

## THE INVENTION OF AGORAPHOBIA

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*By David Trotter*

THE LAST THREE DECADES of the nineteenth century were phobia's *belle époque*. During this first phase of investigation there was, it must have seemed, no species of terror, however febrile, which could not talk its way immediately into syndrome status. In 1896, in his *Psychology of the Emotions*, Théodule Ribot spoke of psychiatry's inundation by a "veritable deluge" of complaints ranging from the relatively commonplace and self-explanatory, such as claustrophobia, to the downright idiosyncratic, such as triakaidekaphobia, or fear of the number 13 (213). Twenty years later, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Sigmund Freud was to respond with similar impatience to the list of phobias drawn up by the American psychologist Stanley Hall. Hall had managed to find 132 (446).

There is a consistent emphasis in Freud's thinking about phobia on the scale and density of the precautions thus erected against danger. Phobia's anticathexis, he observed, takes the shape of a proliferating defensive system. In 1900, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he compared this system to a frontier fortification (738). In 1916, in the *Introductory Lectures*, no doubt mindful of recent innovations in military science, he compared it to an entrenchment (459). However, elsewhere in the same lecture he spoke of the danger confronted in phobia as "tiny" (457). For Freud phobia was both immense, in its power to engender avoidance, and utterly trivial. It was a Hindenburg Line built to repel an army of one.

Freud was by no means alone in emphasizing the disproportion between stimulus and response in phobia. Most psychiatrists regarded the disorder as a perverse singling out, more or less at random, of an object or event to be afraid of. Charles Féré, for example, in *The Pathology of Emotions*, first published in 1892, distinguished between two kinds of "morbid emotivity," one "diffuse and permanent," the other induced only under particular conditions which always remain the same for the individual in question (360). These conditions, Féré insisted, have no meaning for anyone except the person who finds them unendurable.

A favorite diversion among commentators was to make lists of celebrities unhappily transfixed in this way by the mere force of circumstance. Thus Féré, citing B. A. Morel: "'Who has not heard,' says Morel, 'of the febrile fits which were produced in the savant Erasmus at the sight of a plate of lentils? . . . King James II trembled at the sight of a naked sword: and the sight of an ass, if the chronicle of the time can be believed, sufficed to cause the Duke of Epernon to lose consciousness'" (362–63). Other stalwarts included Hobbes (fear of darkness), Pascal (fear of precipices), and Francis Bacon, who experienced syncope during eclipses of the moon. The ass and the plate of lentils are not in themselves particularly illuminating, with

reference to the individual in question; and they remain in turn unilluminated by the intensity of the morbid feeling shone at them.

According to Adam Phillips, the phobic person “submits to something akin to possession, to an experience without the mobility of perspectives.” It is a secular, bodily possession. “A phobia, like virtually nothing else, shows the capacity of the body to be gripped by occult meaning; it is like a state of somatic conviction.” And yet a disproportion persists, a disproportion amounting to asymmetry, between the intensity of the conviction provoked and the unassumingness of the object which provokes it. Phobia, Phillips adds, is a kind of “unconscious estrangement technique. . . . To be petrified by a pigeon is a way of making it new” (16–17). But if the asymmetry between stimulus and response is stark enough, might we not say that the “technique” enforcing it has entered into consciousness? The phobic person who has in Brechtian fashion estranged a pigeon cannot not be aware that in the popular view pigeons remain thoroughly familiar. Phobia’s somatic convictions are knowingly whimsical. Its constitutive asymmetry might be thought to permit, after all, a certain “mobility” of point of view. What the phobic person has learned through phobia is that incapacity is not the same thing as non-existence, although it sometimes feels like it.

In 1871, the Berlin psychologist Carl Otto Westphal offered the first comprehensive account of the nature and possible causes of a disorder to which he gave the name “agoraphobia,” because its symptoms arose at the moment when the sufferer was about to set off across an open space, or along an empty street, and were at their most intense wherever there was no immediate boundary to the visual field. Among Westphal’s patients was a shopkeeper who could not bring himself to cross a street or square if the shops in it were closed, and could not travel by omnibus, or attend the theater without feeling acute anxiety, accompanied by rapid palpitations of the heart. By 1876, the French psychiatrist Legrand du Saulle was able to produce a synthesis of extensive enquiries into what he termed *peur des espaces*. Legrand was keen to emphasize the syndrome’s ubiquity: panic might strike anywhere, on bridges and ferries, as well as in city streets and squares. He characterized the onset of an attack as a hesitation at a boundary: the transition between street and square, the edge of a pavement, an upstairs window overlooking a limitless expanse. Here, the sufferer, unable either to advance or to retreat, begins to tremble, or shiver, or breaks out in a sweat. Legrand’s patients included a Madame B., who found that she could not cross the boulevards and squares of Paris alone, was fearful of empty restaurants, and even needed help in mounting the wide staircase to her apartment. Once inside, she was unable to look out of the window. She had filled her rooms with furniture in order to take the edge off their spaciousness.

In 1898, Dr. J. Headley Neale, a physician at the Leicester Infirmary and Fever House, and himself an agoraphobe, offered a vivid account of the disorder in an article in the *Lancet*. The onset of agoraphobia is so sudden and so fierce, Neale explained, that it seems like the end.

I stop; the heart seems seized in an iron grip. I feel as though I were going down into the earth and the earth were coming up to meet me. There is no semblance of giddiness or faintness in these attacks, it is more a feeling of collapse as though one were being shut up like a crush hat or a Chinese lantern. I have a strong inclination to cry out and I feel that I must fall, so I lay hold of, and steady myself by, the palings.

In Neale’s case, the attack passed in a couple of seconds, giving way to embarrassment. “‘Anyone looking out of his window will think I’m drunk,’ flashes through my mind, so I

drop a book or stoop to tie a shoelace and then hurry homeward, restored by the consciousness that I am not dead” (1322–23).

In July 1904, Olive Garnett spent ten days in Salisbury with Ford Madox Ford and his wife Elsie, at her request: Ford, it seemed, was suffering some kind of nervous breakdown. “I think I had never heard of neurasthenia,” Garnett was to recall in a memoir based on the journal she had kept at the time,

& for a few days all went well; but it was a hot July, & on leaving Lake House . . . to walk over the Plain to Amesbury, Ford had an attack of agoraphobia, & said if I didn’t take his arm he would fall down. I held on in all the blaze for miles, it seemed to me, but the town reached, he walked off briskly to get tobacco and a shave; and when I pointed this out to Elsie she said “nerves”. He can’t cross wide open spaces.

Garnett’s arm was not the only support Ford had needed. He got himself across Salisbury Plain by surviving from bench to bench; at each one, restored for the time being to a physical limit, an enclave, he would sit down and rest. All the while he chewed lozenges as a prophylactic against the wide open spaces (qtd. in Saunders 1: 171, 537). When he got back to London at the end of the month, a specialist recommended rest and travel, and he left for Germany, to visit Hüffer relatives, and to undergo further treatment. “There’s such a lot of breakdown in the land,” Ford was able to report contentedly. “They’ve a regular name for lack of walking power here: Platz Angst” (qtd. in Mizener 95–99).

There would seem to be as much disproportion in an inability to cross Salisbury Plain unaided, or to climb the stairs to one’s own apartment, as there is in an aversion to lentils. But *is* there? Agoraphobia has been said to constitute the most disabling of all phobias.<sup>1</sup> Once we recognize that the spaces which bring it on are not just topographically open, but *public*, a social as well as a physical expanse, we can surely agree that there is a great deal in them to disable. From the outset, agoraphobia has been regarded by some commentators as an entirely proportionate response to the escalating dangers of modern life. In 1889, in an angry critique of modern urban planning, the Viennese architect Camillo Sitte put the outbreak of an epidemic of agoraphobia down to the emptiness and vast extent of the spaces carved out by “modern thoroughfares” such as the Ringstrasse. Sitte lamented the decay or destruction of ancient town centers which held panic at bay by irregularity, curvature, and the balance of masses (45).<sup>2</sup> More recently, a connection has been made between Westphal’s account of agoraphobia and the analyses of modern alienation undertaken by Georg Simmel, Siegfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin (Vidler). Indeed, some commentators now argue that the disorder is a product of “the fearfulness experienced by most women in public settings” (McHugh 356).<sup>3</sup>

These analyses restore a certain proportion between stimulus and response. In them, agoraphobia disappears as a category. It is the environment which must be held responsible for causing panic, not individual perversity. The wonder is now not that some of us sometimes can’t step through the front door, but that any of us ever do.

My concern here is with nineteenth-century commentaries, both psychiatric and literary, on agoraphobia. As the record of what happened to J. Headley Neale and Ford Madox Ford amply demonstrates, the medical profession had no doubts about the disorder’s existence; and no doubts, either, about the disproportion within it between stimulus and response. Open spaces enjoyed the same status, in psychiatric debate, as the plate of lentils.

In his vivid discussion of terror in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James distinguished between “pathological fears,” on one hand, and “certain peculiarities in the expression of ordinary fear,” on the other. The first category includes “cadaveric, reptilian, and underground horrors,” as well as the feelings provoked by “caverns, slime and ooze, vermin, corpses, and the like” (2: 420–22). James, we might think, has been reading too much Gothic fiction. But he needed his caverns and corpses in order to define by contrast the “ordinary” fear manifest in agoraphobia. Ordinary, but “odd.” James thought that evolution had rendered agoraphobia, once a survival strategy, redundant in human beings (though not in the domestic cat). Its oddness, in his view, lay in the disproportion it sustained between stimulus and response. Caverns and corpses, on the other hand, were worth worrying about.

Like the psychiatrists upon whose work he drew, James understood that agoraphobia’s asymmetry rendered it negotiable. Knowing that the open public space holds no terrors for other people, the agoraphobic person makes out of their untroubled progress across it an enclave. He or she moves out into the void behind a vehicle, or in the center of a group. Those who cannot avail themselves of company, Neale observed, carry a stick or umbrella which at each step they plant at some distance from themselves in order thus to increase the “base line of support” (1323). Such people behave like small children, Freud was to remark rather huffily: all we have to do to relieve them of their anxiety is to accompany them across the square (*Introductory Lectures* 448).

But one might also want to say that agoraphobes know how to put the disproportion which structures their feelings of panic to good use. One of Westphal’s patients, a priest, experienced an overwhelming anxiety whenever he had to leave the protection of the vaulted ceiling of his church, but was able to walk in the open beneath an umbrella (139–51). The most interesting case of all, perhaps, widely circulated in the literature, concerns a cavalry officer who was unable to cross open spaces when dressed as a civilian, but did so with ease when in uniform, or on horseback (Ireland 188; Féreé 363). Here, it is not companionship, but performance, which saves the agoraphobe from his anxiety. Putting on a show, one accompanies oneself across the open space. The priest and the cavalry officer have learned to measure non-existence against mere incapacity. In what remains of this essay I want to ask whether the invention of agoraphobia might have made it possible for writers not just to examine these intriguing states of perverse bodily possession, but to grasp their usefulness, as a form of knowledge, to the possessed; and thus to become a little less sure than William James evidently was about the difference between the trivial and the non-trivial.

### *George Eliot and Agoraphobia*

THE NEWS ABOUT AGORAPHOBIA spread rapidly. “Dr C. Westphal has an article on Agoraphobia,” the *Journal of Mental Science* reported in 1873: “by this he means the fear of squares or open places” (“Die Agoraphobie” 453). The English philosopher G. H. Lewes, hard at work in the early 1870s on a series of books about the relationship between mind and body had in his library an issue of the *Psychiatrisches Centralblatt* which contains a brief summary of the debate about Westphal’s findings. There is unfortunately no evidence to suggest that George Eliot ever took this particular volume down from the shelves. She may not have needed to. In 1870, she travelled with Lewes to Berlin and Vienna. “Mr Lewes,” she reported,

has had a good deal of satisfaction in his visits to laboratories and to the *Charité*, where he is just now gone for the third time to see more varieties of mad people, and hear more about Psychiatrie from Dr Westphal, a quiet, unpretending little man, who seems to have been delighted with George's sympathetic interest in this (to me) hideous branch of practice. I speak with all reverence: the world can't do without hideous studies.<sup>4</sup> (*Selections* 373)

Whether the branch of practice in which Lewes took such a sympathetic interest included an enquiry into agoraphobia is impossible to say. But Eliot knew that literature, like the world, couldn't altogether do without hideous studies. Gwendolen Harleth, in *Daniel Deronda*, the novel she began to write in 1874, suffers from what could perfectly well have been described at the time as agoraphobia.

Gwendolen Harleth has long been a focus of debates about gender in nineteenth-century fiction. The consensus appears to be that Eliot chose to characterize her as an hysteric, and that this characterization can best be understood as an allegory of her "imprisonment within social forms" (Flint 177). Jane Wood, in a recent study which usefully connects *Daniel Deronda* to Lewes's enquiries into the relationship between mind and body, concludes that Gwendolen is to some extent a product of the "rhetoric of hysterical neurosis" (158).<sup>5</sup> And yet, although Gwendolen is sometimes described as behaving hysterically, the only symptom of hysteria she ever exhibits is the choking sensation brought about by the thought of what her husband might do to her, and that is always rendered figuratively. Unlike the hysteric, she suffers in mind rather than in body, and is able, to a large extent, to keep her fits under control.

There may be grounds for thinking that Eliot wanted to try out rhetorics other than that of hysteria in designing her novel. The *Daniel Deronda* notebooks include extracts from Sir James Paget's lectures on neuromimesis, a disease which the eminent physician was careful to distinguish from hysteria.<sup>6</sup> These extracts are followed immediately by a list of important events in the 1860s, some of which find their way into the novel. Neuromimesis is not Gwendolen's problem; but she does suffer from a nervous disorder to which – like neuromimesis, unlike hysteria – men were at that time thought to be as susceptible as women.

Consider the scene, a crux for arguments concerning the rhetoric of hysteria (Vrettos 570–71; Ender 253–54), in which Gwendolen, posing as Hermione in a tableau vivant, collapses when a panel in the wall opposite her springs open, revealing a macabre picture. The psychiatric textbooks maintained that in hysteria "the patient yields herself up to, and is overcome by bodily and mental impressions, such as we see in no other disease; there is, therefore, no attempt at concealing or suppressing the paroxysms."<sup>7</sup> By contrast, after the initial shock has worn off, Gwendolen still has "self-consciousness enough to aim at controlling her signs of terror" (61; bk. 1, ch. 6). This terrifying experience leads to a discussion of her "liability" not to hysteria, but to something like agoraphobia.

She was ashamed and frightened, as at what might happen again, in remembering her tremor on suddenly feeling herself alone, when, for example, she was walking without companionship and there came some rapid change in the light. Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself. (63–64; bk. 1, ch. 6)

Limitlessness, the absence of boundaries, is Gwendolen's problem. We might note the specificity of the conditions under which these "fits of spiritual dread" (63; bk. 1, ch. 6)

are likely to occur: for example, when she is walking alone, “and there came some rapid change in the light.” Such sensitivity to minute variation is characteristic of the syndrome, as Neale pointed out: “A sudden noise or a flash of bright sunlight upon a white pavement will induce an attack” (1323). Eliot does seem to want the danger confronted in Gwendolen Harleth’s fits to be, as Freud put it, “tiny.”

Like the cavalry officer who was to feature so prominently in the psychiatric literature on agoraphobia, Gwendolen overcomes this dread through performance. Riding to hounds, she feels “as secure as an immortal goddess” (72; bk. 1, ch. 7); while her skill at archery fills her with “joyous belief in herself” (102; bk. 1, ch. 10). Then there is, of course, the rather more complicated performance at the roulette-table, with which the novel opens (7–14; bk. 1, ch. 1). The understanding of agoraphobia available in scientific circles in the 1870s would have made sense of the dialectic of outward triumph and inward helplessness which is said to characterize her. What difference might it make, then, to think of her as an agoraphobe?

After Gwendolen’s marriage, explicit references to agoraphobia drop away. The fears which beset her in the wedded state are distinctly “pathological,” in James’s terms. She soon comes to think of the mastery Grandcourt exerts over her as reptilian (423–24; bk. 5, ch. 35), for example. The damage done to the “texture” of her nerves is such that she can no longer defy him. “Her husband had a ghostly army at his back, that could close round her wherever she might turn” (447–48; bk. 5, ch. 36). And close it does, at moments of crisis. “His words had the power of thumb-screws and the cold touch of the rack” (680; bk. 7, ch. 54). Like James, Eliot finds in Gothic fiction – or in Gothic fiction’s successor, the sensation novel – a way to talk about serious terror. Agoraphobia’s triviality disqualifies it from commentary on the feelings which afflict Gwendolen once she has been lifted away from the “petty empire” of her girlhood (441; bk. 5, ch. 36). However, that “undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her” does rancorously persist; and it could be said to produce knowledge, of a kind, as well as rancour.

Take chapter 54, for example, in which Grandcourt fatally rows Gwendolen out into the bay at Genoa. During this climactic event, the terminology of imprisonment, torture, and strangulation itself tightens almost unbearably. And yet the manuscript incorporates a deleted motto from Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*: “Alone, alone, all all alone/Alone on a wide wide sea/And never a saint took pity on/My soul/Coleridge.”<sup>8</sup> Gwendolen thinks of this “dual solitude in a boat” as one of the subtlest tortures her husband has yet devised for her (678; bk. 7, ch. 54). For her, the scene of their marriage is configured not as a dungeon, but as a vast empty space. After the event, she describes what has happened as though it were a renewal of agoraphobia: “I had stepped into a boat, and my life was a sailing and sailing away – gliding on and no help – always into solitude with *him*, away from deliverance” (695; bk. 7, ch. 56). There is at any rate nothing figurative about the paralysis which grips her when her husband tumbles into the water.

To confront patriarchy, in this novel, is to confront not just a tyrannical ordering and regulating principle, a deployment of rack and thumb-screw, but a vast emptiness, a lack of boundaries, or boundedness. Grandcourt has been from the beginning an empty grand court. He embodies that immeasurable existence whose aloofness has always troubled Gwendolen. The most frightening thing about him is his indifference, and his refusal ever to be explicit, or to descend into detail (595; bk. 6, ch. 48). Just about the only mistake he ever makes is to get his henchman Lush to inform Gwendolen about the content of his will; the explicitness of this humiliation revives in her, for a moment, a “defiant energy” (595–601; bk. 6, ch. 48).



In every other respect, the marriage has been from the start a dual solitude on a wide, wide sea. Chapter 54 opens with a reference to Madonna Pia, in Dante's *Purgatorio*, taken by her husband to his castle, and there disposed of (668; bk. 7, ch. 54). The bad medieval husband locks his wife up in a castle; the bad modern husband leaves *his* to stew in her own agoraphobia.

Gwendolen, of course, has always relied on Daniel Deronda to accompany her across empty space. The only "definite help" she can find, in the "vast silence" which surrounds her on Grandcourt's yacht, a silence unbroken except by her husband's breathing, is in the thought of Deronda, and of the "direction" he might give her (674; bk. 7, ch. 54). However, from quite early on in the novel, Deronda himself has been associated, in an oblique fashion, with empty space. Gwendolen's reluctance to sell the necklace he had redeemed for her is said to derive from the same "streak of superstition" as her agoraphobia (276; bk. 3, ch. 24). There has always been a contrast between their respective destinies, "hers narrowly personal, his charged with far-reaching sensibilities" (621; bk. 7, ch. 50). Eliot fully endorses the scope of those (masculine) sensibilities. But she also allows us to see, from the point of view of agoraphobia's whimsicality, the damage they do. For Deronda's announcement of his political mission, in the novel's penultimate chapter, puts Gwendolen back out to sea again.

There was a long silence between them. The world seemed getting larger round poor Gwendolen, and she more solitary and helpless in the midst. The thought that he might come back after going to the East, sank before the bewildering vision of these wide-stretching purposes in which she felt herself reduced to a mere speck. (803; bk. 8, ch. 69)

The bad husband and the good mentor have conspired to leave poor Gwendolen where they found her, in thrall to "fits of spiritual dread." All that has changed, under the pressure of bad marriage and good mentorship, is the scope of the dread the fits express: its plausibility. Patriarchy, unlike sudden changes in the light, is something she has had every reason to be afraid of.

Gwendolen Harleth's agoraphobia constitutes a point of view unique in the novel, and quite possibly in Victorian fiction. It enables her to understand the activities of her husband and the activities of her mentor as in some respects similar (in effect, if not in intention). This is a radical thought, and it is hard to imagine many other ways in which a nineteenth-century novelist could have come at it. If we remember the early episodes of *Daniel Deronda*, we remember the significant disproportion between stimulus and response established, in terms not all that far from the terms of science, as the primary characteristic of Gwendolen's fits of spiritual dread. Eliot's familiarity with the terms of science enabled her to propose both that some of patriarchy's grand schemes require endorsement, and that they all operate on the basis of a damaging and ultimately unsustainable distinction between the trivial and the non-trivial.

### *Phobia in General*

THERE WAS, almost certainly, phobia before phobia. The disorder, or something which now looks very much like it, had taken hold in Victorian literature and culture long before the

psychiatrists got to work. Think, for example, of Heathcliff's rejection, in *Wuthering Heights*, of the thought that Isabella Linton may have fallen in love with him.

"I think you belie her," said Heathcliff, twisting in his chair to face them. "She wishes to be out of my society now, at any rate!"

And he stared hard at the object of discourse, as one might do at a strange repulsive animal, a centipede from the Indies, for instance, which curiosity leads one to examine in spite of the aversion it raises. (93)

This incident has been read as a reversal of the "colonizing gaze" (Von Sneidern 180–81). The wild man does not simply look back at civilization, but rather adopts its perspective, its methods of enquiry. However, the conversion of the hard stare into a scientific act takes place at some figural distance from Heathcliff himself: "as one might do . . . leads one to examine . . ." Heathcliff has for a moment been taken over by Catherine's antithesis, the pallid Isabella. He has entered that state of somatic conviction which would come to be known as phobia, and which the narrative voice discerns in the figure of the scientist probing a centipede. What releases him from it is the phobic person's awareness of the limits of phobia: of the disproportion between stimulus and response. One can if need be act as though *not* possessed. Performance is the antidote to somatic conviction. Heathcliff brings Isabella's economic status to mind. "'She's her brother's heir, is she not?' he asked, after a brief silence" (94). Heathcliff will overcome an aversion which might otherwise have enslaved him by playing the roles of suitor, and then husband, and then landlord.

Eliot's interest in phobia, and in the performances which might release one from it, predated her encounter with Westphal. In chapter 5 of *Felix Holt the Radical* (1866), the hero pays a visit to Mr. Lyon, the dissenting minister. Mr. Lyon is defined for us in this scene by the anxiety with which he insists to Felix that the use of candles made of wax rather than tallow is not an "undue luxury," but rather the result of the loathing his daughter feels for the smell of tallow (139–40; ch. 5). Felix, the embodiment of Arnoldian disinterestedness, has cultivated a staunch indifference to the social aspiration encoded in undue luxury. This indifference is dramatically at issue in his troubled courtship of Esther Lyon. When Esther suggests that there is a good way and a bad way to be refined, Felix condemns refinement out of hand. To Felix, one sort of "fine ladyism" seems as good, or as bad, as another (153; ch. 5). In this and other respects, Eliot endorses Felix's idealism, just as she will endorse Daniel Deronda's. However, the indiscriminate vehemence of Felix's "strong denunciatory and pedagogic intention" (150; ch. 5) toward Esther, his rudeness about everything she says and does, does prompt a certain scepticism. Is he right, for example, to make no distinction between her various shortcomings? From his point of view, which is the point of view of the Arnoldian best self, a loathing for tallow is as disreputable in its implications as a liking for subtle bonnets. The novel, which is never not precise about Esther's aversions, gives us reason to disagree with him.<sup>9</sup>

The term the psychiatrists were soon to find for Esther Lyon's aversions was "mysophobia": fear of contamination. Charles Féré complained that mysophobia "applies itself sometimes to objects or substances which are really absurd. Trélat cites the case of a female who had a morbid horror of tallow, and all the articles which could contain any of it" (373). In this case, Eliot's interest in such absurdities clearly precedes their classification as a disorder. But Esther Lyon might none the less be counted among those who learn through an encounter



with phobia that incapacity is not the same thing as non-existence, although it may sometimes feel like it. Esther's defining limitation has a double aspect. Considered as vanity and snobbishness, it is symptomatic of a woman's "imprisonment within social forms," and can be eradicated by self-knowledge; considered as phobia, it is an incapacity rather than a symptom, and cannot be eradicated. Eliot, I think, wanted to explore not just limitation, but the difference between one kind of limitation and another. Esther's loathing for tallow does not serve the same heuristic function as Gwendolen's agoraphobia. It does not survive to trouble the making of easy distinctions between the trivial and the non-trivial. But it belongs to the same general enquiry.

Eliot's close involvement in philosophical and scientific debate subsequently enabled her to pursue that enquiry with a vigor and sophistication other writers could not match. As far as I am aware, the next writer to take agoraphobia seriously was Ford Madox Ford, who had himself suffered from it.

In *Some Do Not . . .*, the first volume of Ford's war tetralogy, *Parade's End* (1924–28), phobia is one of the various ways in which the two main protagonists think about, and move edgily towards, each other. The novel's opening movement is set in the period immediately before the war. Christopher Tietjens and his friend Vincent Macmaster, both civil servants, travel down into Kent for a weekend's golfing, and to visit the Reverend Duchemin, a collector of Pre-Raphaelite paintings (Macmaster has just completed a monograph on Dante Gabriel Rossetti). Tietjens is characterised by encyclopaedic knowledge, and a near-Arnoldian disinterestedness; Macmaster by sentimentality, and arriviste canniness. Tietjens's wife, Sylvia, who has been living abroad with another man, has just taken the first step towards a reconciliation, on her own somewhat sadistic terms. During their first round of golf, another member of the party, a Cabinet Minister, is assaulted by two young suffragettes, whom Tietjens helps to escape. He is generally assumed to be having an affair with one of them, Valentine Wannop. Tietjens encounters Valentine again at a breakfast-party given by Mrs. Duchemin, during which Macmaster handles her mad husband with superb tact, thus earning her gratitude, and also her love.

After breakfast, Tietjens and Valentine Wannop go for a walk down a country path. Tietjens has already figured the development of his feelings for Valentine as a struggle between intellect and passion (87). During the walk, his mind races. Narrative gridlock sets in, as one line of thought is taken parenthetically to task by another, or set up for ridicule, but not altogether displaced (105). Anxieties about sexual etiquette cut across anxieties about the Condition of England. Knowing all the angles, captivated by his own powers of extrapolation, Tietjens seems immune to insignificance; and therefore helpless.

The path down which they have wandered ends at a stile, with a road beyond. Tietjens abruptly reveals that he doesn't like walking on roads (108). Exposure unsettles him. When told that the next stile lies fifty yards away, he panics, and breaks into a run, pursued indulgently by Valentine. The panic clearly precedes the rational anxiety soon incorporated into it, that someone will see them together, and suspect the worst (108). As they scuttle down the road, they are overtaken by a horse and cart containing Mrs. Wannop and an aged retainer. Tietjens's panic subsides in a display of practical knowledge concerning horses and carts so profound that the aged retainer immediately acknowledges him as "Quality" (109–12). Like the cavalry officer who could only cross open spaces when in uniform or on horseback, Tietjens has found a performance which will enable him to out-manoeuvre his anxiety, a mobility of perspectives.

Mrs. Wannop, her horse, cart, and handy-man thus set resolutely in order, drives off.

He was aware that, all this while, from the road-side, the girl had been watching him with shining eyes, intently, even with fascination.

“I suppose you think that a mighty fine performance,” she said.

“I didn’t make a very good job of the girth,” he said. “Let’s get off this road.”

“Setting poor, weak women in their places,” Miss Wannop continued. “Soothing the horse like a man with a charm. I suppose you soothe women like that too. I pity your wife . . . The English country male! And making a devoted vassal at sight of the handy-man. The feudal system all complete . . .”

Tietjens said:

“Well, you know, it’ll make him all the better servant to you if he thinks you’ve friends in the know. The lower classes are like that. Let’s get off this road.”

She said:

“You’re in a mighty hurry to get behind the hedge. Are the police after us or aren’t they? Perhaps you were lying at breakfast: to calm the hysterical nerves of a weak woman.”

“I wasn’t lying,” he said, “but I hate roads when there are field-paths . . .”

“That’s a phobia, like any woman’s,” she exclaimed. (112–13)

This is the first time that Tietjens’s substance, or Quality, has been characterized as performative through and through: an enactment of gender and class difference. Valentine’s subsequent identification of his hatred of roads as phobic seems merely to supplement, or decorate with scorn, this new understanding. But it may be its prerequisite. Only from the point of view of phobia’s irredeemable triviality does the grotesqueness of the manoeuvre required to master it become fully apparent. Valentine knows him, then, and begins to fall in love with him, through the medium of his panic and of the compensatory assertiveness it generates.

Once across the road, on the other side of the panic and the performance it brought about, Tietjens and Valentine engage in a discussion of the suffrage campaign, whose militancy he endorses. They have in some sense come through. What brings them through, and brings them together, is an acknowledgement on both their parts of the implications of Tietjens’s agoraphobia. Tietjens simply cannot uphold those distinctions between the trivial and the non-trivial which had been the making of Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda. Like Esther, like Gwendolen – “like any woman,” Valentine Wannop might have said – he learns to live with an incapacity, to perform his way out of it. Succumbing to a phobia “like any woman’s” certainly does nothing to diminish his support for the suffrage campaign. He subsequently helps Valentine’s companion, who is wanted for outrages over and above the assault on the Cabinet Minister, to elude the police.

The road negotiated may well have been a bar across Ford’s psyche, as well as Tietjens’s. For the debate between Tietjens and Valentine recapitulates an important emphasis in his most unfettered political writing: the essays first conceived in January 1911, written over the next year or so, and eventually published as “Women and Men” in the *Little Review* in 1918, and as a book in 1923, in which he had thought his way to an endorsement of suffragette militancy through a trenchant critique of liberalism. Ford, who suffered from agoraphobia, like George Eliot, who as far as we know did not, put his knowledge of the disorder to good use.

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## NOTES

1. For example, by Goldstein, and Sable.
2. For a “postmodern” version of Sitte’s argument, which eschews both his antiquarianism and his commitment to “artistic principles,” see Carter, *Repressed Spaces*.
3. The geographer Joyce Davidson, examining the stories told by agoraphobic women about what it feels like to fear space, also insists on the significance of gender in “. . . the World Was Getting Smaller” and “Fear and Trembling in the Mall.”
4. Letter of 3 April 1870 to Mrs Richard Congreve. Lewes made three visits to the Charité, where Westphal had been on the staff since 1857, on 21 and 28 March, and 3 April.
5. See also, for example, Ender, Rose, Stone, Vrettos.
6. *Notebooks* 352. See Paget 180–81. The copy of *Clinical Lectures* in Lewes’s library bears the inscription “G. H. Lewes Esq/with the author’s kind regards.” The textbooks available to Eliot and Lewes defined hysteria as a female (or feminine) malady: for example, Rombert 2: 81, 84; or Robert Brudenell Carter, 34 (this, too, in Lewes’s library).
7. E.g., Rombert 2: 84. There was a copy of this book in Lewes’s library; the margins of the chapter on hysteria have been marked and annotated in pencil, probably by Lewes himself.
8. Cited in the Penguin edition of *Daniel Deronda* (842).
9. I discuss Esther’s aversions in relation to criticism of *Felix Holt, the Radical*, and of Victorian fiction in general, in “The New Historicism and the Psychopathology of Everyday Modern Life.”

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