Reforming "Petty Politics!": George Eliot and the Politicization of the Local State

MICHAEL MARTEL

> A people may be unprepared for good institutions; just to kindle a desire for them is a necessary part of the preparation. . . . Those, however, who undertake such a task, need to be duly impressed, not solely with the benefits of the institution or polity which they recommend, but also with the capacities moral, intellectual + active required for working it; that they may avoid if possible stirring up a desire too much in advance of the capacity.
>
> —J. S. Mill, quoted in George Eliot's *Felix Holt* notebook[1]

LITERARY historians interested in Victorian government have a politics problem. Long recognizing that nineteenth-century governance often worked through engineered responses to health crises and that the material scale of such projects justified their subordination to local authorities, scholars tend to overlook the political ramifications of such localization. Primed to understand Britain's march toward democracy as playing out through debates over the national franchise, Victorianists find few links between representative mechanisms—the ballot, parliamentary-style debate—and the local officers performing the day-to-day labors of poor relief, public health, or civil engineering—allotting economic assistance, constructing sewer systems, building and maintaining roadways. Instead, politics flit into view as the rhetoric of fit and unfit citizens, which proceeds through the figuration of healthy and unhealthy bodies or the production of disciplinary individuals.[2] The link between politics and government thereby seems to be a matter of the cultural production of citizens at a national scale, not reforms to the mechanisms through which government could be made amenable to local political control. In dividing its attention between the arts of governance and the national representation of those arts, the cultural history of the state has kept separate what for Victorians were two sides of the same coin—representative government. To grapple with literature's treatment

Michael Martel is a lecturer in the English Department at the University of California, Davis. His current book project explores how media and literary form reimagined the state as a participatory institution by localizing it. Related research has appeared in *Victorian Periodicals Review*.

Victorian Literature and Culture, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 575–602.

doi:10.1017/S1060150319000032

of Victorian government, we need, therefore, to account for such a constitutional model gradually tying the state to local political institutions.

George Eliot might seem like an odd choice for an investigation of the state's local politics. Discussing Eliot's engagement with parliamentary reform, for instance, scholars conclude that her belief in the need for social reform chafes at the recognition that the nation-state is too diffuse for any efficacious response to the challenges of a modernizing Britain.[3] Critics have come to argue that Eliot's reticence about national politics both flags a general apolitical worldview and, following a now common presumption in Eliot criticism, motivates her promotion of social reform through the cultural production of right desires. Specifically, critics like Pamela K. Gilbert and Evan Horowitz suggest that Eliot the reformer swaps out political institutions for cultural formations, particularly the novel with its ability to channel readers' aspirations into the mold of national imagined communities. She does so, in large part, because of her cognizance—expressed in such texts as "Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt" (1868)—that the average Briton was not prepared for national political engagement, even if institutions like Parliament were capable of directing effective social reform. In thus emphasizing Eliot's commitment to the cultural production of political desires, critics have illuminated one foundation of Eliot's fictive project. However, as Eliot's quotation above from John Stuart Mill's *Considerations of Representative Government* (1861) indicates, that is only part of Eliot's novelistic program. As I will suggest throughout, critics have overlooked Eliot's commitment to political institutions because they have equated them with imperial or national administration. Yet Eliot was, in fact, deeply concerned with representative government, just not at the scale to which we are accustomed.

Another way of understanding Eliot's seemingly apolitical worldview is to argue, as does Carolyn Lesjak, that for Eliot politics are everywhere because her fiction grounds them in "the common(s) and the commonplace."[4] Although such a formulation of diffuse politics can demonstrate that for Eliot, like twenty-first-century critics, the personal is political, this does not mean that politics in a narrower sense are any less "common" for Eliot. To paraphrase Lesjak, critics typically maintain that politics are everywhere in Eliot's fiction except in political institutions like *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*'s (1871–72) public health board, which, following the assessment of the thwarted public official Tertius Lydgate, seemingly forms the site of mere "petty politics!"[5] A political institution always "near at hand"—one of Eliot's definitions of

"commonness"[6]—local representative government, instead, promises to channel Eliot's diffuse commons into reformist ends. In what follows, I demonstrate how, rather than eschewing the political institution as a vehicle for social reform, *Middlemarch* tests the limits and potential of local representative government.

In attending to Eliot's localism, this article adds political depth to a growing subfield of criticism that pits a radical, local Eliot against the consensus about her national conservativism. Both Barbara Leckie and Mark Allison see in Dorothea Brooke's cottage and village plans a radical utopianism, while Lesjak grounds Eliot's radical "politics of the common" in her persistent fixation on the village. Following Ruth Livesey's contention that *Felix Holt: The Radical* (1866) rejects national democratic reforms in favor of "an alternative national future grounded in locality,"[7] I explore how Eliot recuperates local representative government as a viable venue for Lesjak's politics of the common. I argue that like Felix Holt's desire for "some roots a good deal deeper down than the franchise,"[8] *Middlemarch* both develops its readers' capacities for political activity and, in so fostering institutional acuity, kindles a desire for Mill's "good institutions."

After sketching how the contrast between the radicalisms of *Felix Holt*'s eponymous protagonist and Harold Transome dramatizes a mid-Victorian political culture pitting local devolution against national centralization, I demonstrate how *Middlemarch* models a provincial government that links "[m]unicipal town and rural parish" (88) through political institutions like Middlemarch's hospital and public health boards. I then explicate how the novel trains its readers in the cognitive skills needed for local self-government. *Middlemarch* does so by merging a Walter Bagehot–like depiction of local government—the subordination of governance's efficient portion to politics' dignified, representative element, which Eliot captures through narrative paralipsis and theatrical council debates—with the realist novel's hallmark typification and network depth. Through such representational protocols, readers practice seeing government in both its local depth and translocal breadth, a cohesive mode of vision lacking in mid-Victorian political debates. Finally, I argue that to foster her readers' desire for local political participation, *Middlemarch* closes with the juxtaposition between an ascendant ratecracy—a mode of local government ruled exclusively by property-owning ratepayers represented by town-clerk Mr. Hawley—and concluding allusions to mid-Victorian democratizing local political reforms. This contrast suggests to readers that they might carry on the thwarted reformist

impulses of Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate through the "incalculably diffusive" and "unhistoric" (785) medium of reformed local representative government.

1. National Centralization, Local Devolution, and Historiography's Middle Distance

For Eliot, mid-Victorian political philosophy's dispute over local devolution and national centralization hampered attempts to coordinate the various local authorities rapidly sprouting up across the United Kingdom. Eliot's writing from the 1850s onward—especially in "The Natural History of German Life" (1856) and *Felix Holt*—warns that this dispute either flattens out local particularity or bars national unity. Needed instead was a framework unfolding between the parish and the nation. Such a scale would better fit local government reforms, increasingly integrating once isolated regimes into translocal networks. Finding such a middle distance in localist historiography, Eliot, I argue, transforms the narrative persona of her early fiction—that of a locally embedded historian—into the translocal governmental realist of *Middlemarch*.

Felix Holt stages the national-local conflict in political thought through the tension between the failed radicalisms of Harold Transome and Felix Holt. Transome's corruptive national politics and Felix's impotent localism undermine any effort to thread town and country together. As it dramatizes a mid-Victorian debate over government reforms pitting national against local control, this conflict gives rise to what Horowitz calls Eliot's radical conservatism. Anxious that Britain's industrial, urban, and technological transformations have outstripped the nation's governing institutions, Eliot nevertheless frets that, owing to the complexity of the social organism, any reform is likely to make matters worse.[9] Testing two potential solutions—Transome's parliamentary reform and Felix's working-class local schools—Eliot finds that both lack a governmental vision productive of translocal breadth and local depth. Stand-ins for Mill's nation-centric reforms and Joshua Toulmin Smith's local devolution, Transome's nationalism and Felix's localism generate a political impasse in their failure, one that gives rise to the misperception that "town and country had no pulse in common."[10] Seeing the provinces through the lens of national politics, Transome, like Mill, flattens out local differences in favor of national standardization. Felix follows a vision so minute that it risks an attenuated perception prone to extreme local devolution. Felix's localism, like

Smith's, reduces political activity to the ken of a shepherd whose "solar system was the parish."[11]

While *Felix Holt* ends on a note of resignation, as Horowitz contends, *Middlemarch* transforms the provincial novel into a vehicle for seeing both local depth and translocal breadth. Characterized, as John Plotz argues, by its "capacity to locate its inhabitants at once in a trivial (but chartable) Nowheresville and in a universal (but strangely ephemeral) everywhere,"[12] Eliot's provincial fiction rearticulates the relation between town and country into a model of the state ensuring local autonomy through national standardization, a model historians now call the "local state."[13] Such a state becomes legible in Eliot's fiction through a form of governmental realism drawn, in part, from localist historiography. Working through archival and print practices that encoded a balance of local depth and translocal breadth, local historiography offered Eliot a modular conception of local governance through which she could transform the provincial novel into a vehicle for imagining a local state composed of semi-autonomous, standardized locales.

Reflecting on local representative bodies in *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill devises a centralist system of national government that forms a hierarchy of "superintending bod[ies]."[14] Such governing institutions range from the most local municipal councils to Parliament. Each body oversees both its own subordinate officers and the governing body beneath it within the overarching system. Mill's state forms a matryoshka doll of supervision: Parliament over counties, counties over municipalities. Mill determines administrative scales based on the public interest a given institution ought to secure. The more local the interest—"The paving, lighting, and cleansing the streets of a town"—the more local the governing body ought to be because these activities "are of little consequence to any but its inhabitants" (278). The more national the interest—"the administration of justice, police, and gaols"—the more centralized the governing body must be because its responsibility would be of "so universal a concern" that it "ought to be uniformly regulated throughout the country" (279).

Following this scalar system, Mill proposes a centralized local state:

> The principal business of the central authority should be to give instruction, of the local authority to apply it. Power may be localized, but knowledge, to be most useful, must be centralized; there must be somewhere a focus at which all its scattered rays are collected, that the broken and colored lights which exist elsewhere may find there what is necessary to complete and purify them. To every branch of local administration which affects the general interest there should be a corresponding central organ. (283)

Wary of local authorities' desire and capacity to adopt the numerous permissive acts enabling them to govern their territories, both Mill and William Gladstone's Liberal First Ministry (1868–74) pushed for a central supervisory organ. Mill's 1861 prescription anticipates the formation a decade later of the Local Government Board, which amalgamated the powers of the Privy Council, Home Board, and Poor Law Board to oversee much of Britain's local governance. Echoing Mill's centralized network of local governance, the Liberal Sir James Stansfeld described the Local Government Board's design as "concentrat[ing] scattered departments" of local government.[15]

Mill and the First Ministry's codification of a centralized supervisory body share a similar distrust of local politics. Hence Mill's use of the rhetoric of interest, which carries with it moral valences castigating the local as profane and, more damning, self-interested. Given their quotidian tasks, argues Mill, "the local representative bodies and their officers are almost certain to be of a much lower grade of intelligence and knowledge, than Parliament and the national executive" (281). Charged with the near-sublime responsibilities of national interest, Parliament and the central state draw the best and brightest into their orbit. Mill worried that such appeal might leave local institutions bereft of qualified officers. In keeping with two of the goals of *Considerations*—"to kindle a desire" for good government and to develop readers' "capacities, moral, intellectual, and active, required for working it" (11)—Mill suggests that "popular institutions" might serve as the "means of political instruction" when guided by a centralized supervisory body (286). Under centralized guidance, local officers can be "thus brought into perpetual contact, of the most useful kind, with minds of a lower grade, receiving from them what local or professional knowledge they have to give" (275). Through such a program, every local regime might come to "contain a portion of the very best minds of the locality," thereby combating what Mill saw as the worst sins of local devolution—"the unscrupulous and stupid pursuit of the self-interest of its members" (275).

Mill worried that the modes of local democracy proposed by Joshua Toulmin Smith and London's radical vestries would lead directly to such purblind self-interested rule. Mill's condemnation of localism stems ultimately from an epistemological division. What makes Smith's secular parish or the radicals' vestry a "relic of barbarism" (267) is an epistemological circumscription augmenting self-interestedness. Because "the knowledge and experience of any local authority is but local knowledge and experience," the local official lacks the perspective from which he can

perceive national principles of collective interest. Accordingly, such an official is always in danger of acting out of local self-interest. In contrast, Mill's central superintending body "has the means of knowing all that is to be learnt from the united experience of the whole kingdom" (283).

What Mill characterized as barbaric, the "arch-localist" Joshua Toulmin Smith contended was the fundamental principle of English government, namely local self-government rooted in the secular parish.[16] Far from promoting the "stupid pursuit of . . . self-interest," as Mill warned, the parish was for Smith "the Institution through which the inner life of the people is developed."[17] As Benjamin Weinstein contends, Smith countered centralists like Mill and Edwin Chadwick with the hope that "an active and highly interventionist system of local government would promote civic responsibility and strengthen communal awareness while also promoting the creation of an active and 'self-directed' citizenry."[18] Turning the tables on centrists, Smith argued that the sins of parochialism charged against local government stem from centralism itself. The central state's appropriation of local responsibilities—public health, poor relief, highways—causes "the neglect of local duties" that historically supported the collective life of each community.[19] It is this centrally produced neglect that Mill misreads as inherent to nineteenth-century local governance.

Rejecting the centralizing reforms espoused by Mill and enacted through Parliament, Smith offered a devolutionary model of the state rooted in the smallest administrative territory: the parish. Derived from British common law, the cluster of local institutions Smith groups under the umbrella term "parish"—hundreds, shires, quarter sessions, guilds, and manors—"give the fullest scope for the habitual use of all the faculties" because they recognized that "no man lives for himself" and that "the duties of good neighborhood are owing, actively, and as an habitual part of his life, by every member of the community."[20] Because "Parliament itself is a result derived out of the pre-existing action of these Institutions,"[21] the optimal way to reform contemporary English government is through recourse to these historical antecedents, not modernizing legislature. As Smith contended, "[T]he history of the Institutions themselves, are the only substantial guide." For localists, such history serves as a remedy for the alienating effects of modern, industrial, and urban life, about which Eliot was similarly anxious. Smith hoped that his polemics would "enable every man practically to understand the nature, purpose, and working of this Institution of the Parish." They might also remind his contemporaries that they still have

recourse to "something permanent and fundamental in our Institutions" distinguished from "what is ephemeral and shifting,"[22] namely nineteenth-century government reforms such as the Public Health Acts of 1848 and 1856. For Smith, these reforms produce "hollow form[s], wanting in the very marrow of [their] existence, the source of all the spirit of its life, the key-note of its action."[23]

Localist historiographers like Lucy Toulmin Smith (Joshua's daughter), George Laurence Gomme, and Sir Henry Maine continued to defend Smith's devolutionary state into the mid-Victorian period. Localist historiography continued to counter centralist accounts of the British Constitution typified by Thomas Macaulay's *The History of England* (1848–55) and Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution* (1867), both of which argued that Parliament, the crown, and the government formed the core of the British Constitution. Localist works like Maine's *Ancient Laws* (1861) refuted these models by using empirical, archival research both to contend that the Constitution derived from Britain's ancient local institutions and to depict such institutions as locally distinctive yet nationally repeatable templates for modern rule. Works like *The Maire of Bristowe Is Kalendar* (1873), edited by Lucy Toulmin Smith and published by the Camden Society, and Gomme's *Literature of Local Institutions* (1886) collected archival sources and reprinted them with interpretive guides, usually in introductions and footnotes. Such works offered patterns that might, in Gomme's words, "guide modern politics in its course."[24]

This political and epistemological contest between Millite national breadth and Smithian local depth was a perennial concern for Eliot. Mill's centralization flattened out local particularity on one hand, while Smith's local devolution threatened to foreclose national cohesion. In "The Natural History of German Life," Eliot locates this fault line in Britain's political culture in Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl's histories of rural Germany. According to Eliot's interpretation of Riehl, German peasants regard modern government as an alien institution severed from their organic, rooted communities: "His chief idea of a government is of a power that raises his taxes, opposes his harmless customs, and torments him with new formalities."[25] For Eliot, peasants rightly place their suspicion:

> Instead of endeavoring to promote to the utmost the healthy life of the Commune, as an organism the conditions of which are bound up with the historical characteristics of the peasant, the bureaucratic plan of government is bent on improvement by its patent machinery of state-appointed functionaries and off hand regulations in accordance with modern enlightenment.[26]

Despite, however, her preference for rooted, organic communitarian life such as that of the German peasant, Eliot harbors a deep distrust of an overly localist form of life. The rootedness of peasant life is always in danger of becoming too withdrawn into its own milieu to participate in modern life. Eliot, like Mill, regards the peasants as prone to blinkered self-interest: "But it must not be supposed that the historical piety of the German peasant extends to anything not immediately connected with himself."[27]

Localist historiographical associations offered Eliot a model of the state that in theory and practice threaded between Smith's local devolution and Mill's centralizing nationalism. Founded during the 1840s in part to consolidate local authority through the publication of historic government records, the Chetham, North Riding Record, and Scottish Burgh Record societies understood government as locally peculiar and nationally repeatable. Like Smith, these associations grounded their model of the state in archaic local institutions. They did so, however, in such a way that these institutions came to form a system of governmental modules balancing local peculiarity with translocal consistency.

As British local government transitioned from isolated regimes into an integrated system, political philosophers increasingly viewed the depth and breadth of such a scalar modularity as critical. The Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), for instance, shifted the locus of local government from the single parish to the multiparish union.[28] Similarly, the Municipal Corporations Act (1835) subordinated multiple local authorities under a single elected council. Such reforms prompted new models of local government unfolding at scales between the parish and the nation-state. The nascent local state needed, in other words, a middle distance between Smith's local devolution and Mill's national centralization. Many mid-Victorian regionalist antiquarian societies modeled such a balance of local particularity and translocal pattern through their protocols of archival research and publication. Developing practices that mimicked the very state it promoted, localist historiography proceeded first through the local accumulation of sources and then the repatterning of those sources into nationally adaptable, standardized, yet flexible models of rule. Localist historians plumbed the assize records, calendars, rent roles, and town clerk memoranda housed in Britain's local governing institutions. Publishing sources connected to the Palatine counties of Lancaster and Chester, the Chetham Society, for instance, framed those counties as both locally autonomous and integrated into a larger network of rule, as the evocation of palatine suggests (a palatine county

being an administratively independent territory tacitly allied with the crown).

Not only was Eliot aware of such associations—she approvingly cited the Camden Society's *Poems of Walter Mapes* (1842) in her *Felix Holt* notebook—but her notion of organicist history derived, as Avrom Fleishman contends, from historians of local institutions like Maine.[29] Maine argued that society formed an array of "component parts . . . in dynamic interdependence, so that individual men, values, and institutions could be understood only as products of an entire complex of conditions."[30] Moreover, Maine contended that multiplex institutions such as the self-governing village held this array together.[31] While striving for universal or national historical accounts of organic society, Maine and other localist historians turned to local institutions for both archival resources and archaic social forms in much the same ways that Gomme derived the form of his local state from rigorous archival research and archaic secular institutions. Eliot's organicism, therefore, stems as much from the history of archaic local political institutions as it does the more well-known evolutionary life sciences of George Lewes.

Taking her cue from localist historiography's epistemic framework capturing local depth and translocal breadth, Eliot makes local institutions into the basis of her experiment in provincial government—*Middlemarch*, a novel that transforms Eliot's realist protocols and narrative persona. As K. M. Newton and Josephine McDonagh demonstrate, Eliot's early fiction was marked by the narrative persona of a local historian who, in "writing about what for him are real people and events,"[32] seeks to "to represent the daily life of village people, through concrete detail[s] of their material lives."[33] Setting novels like *Adam Bede* (1859) and *Silas Marner* (1861) at the turn of the nineteenth century, Eliot focuses on delimited localities often centered on a single village, principal estate, or town: Hayslope, Raveloe, and so on. For such settings, the narrative perspective of a Riehl-like historian offers a keen vision of local depth, albeit often integrated within broader national and international circuits. Set in the 1830s, a period marked by the transformation of British local government typified by the New Poor Law and the Municipal Corporations Act, *Middlemarch*'s setting and narrative perspective mark a shift in Eliot's oeuvre from the circumscribed locale and local historian to the translocal and governmental realist. Making local political institutions crucial to *Middlemarch*'s developmental plots, Eliot transitions from the sort of historically oriented localism of Smith to a realism striving for

a vision encompassing the "fresh threads of connexion" gradually weaving together "[m]unicipal town and rural parish" (88).

2. *Middlemarch*'s Governmental Realism

Striving for a realism capturing these connections' depth and breadth, Eliot molds *Middlemarch*'s public health institutions and their biopolitical labor into a representative local regime capable of ensuring public health's ability to carry out its labors. On one hand, the novel evokes and then elides the day-to-day work of local government. In sidestepping Tertius Lydgate's career-making public health work, *Middlemarch* figures local governance through narrative paralipsis—defined by Gérard Genette as the "omission of one of the constituent elements of a situation in a period that the narrative does generally cover."[34] On the other hand, *Middlemarch*'s voicing of locally situated rationalities of governance through choruslike discussions makes legible the local state's political, representative dimension. This combination of paralipsis and theatricality reiterates the mid-Victorian local press's coverage of local government. Local papers often used the format of printed drama to report on council meetings, while by and large ignoring the day-to-day work of local government. Such representation, however, offers a circumscribed picture of local politics that threatens to undermine Eliot's efforts both to develop readers' capacities to oversee local representative government and to stimulate a desire for its institutions. Eliot supplements the local press's representation with the realist novel's protocols of typification and network depth. These devices supply *Middlemarch* both the breadth and depth lacking in the local press. Through such formal protocols, readers might recognize the potential of their own imperfect political institutions and, in tracing the links between the opaque work of government and its theatrical councils, develop the cognitive skills needed for effective local self-government.

Middlemarch composes the province's "threads of connexion" out of the region's numerous political institutions. The hospital board, the old vestry, the public health board: these institutions form a *via media* between rural parish and municipal town. Like Joshua Toulmin Smith, for Eliot such institutions offer already existing frameworks fitted for the demands of modern social reform. Such a claim is, of course, counterintuitive. When discussing the relationship of Eliot's political institutions to political reform or public health, critics see Eliot as slotting institutions into the category of those "conditions of an imperfect social

state" (*Middlemarch,* 784).[35] Casting over these institutions a pejoratively provincial pallor, critics see Eliot as condemning them through their stifling of protagonists' *bildungs*. The public health board cuts short Lydgate's professional success. The hospital board forms a mere gossipy misstep in Dorothea's social reformism. The governing institutions of *Middlemarch* are, however, good at what they do. As Lydgate boasts to Dorothea, the town's public health effective endeavors ought to meet with nonpartisan acclaim: "The town has done well in the way of cleansing and finding appliances; and I think that if the cholera should come, even our enemies will admit that the arrangements in the New Hospital are a public good" (640). While such nonpartisan affirmation fails to materialize, the public health board nevertheless prevents the spread of cholera while the hospital board cares for the working class.

Middlemarch suggests that such institutions succeed because they localize and reconfigure Walter Bagehot's model of representative government, which stipulates that the "work of government" operates through a semi-autonomous subordination to representative councils.[36] For Bagehot, the House of Lords and the crown represent the state's dignified portion, marked as they are by theatricality, "that which is seen for a moment, and then seen no more."[37] In contrast, the executive cabinet, the state's efficient portion, performs the "work of government" nigh-invisibly: it is "secret in reality" because "no description of it, at once graphic and authentic, has ever been given."[38] The state's ability to govern depends, Bagehot argues, on this very opacity.[39]

We might read the novel's numerous yet brief allusions to public health as falling into Gillian Beer's category of "common knowledge"—those "features that lay latent for readers . . . the shared knowledge that [Eliot] does not share with us but takes for granted with her first readers."[40] Yet *Middlemarch*'s local representative government is not merely a matter of the contemporary obscurity of once common knowledge. Rather, withholding from realist representation the "work of government"—especially Lydgate's management of the New Hospital—Eliot elides one such form of common knowledge from the novel. For a novelist prone to display her omnicompetence across a broad range of nineteenth-century professions, as Joseph Murtagh and Liz Maynes-Aminzade argue, such an absence would have been, perhaps, striking to readers cognizant of public health's centrality to the burgeoning local state. The novel evokes such centrality by making Lydgate's public health labors essential to Middlemarch's health and, especially, his professional plot. Efforts like the cholera ward are crucial to the town's prevention of a cholera

outbreak. They are, moreover, equally critical to Lydgate's plot because they offer the primary channel through which his career can develop. Lydgate's professional plot pivots on his "plan for the future," namely "to do small good work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world" (139). For Lydgate, this plan depends on his securing "a medium for his work, a vehicle for his ideas," namely "a good hospital, where he could demonstrate the specific distinctions of fever and test therapeutic results" (168). In provincial Middlemarch, such an institutional medium entails Lydgate's position as a public health official.

The narrator refuses to discuss in detail these public health endeavors despite their importance to Lydgate's career and *Middlemarch*'s display of all the main professional characters at work. We see Caleb Garth, land agent, surveying and policing unruly laborers; Will Ladislaw, political agent, electioneering; and even Lydgate, medical man, caring for Edward Causabon and Fred Vincy. Instead, the novel outlines Middlemarch's public health regime through scattered allusions to its protocols—Bulstrode's utilitarian understanding that public health depends upon "good solid carpentry and masonry . . . drains and chimneys" (425); Farebrother's allusion to Lydgate's "preparing a new ward in case of the cholera coming to us" (601); Lydgate's assurance to Dorothea that the town's efforts of "cleansing, and finding appliances" will help prevent a cholera outbreak (640); the narrator's reference to "the Act of Parliament . . . authorizing assessments for sanitary measures" (681). Yet neither narrator nor character dilates these terse references to the work of government. They merely hint at a broad range of expert activities: installing interior drainage, clearing nuisances, building cholera wards, petitioning for local clauses acts, and so on.

Evoking its importance yet withholding the details of Lydgate's public health endeavors, Eliot uses narrative paralipsis to figure the labor upon which Lydgate rests his aspirations. Lydgate's work as a public health official constitutes a critical element in his plot, yet the novel sidesteps it, referencing it only in passing allusions. As Gilbert contends, the cholera "'fever hospital' is the rock on which Lydgate's social fortunes founder, and the crisis of the novel comes at a meeting to discuss funding a cholera burial ground," yet for all that we never witness public health officers in action.[41] Lydgate's activities as a public health officer help prevent a cholera outbreak, but they do so in a manner opaque to readers and characters, who glimpse such work through scattered allusions like Farebrother's reference to the new cholera ward. With narrative paralipsis, Eliot transforms public health into local representative government's efficient secret—that by which Middlemarch's representative

government "in fact, works and rules," as Bagehot would put it.[42] In rendering public health crucial yet obscure, *Middlemarch*'s narrative paralipsis figures the efficient portion of the local state as a Bagehot-like secret.

Eliot thereby shifts attention onto the subordination of public health—and Lydgate's professional plot—to local politics. Lydgate's work at the New Hospital enters the novel only as a topic of speculation within the novel's representative regime and its debates over governance. Eliot dots *Middlemarch* with theatrical, choruslike scenes depicting debates over local governance. Echoing Bagehot's definition of the state's representative dimension as "theatrical," *Middlemarch*'s local parliaments take a distinctly dramatic form. Constituted almost exclusively by reported speech, such scenes unfold within stagelike settings. For instance, the novel's climactic public health meeting takes place literally on a stage. Situated in the town-hall at "a large central table," health board members conjoin to denounce Bulstrode before an audience of "everybody of importance in the town" (683). Such scenes dot the novel—the debate over the hospital chaplain (ch. 16), the public discussion over Lydgate's practices at the New Fever Hospital (ch. 47), and the repeated conversations between the Cadwalladers, Sir James Chettam, and Arthur Brooke over Caleb Garth's estate management (ch. 38, especially).

Within such theatrical scenes, public health's practices find no epistemic ground other than that provided by the class-based, profession-centric perspectives articulating them. Take the tense exchange between Lydgate and Middlemarch's coroner, Mr. Chichely, over the practice of judging medical evidence. Typical of debates about governing practice throughout *Middlemarch*, both characters argue by means of "standing up in favour of his own cloth" (147). A lawyer, Chichely contends that a coroner can evaluate medical evidence if he has "legal training." Lydgate counters that coroners ought to possess medical expertise because "[n]o man can judge what is good evidence on any particular subject, unless he knows that subject well." Here a governing practice—a local officer determining the cause of death—enters the novel through attention to the qualifications of the practitioner, not what those practices involve. When Lydgate tries to shift the debate to the protocols of medical judgment, he still frames governing practices in terms of qualifications: "the coroner ought not to be a man who will believe that strychnine will destroy the coats of the stomach if an ignorant practitioner happens to tell him so" (147–48). In emphasizing professional expertise, Lydgate characteristically forgets the relationship between the work of government and its place in a local

politics grounded in personal alliances. As Lydgate belatedly realizes, within Middlemarch's local representative government, "it was dangerous to insist on knowledge as a qualification for any salaried office" (148).

These scenes mimic the local press's coverage of local government. As Aled Jones argues, the local press's expansion following the repeal of the Taxes on Knowledge (1853–61) owed much to the growth of local government. In fact, the local state provided the local press with its "principal *raison*," as "journalists in different localities were attentive, in the first instance, to the activities and conflicts of the local state."[43] However, because the local press's news contained disproportionately high rates of nonlocal material—parliamentary reports, foreign news, leader columns on national politics[44]—its coverage of local government needed to condense the prodigious yet quotidian details of local council meetings.

Local papers did so by adopting the conventions of printed drama. Take, for instance, a report in the East Midlands *Hereford Journal* on a city council debate over the 1867 Reform Bill. After laying out the meeting's attendees in a dramatis personae–like paragraph, the paper formats its report by capitalizing the name of each speaker and providing parenthetical asides explaining to whom each statement was addressed. This exchange epitomizes the local press's government reportage:

> Mr. RAISBECK: You mind your own business, Mr. Treen. I should think that your performance in the City of Hereford would have been sufficient for you already—(loud cries of "Shame," "Turn him out," and "Order").
> Mr. RAISBECK: I am in order. I want to show that I am a reformer, but not after the radical ideas advanced by you.
> The CHAIRMAN (to Mr. Raisbeck): Do not try my patience.[45]

The *Hereford Journal* is prototypical of much mid-Victorian local government coverage. The *Coventry Herald and Free Press*—the reformist paper to which Eliot contributed anonymous reviews and the short series "Poetry and Prose from the Notebook of an Eccentric"[46]—also organized its council reports through dramatis personae, paragraph-by-paragraph individual statements, and even scenelike breaks in meeting topics such as "Proposal for a New Fire Engine" or "The Market Clock." Yet because such theatrical representations stripped local political coverage of any context or commentary, to understand the underlying motivations, animosities, and alliances of such debates, readers would have to have either continually read such reports or possessed extrajournalistic knowledge. Moreover, in fixating on public council meetings, the local

press curtailed its coverage of local authorities' day-to-day activities. Accordingly, the local press's restaging of the drama of council meetings rendered cryptic both the real work of government and the political networks supporting it.

As if arising from the Bagehot-like constitutional opacity of representative government's governing institutions, such distortions of specialist expertise within political debates and the local press partially justify those institutions' continued semi-autonomy amid reformist efforts to subordinate local authorities to all-purpose councils. Within such a political world, *Middlemarch*'s withholding of expert knowledge through paralipsis clears the space for its efficacious labors while maintaining its subordination to political oversight.

To his detriment, Lydgate fails to understand the superintendence of government by politics. Lydgate believes that this career depends solely on his professional prowess as both a researcher and a public health official. Throughout the novel he remains bound to a politically shortsighted belief that the "path I have chosen is to work well in my own profession" (118). Nevertheless, Lydgate bases his scientific research and work as a public health official on a vision encapsulating both breadth and depth. He describes his research as a process of "continually expanding and shrinking between the whole human horizon and the horizon of an object-glass" (602). Lydgate's work at the New Fever Hospital provides the occasion for such scientific research. That work, the basis for this professional success, operates only within the structure of local representative government. It is from the first dependent on local politics within council debates and outside in Middlemarch's broader social milieu. The hospital board, after all, elects Lydgate manager.

Lydgate's failure to perceive governance's function within local political institutions derives, in part, from his unwillingness to extend his medical epistemology to local politics. Lydgate's unwillingness to see that regime as anything but "petty politics" scuttles his professional plans. It does so, in part, because he fails to recognize that the depth of his research depends on the breadth of his political acumen. To be a successful public health official one must, like Lydgate's ideal scientist, enact "a much more testing vision of details and relations" (154). Instead, Lydgate's political assessment flattens out local differences. Much like Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government*, he assumes that "all country towns are pretty much alike" (152). Such an assumption forecloses Lydgate's recognition that local politics encompass both his depth of medical expertise and the breadth entailed by the imbrication

of that expertise within official and unofficial networks threading together Middlemarch's council chambers and its dinner parties.

In precipitating his professional failure, Lydgate's blinkered political vision lacks what Will Ladislaw argues is essential to modern political agency: "breadth as well as concentration" (336). The novel's form has, however, been training readers in precisely such a vision of breadth and concentration all along through its modes of typification and network depth.

Middlemarch's council scenes do more than dramatize local debates over governance. To the local press's depiction of political squabbles, Eliot adds typification to generalize local opinions into national governmental rationalities. As these scenes rapidly pass back and forth across an array of localized governmental rationalities, they stage what Michel Foucault defines as politics in the age of governmentality: debates over "the interplay of . . . different arts of governance."[47] Lacking characterological depth, each governing figure stands in for a governmental rationality. Lawyers Chichely and Hawley, manufacturers Plymdale and Hackbutt, tradesman Mawmsey, transporter Larcher, clergyman Rev. Thesiger, and medical men Wrench, Minchin, and Toller: such figures represent England's main ratepayer constituencies. Discussing the appointment of a hospital chaplain, Lydgate's hospital management, or Bulstrode's fitness for public office, characters draw on their professional expertise to address the question, "What line would you take?" (146). Each character's answer depends largely on the constituency he epitomizes. Hackbutt, a manufacturer, assumes a historically apt retrenchment position regarding Bulstrode's costly public health initiatives: "There are influences here which are incompatible with genuine independence" (172). The town clerk, Hawley, opposes Bulstrode's evangelical-inflected administration on secular grounds: "sick people can't bear so much praying and preaching" (173). Contesting Lydgate's managerial appointment, Chichely, lawyer and town coroner, characterizes all medical reform as "wanting to take the coronership out of the hands of the legal profession" (147). These characters do not voice personal opinions but rather, as metonyms for local interests, governing rationales that localize otherwise abstract, national ideologies. These scenes situate ratecracy, secular liberalism, and legal proceduralism within a highly contested local parliament.

As members of local governing boards, these figures are, in Alan Palmer's formulation, "representative voices" for Middlemarch's ratepayers.[48] As Hawley claims in denouncing Bulstrode at an open health

board meeting, "I am speaking with the concurrence and at the express request of . . . my fellow-townsmen" (682). While bound to their own class and professional identities, within representative political institutions these individual voices can coalesce into "an expression of general feeling" (685). Hawley's assertion that "we . . . co-operate" reveals the nature of politics as staged through *Middlemarch*'s combination of choruslike scenes and typification. Such scenes provide a form through which individual representative voices can both articulate ideologically specific, agonistic rationalities and coalesce into a collective expression of Middlemarch's will. They thereby present politics as the channeling of dissensus into collective ends. Through the formal affordances of the novelized dramatic scene, *Middlemarch* imagines the venue within which otherwise petty political officials, "[r]egarding themselves as Middlemarch institutions," can achieve cohesion and "combine against . . . all non-professionals given to interference" (170). These scenes thereby model the representative dimension of the local state as a fraught yet potentially collective deliberation of the rationalities of governance capable of effectively directing the "work of government" to meet local needs and values.

So typified, figures like Chichely provide the novel local depth by enabling the implied reader to trace the network of alliances forming both the governing order of provincial Middlemarch and the character system of *Middlemarch*. The combination of theatricality and typification of the novel's political debate scenes extends to those social gatherings placing town and country on the same footing. Brooke's "dinner-party" (81), the Vincys' salons, Bambridge's auctions: such events politicize the social through formal isomorphism. In scenes such as Brooke's dinner party—a "large and rather more miscellaneous" (81) event drawing together the novel's rural and urban character systems: Brooke, Chettam, Dorothea on one hand, Mr. Vincy, Bulstrode, and Lydgate on the other—protagonists as well as figures like Chichely undergo typification through the stripping of characterological depth. Such attenuated characterization shifts attention onto Lydgate, Brooke, or Dorothea's place within the sociopolitical networks shaping the county's politics. In Alex Woloch's terms, these scenes render visible the weaving of individual character-spaces into the novel's overarching character-system. While at such moments readers participate in the realist novel's ethical work of "unravelling certain human lots" and "seeing how they are woven and interwoven" (*Middlemarch,* 132)—a process Woloch describes as the omniscient novel's compelling readers "to 'connect' . . . individuals"[49]—their dramatis personae focalize our reading of these overlapping

webs on the novel's political castes, both rural and municipal. Our seeing Dorothea's or Lydgate's place within the novel's character system is, therefore, simultaneously an insight, in excess of both paralipsis and theatricality, into their locations within *Middlemarch*'s political world.

If paralipsis and theatricality distinguish the local press's depiction of local government, then *Middlemarch*'s typification and network depth supplement such protocols. They thereby turn the realist novel's moral training into a prolonged lesson in political participation. *Middlemarch*'s realist reading protocols—tracing the threads of connection between human lots and political representatives—come thereby to prepare readers for such political engagement with their own local representative authorities.

3. Ratecracy and the Promise of Local Democracy

For all this training, much had changed in British local government between *Middlemarch*'s historical setting and its first readers' contemporary moment. Through what Gillian Beer calls the novel's "invisible structuring arc"—the hiatus between the novel's setting in the 1830s and its *récit* during the 1870s—Eliot nurtures her implied reader's desire for local political action.[50] Such prompting relies on the tension between the shifting institutional structures of Middlemarch's local representative government and the novel's concluding invocation of subsequent local political reforms.

Middlemarch charts the transition from a relatively inclusive and governmentally successful local regime to an exclusive and ineffectual mode of "ratecracy." Middlemarch starts the novel with an "old corporation"—replete with mayoral robes (376) and open council meetings (682)—and ends with a regime clothed in the veneer of elective politics. Lydgate's temporarily successful public health work fits within this older model of local government because it can rely on the noncodified political patronage of Bulstrode. In Bulstrode's ouster by Hawley, however, *Middlemarch* stages the early nineteenth-century reform of local government according to the deceptively named "elective principle." As James Vernon demonstrates, during the 1820s and 1830s the elective principle used the discourse of law to "close down the public political sphere by providing ever more restrictive definitions as the legitimate basis of political participation and authority."[51] Such restrictive legislation—exemplified by the Sturges-Bourne Acts (1818–19)—shut out nonratepayers from local government administration. Electoral reforms, Vernon claims,

primarily targeted the open vestry, a "generally popular" institution in which nearly all classes had a say in local government.[52] Charged with skyrocketing administrative costs, ratepayers argued that nonratepayers could not be trusted to control anything they lacked a financial stake in.

While Hawley espouses his role as representative of Middlemarch—his rhetorical "we" denouncing Bulstrode—Middlemarch's town clerk is one of the novel's most vociferous opponents of popular politics. Deploring Brooke's proreform parliamentary platform, Hawley quips, "What business does an old county man have to come currying favor with a low set of dark-blue freemen?" (336). Hawley objects to the expansion of the franchise—national or local—on the grounds of class. For him and the 1830s ratecrats he exemplifies, representative government ought to bar lower-class freemen without rateable property from political participation.

The scene depicting Hawley's overthrow of Bulstrode epitomizes the rise of exclusive ratecracy. On one hand, Hawley's coup occurs at an "open" meeting that "almost everybody of importance in the town" attends (681)—a setting evoking the popular open vestries rapidly replaced with ratepayer councils during the 1820s and 1830s. On the other hand, against this popular mode of local governance, *Middlemarch* juxtaposes Hawley's class-based objection to Bulstrode. According to Hawley, Bulstrode ought "to resign public positions which he holds . . . as a tax-payer" (683). Superseding Bulstrode, Hawley sketches an exclusive model of local government by stipulating that officers ought to be ratepayers. Hawley governs not in service of Bulstrode's "broader kind" of public responsibility (118)—the general public health—but rather his fellow ratepayers: "I and the friends whom I may call my clients" (683).

With Hawley's ratecrat coup, Eliot leaves readers with a mode of local representative government that is, indeed, "petty" in both its limiting the franchise to those who pay rates and its class-based self-interestedness. Bulstrode expelled, "the business of the meeting was despatched" (686). The narrator's terse and dismissive passive construction here elides the type of debate *Middlemarch* had depicted in-depth through theatricality. It is as if with the rise of Hawley's ratecracy the novel can no longer represent local politics. Flipping the formal protocols encoding *Middlemarch*'s one-time successful balance of government and politics, Eliot now secrets away politics in much the same way she previously treated Lydgate's public health labors. Behind the novel's closed doors, ratecrats, led now by Hawley, vote against purchasing land for a cholera burial ground through rates: "The land is to be bought by subscription" (704) rather than "by

means of assessment" (682). With Hawley ascendant, it is little wonder that Lydgate is ousted from Middlemarch's local government. A renter rather than a property-owning ratepayer, Lydgate would have been excluded from political participation in the type of local government ruled by Hawley.

The period of *Middlemarch*'s "invisible structuring arc" was marked by continued reformist conflict. While the Sturges-Bourne Act curtailed popular participation in local politics, following the 1832 Reform Act local government legislation took on an actually democratizing color, often at the urging of radical politicians in London and the industrial North. Central to the shift from restrictive to democratic electoral reforms was the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. According to Frederick Lansbury and Bryan Keith-Lucas, this act inaugurated "the principles of public election and public accountability" that would characterize "the whole field of English local government for the next century."[53] This act both subordinated disparate local authorities to all-purpose representative bodies and placed those authorities on a more inclusive, nonplural voting basis. It thereby opened the way for future expansions of the local franchise. And while this democratizing arc would culminate in the Local Government Acts of 1888 and 1894—the latter abolishing property requirements and extending the local franchise to women—the 1860s marked a period of intense yet localized reform endeavors. Joseph Firth, the founder of the London Municipal Reform League, began his career as "champion of popular rights" during the late 1860s.[54] Lydia Becker and the National Society for Women's Suffrage secured the vote for women in local elections throughout the industrial North between 1869 and 1870.

Middlemarch's "Finale" imagines the national dynamics of such electoral reforms. The novel's invisible structuring arc commences with a reference to the aforementioned Municipal Corporations Act. Following months of correspondence with Ladislaw and Dorothea, recently exiled from Middlemarch for their marriage, Brooke extends them "an invitation to the Grange" (783). Launching the process by "which the family was made whole again," this invitation flows out from a letter "remarkably fluent on the prospects of Municipal Reform." In part an instance of Beer's common knowledge, this seemingly passing allusion stages the formation of the local state as a familial reconciliation—the progressive, London-based Ladislaws productively communicate with the provincial magistrate Brooke through the *via media* of the Municipal Corporations bill. If throughout *Middlemarch* town and country are linked through

local political institutions, at its conclusion protagonists excluded from local politics end up facilitating the reform of those very institutions at a national scale. Will, "an ardent public man," ends the novel "working well in those times when reforms were begun" (782). Unfolding after the 1832 Reform Act, such reforms would have by and large targeted the local state—the Poor Law Amendment, Municipal Corporation Act, as well as the various public health and local clauses acts of the 1840s. That the reunification of *Middlemarch*'s "rural parish" character system occurs through a communiqué regarding a democratizing reform of local government casts a progressive hue over the novel's "Finale."

Often read as evidence of "the conditions of an imperfect social state," the Ladislaws' expulsion from Middlemarch looks quite different in the light of the novel's structuring arc, the allusion to the Municipal Corporations Act, and the implied readers' common knowledge about recent local government reform. To extend Livesey's argument about *Felix Holt*, we can see in this confluence Eliot forging "a dynamic connection between . . . local being and the cosmopolitan mobility of her implied readers" (188). Unlike *Felix Holt* and its local-national political impasse, however, *Middlemarch*'s "Finale" suggests that the politicized local state offers, in Livesey's words, "an alternative national future grounded in locality."[55] Read with the local state in mind, the narrator's claim that city-states and monasteries once served as "the medium[s]" for Antigone and Saint Theresa's "ardent deeds" (785) points toward democratizing reforms afoot in 1870s Britain. Defenses of municipal authorities' expansion of both public works and the local franchise often evoked classical city-states.[56] Tennyson concludes *The Idylls of the King* with a vision of Guinevere's nigh-utopian local "ministration,"[57] a projection of ideal governance onto medieval institutions akin to the localist historiography of Gomme and the Chetham Society. Behind such rhetoric, local government reformers like Becker and Firth pushed hard at this moment to expand the local franchise to women and those without rateable property. In these concluding, arguably optative allusions, it is as if Eliot, having shown her protagonists' exclusion from the 1830s local representative government, holds out hope that those once-exclusive ratepayer institutions will become, like Firth's and Becker's local politics, truly democratic bodies through which everyone can realize their "ardent deeds." In so promoting the desire and capacities for effective local governance, *Middlemarch* anticipates such an

egalitarian, localized political realm, one in which latter-day Dorotheas share council seats with the likes of Hawley.

From the perspective of recent work on the Victorian state, with its conflation of politics in the narrow sense with national electoral reforms, such a claim will seem counterintuitive. Yet Eliot's investment in what Lesjak calls a "politics of the common" demands a shift in scale from the national to the local. In Middlemarch's opaque workings of public health and theatrical council politics, Eliot seeks the cultural production of local political desire. However, Eliot, like Mill, recognized that for a "people . . . unprepared for good institutions," the direction of this desire toward reformist ends depends on the simultaneous development of their "capacities, moral, intellectual, and active, required for working it" (*Considerations on Representative Government,* 10). Tracing the links between the prevention of cholera, public health, and politics, *Middlemarch*'s readers practice a political vision seeing local government in its depth and breadth. Spurring political desire, training local citizens: Eliot's politics of the common channels reformist energy through local political institutions. Much like Eliot's first readers, by reorienting our political perspective locally we can begin to see the Victorian state's politics not in Westminster's marbled halls or the cultural production of national citizens but rather in the thousands of town halls that pervaded Britain and oversaw the day-to-day "work of government."

Notes

1. Eliot, Notebook, n.p.
2. See Gilbert, *The Citizen's Body*; and Poovey, *Making a Social Body.*
3. See Bamber, "Self-Defeating Politics"; Gallagher, "The Failure of Realism"; and Horowitz, "George Eliot," for Eliot's treatment of political reform.
4. Lesjak, "George Eliot and Politics," 339.
5. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 167. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
6. Lesjak, "George Eliot and Politics," 340.
7. Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*, 174.
8. Eliot, *Felix Holt,* 264.
9. Horowitz, "George Eliot," 9.
10. Eliot, *Felix Holt,* 7.
11. Eliot, *Felix Holt*, 4.

12. Plotz, *Semi-Detached*, 102.
13. Historians typically interpret the local state through the lens of disciplinary individualism, the process "whereby individuals express their freedom through voluntary compliance with some greater law" (Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, 20). Zarena Aslami and Patrick Joyce base such a characterization on official channels between local authorities and centralized institutions like the Local Government Board. But, as Christopher Harvie suggests, because the British state rested on an unwritten constitution, it came to rely on the cultural mediation of novels, histories, and the press. As this article contends, Eliot's entwinement of localist historiography, local newspapers, and the realist novel provided readers' local self-government autonomy from the nation-state's centralizing institutions.
14. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, 273. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
15. Stansfeld, "Local Government Board Bill."
16. Weinstein, *Liberalism and Local Government*, 89.
17. Smith, *The Parish*, 8.
18. Weinstein, "'Local Self-Government Is True Socialism,'" 1197. Following Mill's castigation of localism, most historians have characterized Smith as an ardent promoter of an individualist, laissez-faire governing philosophy. Lauren Goodlad, for instance, casts Smith as an "ardent individualist" (*Victorian Literature*, 92), a characterization following a line of historians ranging from Peter Mandler to William Lubenow. As Weinstein demonstrates, Smith's writings on local government evidence a strong commitment to collective, governmental intervention, albeit at a local, nonnational scale too often foreign to late twentieth- and twenty-first-century historians. Such commonplace assertions that the promotion of local government was de facto individualistic and laissez-faire demonstrates a continued metropolitan bias, inherited from Victorians like Mill and Chadwick, that sees nonmetropolitan articulations of self-rule as backward and self-interested. Such biases, I contend, have significantly curtailed our understanding of literature's engagement with representative government, particularly regarding Eliot's provincial novels.
19. Smith, *Local Self-Government Unmystified*, 22.
20. Smith, *The Parish*, 2.
21. Smith, *The Parish*, 10.

22. Smith, *The Parish,* 11.
23. Smith, *Local Self-Government Unmystified*, 26.
24. Gomme, *Literature of Local Institutions,* 9.
25. Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," 158.
26. Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," 158.
27. Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," 153.
28. McDonagh, "Imagining Locality and Affiliation," 362.
29. Fleishman, *George Eliot's Intellectual Life*, 172–173.
30. Jann, *Art and Science,* xxi.
31. Burrow, "'The Village Community,'" 257.
32. Newton, "Role of the Narrator," 98.
33. McDonagh, "Imagining Locality and Affiliation," 359–60.
34. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 51–52.
35. On political reform, see Bamber, "Self-Defeating Politics"; and Horowitz, "George Eliot"; on public health, see Furst, "Struggling for Medical Reform"; Carpenter, "Medical Cosmopolitanism"; and Gilbert, *Cholera and the Nation.*
36. Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, 5.
37. Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, 9.
38. Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, 16.
39. *Middlemarch*'s local government transforms Bagehot's constitutional model in much the same way that Anthony Trollope does in his political fiction. As I argue elsewhere, through narrative paralipsis Trollope displaces Bagehot's efficient secret from the cabinet to the state's day-to-day governance (Martel, "Figuring the State," 122). What Trollope does to the central state—shifting Bagehot's efficient secret from a deliberative, political body to the activities of the state itself—Eliot does to local government. She does so, moreover, with the added twist of making Bagehot's opaque executive councils into the local state's dignified element through theatricality.
40. Beer, "What's Not in *Middlemarch*," 16.
41. Gilbert, *Cholera and the Nation*, 148.
42. Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, 5.
43. Jones, "Local Journalism," 65.
44. Hobbs, "When the Provincial Press," 24.
45. "Reform Meeting," 8.
46. Haight, *George Eliot*, 61.
47. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 313.
48. Palmer, "Large Intermental Units in *Middlemarch*," 94.
49. Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 32.

50. Beer, "What's Not in *Middlemarch*," 18.
51. Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 15.
52. Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 17.
53. Lansberry and Keith-Lucas, "Old Corruption," 92.
54. "Death of Mr. Firth," 51.
55. Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*, 174.
56. Harrison, *The Transformation of British Politics*, 116.
57. Tennyson, "Guinevere," 688.

Works Cited

Allison, Mark. "Utopian Socialism, Women's Emancipation, and the Origins of *Middlemarch*." *English Literary History* 78, no. 3 (2011): 715–39.

Aslami, Zarena. *The Dream Life of Citizens: Late Victorian Novels and the Fantasy of the State*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

Bagehot, Walter. *The English Constitution*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1867.

Bamber, Linda. "Self-Defeating Politics in George Eliot's *Felix Holt*." *Victorian Studies* 18, no. 4 (1975): 419–35.

Beer, Gillian. "What's Not in *Middlemarch*." In *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Karen Chase, 22–54. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Burrow, J. W. "'The Village Community' and the Uses of History in Late-Nineteenth Century England." In *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society in Honour of J. H. Plumb*, edited by Neil McKendrick, 302–6. London: Europa, 1974.

Carpenter, Mary Wilson. "Medical Cosmopolitanism: *Middlemarch*, Cholera, and the Pathologies of English Masculinity." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38 (2010): 511–28.

"Death of Mr. Firth." *County Council Times,* Sept. 6, 1889, 51–52.

Eliot, George. *Felix Holt: The Radical*. 1866. New York: Penguin, 1995.

———. *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*. 1871–72. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

———. "The Natural History of German Life." 1856. In *The Essays of "George Eliot,"* edited by Nathan Sheppard, 141–77. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883.

———. Notebook, *Felix Holt* MS, George Eliot and George Henry Lewes Collection, Yale University.

Fleishman, Avrom. *George Eliot's Intellectual Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2008.

Furst, Lilian R. "Struggling for Medical Reform in *Middlemarch*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 48, no. 3 (1993): 341–61.

Gallagher, Catherine. "The Failure of Realism: *Felix Holt*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35 (1980): 372–84.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.
Gilbert, Pamela K. *Cholera and the Nation: Doctoring the Social Body in Victorian England*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2008.
———. *The Citizen's Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007.
Gomme, George Laurence. *The Literature of Local Institutions*. London: Elliott Stock, 1886.
Goodlad, Lauren. *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
Haight, Gordon S. *George Eliot: A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.
Harrison, Brian. *The Transformation of British Politics, 1860–1995*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
Harvie, Christopher. *The Centre of Things: Political Fiction in Britain from Disraeli to the Present*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1991.
Hobbs, Andrew. "When the Provincial Press Was the National Press (c.1836–c.1900)." *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 5, no. 1 (2009): 16–43.
Horowitz, Evan. "George Eliot: The Conservative." *Victorian Studies* 49, no. 1 (2006): 7–32.
Jann, Rosemary. *The Art and Science of Victorian History*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985.
Jones, Aled. "Local Journalism in Victorian Political Culture." In *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, edited by Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, and Lionel Madden, 63–70. London: Macmillan, 1990.
Joyce, Patrick. *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State Since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
Lansberry, Frederick, and Bryan Keith-Lucas. "Old Corruption: Government in the Boroughs." In *Government and Politics in Kent, 1640–1914*, edited by Frederick Lansberry, 63–94. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001.
Leckie, Barbara. "The Architecture of *Middlemarch*: From Building Cottages to the Home Epic." *Nineteenth-Century Studies* 24 (2010): 53–75.
Lesjak, Carolyn. "George Eliot and Politics." In *A Companion to George Eliot*, edited by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw, 338–52. London: John Wiley and Sons, 2013.
Livesey, Ruth. *Writing the Stage Coach Nation: Locality on the Move in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
Lubenow, William. *The Politics of Government Growth: Early Victorian Attitudes toward State Intervention*. Hamden: Archon, 1971.
Mandler, Peter. "After the Welfare State." *Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 382–88.
Martel, Michael. "Figuring the State: Representative Government and Paralipsis in Anthony Trollope's Palliser Novels." *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 128 (2015): 117–38.
Maynes-Aminzade, Liz. "The Omnicompetent Narrator from George Eliot to Jonathan Franzen." *Studies in the Novel* 46, no. 2 (2014): 236–53.

McDonagh, Josephine. "Imagining Locality and Affiliation: George Eliot's Villages." In *A Companion to George Eliot*, edited by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw, 353–69. Oxford: Blackwell, 2013.

Mill, John Stuart. *Considerations on Representative Government*. London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861.

Murtagh, Joseph. "George Eliot and the Language of Expertise." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 44, no. 1 (2011): 88–105.

Newton, K. M. "The Role of the Narrator in George Eliot's Novels." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 3, no. 2 (1973): 97–107.

Palmer, Alan. "Large Intermental Units in *Middlemarch*." In *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, edited by Jan Alber and Monka Fludernik, 83–104. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010.

Plotz, John. *Semi-Detached: The Aesthetics of Virtual Experience Since Dickens*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

Poovey, Mary. *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

"Reform Meeting." *Hereford Journal*, January 12, 1867, 8.

Smith, Joshua Toulmin. *Local Self-Government Unmystified: Common Sense, Human Nature, and Practical Improvement, against the Manifesto of Centralism Put Forth at the Social Science Association, 1857*. London: Edward Stanford, 1857.

———. *The Parish: Its Powers and Obligations at Law as Regards the Welfare of Every Neighbourhood, and in Relation to the State: Its Officers and Committees: And the Responsibility of Every Parishioner*. 2nd ed. London: S. Sweet, 1857.

Stansfeld, James. "Local Government Board Bill." *The Times*, July 28, 1871.

Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "Guinevere." In *Idylls of the King*. 1859. New York: Penguin, 2004.

Vernon, James. *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.* 1815–1867. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Weinstein, Benjamin. *Liberalism and Local Government in Early Victorian London*. Rochester: Boydell Press, 2011.

———. "'Local Self-Government Is True Socialism': Joshua Toulmin Smith, the State and Character Formation." *English Historical Review* 123, no. 504 (2008): 1193–1228.

Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.