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THE ECONOMICS OF "A BIT O' VICTUAL," OR MALTHUS AND MOTHERS IN *ADAM BEDE*

By Lana L. Dalley

HETTY SORREL'S ECONOMIC SELF-INTEREST is impossible to ignore, as is its sexual nature. George Eliot tells us that Hetty is "quite used to the thought that people liked to look at her" and is determined to exchange her physical charms for a life of luxuries (96; ch. 9). Hetty's attraction to the young, wealthy Arthur Donnithorne is unabashedly opportunistic. While Hetty is searching for Arthur, once she is aware of her "swift-advancing shame," the narrator reveals the turn of her thoughts: "He would not marry her and make her a lady; and apart from that she could think of nothing he could give her towards which she looked with longing and ambition" (364; ch. 35, 372; ch. 36). And it is certainly not unusual for economic considerations to figure in the Victorian marriage plot; Mary Barton's attraction to Harry Carson is predicated on his ability to make her a lady; Rosamond Vincy marries Lydgate in the hopes that his relationship to the landed gentry will, quite literally, pay off. It is the lethal turn of Hetty's material self-interest – the murder of her illegitimate child – that makes her story exceptional. I suggest that Hetty's desire to "purchase" Arthur's social prestige and her ultimate rejection of maternal responsibility intersect with Malthusian economics. The central action of the story, infanticide, signifies one of the chief topics of Malthusian debate. T. R. Malthus and his followers suggested that economically imprudent marriages were akin to an unthinking infanticide because the newlyweds would likely be unable to feed the children that would arise from their conjugal relations; they also registered child-murder as one of the checks to population, classifying it as "one of the worst forms of vice and misery" (1803: 71; ch. 3). In this essay, I read food and the life-and-death economics of food in *Adam Bede* as a register for Malthusian concerns about sex, family, responsibility, and dependence. In the novel, these concerns are not only for fathers – which is Malthus's own emphasis – but also for mothers. Although published in 1859, the novel is set in 1799, a year after the first publication of Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, and three decades before the Poor Law reform developed in response to Malthusian analysis. It is in this context that I propose reading *Adam Bede* alongside Malthus's *Essay*.

Although Eliot, in contrast to her literary predecessor Harriet Martineau, was not writing fiction to "illustrate" political economy, she did have intellectual ties to classical-school economics.[1] In 1852, Eliot began anonymously editing the *Westminster Review*, which was founded in 1824 by Jeremy Bentham and other "philosophic radicals," including political economist James Mill who, like his son J. S. Mill, was a follower of Adam Smith and Malthus. While editor at the *Westminster Review*, Eliot often worked with Martineau, who

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was a frequent contributor to the journal. Furthermore, Eliot said that she "relied on [J. S. Mill's] *System of Logic* and *Principles of Political Economy* as works of 'reference'" (Rignall 266). Eliot also "saw the industrial novels, especially [Elizabeth Gaskell's] *Mary Barton* and [Charles Kingsley's] *Alton Locke*, as important steps forward in the development of the novel," and, in fact, she was reading *Mary Barton* while writing *Adam Bede* (Gallagher 223). Her approbation of *Mary Barton* and *Alton Locke* is important because both novels engage economic theory, albeit in different ways. That Eliot was both conversant with the principles of political economy and responsive to the intentions of industrial fiction (the genre most readily identified with economics) indicates a role for economic discourse as a theoretical underpinning of her fiction.

The language of political economy is spoken early in *Adam Bede* when the narrator states, "the existence of insignificant people has very important consequences in the world. It can be shown to affect the price of bread and the rate of wages, to call forth many evil tempers from the selfish, and many heroisms from the sympathetic, and, in other ways, to play no small part in the tragedy of life" (67; ch. 5). That the "price of bread and rate of wages" are here listed as important gestures towards political economy as a key discourse in the shaping of the novel and its characters.[2] The publication of Malthus's *Essay* shifted political economy's focus from large-scale industrial production to the reproduction and consumption of the individual British home. While Smith argued, in *Wealth of Nations*, that the happiness of the nation depended on the comfort of "the great body of the people," Malthus gave the argument greater bodily specificity: "Other circumstances being the same, it may be affirmed that countries are populous according to the quantity of human food which they produce, and happy according to the liberality with which that food is divided" (Smith 1: 81; ch. 8; Malthus 1798: 117; ch. 7). The relations of supply and demand for food are the constitutive concerns in Malthusian economics and, I will argue, the key registers for moral and economic well-being, particularly the well-being of the novel's female characters, in *Adam Bede.* Within the novel, women's relationships to Malthusian economics reveal the material dimensions of their domestic lives and suggest that the uneven economic framework of Victorian love often reduces women to matrimonial pauperism. Although Malthus gives very little attention to women within the *Essay*, his theories provide a space for the entry of women into economic theory. Under Malthusian influence, marriage, motherhood, and household management can be imaginatively conceived in the very terms that define the competitive public sphere – they are controlled by the laws of supply and demand, production and consumption: food is integral to marriage and its human productions, and both are linked to economics.

Malthusian Economics

THE INTRODUCTION OF MALTHUSIAN theory into British society challenged traditional ideologies regarding sex and morality by, in some substantial degree, shifting focus from the religious imperative for marriage to the economic repercussions of marriage and sexuality. Political economists and Neo-Malthusians argued that sexual acts should not be judged solely on the basis of a Judeo-Christian moral code, but also on the basis of their material consequences, which featured in the new moral-economic sexual code they espoused.[3] Overpopulation, according to Malthus and his followers, is the source of poverty and starvation and, consequently, of "vice and misery." Thus, within this model, marriage – and the children who are an inevitable consequence of it – can no longer be conceptualized

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as existing in a separate sphere than the operations of industrial capitalist society; rather, they are positioned at its center.

In the *Essay,* Malthus argues that if the population continues to increase at its current rate, unchecked, the number of people will eventually exceed the amount of subsistence. He supports his thesis by suggesting that population increases geometrically, while the food supply increases arithmetically. However, Malthus notes that there are two checks that prevent the population from exceeding the food supply: positive and preventive checks. Positive checks are those that repress "an increase which is already begun" and include severe labor, starvation, disaster, disease, and so forth (1798: 93; ch. 5). Malthus argues that positive checks are "confined chiefly, though perhaps not solely, to the lowest orders of society" (1798: 93; ch. 5). Preventive checks, on the other hand, are conscious attempts to prevent births. Of course, for Malthus, the only acceptable preventive check is "the restraint from marriage which is not followed by irregular gratifications" – what he terms "moral restraint" in the 1803 edition of the *Essay* (bk 1: 23; ch. 2).[4] In *A Summary View of The Principle of Population* (1830), Malthus refers to the possibility of other types of preventive checks – presumably artificial birth control, prostitution, abortion, and infanticide – and classifies them as vice. Indeed, Malthus never even explicitly admits the possibility of moral restraint within marriage, although later political economists, like J. S. Mill, do.

A foundational aspect of the *Essay* is Malthus's argument that man's position in regard to reproduction is more complicated than that of plants and animals because it is a moral – rather than simply a biological or instinctual – matter. In the course of the essay, it becomes quite clear that the moral code Malthus refers to is deeply intertwined with economics. In other words, an ethical decision about starting a family rests largely on the husband's ability to feed his family. Malthus states that, before starting a family, a man must ask himself:

> Will he not lower his rank in life? Will he not subject himself to greater difficulties than he at present feels? Will he not be obliged to labour harder? And if he has a large family, will his utmost exertions enable him to support them? May he not see his offspring in rags and misery, and clamouring for bread that he cannot give them? And may he not be reduced to the grating necessity of forfeiting his independence, and of being obliged to the sparing hand of charity for support? (1798: 76; ch.2)

This passage further demonstrates the extent to which the socio-ethical sexual code pronounced by Malthus and, to a greater extent, by his followers, was established on economic grounds. The economic ethos first pronounced by Malthus and adopted by later political economists, is founded upon the notion of a man's "spirit of independence" – a notion central to the tenets of classical political economy. For example, Malthus writes of the laborer:

> Harder fare and harder labour he would submit to for the sake of living with the woman that he loves, but he must feel conscious, if he thinks at all, that should he have a large family, and any ill luck whatever, no degree of frugality, no possible exertion of his manual strength could preserve him from the heart-rending sensation of seeing his children starve, or of forfeiting his independence, and being obliged to the parish for their support. The love of independence is a sentiment that surely none would wish to be erased from the breast of man, though the parish law of England, it must be confessed, is a system of all others the most calculated gradually to weaken this sentiment, and in the end may eradicate it completely. (1798: 91; ch. 4)

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In this passage, Malthus equates a man's love for financial independence with his love for his children by comparing the "sensation of seeing his children starve" with the "forfeiting of his independence." For Malthus, marriage can no longer be conceived as simply a duty of the upstanding Christian citizen, but must be understood in terms of financial responsibility. If a husband is unable to support his wife and children, Malthus argues that it is more ethical to remain unmarried, than to marry out of so-called Christian duty; on the contrary, to marry without the means to support a family is to defy that Christian duty.

In the second edition of the *Essay*, Malthus expanded this critique of "dependent poverty," and the Poor Laws which he believed encouraged such dependence, in what is perhaps the most infamous passage in the text:

> A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he do not work upon the compassion of some of her guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. The report of a provision for all that come fills the hall with numerous claimants. The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed to scarcity; and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall. . . . The guests learn too late their error, in counteracting those strict orders to all intruders, issued by the great mistress of the feast, who, wishing that all her guests should have plenty, and knowing that she could not provide for unlimited numbers, humanely refused to admit fresh comers when her table was already full. (1803: 249; bk. 4, ch. 6)

Malthus condemns the charity of the dinner guests – those offering parish support – for giving food to those who, because of their economic dispossession, have no "claim of right" to Nature's feast. According to Malthusian logic, the plentitude of food is "changed to scarcity" by over-demand and, thus, the deserving guests receive less than their due. Malthus's censure of the Poor Laws and his support of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act (which abolished parish relief and instituted workhouses in its place) earned him a reputation for insensitivity towards the plight of the poor, particularly from Romantic critics like Robert Southey and S. T. Coleridge.[5] He was most harshly critiqued first for suggesting that the parish assistance increased pauperism and, second, for suggesting that the poor were, essentially, responsible for their own misery because they had more children than they could feed. Despite the controversy – or perhaps because of it – Malthus's text enjoyed a wide readership, a fact evidenced by the publication of six editions during his lifetime, the last in 1826. Malthus's *Essay* introduced a new way of thinking about marriage and reproduction, and therefore needs to be taken into account in critical discussions of gender, economics, and the family in Victorian England.

Malthusian economics were perceived as particularly unfitting for women because they call traditional notions of marriage into question – and, simply put, sex is an inherent aspect of the subject. Malthusian theories (specifically "moral restraint") were popularly characterized as irreligious and as a threat to conventional domesticity. The point is vehemently made in an article on the preventive check in the November 1832 issue of *Fraser's Magazine*. The writer states: "And what is this 'preventive check?' It is the fear of starvation, operating to deter men from marrying. And this, by the most extraordinary abuse and perversion of language

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that ever fell from the lips or pen of man is called 'moral restraint!' Morality, connected with a repudiation of marriage!" (412). Because Malthusian theories were associated with laxity regarding marriage and sex (and disregard for children), they were considered particularly dangerous for women, and morally inappropriate as topics for women writers.[6] Critics of Malthus suggested that the postponement of marriage encouraged vice among young people, threatened the sanctity of the traditional British home where children were, according to J. A. and Olive Banks, "an inevitable consequence of marriage," and went against God's word, which instructed married people to "'be fruitful and multiply'" (Banks 1, 117).

Harriet Martineau was one of the first women writers to feature Malthusian economics in her fiction.[7] In *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832), Martineau openly endorses population control (via "moral restraint") and argues against the Poor Laws. Like Malthus, Martineau declares that overpopulation is one of the most important economic and moral questions of the age; unlike Malthus, she includes women in her rendering of the population problem, going so far as to allow two women to frankly discuss the benefits of the preventive check in one of her tales.[8] In her *Autobiography*, Martineau writes, "It was my business, in illustrating Political Economy, to exemplify Malthus's doctrine among the rest. It was that doctrine 'pure and simple,' as it came from his virtuous and benevolent mind, that I presented" (159). Despite such "pure and simple" intentions, the Malthusian aspects of Martineau's tales subjected her to the most substantial criticism for a series that was otherwise quite popular and widely read. In fact, when she wrote her *Autobiography* in 1855, she suggests that there is "some lingering feeling still, – some doubt about my being once held in horror as a 'Malthusian'" (151). Martineau's recollections demonstrate how the Malthusian aspects of classical economics were largely responsible for the cultural assumption that economic subjects were unfit material for women, specifically in the first seventy years of the nineteenth century. This attitude is forcefully demonstrated in James Fraser's entry on Martineau in the "Gallery of Literary Characters," in *Fraser's Magazine*. After an unflattering comparison between Martineau and "Mother Wollstonecraft," he continues by critiquing the presence of Malthusian theories in Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy:*

> Disgusting this [Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*] . . . but far less disgusting than when we find the more mystical topics of generation, its impulses and consequences – which the common consent of society, even the ordinary practice of language (a little philological or etymological consideration will explain to the cognoscente reader what we mean), has veiled with the decent covering of silence, or left to be examined only with philosophical abstraction – brought daily, weekly, monthly, before the public eye, as the leading subjects, the very foundation-thoughts, of all essays, articles, treatises, novels! Tales! Romances! – to be disseminated into all hands, to lie on the breakfast-tables of the young and the fair, and to afford them matter of meditation. We wish that Miss Martineau would sit down in her study and calmly endeavour to depict to herself what is the precise and physical meaning of the words used by her school – what is preventive check – what is moral check – what is it they are intended to check. . . . (576)

Fraser's critique underscores the presence of Malthusian language in the literature of the time, as he regrets that the "mystical topics of generation" are now discussed openly – and by openly, of course, he simply means through an author's reference to the bearing of children and its economic consequences – in "essays, articles, treatises, novels! Tales! Romances!".

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I include Martineau here because her treatment of Malthusian economics (and the reputation of Malthusian theory, more generally) highlights one of the central conflicts between domestic discourse (a discourse most readily identified with novels, particularly women's fiction) and the discourse of political economy: domestic discourse is anchored to traditional notions of marriage and family, while political economists advocate new notions of delayed marriage and family for the sake of the greater social good.[9] Within nineteenth-century novels that engage economics, like *Adam Bede*, this conflict is between representing marriage and motherhood as eventualities that resolve social problems or as eventualities that cause social problems, themselves in need of resolution.

Nancy Armstrong's reading of the marriage plot in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century fiction underscores its crucial function in domestic fiction:

> The good marriage concluding fiction . . . where characters achieve prosperity without compromising their domestic virtue, could be used to resolve another order of conflict, the conflict between an agrarian gentry and urban industrialists, for one, or between labor and capital, for another. By enclosing such conflict within a domestic sphere, certain novels demonstrated that despite the vast inequities of the age virtually anyone could find gratification within this private framework. As it became the woman's sphere, then, the household appeared to detach itself from the political world and to provide the complement and antidote to it. And in this way, novels helped to transform the household into what might be called the "counterimage" of the modern marketplace, an apolitical realm of culture within the culture as a whole. (48)

Armstrong then tracks a distinct change in the function of marriage within the novelist's agenda after the 1840s. She argues that marriage became "a way of drawing a line around culture in order to preserve it in the face of a competitive market place" (163).

Despite this perceived shift in the function of the marriage plot, it endured as a primary novelistic device throughout the nineteenth century. I want to suggest, though, that marriage serves another function in nineteenth-century fiction than those Armstrong identifies. I contend that rather than functioning as a way of solving the problems caused by competitive industrialism or of preserving culture in the face of aggressive market behavior, in *Adam Bede* and other novels concerned with economics, marriage itself is characterized as a "competitive market" that sacrifices women as often as it preserves them. In other words, under Malthusian influence, the domestic sphere comes to be imaginatively conceived in the very terms that define the public sphere – courtship, marriage, and mothering are controlled by the laws of supply and demand, production and consumption.

Davidoff and Hall claim that in the nineteenth century, "Women's identification with the domestic and moral sphere implied that they would only become active economic agents when forced by necessity" (272). They problematize this ideological precept by arguing that "marriage was indeed a 'trade' and as economic actors [women] appear as shadows behind the scenes of the family enterprise" (273). Davidoff and Hall's historical analysis is useful here because it demonstrates the discrepancy between domestic ideology and domestic practice in the nineteenth century. In *Adam Bede*, Eliot characterizes the correlative between women and domesticity as economic, in opposition to domestic ideology, by emphasizing the material dimensions of marriage and motherhood. In so doing, Eliot lays bare the contradiction between a woman's economic subjection and her economic responsibility "for creating and maintaining the house, its contents and its human constituents" by linking Malthus

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and mothers (Davidoff and Hall 360). In "'Ladies – Loaf Givers': Food, Women, and Society in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot," Francis and Monica Fennell explain, "in mid-century food represented 54 percent of the budget of a typical Victorian middle-class family. Supervision over that portion of the budget fell almost exclusively to women and gave them an economic power of no mean significance" (242). Eliot's representation of the Malthusian dimensions of food – and domesticity, more broadly – challenges traditional depictions of the domestic woman as separate from "the so-called public sphere of competition, self-interest, and economic aggression" (Poovey, *Uneven Developments* 10) and discloses the financial responsibilities of and pressures on mothers, to which Malthus pays little heed.

Adam Bede

IMAGES OF THE PRODUCTION and consumption of food are quite copious in *Adam Bede*: Lisbeth constantly nags Adam to have "a bit o' victual" (44; ch. 4); the first picture of Hetty is of "her dimpled arm . . . lift[ing] a pound of butter out of the scale" in the dairy (83; ch. 7); and, the novel's structure is punctuated by the Birthday Feast and the Harvest Supper. Food functions as a way of demarcating class: at the Birthday Feast, Arthur honors Adam by inviting him to dine upstairs rather than in the cloisters with Lisbeth and Seth (258; ch. 23). It serves as a symbol of motherly affection: in order to make up for her "nattering" the night before, Lisbeth is "more than usually bent on making her hearth and breakfast-table look comfortable and inviting" (52; ch. 4). And, finally, food registers Malthusian economics: Mrs. Poyser warns her maid Molly, "You're never easy till you've got some sweetheart as is as big a fool as yourself: you think you'll be finely off when you're married, I daresay, and have got a three-legged stool to sit on, and never a blanket to cover you, and a bit o' oatcake for your dinner, as three children are a-snatching at" (75; ch. 6). The relationship between economics and mothering is further drawn when the narrator states, "Meantime Lisbeth had dried her eyes, and now followed Seth, holding something in her hands. It was the brown-and-yellow platter containing the baked potatoes with the gravy in them, and bits of meat, which she had cut and mixed among them. Those were dear times, when wheaten bread and fresh meat were delicacies to working people" (47; ch. 4). Here, Lisbeth's motherly affection is cast in economic terms. Lisbeth's preparation of meat for her sons during difficult financial times is a way to demonstrate her control over household resources and to emphasize how her maternal nurturing is, in part, economic. Francis and Monica Fennell argue that Eliot uses "the serving of food as a device for illuminating the structure of the societies [she] portray[s]" (237). They contend, however, that within Eliot's novels, "the most frequently exercised power is social rather than economic: the use of food preparation to stimulate affection and fellowship" (242). While this may, at times, hold true in Eliot's other novels, I want to suggest that in *Adam Bede* food is always, and inextricably, tied to Malthusian economics. In other words, the presence of or contemplation of food is never separate from themes of sex, family, responsibility, and dependence.

Adam Bede contains multiple references to delayed marriage, including the delayed marriage at the novel's center: that of Adam and Hetty. When introducing Rev. Irwine, the narrator informs the reader that if he did not have "two hopelessly-maiden sisters, his lot would have been shaped quite differently: he would very likely have taken a comely wife in his youth, and now, when his hair was getting grey under the powder, would have had

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tall sons and blooming daughters" (67; ch. 5). The narrator explains that his three livings do not provide him with enough income to support his sisters and a family, so he abstains from marriage and is denied those "possessions [wife and children] . . . as men commonly think will repay them for all the labour they take under the sun" (67; ch. 5). The relative positions of husbands and wives are laid bare in this economic framework: wives (and children) are commodities which the working man can take possession of once he has stored sufficient capital. The language in this passage reflects Smith's statement in the *Wealth of Nations* that "the liberal reward of labour encourages marriage," while it simultaneously recognizes the (Malthusian) limits of that statement (344; vol. 4, ch. 6).

Adam's attitude toward marriage reflects Rev. Irwine's prudent behavior. Throughout most of the novel, Adam imagines marriage to Hetty in his future but has "too cool a head not to estimate to the full the obstacles that were to be overcome" (208; ch. 19). The narrator states, "He had long made up his mind that it would be wrong as well as foolish for him to marry a blooming young girl, so long as he had no other prospect than that of growing poverty with a growing family" (210; ch. 19). Like the generic father in Malthus's *Essay*, Adam ponders whether "his utmost exertions" will enable him to support his offspring, and he refuses to see his children "clamouring for bread that he cannot give them" (Malthus 1798: 76; ch. 2). Adam's willingness to postpone his personal (and sexual) gratification in order to secure the future happiness and physical well-being of his family is one way in which he distinguishes himself from Arthur, who uses his wealth to set up false pretences of courtship to Hetty. Hetty responds to the immediate economic gratification offered by Arthur (through expensive gifts and the prospect of being a lady) and rejects Adam's economic prudence.

Hetty's desire for the young, wealthy Arthur Donnislope is blatantly economic in nature. Hetty's motives for marriage are uncovered early in the novel when the narrator reveals Hetty's thoughts about Adam:

> She saw him as he was – a poor man, with old parents to keep, who would not be able, for a long while to come, to give her even such luxuries as she shared in her uncle's house. And Hetty's dreams were all of luxuries: to sit in a carpeted parlour, and always wear white stockings; to have some large beautiful earrings, such as were all the fashion; to have Nottingham lace round the top of her gown, and something to make her handkerchief smell nice, like Miss Lydia Donnithorne's when she drew it out at church; and not to be obliged to get up early or be scolded by anybody. She thought, if Adam had been rich and could have given her these things, she loved him well enough to marry him. (99; ch. 9)

The only way that Hetty, as a woman, can have the life she desires is to choose a wealthy husband – a fact made more explicit through the chronological juxtaposition of her economic "fall" with Adam's economic rise. In Hetty's mind, marriage to a wealthy husband is the only way she will escape the drudgery of her everyday life at the dairy. In fact, when Arthur finally rejects her (upon Adam's insistence), her chief regret is that life will now lack change and pleasure:

> As Hetty began languidly to take off the clothes she had worn all the night, that she might wash herself and brush her hair, she had a sickening sense that her life would go on in this way: she should always be doing things she had no pleasure in, getting up to the old tasks of work, seeing people she

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> cared nothing about, going to church, and to Treddleston, and to tea with Mrs. Best, and carrying no happy thought with her. (334; ch. 31)

Hetty's fear of a monotonous, boring life stands in stark contrast to Arthur's confidence in his future: by the time Hetty receives the letter which ends their relationship, Arthur has embarked on his travels as a soldier. Hetty, on the other hand, shifts her prospects to Adam, until the "on-coming of her great dread" forces her to break their engagement (365; ch. 35).

Hetty's mercenary motives for marriage are cast in a new light, though, when the narrator reveals Hetty's repugnance towards parish support. When Hetty is on her journey to find Arthur she recalls the story of a young woman in her situation who was discovered "against the church wall at Hayslope one Sunday, nearly dead with cold and hunger – a tiny infant in her arms: the woman was rescued and taken to the parish" (378; ch. 37). Hetty's fear is highlighted by a mounting awareness of her own financial predicament. For the first time, Hetty is responsible for her own subsistence. Even as Hetty contemplates suicide, the narrator observes, "Yet she took care of her money still; she carried her basket: death seemed still a long way off, and life was so strong in her! She craved food and rest" (384; ch. 37). Where she used to crave such luxuries as "white stockings" and "Nottingham lace," Hetty now craves "food and rest." Later, Hetty decides that, "[i]t was no use to think of drowning herself – she could not do it, at least while she had money left to buy food" (388; ch. 37). The satisfaction she feels after eating three buns she's purchased stands in stark contrast to the suffering felt by the woman who was "nearly dead with cold and hunger": "She took them out now, and ate them eagerly, and then sat still again, looking at the pool. The soothed sensation that came over her from the satisfaction of her hunger, and this fixed dreamy attitude, brought on drowsiness, and presently her head sank down on her knees" (378, 385; ch. 37).

The thought of finding herself under the support of the parish is repulsive to Hetty and, indeed, the narrator hints that fear of falling under parish support may have motivated Hetty to kill her baby. The narrator states:

> 'The parish!' You can perhaps hardly understand the effect of that word on a mind like Hetty's, brought up among people who were somewhat hard in their feelings even towards poverty, who lived among the fields, and had little pity for want and rags as a cruel inevitable fate such as they sometimes seem in cities, but held them a mark of idleness and vice – and it was idleness and vice that brought burthens on the parish. To Hetty, the 'parish' was next to the prison in obloquy; and to ask anything of strangers – to beg – lay in the same far-off hideous region of intolerable shame that Hetty had all her life thought it impossible she could ever come near. But now the remembrance of that wretched woman whom she had seen herself, on her way from church, being carried into Joshua Rann's, came back upon her with the new terrible sense that there was very little now to divide *her* from the same lot. (378–79; ch 37)

Hetty's opinions about the parish support upheld by the Poor Laws – opinions shared by her "people" – are reminiscent of the Malthusian critiques thereof. She is horrified at the idea of, to use Malthus's terms, "forfeiting . . . independence and being obliged to the parish for support" (1798: 76; ch. 2). This point is reinforced during John Olding's testimony against Hetty at her trial. He notes that when he found Hetty "she cried out . . . but she never offered to move. She'd got a big piece of bread on her lap" (435; ch. 43). The "big piece of bread" symbolizes Hetty's sense of her own self-dependence, which she imagined losing as an

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unwed mother dependent on the parish for food. Malthus's treatment of parish support and the "spirit of independence" never extends beyond his descriptions of potential husbands and fathers, though, as Eliot's treatment does.

It is tragically ironic that Hetty's repugnance towards parish support manifests itself during her journey to find Arthur. Clearly, Hetty regards the paternalistic offerings of the parish in a completely different light than the paternalistic offerings of marriage. Her greatest fear is to be dependent on the parish, while her greatest hope is to gain (in)dependence by marrying Arthur. However, the novel makes it clear that Hetty's perspective is socially sanctioned. In the narrator's description of Mrs. Poyser's attitude toward marriage, she uses a food metaphor that lays bare the material dimensions of courtship:

> Mrs. Poyser was strict in adherence to her own rules of propriety, and she considered that a young girl was not to be treated sharply in the presence of a respectable man who was courting her. That would not be fair play: every woman was young in her turn, and had her chances of matrimony, which it was a point of honour for other women not to spoil – just as one market-woman who has sold her own eggs must not try to balk another of a customer. (225; ch. 20)

In this passage, marriage is described as a market in which a young girl, if she is not balked, may be able to sell her person for material gain. *Adam Bede* draws parallels between the paternalism of public support and the paternalism of marriage and suggests that, in order for marriage to be a respectable option for women, they must possess economic self-dependence before entering it.

This point is made through the juxtaposition of Hetty and Dinah. Dinah is another character who delays marriage, and because she is a woman, her desire to remain unmarried marks her as an anomalous figure within her community. In Dinah's case, she delays marriage not for monetary reasons, at least ostensibly, but in order to retain her independence to work as a preacher. Part of that work, though, includes distributing her limited income (which she gains through work at a factory) as she pleases. When Seth first approaches Dinah about marriage, he cites Christian evidences as a means of courting her. He says, "it seems to me there's more texts for your marrying than ever you can find against it. For St. Paul says as plain as can be in another place, 'I will that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, [and] give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully'" (34; ch. 3). He continues, "I'd make a shift, and fend indoor and out, to give you more liberty – more than you can have now, for you've got to get your own living now, and I'm strong enough to work for us both" (34; ch. 3). Dinah rejects his advances, though. She says, "I desire to live and die without husband or children. I seem to have no room in my soul for wants and fears of my own" (35–36; ch. 3). Dinah rejects marriage for the sake of either social approval or financial ease; and, in her rejection she describes marriage and motherhood in terms of financial and emotional liability. In this context, Dinah's unwillingness to marry indicates that she is an exceptional woman, decidedly different from women, like Hetty, who look to marriage as their ultimate economic aspiration.

Many critics have argued that Eliot presents Hetty in too harsh a light, especially when compared to the pious Dinah. Nina Auerbach argues, "Hetty Sorrel is presented as fallen from her first lush and sensuous appearance in the novel" and notes that Hetty, represented as a "selfish and solitary little figure" never appears to be under her author's "special protection"

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the way that other "fallen" women, like Gaskell's Ruth and Hardy's Tess, do (169, 174). Auerbach argues further,

> Hetty Sorrel's power in *Adam Bede* is even more oblique than that of Ruth and Tess, in part no doubt because George Eliot endows her with no spiritual or physical gifts that will draw the reader's sympathy. Unlike the others, Hetty is emotionally insentient and intensely aggressive, falling not because she is lulled passively into a sexuality associated with sleep, but because she wills to possess the social glamour and power Arthur embodies. (174)

More recently, Kate Flint has demonstrated that Eliot, rather than unfairly representing her female characters like Hetty, was "alive to the shifting connections of gender and power, as they manifest themselves in both familial and broader contexts . . . making her readers think about the connections between power, authority, and gender relations is an inseparable part of her literary and critical enterprise" (163). As such, Flint argues, "[m]aternal feeling . . . is not a freestanding attribute, but must always be seen in its intersections with broader social relations and pressures" (168). I argue that in *Adam Bede*, Hetty's desire to possess Author's "social glamour and power" and her rejection of maternal responsibility through the murder of her child is a reflection of Malthusian economics; Eliot shifts the focus from the financial pressures placed on the father (as imagined by Malthus) to those placed on the mother. Thus Eliot's portrayal of Hetty, rather than being unsympathetic, strikingly reveals the lack of economic options available to women, while it highlights the economic pressures – most specifically, feeding their children – under which women, like men, labor. Eliot's refusal to offer Hetty "special protection" is not a reflection of her own moral judgment, but rather a reflection of the lack of such protection offered to Hetty, and women more generally, by society. Flint argues, "George Eliot's portrayal of gender relations demonstrates what must change and be thought afresh if new plots, in both life and literature, are to be written" (179). The gender relations in *Adam Bede* reveal Hetty's disgrace to be a product of her material subjection and demonstrate that in order for a "new plot" to be written, women must gain greater economic autonomy. And, indeed, that "new plot" is written when Adam and Dinah marry.

Dinah's self-dependence is prerequisite for her marriage to Adam. Her character serves not only as a contrast to Hetty's, but also as a picture of marriage and motherhood in which a woman marries not for worldly security, but rather under the condition that she can maintain her autonomy. Dinah eventually stops preaching when the Methodist Conference bans women preachers; however, in her courtship with Adam, he promises not to interfere with her work. And, Dinah's decision to "submit" to the rules of the Conference is represented as her decision and not Adam's. He says to Seth: "I agree with her, and approve o' what she did" (539; epilogue). Adam makes it clear that the decision rested with Dinah and that he accepted her judgment.

Adam Bede presents three possible "marriage plots": the novel could end with the marriage of Hetty and Arthur, Hetty and Adam, or Dinah and Adam.[10] The struggle between these various plots within the novel uncovers the life-and-death economics of marriage and, in Hetty's case particularly, mothering. The marriage of Dinah and Adam offers the novel a strong resolution partly because of the pair's mutual attraction and love. However, the resolution is also predicated on Dinah's autonomy and Adam's economic prudence, which sets them on equal footing and balances the marital power dynamic which would have been

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uneven in the case of Hetty's marriage to either Arthur or Adam. Adam and Dinah's marital stability is reinforced in the final images of their domestic prosperity in the novel. They are living in a "pleasant house" with their two children, one a "sturdy" two year-old boy, the other a "small, fair creature . . . little more than four years old" (537; epilogue). Dinah's face "is scarcely at all altered – only a little fuller, to correspond to her more matronly figure, which still seems light and active enough in the plain black dress" (537; epilogue). The fullness of Dinah's figure is again emphasized when Adam tells her she is "only a bit plumper, as thee'dst a right to be after seven year" (539; epilogue). Marriage is treating Dinah well – she is clearly well-fed, as are her children, who are portrayed as happy and healthy. Adam and Dinah are being rewarded for their economic prudence which, I want to suggest, they continue to practice within marriage. That Adam and Dinah have been married for seven years, and have only two children, suggests a certain amount of "moral restraint" within their marriage.[11]

There is yet another story within *Adam Bede* that calls attention to the balance sheet of marriage: the story of the misogynistic Bartle Massey and his dog. Bartle's grumblings about his dog's illegitimate puppies offers a funny, but nonetheless poignant, parallel to Hetty's story. Bartle's frustration with the growing size of his "family" (which is humorously exaggerated by the birth of a litter of pups, rather than a single child!) reflects the economic concerns of the generic father in Malthus's *Essay*, but does so in such a way as to mask the socio-economic implications of his situation. After Bartle misses church one Sunday (a rare occurrence), Adam visits him to find out why. Bartle says that he had to miss church because his dog, Vixen, had puppies that morning. He then proceeds to admonish Vixen:

> 'I'm never to have a will of my own any more. And those pups, what do you think I'm to do with 'em when they're twice as big as you? – for I'm pretty sure the father was that hulking bull-terrier of Will Baker's – wasn't he now, eh, you sly hussy?' (Here Vixen tucked her tail between her legs, and ran forward into the house. Subjects are sometimes broached which a well-bred female will ignore.) (246; ch. 21)

And, earlier in the conversation he says: "If I'd known Vixen was a woman, I'd never have held the boys from drowning her; but when I'd got her into my hand, I was forced to take her. And now you see what she's brought me to – the sly, hypocritical wench" (238; ch. 21). Bartle's exaggerated sense of "paternal" responsibility is humorous in this context, but has a more serious subtext. This is highlighted when Bartle says, "I've wished again and again I'd been a bloody-minded man, that I could have strangled the mother and the brats with one cord" (238; ch. 21). Despite his complaints and "suffering," Bartle is able to refrain from killing Vixen and her puppies and, with Bartle's material assistance, Vixen is able to nurture her pups. He says to Adam, "I must give Vixen her supper too, confound her! though she'll do nothing with it but nourish those unnecessary babbies. That's the way with these women – they've got no head-pieces to nourish, and so their food all runs either to fat or to brats" (239; ch. 21). Unlike Bartle (or Vixen), Hetty does kill her baby in the face of parental responsibility. Yet, the narrator and reader's moral judgment of Hetty's crime is mediated by her economic subjection – a weakness that is underscored by Bartle's story of "paternal" financial responsibility and Dinah's story of self-dependence.

Anti-Malthusians and Neo-Malthusians argued that delayed marriage would cause an increase in infanticide, prostitution, and a general decline in public morality. The story of

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Hetty Sorrel suggests that a woman's economic subjection and dependence on paternalistic marriage is more to blame for such vice than the delay of marriage. Eliot suggests that only exceptional women, like Dinah, are able to survive outside marriage; and Dinah's self-dependence is rewarded with marriage and a well-fed family, as is consistent with the demands of domestic fiction. In contrast, the paternalistic dependence motivating an average woman's efforts at matrimony (embodied in Hetty's character) ultimately sacrifices her. Hetty cannot be reintegrated into society; she dies on the brink of that reintegration. Her death accentuates the need for woman's increased economic autonomy, both inside and outside of marriage. Adam Bede's economic narrative shifts the focus from the Malthusian concerns of husbands and fathers to the Malthusian concerns of wives and mothers.

Malthus's theories challenge women's roles as mothers and wives (by suggesting delayed marriage as a means of preventing starvation and suffering) without advocating other potential functions for them within society. In *Adam Bede*, Eliot provides an alternative by suggesting that if marriage is to be regarded as less desirable, and mothering as less fulfilling (less than they were in the days before Malthus, that is), it is necessary to provide women with more options for economic self-dependence. Featuring Malthusian economics in *Adam Bede* was a way for Eliot to draw attention to the material dimensions of marriage and mothering, and to conceptualize the courtship and marriage plot within an economic framework.

Malthus and Mothers

Scholars have recently noted the paradoxical absence of women in Malthus's *Essay*. Their absence is certainly conspicuous, given the implicit focus on reproduction, as the source of overpopulation and the consequent "vice and misery," within the text. Historian S. Chandrasekhar states, "one can read the *Essay* from cover to cover without encountering a passage that indicates Malthus ever thought women had anything to do with population" (12). Rather than considering the consequences of excess reproduction on mothers, Malthus instead dwells on the father's economic responsibilities within the family, as demonstrated earlier in this essay. In fact, when Malthus mentions unwed mothers – those mothers who might be supposed to support their children – he suggests that they are incapable of doing so: "When therefore a woman was connected with a man, who had entered into no compact to maintain her children, and, aware of the inconveniences that he might bring upon himself, had deserted her, these children must necessarily fall for support upon the society, or starve" (1798: 141–42; ch. 10). Malthus characterizes women as completely dependent on men for financial support, thus divesting them of any economic responsibility as mothers and wives. If a woman's husband or lover deserts her, Malthus argues, she will not be thrust into the position of the generic father who worries about feeding his family. Rather, she is stripped of all independent agency and her children will either starve or fall upon parish support. However, while Malthus does not identify a relationship between women and economic responsibility (or between women and reproduction) within the *Essay*, his argument provides a space for the entry of women into economic theory.[12] As marriage was the only socially sanctioned "profession" for women in the early-nineteenth century, the suggestion to delay marriage in order to "check" population would potentially create a challenging situation for many women, and ultimately, a need to redefine society's expectations regarding gender roles. F. M. L. Thompson writes,

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> The middle classes had, indeed, every reason to exercise moral restraint in delaying their own marriages until the bridegroom was sufficiently established in his career to be able to afford to keep a wife and family in the style considered suitable to his station in society. That this was the ideal to aim at was taken for granted in guidance literature and fiction alike, and was presumably largely observed in practice. . . . Given that middle-class daughters were brought up to regard marriage and motherhood as their main purpose in life – although generally kept in ignorance about the mechanics of procreation – there was nothing in their upbringing to suggest that they, or their parents, had a duty to exercise restraint by delaying marriage. (59)

This matrimonial double standard is never addressed by Malthus, but does open a space for a feminist response to his male-centered perception of family economics. Malthus encourages men to delay marriage in order to retain and develop their independent spirit; women, on the other hand, are presumed to be dependent creatures, which problematizes their position within this paradigm.

The number of single women grew quite significantly throughout the nineteenth century, leading people to speculate on the "redundant woman" and her place in Victorian society. The increase in single women, and the simultaneous increase in the pressure by feminists to broaden both married and unmarried women's scope for action, constitute the broad concerns of the woman question. Furthermore, while the theories of political economists like Smith are compatible with and arguably endorse a separation of public and private spheres – where the private sphere is a haven from the social problems that saturate the public sphere (especially for women) – Malthus's theories effectively locate the origin of many social problems within the individual British home.[13] Trying to accept both theories presents a paradox. The ideology of separate spheres breaks down when the home can no longer symbolize a refuge from the public world. Indeed, the challenge that Malthus's *Essay* makes to traditional notions of domesticity – chiefly by advocating "moral restraint" – was the source of much of the controversy surrounding population control.[14]

For Malthus, economic self-interest is tied to a denial of one's sexual instincts. He argues that "the most powerful and universal of all desires is the desire of food . . . after the desire of food, the most powerful and general of our desires, is the passion between the sexes" (1803: 210–11; bk. 4, ch. 1). The hierarchical ordering here is important because, in order to satisfy our "desire of food," Malthus contends, we must deny – or at least postpone – our sexual desire. Sexual self-interest, like that exercised by the unthinking Arthur Donnithorne, is, according to Malthus, a force that needs to be checked because, if left unchecked, it leads to disproportion between the number of people and the amount of food. In other words, laissez-faire does not apply to sexual practice. Malthus acknowledges that sexual feeling is a "natural propensity" that "exists still in undiminished vigour," yet he presents that "natural propensity" as potentially deadly if unregulated (1798: 89; ch. 4). What Malthus fails to take into account, though, is that a woman's economic self-interest was inextricably tied to sexuality. The "relations of paternalistic dependence" within marriage and mothering are both economic and sexual. In the novel, Adam's economic forethought is presented as a virtue, chiefly on Malthusian grounds. Adam does not act on his sexual feelings for Hetty because he does not have the economic resources to feed a family; however, he is able to work towards that sexual gratification through economic self-improvement. In fact, the rise in Adam's material prospects is a consequence of his desire to eventually marry Hetty. Malthus suggests that men possess this tendency towards self-improvement: "The exertions

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that men find it necessary to make, in order to support themselves or families, frequently awaken faculties that might otherwise have lain for ever dormant" (1798: 208; ch. 18). In the second edition of the *Essay*, he expands on this idea: "The formation and steady pursuit of some particular plan of life has been justly considered as one of the most permanent sources of happiness; but I am inclined to believe that there are not many of these plans formed which are not connected, in a considerable degree, with the prospect of the gratification of this [sexual] passion, and with the support of children arising from it" (1803: 211; bk. 4, ch. 1). Hetty, on the other hand, is left vulnerable by Adam's decision to delay marriage. Marriage is her only option for economic (in)dependence, a truth tragically revealed when her failed matrimonial efforts threaten to make her dependent on the parish for subsistence. This point is strikingly made when Adam voices regret about his prolonged courtship with Hetty and suggests that it led to her illegitimate pregnancy and to the murder of her baby. The economic demands placed on Hetty – the prospect of caring for her baby and needing parish support – also "awaken faculties" in her character "that might otherwise have lain for ever dormant." On the eve of her execution, Adam says to Bartle Massey: "And if he'd [Arthur] never come near her, and I'd married her, and been loving to her, and took care of her, she might never ha' done anything bad" (459; ch. 46).

Donald Winch argues that central to Malthus's concern about overpopulation and advocacy of moral restraint is his belief "that human dignity and happiness were strongly connected with the absence of relations of paternalistic dependence, and with self-exertion and the exercise of discretionary foresight in conducting personal affairs" (256). Winch does not explore the feminist possibilities in this argument, but I argue that it is precisely this facet of Malthusian thought that engages Eliot's feminist literary imagination. Malthus critiques "the relations of paternalistic dependence" between the individual and the parish; Eliot employs Malthusian language to critique "the relations of paternalistic dependence" within marriage and mothering.

Delayed marriage as well as the more jarring topics of starving children and infanticide have a clear bearing on women. Malthus's emphasis on "moral restraint" and the images of domestic misery that result from overpopulation challenged early-nineteenth-century models of domesticity. Davidoff and Hall note, "If home was the physical location of domesticity, marriage was at its emotional heart" (178–79). The subjects of courtship, marriage, and birth are key plot devices in nineteenth-century fiction, as are economic themes. Because fiction was increasingly accessible to women and members of the working class over the course of the nineteenth century, it was a site for widespread analysis, discussion, and deployment of economic theory by those who were traditionally excluded from participating in formal debate on the subject. In *The New Economic Criticism*, Mark Osteen and Martha Woodmansee assert that literary analysis should examine "how social forces and conditions both shape and are shaped by economic discourses and practices" (12). A careful examination of this subject reveals new and interesting intersections in Victorian economic and gender ideologies, and brings to light the various ways women writers like Eliot, despite their marginal status in the history of economics, contributed to the economic ideologies so pervasive in Victorian Britain. Catherine Gallagher persuasively argues that "[l]iterary forms often disrupt the tidy formulations and reveal the inherent paradoxes of their ostensible ideologies" (xiii). This comment is made in the specific context of her discussion of the "industrial reformation of English fiction," but it resonates well beyond that scope. While political economy offered an orderly and systematic explanation of the principles governing

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a capitalist society, literature attempting to illustrate those principles generally failed to be so "tidy." Thus, the reverberations of Malthusian concerns about food, sex, family, responsibility, and dependence are more complex, or "messier," *in Adam Bede* than they are in An *Essay on the Principle of Population.* By writing women into the dominant economic paradigm Eliot "reveals the inherent paradox" of leaving them out in the first place.

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NOTES

1. In 1832, Martineau published *Illustrations of Political Economy*, a popular series of twenty-five tales written to present "the science [political economy] in a familiar, practical form" (xi). For more on political economy in George Eliot's fiction see essays by Blake, Coovadia, and Kreisel.
2. In this passage, Eliot is likely referencing the Speenhamland System, established in 1795, which formalized the practice of supplementing low poor rate wages based on the price of bread.
3. The Neo-Malthusians advocated population control, via birth control within marriage, as the solution to poverty and its consequent "evils." Beginning with Richard Carlile and Francis Place in the 1830s, the Neo-Malthusians shifted the focus from the delayed marriage (or "moral restraint") advocated by Malthus to a "scientific" check, which they argued would encourage early marriages and discourage promiscuity and prostitution. In 1877, a group of Neo-Malthusians established the Malthusian League in London, a group founded on Malthus's population principle, political economy, and some aspects of early feminism; the primary focus of the Malthusian League was the publication of their journal, the *Malthusian: A Crusade Against Poverty*. It should be noted, however, that the connections between Malthusian and Neo-Malthusian thought are (and were) considered by many to be quite tenuous.
4. The enlarged (from 396 pages to 610 pages) second edition was published in 1803. The most notable change in the second edition was the introduction of "moral restraint" as one of the checks to population. In *A History of the Modern Fact*, Poovey notes that, in addition to the introduction of "moral restraint," the second and third editions (1806) incorporated much less providentialism and much more numerical data to support the theories. She argues that Malthus's use of extensive numerical data in these subsequent editions "helped make numbers . . . seem both amoral and antitheoretical" (287). See also Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834*.
5. For example, a rather entertaining article in the March 1830 *Fraser's,* entitled "Suicide of a Financier," showcases the pejorative connections often drawn between Malthusian thought and political economy and reveals the popular misconceptions of Malthus's work. The article is about a financier and student of political economy who has killed himself. The writer of the article states that "'Died of Political Economy' ought to be a verdict of the jury" and further declares that "of all cramping and degrading studies, that of political economy is the most objectionable for a young man" because "its end and object is a consideration of *money*" (245). The author's major problem with Malthus is his support of the Poor Law Amendment, which the author equates with infanticide, citing Malthus's allegory about Nature's feast as evidence: "A calculation of the expenses of the poor laws leads to the dreadful conclusion, that Nature's table is full, and that, in consequence, the new-born child of a pauper should be starved. This is the doctrine – almost the words – of Malthus. Every thing, in short, is by this school reduced to money – nothing else is worthy of consideration" (245). For more on the Romantic critique of Malthus, see Winch 288–322.
6. For example, in *Alton Locke* (1850) Crosswaithe (Alton's friend and fellow worker) replies to Alton's question about whether he believes in Malthusian doctrines by saying, "I believe them to be an infernal lie, Alton Locke; though good and wise people like Miss Martineau may sometimes be deluded into preaching them. I believe there's room on English soil for twice the number there is now; and when

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we get the Charter we'll prove it; we'll show that God meant living human heads and hands to be blessings and not curses, tools and not burdens" (118; ch. 10).

7. Before Martineau's *Illustrations*, Marcet published *Conversations on Political Economy* (1817) which also incorporated Malthusian doctrine. In her *Autobiography*, Martineau acknowledges that Marcet's text was her first formal encounter with the subject of political economy, even though she had already been illustrating its principles in her early writing – a statement that underscores Martineau's belief in the principles of political economy as natural laws. In *Conversations*, Marcet justifies the use of the colloquial form to teach political economy because she says that the questions of the young Caroline are "such as would be likely to arise in the mind of an intelligent young person, fluctuating between the impulse of her heart and the progress of her reason, and naturally imbued with all the prejudices and popular feelings of uninformed benevolence" (ix).
8. See "Weal and Woe in Garveloch" in Martineau, *Illustrations* 112–13.
9. During the 1830s and 40s there was an increase in the publication of literature, both fictional and didactic (more specifically, conduct manuals and household manuals), devoted to the "cause" of domesticity: together, these texts generated a domestic discourse that held considerable sway throughout most of the nineteenth century. The discourse of domestic fiction and didactic domestic literature was responsible, in part, for the creation of the Victorian domestic ideology that sanctifies and moralizes the domestic sphere – and the woman at its center – as a haven from an increasingly secular and threatening public world. Armstrong argues that "[l]iterature devoted to producing the domestic woman . . . appeared to ignore the political world run by men" (4). The domestic woman, as Poovey argues, is a crucial component of the separate spheres ideology: "The rhetorical separation of spheres and the image of domesticated, feminized morality were crucial to the consolidation of bourgeois power partly because linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to the self-interest and competition integral to economic success preserved virtue" (*Uneven Developments* 10). Thus, the woman at the center of nineteenth-century domestic discourse is characterized, first and foremost, by her separation from the economic world. My reading of Malthusian discourse in *Adam Bede* problematizes this understanding of domesticity. Rather than separating the domestic woman from the economic world run by men, in *Adam Bede*, the domestic woman is portrayed as an economic figure whose actions are determined by, judged according to, and an influence on socio-economic conditions.
10. I do not include Seth and Dinah here because their marriage is never presented as a viable possibility. Rather, it feeds the courtship of Dinah and Adam by demonstrating the difficulty Dinah has in consenting to marriage.
11. As I mentioned earlier in the essay, Malthus never admits this as a possibility but his followers do. For example, Place writes, "If, above all, it were once clearly understood, that it was not disreputable for married persons to avail themselves of such precautionary means as would, without being injurious to health, or destructive of female delicacy, prevent conception, a sufficient check might at once be given to the increase of population beyond the means of subsistence; vice and misery, to a prodigious extent, might be removed from society, and the object of Mr. Malthus, Mr. Godwin, and of every philanthropic person, be promoted, by the increase of comfort, of intelligence, and of moral conduct, in the mass of the population" (165).
12. There is a rare exception to this exclusion of women. Near the beginning of the *Essay*, Malthus writes a long passage in which he discusses the plight of the Native American woman. He writes, "The North American Indians, considered as a people, cannot justly be called free and equal. In all the accounts we have of them, and, indeed, of most other savage nations, the women are represented as much more completely in a state of slavery to the men than the poor are to the rich in civilized countries" (1798: 81–82; ch. 3). He continues by suggesting that the living conditions of Native American women make childbearing and childrearing extremely difficult for them, and as a result, the rates of miscarriage and infant mortality are high. Malthus, however, does not extend his analysis of the subjection of women to include British women, thus implying that the "civilized" state they live in provides them with more liberty and comfort than the "savage" state of Native American women.

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13. I contend that Smith's ideas about self-interest – the quality most instrumental to the operation of the free market – are limited by his conceptualization of what constitutes proper gender roles. While Smith does not deny women the ability to act according to self-interest, he suggests that they are capable of something more exquisite, of which men are not capable. The rhetoric of separate spheres is profoundly relevant here, and helps to explain the absence of women in *Wealth of Nations*. Because women are expected to embody Smith's notions of humanity – and be distanced from self-interest, accordingly – their role within the marketplace of *Wealth of Nations* is extremely limited, as are their appearances. Working-class women show up occasionally when Smith acknowledges that they are forced, by circumstances, to enter the marketplace. Rendall argues that although Smith acknowledges that poor women must work to help support their families, one condition of an improving society will be the ability of women to stay at home with their families, rather than work. She writes, "Clearly Smith saw it as desirable that families should reap the 'liberal reward of labor,' allowing them to bring up their children better. Women's participation in the economy was limited, then, and given a better distribution of wealth, would be limited even more by the proper care of their families" (69). It is in this way that Smith "participated in the formalization of the division between the public (market, capitalist) sphere and the private (moral, personal) sphere" (22). For more on humanity, generosity, and self-interest in Smith's philosophical framework see *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 93–94 and 274–75, and *The Wealth of Nations* 21–25. For more on Smith and separate spheres ideology see Pujol's introduction.
14. For more on the contemporary controversy over Malthus, see chapter one of Connell and Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* 278–94.

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