make it more consistent with our previous conviction concerning his character' (*GEL*, III:111).
38. In 1851, she wrote an old friend, 'I cannot write about myself save to one or two people in the world' (*GEL*, I:358; cf. 306, 362; II:203). Despondent over what Lewes called the public's need to make 'some positive statement' about George Eliot's identity (*GEL*, III: 87), George Eliot probably wrote 'The Lifted Veil' out of her desire 'to heighten men's reverence before the secrets of each other's souls' (*GEL*, III:164); the story explores the morbidity of men's obsession to explain whatever is a mystery to them.
39. Cf. *GEL*, VI:163 and *Letters of Lewes*, III:114. At first, Marian regarded the disposition of her letters light-heartedly. In 1848, she asked John Sibree to burn her letters to him, for then 'there would be no risk of a critical third pair of eyes getting a sight of them, which would certainly be a death blow to my reputation for gravity and wisdom' (*GEL*, I:255; cf. 26). But she was soon writing more earnestly. In 1852, she prayed that the Brays would burn a note in which she asked them not to mention her and Herbert Spencer together, 'that it may not lie on the chimney piece for general inspection' (*GEL*, II:35). A letter about a possible translator of *Adam Bede* she asked D'Albert-Durade to burn under certain conditions and to write her that he had done so (*GEL*, III:255). For other evidence that she was concerned with the privacy of her letters, see *GEL*, I:306; II:130, 132, 133, 183, 339; III:157, 169, 339; IV:208; V:58, 448, 458; VI:113; VII:120; VIII:134; *Letters of Lewes*, III:83.

Moreover, George Eliot not only assured her confidants that their letters would be 'sacred' to her (*GEL*, I:255, cf. 360; VI:126; VII:310), but she divulged the contents of others' letters in confidence, often asking friends to whom she sent such letters to burn them. A laudatory letter from Dickens on *Scenes of Clerical Life* she asked John Blackwood to return as soon as possible and not to share with anyone but his brother and partner, that no specific allusion be made 'to the words of a private letter' (*GEL*, II:424; cf. 211, 280, 482; III:43, 72, 171, 192; IV:89, 104, 268, 421; VIII:89; IX:117). Determined to do as she would be done by, she wrote in 1861, 'I have destroyed almost all my friends' letters to me, . . . because they were only intended for my eyes, and could only fall into the hands of persons who knew little of the writers, if I allowed them to remain till after my death. In proportion as I love every form of piety . . . I hate hard curiosity; and unhappily my experience has impressed me with the sense that hard curiosity is the more common temper of mind' (*GEL*, III:376). In 1880, she wrote Cara Bray, 'Burning is the most reverential destination one can give to relics which

will not interest any one after we are gone. I hate the thought that what we have looked at with eyes full of living memory should be tossed about and made lumber of, or (if it be writing) read with hard curiosity. I am continually considering whether I have saved as much as possible from this desecrating fate' (*GEL*, VII:340-41; cf. 200). Though George Eliot buried Lewes's letters to her (*The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston [Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1998], 187), She burned her letters to him (Simcox, *Monument*, 219).

40. Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, ch. i, p. 36.
41. *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912-1924*, ed. Margaret I. Cole (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), 245.
42. [Marian Evans], 'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé', *Westminster Review* 62 (Oct. 1854): 448-73.
43. Scholars are divided as to whether twenty-seven or thirty years divides Casaubon and Dorothea. John Sparrow and Gordon S. Haight, who agree on very little in what concerns the relation of Pattison and Edward Casaubon, are at one in seeing Casaubon, like Mark Pattison, as twenty-seven years older than his wife (Sparrow, *Mark Pattison*, 10, 11; reply to Haight, *Notes and Queries* 213 [Nov. 1968]: 433; 'To the Editor', *Times Literary Supplement* 72 [4 May-15 June 1973]: 501, 692; *GEL*, V:39 n. 5; Haight, rev. of Sparrow, *Mark Pattison, Notes and Queries* 213 [May 1968]: 193; 'To the Editor', *Times Literary Supplement* 72 [1 June 1973]: 616). D. B. Nimmo, 'Mark Pattison', 81, repeats the error. Their authority has to be the notoriously unreliable Brooke, who, at the beginning of the story, when Dorothea is 'not yet twenty', in September 1829 (i, 8, 11), tells Dorothea, 'He is over five-and-forty, you know. I should say a good seven-and-twenty years older than you' (iv, 40).

The only reliable evidence we have of the difference in age between Casaubon and Dorothea is that given by the narrator, who tells us that Casaubon is thirty years older than Dorothea (xxxi, 286). This squares with the narrators's also telling us, in an early chapter, before Dorothea turns twenty, that Casaubon is 'toward fifty' (ii, 22), that is, forty-nine. How Professor Haight calculates that Casaubon is forty-eight when he marries (*George Eliot*, 448; 'Poor Mr. Casaubon', 255), I do not know. He says that Dorothea is nineteen when she marries ('Poor Mr Casaubon', 255), though since it is not clear whether she marries in November or December, the month she turns twenty (xlix, 474), we cannot know whether she is nineteen or twenty when she marries. But, no matter; if Casaubon is forty-eight when he marries, he is not twenty-seven years his wife's senior by Haight's own calculations.

44. Spencer, *Autobiography*, 'Eighteen Months Lost', I:478.
45. *Journals of George Eliot*, 163.
46. *GEL*, V:322, 441; [F. W. H. Myers], 'George Eliot', *Century Magazine* 23 (Nov. 1881): 60.

47. For references to 'poor Mr Casaubon', see *Middlemarch*, x, 84; xx, 192; xxx, 280; xxxvii, 368, 369; xlii, 409; li, 498. For references to 'poor Mr Spencer', see *GEL*, II:233; IV:11, 71; VI:15.
48. One source of the greater pain George Eliot suffered from Spencer's rejection of her was his finding her lack of beauty the deficiency.
49. *George Eliot's 'Middlemarch' Notebooks*, 'Introduction', xxvi.
50. Cf. *GEL*, II:375-76, 460; III:85-86, 129, 155-56, 427; *Journals of George Eliot*, 297; cf. *Letters of Lewes*, I:271-72. Repeatedly George Eliot denied creating portraits of real persons, except for two in her first work of fiction (*GEL*, III:156-57). In a late Notebook, she copied Phaedrus's protest against readers who see themselves in his writings, saying that he has no intention to brand characters (*Some George Eliot Notebooks: An Edition of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library's George Eliot Holograph Notebooks*, MSS 707-II, ed. William Baker, 4 vols., Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Romantic Reassessment, no. 46 [Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1976-1985], II:61 n.3).
51. Cf. 'Janet's Repentance', ch. xxvi, where George Eliot speaks of 'that remarkable resemblance as to mental processes which may frequently be observed to exist between plain men and philosophers', and *The Mill on the Floss*, Bk IV, ch. i, where she compares 'small things with great'. She compares persons apparently dissimilar in *Adam Bede*, ch. xxv; *Middlemarch*, xvi, 163; xli, 403; lxvii, 665-66; and *Daniel Deronda*, ch. iv.