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ELIOT'S ONION: PERFECTING TASTE IN GEORGE ELIOT'S PHILOSOPHICAL POETRY

By Isabella Brooks-Ward

> I think, when I give a white bait dinner I will invite no one but my second self, and we will agree not to talk audibly.[1]

In his 'Comments on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola', Gerard Manley Hopkins considers his selfbeing,

> my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor [...]. Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own.[2]

In order to represent the otherwise unspeakable concept of his selfhood, Hopkins enlists the senses of the body of which his self-taste both is and is not a part. His palate is accustomed to distinguishing between ale and alum, but it is also attuned to finer distinctions in taste, such as those between '*I* and *me*'. The savour of selfbeing lies in this quality of distinction, which feeds back to the self a unifying conception of its 'distinctiveness'. Though his feeling for himself is like 'nothing else in nature', the system of insufficient yet poetically resonant correlatives that Hopkins draws upon revels in the plenitude of language, whilst conveying a sense of awe for a selfbeing that there are nevertheless not words enough to describe. Importantly, Hopkins derives a perfectionist narrative from the salt of his self. As he writes, 'to be determined and distinctive is a perfection, either self-bestowed or bestowed from without' (Hopkins, 148). This article considers how George Eliot uses the alimentary figure to similar ends in her often-neglected poetical works. In 'A Minor Prophet' (1865) and 'A College Breakfast Party' (1874), Eliot deploys the discourse of the dietetic in order to read a moral through the formative faculties of appetite and taste. In doing so, she reflects upon the nineteenth-century preoccupation with perfectionist narratives and makes a case for the gloriously imperfect predilections of the individual self.

Before she began to write fiction, Eliot had already discovered a philosophy for the corporeal basis for knowledge and how this might conform to a system of ethics. Her early translations of philosophers such as David Friedrich Strauss, Baruch Spinoza, and Ludwig Feuerbach, enabled her to separate her ethical ideals from the theological orthodoxy of her youth. In all

three, the efficiency of religious faith depends less on the supreme workings of a higher power than on the empowered individual and embodied self. The best teachings that faith accords us are, to put it simply, dependent on a very literal interpretation of human nature. We feel for what is right. Due to this philosophical training, Eliot believed that the best way to establish moral conviction was through a supreme attentiveness to human emotion. The feeling body, therefore, became both an analogical and literal testing ground for the validity of ethical ideas. As she wrote to Frederick Harrison, in what must be one of the clearest articulations of her literary practice: '[I] have gone through again and again the severe effort of trying to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they had revealed themselves to me first in the flesh and not in the spirit'.[3] She looks, therefore, to the embodied self to discover (what she terms elsewhere in the letter) her 'aesthetic teaching'. Two of the most obdurate conditions of being an embodied self are these: the need to feel both morally and physically satiated. Eliot combines them in the development of what I term a moral dietetic.

A passage from 'A College Breakfast Party', a poem that consistently draws upon metaphors of appetite to appraise alternative doctrines of the moral life, serves to elucidate this further. At the conclusion of the breakfast, the poem's speakers engage in debates surrounding those '[s]mall words' which hold 'mighty meanings: Matter, Force, | Self, Not-Self, Being, Seeming'.[4] According to one speaker – who is perhaps having trouble digesting an abundance of breakfast and ideology at such an early hour – this is all 'tasteless squabbling called philosophy' (161). According to others, however, philosophy is very much a matter of taste. When the youngest of their party, Hamlet (no relation to Shakespeare's Dane), demands a fixed rule by which to live, in order to counter the antiphonal voice of (self-)doubt, the figure of the Priest replies:

> I think I hear a bias in your words,
> [...] that strong natural bent
> Which we call hunger. What more positive
> Than appetite? – of spirit or of flesh,
> I care not – 'sense of need' were truer phrase.
> You hunger for authoritative right. (150–55)

The Priest understands Hamlet's desire for a strong ethical identity through the dietary metaphor. He likens this to the physiological drive of hunger. The longing for sustainment on a metaphysical level feels very much akin to that gnawing urgency of an empty stomach. Appetite enacts a coherence of body and of mind, imaging this 'sense of need' in both physical and philosophical terms. Through this, Hamlet's moral hunger becomes viscerally present. Eliot

also includes the reader in this questing need by evoking a feeling which, by virtue of being human, we can all understand.

This article will now move to briefly summarize the appetitive ethics Eliot inherited from her translations of Spinoza and Feuerbach, before focusing on her poem 'A Minor Prophet'. Eliot makes clear in her letters that each poem 'represents an idea which I care for strongly and wish to propagate as far as I can' (*GEL*, 6, 26). Of the surprisingly few commenters on this poem, Herbert F. Tucker and Charles LaPorte come to similar conclusions as to what the 'idea' behind 'A Minor Prophet' is. For the former, this is a poem in which 'we see Eliot experimenting poetically with how to represent in verse prophecy's fallible, vulnerable openness to futurity', whilst LaPorte states that her 'goal in the domestic prophesies of "A Minor Prophet" is to venerate prophecy even as she de-mystifies it and qualifies it by admitting positive human knowledge only of ourselves and of our past'.[5] These arguments are undoubtedly valid; however, they do not sufficiently cater for Eliot's dialectic form when treating of man's potential for perfection, or her use of the alimentary in figuring the movement towards or away from it. In order to understand this, we must look to the philosophers who influenced her views on both.

In his book the *Ethics,* which Eliot finished translating in 1856, Spinoza offered a 'definition of every tendency of human nature' which he believed could be 'signified by the name of appetite'.[6] Much like the priest in 'A College Breakfast Party', Spinoza consistently used the alimentary to signal key moral precepts. In pursuit of greater perfection, for instance, the philosopher recommends the individual to actively participate in moments of pleasure which he images through the act of consumption:

> It is, I say, the part of a wise man to refresh and recreate himself with moderate and agreeable food and drink, as also with the perfume and beauty of plants, with dress, music, athletic sports, theatre [...]. For the human body is composed of many parts, differing in nature, which continually require new and various aliment, in order that the whole body may be equally capable of everything which can follow from its nature, and consequently that the mind may also be equally capable of understanding many things at once. Hence this course of life best agrees both with our principles and with common practices. (260)

Spinoza is transparent in his connection of bodily and aesthetic enjoyment: the beauty of plants or dress, of music and theatre are all types of 'aliment[s]' or foodstuffs. What nurtures the body, in other words, also nurtures the perfectible self. As Julie R. Klein has summarized, this passage suggests that '[t]he more the body is capable of undergoing, the more the mind can know'.[7] The dietetic, then, is not a lowly function of the animal self that is beneath

the philosopher's notice. Instead, it is raised to a position of significant moral import, to be ranked alongside the conventionally higher aesthetic pursuits of consciousness. When considering how the nourishment of the body is connected to that of the mind, Eliot's phrase 'refresh and recreate is noteworthy. Whilst Edwin Curley's translation reads 'restore', Eliot's also emphasizes enjoyment.[8] A third meaning, appropriately, carries with it the idea of self-creation. As such, it conveys the sense that we are empowered to re-constitute ourselves through our dietary and moral choices. Encoded within our eating habits, then, is a moral language that registers through and beyond the physical.

In the *Ethics*, appetite is something that is worth studying at its most basic level because it features on the scale of human complexity as an initial indication of why man acts and feels. One's diet sustains life and is simultaneously propagated by that life, being consequentially endowed with a meaning that surpasses its materiality.

Whilst the idiomatic phrase 'food for thought' entered the nineteenth-century vocabulary via Robert Southey's *A Tale of Paraguay* (1825), it was Feuerbach who coined the phrase '[m]an is what he eats', now an (albeit unfortunate) mainstay of the language of the self-help industry.[9] In expanding upon this, Feuerbach offered the most explicit connection between moral action and the alimentary, given that he connected the acts of ingestion with the religion of humanity to which he and his translator conformed. It is therefore interesting to note that when Eliot writes her famous letter to her friend Sara Hennell, in which she states that 'with the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree', she expresses her mode of translation according to an alimentary metaphor. Specifically addressing a portion of the appendix, which she has submitted for Hennell's approval, she asserts 'I have written it very rapidly and have translated it quite literally so you have the *raw* Feuerbach – not any of my cooking'.[10] Such a figure offers another way of encountering Feuerbachian philosophy in her novels, which has gone through a certain amount of processing – perhaps to make it more digestible.

As can be seen from the *Ethics*, Spinoza used the ordinary acts of eating and drinking as proof of the self's essential striving 'to persevere in its existence' (169). For Spinoza, the strength of this philosophical argument lay in its confirmation through the most basic human actions: 'Hence this course of life best agrees both with our *principles* and with *common practices*' (260). Principles and practice, here, are allied within the human body. Feuerbach concurred. In a sentence that reacts against what he deems to be abstract systems (he wrongly includes Spinoza in the proponents of these), Feuerbach pronounces that '[p]ersonality, individuality, [and] consciousness' would be 'unsubstantial abstraction' without Nature. 'But Nature [...] is nothing

without corporeality. The body alone is that negativing, limiting, concentrating, circumscribing force, without which no personality is conceivable'.[11] There is no consciousness without the body, and nature without consciousness is an empty concept, hence why the two are co-determinant. What sustains the body also sustains the ethical agency of the individual, which is why he concludes the entire work with a remarkable argument for seeing the spiritual in the alimentary. Having explained how '[w]ater plays a part not only in dietetics, but also in moral and mental discipline', he goes on to write about how the nourishing effects of food and drink incline man to worship the two interdependent godheads of Feuerbach's new religion: the man who produces such things as bread and wine, and the natural world to which bread and wine is 'flesh' and 'blood' (272). If some should find this new embodied system of ethics laughable, particularly in his application of a language of dietetics to morality, he asks them to reflect that:

> Hunger and thirst destroy not only the physical but also the mental and moral powers of man; they rob him of his humanity – of understanding, of consciousness. Oh! if thou shouldst ever experience such want, how wouldst thou bless and praise the natural qualities of bread and wine, which restore to thee thy humanity, thy intellect! It needs only that the ordinary course of things be interrupted in order to vindicate to common things an uncommon significance, *to life, as such, a religious import*. Therefore, let bread be sacred for us, let wine be sacred, and also let water be sacred! Amen. (274)

Feuerbach's kinship to Spinoza's philosophy is particularly pronounced here, with the two feeding into Eliot's development of a corporeal morality. The wants of the physical system, Feuerbach insists, have a moral capacity in that they teach something that goes beyond mere material gratification.

Feuerbach ends his *Essence of Christianity* with a 'Concluding Application'. True to form, the term 'Application' stipulates for a practical ethics to be enacted by the secular reader, whilst also bearing reference to the term's theological use as 'the action of bringing the benefits of redemption to bear on the heart of the believer' (*OED*). Feuerbach uses the language of consumption to encourage a praxis of self-development by grounding it in the mysterious fact of the body:

> But what then is force and strength which is merely such, if not corporeal force and strength? Dost thou know any power which stands at thy command, in distinction from the power of kindness and reason, besides muscular power? […] Is not the mystery of Nature the mystery of corporeality? Is not the system of a 'living realism' the system of the organized body? Is there, in general, any force, the opposite of intelligence, than the force of flesh and blood? (89–90)

It is impossible to conceive of oneself as a subject without reference to the body, and the power of the body comes from a metabolization of food which translates into the moral apparatus of the individual. As he writes elsewhere, '[f]ood becomes blood; blood becomes heart and brain, food for thoughts and feelings'.[12] Consequently, Feuerbach's 'living realism' has implications for this article. He is using the term here in order to separate his material ethics from those abstract systems that privilege the metaphysical mind over being in the physical world. It is tempting, however, to apply it to the kind of psychological, fleshly realism that Eliot develops throughout her novels.

Eliot's most explicit conflation of the appetitive with moral constitution lies, however, not in her novels but in her poetry. Given that Eliot's verse was meant to articulate 'what she regarded as the absolutely vital relationship between poetic form and philosophical reflection', this is not surprising.[13] In 1865, Eliot wrote to Sara Hennell about the importance of interpreting philosophical works such as those by Spinoza for oneself, rather than 'read[ing] what others say about him' (*GEL*, 4, 207). She is referring specifically here to David Masson's *Recent British Philosophy* (1865) and plays on the double meaning of the word 'digest' (meaning both a summarization or anthology of larger literature and the digestive processes of the body) when concluding: 'The difficulty is to digest and live upon any valuable truth oneself'. Like a true Feuerbachian, she here invokes his idea of food for thought. It is no coincidence, I would argue, that in the same year this letter was written she was exploring, in her poem 'A Minor Prophet', the fact that a system of personal ethics is very often something that we dine out on. Diet is a question of taste, the aesthetics and philosophy of which Eliot considers in both this poem and 'A College Breakfast-Party'. 'A Minor Prophet', on which this article will focus, begins with a jesting portrait of the speaker's eccentric friend, and ends with a serious contemplation of the cost of progress according to a perfectionist ideology. Such a confusingly mixed tone is difficult to navigate, which is an appropriate reflection of the struggle to understand the ideas of the poem's initial subject. The speaker introduces his 'friend, a vegetarian seer, | By name of Elias Baptist Butterworth | A harmless, bland, disinterested man' (1–3). On each line, Elias is described in terms that allude to this defining diet. His forenames are calculated to link him with prophetic characters from the Old and New Testament, whilst the stolid, English-sounding name of 'Butterworth' immediately re-grounds him in the ordinary contemporary. The surname goes further in announcing one of Eliot's themes in the poem: a foodstuff becomes inseparable from a wider concern about one's moral condition. On the third line, Eliot's speaker curbs our expectations of this 'seer', which may have been heightened by his full name, by pronouncing him to be 'bland' – that is, without taste.

Elias, however, is far from bland where his prophesies are concerned. He looks forward to a time 'when all Earth is vegetarian' in which the highly mystical and deliberately dubious sounding 'Thought atmosphere' will not be needlessly absorbed by 'quadrupeds' and 'insects parasitical' (5–6). Unhindered by these needless bodies, who absorb such precious airs much as a plant might carbon, Elias insists that

> Those higher truths, seized now by higher minds
> But not expressed (the insects hindering)
> Will either flash out into eloquence,
> Or better still, be comprehensible [...]. (57–60)

The fact that Eliot renders Elias's moral system in alimentary terms is particularly telling. His ethics depend not on the human mind but on the body. Elias – a name that contains both Eliot and alias – posits an uneasy human exceptionalism, for if all animals unsuited to the vegetarian diet will die out, this fate might be shared by some humans who are similarly predisposed to favour one of flesh. Perhaps bearing this in mind, Elias claims that 'dogs will all be moral, | With longer alimentary canals | Suited to diet vegetarian' (109–11). The idea is humorous, but underlying it is a theme that we see time and again in Eliot's fiction: the body serves the individual as an index of moral principle. The dog's body, analogous to our own, conditions the moral state. We see this line of thinking as Elias, or perhaps the speaker, imagines the dying off of those creatures who do not adapt:

> All these rude products will have disappeared
> Along with every faulty human type.
> By dint of diet vegetarian
> All will be harmony of hue and line,
> Bodies and minds all perfect, limbs well-turned,
> And talk quite free from aught erroneous. (128–33)

Taking the idea of 'you are what you eat' to a new level, Eliot represents these superfluous animals (human or otherwise) as being both products of their diet, as well as disposable items because of it. Meanwhile, the categorization of the faulty human as a 'type' draws attention to the ready circumscription of biological life within the circumference of didactic prose. This is only enhanced by the casual alliteration of 'By dint of diet'. The solution to human imperfection trips too easily off the tongue, but is also something that requires spitting out. It is not possible, as Eliot's speaker goes on to state, to dismiss an imperfect race through doctrine alone, though he readily admits (this time in a voice clearly distinct from Elias's) 'that every change

upon this earth | Is bought with sacrifice' (145–46). Eliot's speaker does not contest the fact that the human race is interminably progressing – according to the Spencerian or Darwinian model – and that this must mean that it is continuously perfecting itself. Instead, the speaker allies himself with Elias in accepting that such an evolution must necessarily be effected through both bodily and mental development. Human progress, for Eliot, is physiological: improvement expresses itself on the site of the body, with 'limbs well-turned'. The last portion of the poem, however, hints at the poem's real theme – which Eliot covers in prose ranging from her early 'Notes on Form in Art' (1868) to her final work *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879) – that language, and indeed life without error, would not be free but incalculably limited. As in Spinoza, form cannot be perceived without the limiting presence of difference. Perfection cannot be envisioned without imperfection. Eliot images these weighty ideas through something less commonly intellectualized but vital to all individuals: the feeding body.

'[...] Your belief - | In essence what is it but simply Taste?' (326–27) So questions Osiric, one of the most outspoken members of the philosophizing group that make up 'A College Breakfast Party'. Eliot's choice of the vegetarian diet in order to pass judgement on a speculative philosophy of self-improvement is important. Striving is performed not only through the very ordinary processes of bodily consumption, but by displacing the usual reliance on metaphysical systems in favour of a material one. Self-discipline is thus not simply a tasteless feature of improvement rhetoric, but something that can be materially felt by the individual and controlled by the mouthful. For Eliot and her partner George Henry Lewes, vegetarianism also represented a diet that was linked to poetic taste. It is thus a diet that explicitly connects a Spinozan or Feuerbachian discourse of self-improvement, and concurrent societal progress, to a literary tradition. Lewes's *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859–60) – in a short section in which vegetarianism is ultimately dismissed – contains a brief autobiographical statement in which he describes how '[m] any years ago, I was myself a convert to this doctrine, seduced by the example and enthusiasm of Shelley'.[14] Timothy Morton's monograph on *Shelley and the Revolution of Taste* (1995) demonstrates how Eliot's imaging of individual and societal improvement through the consuming body was already present in the works of the Romantic poet. From Shelley's pamphlet *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813) to his wider poetical works, Morton details how his 'imagining of the consuming self interpellates a discourse of diet' within his texts in order to highlight the position of the human body as an 'interface between society and natural environment'.[15] Elias could easily be seen as caricature of Shelley, who famously claimed that '[i]t is impossible, had Buonaparte descended from a race of vegetable feeders, that he could have

had either the inclination or the power to ascend the throne of the Bourbons'.[16] This idea is pursued in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), in which the 'monster's' developing sense of morality is reflected in a vegetarian choice of diet: 'I do not destroy the lamb and the kid, to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment'.[17] Eliot, in this poem, therefore joins a long tradition of linking the vegetarian diet to a system of ethics that is too far-reaching to do anything but gesture towards it in this article. Suffice to say that the body has long provided a radical site on which the position of humanity towards nature and progress can be reconstituted and improved.

Eliot's 'A Minor Prophet', supported by these literary antecedents, registers a qualified assent to the ideology expressed by such revolutionary texts. And yet, as if in reaction to this radical tradition of the prophetic poet (remembering the poem's title), Eliot's speaker makes an abrupt descent from the sublime heights of the Romantic:

> My yearnings fail
> To reach that high apocalyptic mount
> Which shows in bird's-eye view a perfect world,
> Or enter warmly into other joys
> Than those of a faulty, struggling human kind. (146–50)

Perhaps it is a tongue-in-cheek gesture towards such engaging imperfection that 'yearning' means not just an intense desire after something but also rennet (the stomach of a calf), and the braying of a dog when it has found its prey (*OED*). Language, in this imperfect world, cannot yet separate itself from meat. It is, however, still not incompatible with feeling. Those faulty joys that the speaker so readily engages with are human in kind, but also speak to humankind in a collectivized sense. The terms through which we imagine the social body are predicated on this imperfection. For Eliot's speaker, akin in this to Silas Marner whose shrunken emotional life briefly overflows at the breakage of his familiar, friendly earthenware pot, it is '[t]he twists and cracks in our poor earthenware | That touch me to more conscious fellowship' (161–62).

Henry James, in his review of the collection of poems in which 'A Minor Prophet' appeared, suggests that Eliot's conclusion is that '[h]uman improvement [...] is something both larger and smaller than the vegetarian bliss, and consists less in a realized perfection than in the sublime dissatisfaction of generous souls with the shortcomings of the actual'.[18] James is correct in stating that this poem is explicitly about the discourse of human improvement, and that the question of vegetarianism is only one lens that Eliot applies to the question. Where his criticism becomes a little lazy, however, is in his theory

of the poem's depiction of 'the shortcomings of the actual'. This is because it is the acceptance of the actual that makes the imperfect life worth living: a happy dwelling within the unprophesied present that carries with it a pungent smell of onions. The representative of this contented and ordinary individual is Colin Clout (whom some critics erroneously take to be the identity of the unnamed speaker). Through Colin, Eliot pursues her conflation of diet with theories of perfectionism:

> So poor Colin Clout,
> To whom raw onion gives prospective zest,
> Consoling hours of dampest wintry work,
> Could hardly fancy any regal joys
> Quite unimpregnate with the onion's scent
> Perhaps his highest hopes are not all clear
> Of waftings from that energetic bulb:
> 'Tis well that onion is not heresy.
> Speaking in parable, I am Colin Clout.
> A clinging flavour penetrates my life –
> My onion is imperfectness [...]. (164–74)

The earthenware jug and Colin *Clout* originate from the same source, grounded in the soil from which springs Eliot's nostalgia-tinged picture of the present day. Colin's consolatory meal is likewise grown in the earth and is thus 'not heresy' to the vegetarian cause. Eliot does not make such clumsy distinctions between the ideal of future progress and the imperfect present by radically altering the dietary conditions to which the representatives of both subscribe. Instead, from within a vegetable context, she juxtaposes cerebral system (Elias's) with affective and physiological stimulation (Colin's), in order to represent the ontological merits of both. With the description of Colin's savouring of his raw onion, Eliot develops what Denise Gigante, in her chapter on taste in Wordsworth's poetry, usefully terms a 'symbolic economy of consumption'.[19] The unworldly dietary conditions of Elias's recommendation, so mystical in their operations as to be distinctly unpalatable, find an abrupt obstacle in Colin's onion which, for all its simplicity, is a 'clinging flavour' familiar to all. Colin's diet thus figures the social body within which both speaker and reader are united by mutual, visceral taste. Eliot's 'parable', like Feuerbach's alternative prayer, is one that helps to render the commonplace life not only palatable but numinous. Colin Clout resolutely pitches himself against the abstract self-help narratives of the nineteenth century. As if to emphasize this, Eliot brings in another 'plodding citizen' who, having cheered the 'world-hero' akin to those lauded by Thomas Carlyle and many of his peers, yet thinks with greater

[...] pleasure that there is just one bun
Left in his pocket, that may serve to tempt|
The wide-eyed lad, whose weight is all too much
For that young mother's arms [...]'. (164–74)

With this, he lapses into a reverie about his own happy childhood, 'with bread and cheese so nice all through the year' (254). Great man narratives are all very well, Eliot tells us, but it is to the comforts of our own satiate bodies that we look for self-support and moral teaching.

Elias's vision of the ideal vegetarian world is ridiculous, but the same cannot be said for the representation of the perfectionist discourse as a whole. As the speaker confesses:

But I am Colin still: my prejudice
Is for the flavour of my daily food.
Not that I doubt the world is growing still
[...]
I too rest in faith
That man's perfection is the crowning flower,
Toward which the urgent sap in life's great tree
Is pressing [...]. (217–20)

In Eliot's poem, the idea of diet represents a fundamentally human choice. Our taste speaks to the formation of our individual selves and conforms to the Lockean notion of identity as sensational rather than wholly cognitive – grounding the feeling of our being within the natural world. Elias's vegetarianism, Colin's onion, and the tempting bun, exemplify the luxury of this choice, open solely to the human race, which is a form of self-cultivation. Yes, the poem says, progress – and thus human improvement – is inevitable. Checking these strides into self-neutering uniformity, however, is the feeding body whose survival is predicated on the fulfilment of taste. Diet gives form to a feeling for the self as well as providing a language through which to articulate individuality; after all, who can forget Casaubon's 'small hungry shivering self'? All four personalities in 'A Minor Prophet', unlike the malnourished scholar, have a creed that is given form through food. Sometimes something to live by really is something we live upon, whereby personal taste details to the self a personal belief system. I return to quote the Priest in 'A College Breakfast-Party': 'What [is] more positive than appetite?' (152–53). Though the Priest is promoting an instinctive obedience to the will and teachings of a higher power, his words still speak to the tone of this earlier poem: 'Take inclination, taste – why, that is you, | No rule above you' (169–70). Identity is an onion.

NOTES

1 George Eliot, *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 90.

2 Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 145–46.

3 Eliot to Frederick Harrison, 15 August 1866, The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight (London: Yale University Press, 1954–76), vol. 4, p. 300.

4 George Eliot, *Collected Poems, ed. Lucien Jenkins* (London: Skoob Books, 1989), p. 161; further references to the lines of the poems in this edition are given in the text.

5 Herbert F. Tucker, 'Quantity and Quality: The Strange Case of George Eliot, Minor Poet', *George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies*, 60/61 (September 2011): 17–30 (25); Charles LaPorte, 'George Eliot, the Poetess as Prophet', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31:1 (March 2003): 159–79 (174).

6 George Eliot, *Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Clare Carlisle (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 209.

7 Julie R. Klein, 'Nature's Metabolism: On Eating in Derrida, Agamben, and Spinoza', *Research in Phenomenology,* 33 (2003), pp. 186–217 (195).

8 Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 140.

9 Ludwig Feuerbach, '*Das Geheimnis des Opfers oder Der Mensch ist, was er iß*', qtd. in Melvin Cherno 'Feuerbach's "Man is what He Eats": A Rectification', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24:3 (July–September 1963): 397–406 (397).

10 Eliot to Sara Hennell, 29 April 1854, GEL, vol. 2, p. 153.

11 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. Marian Evans (London: John Chapman, 1854), p. 90.

12 Feuerbach, quoted. in Cherno, 'Feuerbach's "Man is what He Eats"', (401).

13 Kimberly J. Stern, 'The Poetics of Criticism: Philosophical Discourse and George Eliot's "A College Breakfast Party"', *George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies*, 60/61 (September 2011): 91–106 (93).

14 George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, 2 vols., 1 (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859), p. 173.

15 Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution of Taste: The Body and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 81–2.

16 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Vindication of a Natural Diet* in *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E. B. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vol. 1, p. 83.

17 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter (London: Norton, 2012), p. 103.

18 Henry James, 'The Legend of Jubal, and Other Poems by George Eliot', *The North American Review*, 119: 245 (October 1874): 484–89 (487).

19 Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 77.