

# The Path of Least Resistance: Mapping the 1832 Reform Act and *Felix Holt*

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ABSTRACT: The 1832 Reform Act has been hailed as the best mapped piece of legislation of the century, and this from a country characterised by map historians as 'leading the map-making world with the most prolific output and the most innovatory technology ever known in cartographic history'<sup>1</sup>. This paper examines a cartographic corpus – of retrospective, interpretative maps – in relation to the riots and resistance associated with the passing of the Great Reform Act. By arguing that Eliot's *Felix Holt: The Radical* (1866) contributes to such a corpus, thanks to its concern with ideas of discretisation and summation, its aerial insistence and its belatedness, the paper attempts to cartographically contextualise traditional critique of *Felix Holt's* much-debated conservatism and engages with the problems of using an archive to animate resistance.

KEYWORDS: Maps, George Eliot, 1832 Great Reform Act, *Felix Holt*, Representation, Realism



"Sit down, sit down," said Harold, as they entered the handsome, spacious library. But he himself continued to stand before a map of the county which he had opened from a series of rollers occupying a compartment among the bookshelves. "The first question, Mr. Jermyn, now you know my intentions, is, whether you will undertake to be my agent in this election, and help me through?"<sup>2</sup>

In Chapter II of *Felix Holt: The Radical*, Harold Transome looks down at the faded county map and plans his political future. The map, covetously concealed in a compartment of his plush library, is not a logistical tool, not a means by which he intends to learn anything new; after all, he has just heard an up-to-date report on county politics from

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<sup>1</sup> David Smith, *Victorian Maps of the British Isles* (London: Batsford Ltd, 1985), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> George Eliot, *Felix Holt: The Radical* (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), p. 38.

his lawyer, Jermyn.<sup>3</sup> Rather, he seeks out the map to fantasise, because after a successful campaign, it will be his name that is lithographed onto county maps like these, as part of a tradition to stamp electoral divisions, polling stations, borough towns returning two members and, most importantly for Harold, parliamentary seats onto the surface of even the humblest regional map. Rummaging through his rollers in 1832, Harold is not to know that the Great Reform Act will become the best mapped piece of domestic legislation of the century, but George Eliot, writing three decades into Harold's future, does. This article shows how Eliot exploited a cartographic context to evoke the historical moment and to inform her characterisations. However, we also start to see how Eliot, looking back herself onto a gently faded picture of English life, encounters some of the representational difficulties well-known to the cartographer, especially in scenes which attempt to map political resistance.

*Felix Holt: The Radical* sees George Eliot returning to her earlier fictional domain – the Midlands – and to the past. Written in 1866, as debates upon the Second Reform Act were taking place in Parliament, *Felix Holt* describes the weeks following the passing of the 1832 Act. The town of Treby Magna has just been bestowed the 'new honour' of becoming a polling place, when Harold Transome, heir of Transome Court, returns from the Middle East. He loses no time in declaring himself the new Radical candidate, much to the consternation of his Tory mother. But his reasons, the narrative makes clear, are all wrong: vanity and opportunism. Meanwhile, the newly apprenticed doctor, Felix Holt, eschews the promise of a medical career in Glasgow and returns to Treby, his hometown, to become a watchmaker, thus enacting the kind of rooted existence so admired by Eliot and Cobbett alike. During Radical electioneering in the nearby mining town of Sproxtton, Felix witnesses the 'treating' of workers with beer in exchange for support and becomes involved in the workers' cause and education – a stance that finds him accused of murder following election day riots.

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<sup>3</sup> Before Harold reveals his "Radicalism" and leads Jermyn to the library, the lawyer stammers the following: 'This division of the county, you are aware, contains one manufacturing town of the first magnitude, and several smaller ones. The manufacturing interest is widely dispersed. So far—a—there is a presumption—a—in favor of the two Liberal candidates. Still, with a careful canvass of the agricultural districts, such as those we have round us at Treby Magna, I think—a—the auguries—a—would not be unfavorable to the return of a Conservative', Eliot, *Felix Holt: The Radical*, p. 38.

In his British Library Introduction to *Middlemarch*, John Mullan describes how the Great Reform Act 'redrew the map of parliamentary constituencies to make them more representative of the nation's population, doing away with so-called 'rotten' and 'pocket boroughs''<sup>4</sup>. But when Eliot's narrator muses about 'departed evils', the 'pocket boroughs' of the past and 'a Birmingham unrepresented in Parliament' it is with a knowing wink, for her contemporary readers are well aware, thanks to 1860s campaigns, of remaining pocket boroughs and of an ever-growing Birmingham still only represented by a very small number of enfranchised voters.<sup>5</sup> Because the Act which had been intended as an end-answer to early-century resistance, found itself, thirty-five years later, under pressure again, but this time from a much larger electorate, with devastating riots in Glasgow and Manchester, culminating in the 1866 Hyde Park riots.<sup>6</sup> It is in this environment that Eliot writes *Felix Holt*, and it is this combination of temporal belatedness with present relevance that has inspired most recent scholarship.<sup>7</sup>

### *Felix Holt's* Critical History

While older criticism of the novel has often dwelt on Felix's call for 'slow' reform and addressed the 'failure of [its] realism', recent work tends to tackle the special periodicity embraced by a novel set just after 1832 but written just before 1867<sup>8</sup>. This article does not save Eliot from the former but does hope to contribute to the latter. By referring to the maps produced alongside the 1832 Reform Act, this piece will explore the spatialization of the politics of resistance in *Felix Holt* and attempt a contextual, cartographic re-reading of Eliot's mediation of the historical moment. Classical criticism

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<sup>4</sup> John Mullan, 'Middlemarch: reform and change', 15 May 2014, <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/middlemarch-reform-and-change>> [accessed 08/01/2020].

<sup>5</sup> For more on 1860s Radical politics, see Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 173; for a contemporary cartographic response to Mancunian 'processions', see map of loyal and patriotic processions, Manchester, plotted on R. Creighton's map of parliamentary boundaries, 1832.

<sup>6</sup> For a guide on nineteenth-century reform, see Rohan McWilliams, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> For a literary review on the controversy vis-à-vis the 1867 Act see Helen Kingstone, *Victorian Narratives of the Recent Past: Memory, History, Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Gallagher, 'The Failure of Realism: Felix Holt', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Special Issue: George Eliot, 1880-1980 (Dec. 1980), 372-384.

of the novel still stands, though; it is for good reason that Terry Eagleton condemns the 'double displacement' created by Mrs Transome and Felix's fundamental similarity, not least because Eliot herself declared 'Every difference is form' in 'Notes on Form in Art'<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, as many have pointed out, Felix wields almost as little political power as the dowager and inspires much less sympathy: 'the unabsorbed region of bleakness, nostalgia, and frustration with which nothing can be done politically [Mrs Transome's scenes] ...protests by its sheer artistry'.<sup>10</sup> According to Eagleton, then, Felix is the 'false centre' of the novel, while Mrs Transome is its 'real but displaced' one – a democratisation of focal interest which is relevant to map-presentation and which will be discussed later. Eagleton is not the first to be struck by Mrs Transome's passages, with John Blackwood's appraisal of the two volumes noting the dowager above any other character, lauding the 'old lady's feelings' as 'so painfully true'.<sup>11</sup> In the same letter, Blackwood goes on to write – in a postscript ('I had nearly forgotten') – 'I suspect I am a radical of the Felix Holt breed, and so was my father before me'.<sup>12</sup> So, due to the essential cautiousness of the speech in Chapter XXX ('no fresh scheme of voting will much mend our condition'), Blackwood neither recognises Felix as the narrative centre (resigned as he is to the postscript), nor the political engine of the novel. What he does recognise, however, is generational continuity ('so was my father before me'), foreshadowing typical analysis of Felix as 'not opposed to change as long as it is accompanied by continuity'.<sup>13</sup>

The novel's 'pure, disinterested politics' (Catherine Gallagher's words again) are, Nancy Henry argues, the result of Eliot's dependence 'on representation of the facts' for her political views.<sup>14</sup> And it is this notion of representation that motivates this paper, being constitutive of two important contemporary technologies: realism and cartography. Ruth Livesey has identified 'the narrative's internalization of radicalism and the novel's dramatization of the active processes of memory', achieved by 'writing a

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<sup>9</sup> Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 117; George Eliot, 'Notes on Art in Form', 1868, *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. by A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Eagleton, *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> John Blackwood to George Eliot, April 1866, *The George Eliot Letters*, Volume IV, ed. by Gordon Haight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 244.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Gallagher, 'The Politics of Culture and the Debate over Representation', p. 139.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129; Henry, *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, pp. 155-174.

recreative account of radicalism', and Michael Martel describes how 'Eliot prompts a desire for local political institutions and trains her readers in the cognitive skills needed to participate within them' – both scholars emphasising the importance of *processing* representation in order to reach a personalised, but somehow 'correct', political understanding.<sup>15</sup> Here is the bifold nature of both realist-fictional representation and cartographic representation: both technologies assume objectivity, despite their hyper-representational form, at the same time as offering a guide to individuals in order to help them orient the world. Given the novel's emphasis on 'the necessary humbug of representation' and the concurrence of George Eliot's realism with the emergence of Great Reform Act maps, it seems worth considering the novel's representational difficulties (or 'failures') in the light of contemporary cartography.<sup>16</sup> By so doing, we might add to scholarship on realism – such as Josephine McDonagh's assertion that 'mobility acts as the concealed trauma at the heart of individual identity in modern society, a trauma which realism attempts to heal' – to consider how maps – inert facilitators of mobility – deal with 'trauma' and resistance.<sup>17</sup>

It is not just the 1866 novel's subject-matter and temporality that makes it the right case-study for this kind of investigation, but also the aeriality of its narration. Its voice surveys Transome's freehold, Sir Maximus Barry's grounds, the geography of Treby Magna, the discretization (portioning into discrete parts) of Treby's surroundings, the peripheral, 'outlying' Sproxtton, the female characters pacing around their rooms, and, most famously, the path of the mob. From this distance, Eliot has, according to her critics, tried artificially and unconvincingly to yoke different human experiences together for the sake of a larger artistic vision – the result of which, according to the likes of Eagleton, is flat characterisation. But it is this flatness and attempt at wholesale representation, engendered by the aerial vantage point and the historical distance from which she wrote, that conjures the era with far more eloquence than Felix's own speech. Ruth Livesey has written very persuasively on the stage coach's ability to 'reflect on the

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<sup>15</sup> R. Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*, p.199; Michael Martel, 'Reforming "Petty Politics!": George Eliot and the Politicization of the Local State' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 47, Issue 3 (Autumn 2019), 575-602.

<sup>16</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup> Josephine McDonagh, 'Space, Mobility, and the Novel: "The spirit of a place is a great reality"' in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 65.

problematic of national feeling through local belonging', and, as Rachel Hewitt, on the Ordnance Survey, and Martin Spychal, on the Boundary Commission, are beginning to show, this is a problematic not only reflected but embodied by the map.<sup>18</sup> Thanks to the Boundary Commission and the Ordnance Survey, a paradox was emerging, whereby members of the public were more aware than ever of living within a boundary, and an officialised region, but also of their connection to surrounding areas, expanding fractally to include the entire nation<sup>19</sup>. By acknowledging the way cartographic issues infuse questions of local belonging and parliamentary representation and resistance in *Felix Holt*, we can start to see how the novel's so-called ambiguous stance is connotative of wider representational practices of the age.

### The Cartographic Context

The First Reform Act of 1832 has been hailed as the most, and best, mapped piece of legislation of the century.<sup>20</sup> As Stephen Daniels's recent work explores, some maps born from 1832 were even given Display status.<sup>21</sup> For example, John Britton's 'Topographical Survey of the Borough of St Marylebone as Incorporated and Defined by Act of Parliament 1832' delineates a constituency that was only brought into being thanks to the Act, and commemorates 1832 in technicolour, replete with vignettes; it is a map that boasts 'a projection of manifold, overlapping movements of reform in the metropolis'.<sup>22</sup> These are special maps, though, and this paper is concerned with more general cartographic responses to the Act, responses which saw each proposed change from Parliament, as well as the final reforms, officially illustrated by Robert Kearsley Dawson on both county maps and town plans, alongside countless unofficial versions

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<sup>18</sup> Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*, p. 181.

<sup>19</sup> Rachel Hewitt, *The Map of a Nation: A Biography of the Ordnance Survey* (London: Granta Books, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Martin Spychal, 'Constructing England's Electoral Map: Parliamentary Boundaries and the 1832 Reform Act', 2017, University of London, PhD thesis; Smith, *Victorian Maps of the British Isles*, p. 39; for reasons why Victorian Britain's output would 'ultimately gain even greater fame than the Carte de Cassini' see Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 798.

<sup>21</sup> Daniels, Stephen, 'Mapping the metropolis in an age of reform: John Britton's London topography, 1820-1840' in *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 56 (2017), 61-82.

<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2016.12.010>> [accessed 21/11/2019].

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

by plagiarists such as Samuel Lewis. Franchise reforms throughout the century produced a vast range of interpretive cartographic material from private cartographers, with James Wyld's 'Map of England & Wales SHEWING THE STATE OF THE REPRESENTATION BEFORE THE REFORM BILL OF 1832. As amended by the Reform Bill of 1832 AND THE GOVERNMENT REFORM BILL as Proposed by LORD JOHN RUSSELL' (1860) being one of the best known.<sup>23</sup> Such maps narrated the impact of the reforms and were rarely entirely politically neutral. After all, Wyld was not only one of the century's most industrious private cartographers, but also Geographer to the Queen, as well as being Liberal MP for Bodmin from 1847 to 1852 and again from 1857 to 1868. He was instrumental in establishing the Association of Surveyors, promoted industrial schools in Manchester, Leeds and Bristol, and penned the County Financial Boards Bill, used in conjunction with the 1869 Select Committee report drafted by the more radical Forster.<sup>24</sup> Wyld and his peers, therefore, occupy an ambiguously liberal position in their cartographic representations of parliamentary reform.

Along with his theolodite, the cartographer also had retrospect as a tool. Elections throughout the century were followed by a spate of maps showing voting patterns, election districts and seat distribution, as we can see in the British Library's wonderful '[William] LANDER'S ELECTORAL DISTRICT MAP, OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF BRISTOL': 'THIS MAP, (COMPRISING A CIRCUIT OF NINE MILES FROM THE GUILDHALL,) INCLUDES THE QUALIFYING RESIDENCES OF THE CONSITUENCIES OF THE CITY OF BRISTOL, BOTH PARLIAMENTARY AND MUNICIPAL, Accurately Copied from the ORDNANCE SURVEY WITH Additions & CORRECTIONS TO THE YEAR 1840'.<sup>25</sup> Colour, too, becomes important. One of the most popular examples of retrospective electoral analysis was *Stanford's Handy Atlas and Poll Book of the Electoral Divisions* which represented the political parties by colours altered in accordance with the election results for each issue. Other smaller cartographic houses also published coloured maps showing parliamentary data: for example, Samuel Lewis's 1835

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<sup>23</sup> James Wyld, 'A Map of England & Wales SHEWING THE STATE OF THE REPRESENTATION BEFORE THE REFORM BILL OF 1832. As amended by the Reform Bill of 1832 AND THE GOVERNMENT REFORM BILL as Proposed by LORD JOHN RUSSELL', 1860.

<sup>24</sup> Jill A. Sullivan, *Popular Exhibitions, Science and Showmanship, 1840–1910*, ed. by Joe Kember, John Plunkett and Jill A. Sullivan (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 22–23.

<sup>25</sup> William Lander, 'Lander's Electoral District Map of England', 1840, British Library (Maps 5060(2)).

'Devonshire. Engraved by J. & C. Walker. Drawn by R. Creighton'. In this map of Devonshire, county boundaries are highlighted in pink, electoral divisions in dark green, hundreds in yellow, blue and light green, with 'Places of Election' as blue squares, 'Polling Places' as black crosses and 'Borough Towns to return 2 Members' as red dots circled by black.<sup>26</sup> Seats – the names of MPs – were printed onto the surface of even the most everyday maps, sometimes in elaborate cursive, sometimes in the same font as town names.

These plans, therefore, serve as a visual reminder of the country's parliamentary structure, and could potentially act as visual prompts for popular resistance; after all, the maps represent imbalances, where they exist, as clear as day. However, whatever the cartographer's political leaning, they also entrench the idea that the very geography of the country belongs to certain men, because if post-Reform maps showed new MPs whose election was only made possible by the events of 1832, they also served to reiterate the type of men standing for election by printing their names onto the topography of their lithographed world, strengthening the sense of a landed political class. Britton's Display Map, for example, has 'PRINCIPAL LANDED ESTATES' in a larger font than the other descriptors in the map's title. It is my assertion that *Felix Holt* constitutes this large body of retrospective, interpretive, and ambiguously liberal cartographic material, because in trying to repossess a portion of England for her 'radical' Felix, Eliot also pays credence to the pains of the landed Transomes. By so doing, like the cartographers who invested in colour-coding and clear lettering to impress landed seats onto regions, however far from 'the mysterious distant system of things called "Gover'nment"', while also purporting to 'project' 'movements of reform', Eliot shows how the structure of rural politics is part of the blueprint of the country's cultural history<sup>27</sup>. It is partly this representational paradigm, inevitable in the cartographic context, that has seen Felix compared to a Marxian 'Bourgeois' and has so often encouraged critical focus on the novel's lack of real, resistant politics.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> 'Devonshire. Engraved by J. & C. Walker. Drawn by R. Creighton.' Published by Samuel Lewis, 1835.

<sup>27</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> John Rignall, *George Eliot and Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), p. 96.



### Characterisation: Private Estate Maps versus the Ordnance Survey

We will now trace our path into Transome Estate. Let us imagine the family name lithographed between little rectangles of property, Transome Court being the largest, the letters transposed above a series of symbols which denote the old oak grove. Peter Coveney, in his English Library introduction to the novel, spends a long time discussing the trees at Transome Court, and Josephine McDonagh and Ruth Livesey have both done important work in this area, too. But it is also worth drawing attention to the fact that trees – or rather their cartographic representation – can tell you something about the politics of a cartographer. In Chapter I, Mrs Transome endows the trees with social significance by declaring, in response to her son's surprising choice of candidacy, 'I did not think I was taking care of our old oaks for that. I always thought Radicals' houses stood staring above poor sticks of young trees and iron hurdles'<sup>29</sup>. Visualising the trees from 'above', Mrs Transome has an idea of her land being mapped using certain techniques over others.

Rachel Hewitt describes how 'The Ordnance Survey ironed out the idiosyncrasies of trees' with orchards 'arranged in neat ranks'. She uses the anecdote of the Dundas family watching as surveyors 'laid measuring chains along the length of the youngsters' favourite avenue of trees, translating the familiar Midlothian landscape into numbers, angles and lines on a map'; it is hard to imagine Mrs Transome watching with such impartiality<sup>30</sup>. Robert Kearsley Dawson based nearly all his Great Reform Act maps on Ordnance Survey data, so his symbols are, more or less, in keeping with the Ordnance's standardised (or certainly standardising, until 1853) keys and legends. In Dawson's maps, verdant areas are not even afforded a wash of green. However, some private cartographers, especially those funded by estates, favoured an earlier painterly approach. Take, for example, Frederic Young's beautiful map of the parish of Hawkhurst. This 1818 map remains an inventory of property despite the lush detail – land parcels are numbered and coloured using naturalistic modes of representation in order to make land-use graphically clear – but the meticulous detail, the shadows and the vivid multi-tonality of the trees in different seasonal modes, helps to create a map whose artistic sophistication bolsters the estate's importance as owned by Christ Church College, Oxford. It is this history of England with which Mrs Transome associates. Not

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<sup>29</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Hewitt, *The Map of a Nation*, p. 5.

for Mrs Transome, then, the crude black outlines, the 'neat ranks', of the Ordnance Survey trees; instead, she envisages the painterly mode expressed by conservative Young's map, where her 'old oaks' are densely packed, not sparse young 'sticks'. In Young's map, the trees are so substantial, so seemingly real, that they cast shadows, their tonality lending the map a deep textural quality. Both Young and Mrs Transome, then, are at pains to show woodlands with history, for if Mrs Transome's old oaks represent deep-time and rooted conservatism, the Radicals, by implication, do not have a history on the ground.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth considering how Young's impossible multi-seasonality is reminiscent of the opening of *Felix Holt*, where the reader is shown 'silvered the meadows', 'golden corn-ricks', 'bushy hazels', 'bushy willows', 'pale pink dog-roses', 'catkined hazels', 'blackberry branches' and, 'if it were winter', 'the scarlet haws, the deep-crimson hips, with lingering brown leaves'<sup>32</sup>. This passage is convincingly read by Livesey as an expression of 'wish fulfilment'; it is, Livesey points out, 'an extraordinary exercise in the subjunctive' (the narrator 'supposes' and repeats 'perhaps' three times).<sup>33</sup> Not, of course, that Eliot is simply suggesting the past was a haven – the irony of her 'reminiscences' of pocket boroughs and an unrepresented Birmingham has already been mentioned; instead, exactly as Livesey argues, Eliot is exposing a past that was always-already unstable. However, while Livesey identifies the workings of 'hopeful memory' in this passage – the possibility of using creative memory as a means for revived national hope, as proposed in *Theophrastus Such* – there is no such hope for Mrs Transome in her wish to maintain a certain vision of England and to resist the new one.<sup>34</sup> Because even though estate mapping continued, and despite the fact that the 'Ordnance Survey maps never had the monopoly on geographical information', we start to see estate mappers, like C. & J. Greenwood, discarding the older painterly mode and replacing it with Ordnance techniques in a fairly comprehensive way (although Greenwood does use a green wash).<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Mrs Transome's anxiety is imbued

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<sup>31</sup> For more on topography as a way of visualising nationhood see Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> Livesey, *Writing the Stage Coach Nation*, p. 181-2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>35</sup> Hewitt, *The Map of a Nation*, p. 311.

with the pathos of knowing her own resistance is pointless; the 1860s reader can already date the dowager's wishful self-representation as fatally passé.

Stick trees therefore aren't just stick trees, but proof of foregone conclusions; after all, as Harold Transome recognises, the 'Tory oaks are rotting'.<sup>36</sup> The sticks are emblems of the brave new world represented by documents accompanying the Great Reform Act: a world of mass politics, a world with a burgeoning electorate and a rearranged world, in which the old county, parish and estate maps had been challenged by a project to organise Britain into a simpler format, which sliced the country into neat rectangles reflecting sheet sizes, according to a standardised approach. Map fashions, especially those born from state-funded enterprises, are efficient at overwriting the past; as we have seen with Dawson and Greenwood, once trees become sticks, they tend to stay that way, because cartographers no longer need to ingratiate themselves upon estate owners. Thanks to new financial solvency, cartographers had no reason to add 'that kind of information which will give pleasure to peregrinations' so important to eighteenth-century map-making.<sup>37</sup>

Standardisation, and the elision of pleasurable peregrinations, evokes a 'barren' world for Mrs Transome, but also for the narrator in the Introduction, who laments the modern pace of life which 'may be shot, like a bullet through a tube', the bullet, unlike the train it symbolises, only ever travelling in one direction.<sup>38</sup> This journey, says the narrator, 'can never lend much to picture and narrative; it is as barren as an exclamatory O!'. Although maps are not explicitly mentioned in this representation of a world lacking in picture and narrative, it is worth remembering that rail lines through hills ('bullet through a tube') relied on Ordnance Survey technology, given it was survey data that was used in supplying evidence to the Select Committee on the Railway Bills in 1845. 'Stick trees' and the exclamation 'O!' refer to ideas of delineation and meaning-making, with abstracted symbols consolidating their meaning in a key and exclamations existing as ciphers of tone and implicature. Thus, Eliot shows the different forms of meaning-making functioning in her historical moment and exploits the social implications of contrasting mapping techniques in order to characterise and contextualise Mrs Transome's anxiety.

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<sup>36</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Advertisement (1790) cited in David Smith, *Victorian Maps of the British Isles*, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 3.

It is by coinciding the 'sheer artistry' of her scenes with the pointlessness of her resistance (against standardised representation) that Eliot uses Mrs Transome to trace a clear middle path politically. John Kucich has written about the 'organic appeals' in *Felix Holt*, whereby characters 'consent' to the relocation of 'paternalism to impersonal state structures'.<sup>39</sup> The novel, Kucich argues, offers a 'robustly corporatist vision' which was taken up by the New Liberals.<sup>40</sup> However, Mrs Transome, who is not mentioned in Kucich's article, is not afforded the luxury of consent. Her son, on the other hand, despite being characterised by maps early in the novel when he comes back from the East and boasts 'All the country round here lies like a map in my brain' – proving his essential disconnection (Edward Stanford described early nineteenth-century maps as 'merely a record of the state of things some years back') and thus the 'essential emptiness of his radicalism' – is given the opportunity, after learning the truth about his father, to choose to be 'the character of a gentleman' through repeated future acts of good conduct.<sup>41</sup> Fixed in representational methods of the past, Mrs Transome cannot partake of the 'organic appeal'. The quasi-Grecian tragedy of her scenes – the 'sheer artistry' – is therefore politically neutral. This is not the 'limit' of Eliot's realism, as Knoepfmacher has it, but the strategy; while progressivism can be inferred from the development of other characters, Eliot's 'nostalgia' or 'conservatism' is allowed free-reign when dealing with representations of life that cannot now be retrieved.<sup>42</sup> It is by this means that Eliot steers away from an allegiance to 'mid-century political parties and their predictable hesitations over centralization' and finds relative neutrality *through* representation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John Kucich, 'The "Organic Appeal" in Felix Holt: Social Problem Fiction, Paternalism, and the Welfare State' *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Summer 2017), 609-635, p. 609.

<sup>40</sup> Kucich, 'The "Organic Appeal" in Felix Holt', p. 609.

<sup>41</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p.22; Edward Stanford, 'A re'sume' of the publications of the Ordnance and Geological Surveys of England and Wales: with indexes to the 1-inch maps of the British Isles: and a supplement on methods of map mounting' (1891), (David Archer, 1994); David Kurnick, 'Felix Holt: Love in the Time of Politics', *A Companion to George Eliot*, eds. Amanda Anderson, Harry E. Shaw (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), p. 146; Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 457.

<sup>42</sup> U. C. Knoepfmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (California: University of California Press, 1968).

<sup>43</sup> Kucich, 'The "Organic Appeal"', p. 609.

### Mapping a Politics of Resistance

Thus far, this article has considered the novel with reference to material maps. Now, we move to the novel's climax, the riot scene, with reference to the verb and the metaphor – to map – to see how Eliot's own narrative approach shares some of the representational methods of cartography. The scene is arguably the most cartographic of the novel, insofar as the narrative voice maps the course of the diluvial mob through different localities in great detail. In this episode of populist but irrational resistance, a new sense of self emerges: individuals become a mob and Felix becomes a murderer. Strikingly, the new sense of self is formulated in terms of an individual's sense of mapped space. To understand how the riot scene plays with the discretisation of the novel's landscape, we return to the opening of Chapter XI:

'Felix was going to Sproxtton that Sunday afternoon. He always enjoyed his walk to that outlying hamlet; it took him (by a short cut) through a corner of Sir Maximus Debarry's park; then across a piece of common, broken here and there into red ridges below dark masses of furze; and for the rest of the way alongside of the canal, where the Sunday peacefulness that seemed to rest on the bordering meadows and pastures was hardly broken if a horse pulled into sight... This canal was only a branch of the grand trunk, and ended among the coal-pits, where Felix, crossing a network of black tram-roads, soon came to his destination'<sup>44</sup>.

The landscape, here, is cartographically plotted: the park is conceived as a shape with corners; the language of 'ridges' and 'dark masses' borrows from the visual language of hachure-shaded maps; the meadows and pastures exist through their borders; and Eliot traces the infrastructural lines of canals and black tram-roads. The latter's suggestion of the landscape's reach ('only a branch of the grand-trunk') dramatises Eliot's decision to portion off a section of land from the larger region of Loamshire for her narrative purposes. This is typical of Eliot's technique, as we have seen in *Adam Bede* when Adam observes 'in one view nearly all the other typical features' while the narrator famously acknowledges 'he might have seen other beauties in the landscape if he had turned'.<sup>45</sup> By acknowledging the artificial delineation of space which every

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<sup>44</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 127.

<sup>45</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), p. 23.

map-maker must perform, she reinforces the idea of the underlying reality of the world she describes<sup>46</sup>.

Grammatically, the opening to Chapter XI is reminiscent of a passage from *Janet's Repentance* (1858), where the reader is moved between geographical compartments as Eliot's narrator moves conjunctively between clauses:

'Janet's way thither lay for a little while along the high-road, and then led her into a deep-rutted lane, which wound through a flat tract of meadow and pasture, while in front lay smoky Paddiford, and away to the left...'<sup>47</sup>

These conjunctions replace the stasis of a map but also rely on a mentally-fixed one; Felix and Janet's movement across their landscapes communicates and solidifies the reality of a pre-existing map. However, although these clausal arrangements strengthen the sense of 'realist' indexicality, they also condemn Felix and Janet to the two-dimensional. With this 'field of vision' established at the beginning of Chapter XI, it will become difficult to appreciate the dilemmas of lived-politics at work within the minds of rioters, without the author telling the reader in a narrative interjection. This is the realist paradigm – the attempt to show depth (questions of morality, for Eliot) through an insistence on surface – which McDonagh explores in her chapter in *Adventures in Realism*. In this volume, McDonagh concludes that realism 'secretes' space and that the mobility made possible by modernity – the 'secret subject' of realist novels – 'heals trauma'.<sup>48</sup> But by 'secreting space' behind a map, we can also start to see how realism 'heals' emotional and political turbulence (or trauma) by flattening and eliding it, and it does so by adopting the simultaneity involved in map-reading.

The confusion engendered by the mob breaks down the compartments established on Felix's walk. We no longer lazily trace the line of the canal but speed

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<sup>46</sup> 'The cartographer makes a series of simultaneous judgements involving his personal concept of the statistical surface, his concept of the most desirable degree of generalisation and his selection of a mathematical process for classing the data. These three judgements control and shape a generalised statistical surface, which is then symbolised to represent the abstract data. If the cartographer makes these judgements through rational processes he can transmit his concept of the distribution to the reader and the map reader is obligated to realise that this is a selected generalisation', George F. Jenks, 'Generalization in Statistical Mapping', in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Taylor & Francis Ltd), Vol. 53, No. 1, (Mar., 1963), p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> George Eliot, *Janet's Repentance*, Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. 82, 1857, p. 537.

<sup>48</sup> McDonagh, 'Space, Mobility, and the Novel' in *Adventures in Realism*, pp. 50-68.

along 'fitfully' in the wake of the 'flood'<sup>49</sup>. The flood obscures the map – an idea that Eliot developed in *The Mill on the Floss*: 'the immeasurable watery level' of 'the overflowed fields'; Maggie's cry 'O God, where am I? Which is the way home?' at recognising 'there was no colour, no shape'; and her longing to 'catch some faint suggestion of the spot [of home]' upon the 'dismal watery level'.<sup>50</sup> Once the mob is mobilised in *Felix Holt*, the whole region is suddenly compressed; a 'galloping messenger' flies to Duffield and the Rector of Treby Magna has already written 'an indignant message and sent it to the Ram'.<sup>51</sup> Even 'the bordering meadows and pastures' are infused with speed, as the mob spots a 'speedy opening between hedgerows'.<sup>52</sup> And once the final call 'to Treby Manor!' goes up, we are almost immediately in Treby Park. Thanks to the pace, the narrative shifts from a compartmentalisation of space to its summation – the same movement that sees one subject (Felix) become a summarised crowd. Narrative interjections, during which we might hear the rioters' reasons for resistance and Felix's reasons for joining, are sacrificed for speed. This countermanding of explanation for speed, of focus for summation, enacts the graphic logic of the map, where data appears simultaneously on one page. Simultaneity in maps is made possible by the aerial perspective – a perspective that pervades the moments of political resistance in this novel.

Despite Chapter XXXIII starting with the Shakespearian epigraph 'Mischief thou art *afoot*', the crowd is repeatedly plotted from above: the rector reads the Riot Act from a balcony; Mr Crow reads it from a window at the Seven Stars and then from even higher at 'an upper window'; and Felix is 'observed by several persons looking anxiously from their upper windows'<sup>53</sup>. This stratification, which ensures the reader also looks down at the crowd from above, struggles to grasp the pedestrian ('afoot') subjectivities subsumed within it and opens up a space of relationality, where different bodies have difficulty interpreting one another across space. Crucially, the epigraph is almost immediately problematised by the ominous 'at present there was no evidence of any

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<sup>49</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 312.

<sup>50</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), Book VIII, Chapter V.

<sup>51</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, pp. 312-3.

<sup>52</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p.127; Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 317.

<sup>53</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 311; Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 312; Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 315.

distinctly mischievous design'. As Felix joins the crowd, the ground-level 'afoot' becomes the over-arching 'design' in a matter of a few lines; the temporal adverb foreshadows Felix's imminent loss of personal agency, warning us that a whole-scale gaze, one which gives preference to summation, will soon obscure his motives to onlookers<sup>54</sup>.

The new sense of space engendered by this summarising, aerial perspective transforms Felix into an accidental murderer, when he leaves a man for dead at a 'finger post' (a symbol of intersecting spatial compartments). Andrew Piper, in his work on Goethe, has diagnosed 'a new sense of space and subjectivity according to the principle of stratification, discretization and relativity' which emerged in Western Europe in the 1800s, in the wake of cartographic pioneers such as Keferstein, William Smith, Lavoisne, Stieler and Berghaus: 'from the stratification of temporal consciousness, the disaggregation of the perception of different scales of space and self, and finally to the relationality of spatial perception that helped shatter the exclusivity of notions of space and species and ushered in a new relativity of the idea of 'location''.<sup>55</sup> Eliot addresses the 'new' 'relationality of spatial perception' in two, fundamentally ambiguous, ways. Firstly, she avoids creating a single 'people's centre' in opposition to the estate, by shifting narrative interest across Loamshire and by having the 'outlying' Sproxtton coexist with 'the other nucleus, known as the Old Pits'. This democratisation of focal interest allows for many nuclei, depending on where each member of the growing electorate calls home, and informs her evocation of the grand 'central plain' of England and the instability of a middling identity in the Introduction. Secondly, she places Felix in front of a window at Treby Manor:

'[H]e had approached the large window of a room, where a brilliant light suspended from the ceiling showed him a group of women clinging together in terror...[H]e kept his post in front of the window, and, motioning with his sabre, cried out to the oncomers, Keep back!'<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 311.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Piper, Mapping Vision: Goethe, Cartography and the Novel', *Spatial Turns: Space, Place, and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture*, ed. by Jaimey Fisher and Barbara Mennel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 320.



The problems of visualisation thrown up by the transparent but soundproof window – problems fully discussed in Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Glassworlds* – could not be clearer: separated in the discrete locations of drawing room and front court, the perception of the women and that of the sabre-brandishing rioter himself will never align, and so Felix will be sentenced.

Andrew Piper's discussion on 'the stratification of temporal consciousness' derives from a study on geological maps, but geology is not what interests Eliot in *Felix Holt*.<sup>57</sup> In the 1866 novel, a stratified temporal consciousness is one also associated with the methodology of using source materials as a way into the past.<sup>58</sup> Eliot is writing the novel belatedly, just as James Wyld and Samuel Lewis continued to interpret past franchise reforms throughout the century; novelist and cartographers, alike, proving the cultural urgency to reinterpret mapped space provoked by the Great Reform Act. Eliot's insistence on aeriality when framing the riot scene marks the archival location of her narrative; the Riot Act is read from a distance of altitude – an altitude which ensures the inefficacy of the address on the movement of the people below. Eliot tried to combat the difficulty of historical altitude, of recapturing a 'spirit of the age' in retrospect, by researching extensively: her notebooks at the time of planning famously include passages from Henry Hallam's *View of the State of Europe During the Middle Ages*, 1833 Parliamentary Reports on Agriculture, the 1835 Report of the Select Commission into Bribery at Elections, the Annual Register for 1832, accounts of the Nuneaton riots, Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* and, of course, Samuel Bamford's *Passages from the Life of a Radical*. It is possible, then, that the 'mapped riot' dramatises Eliot's struggle to penetrate the flatness of the archival materials she consulted to show the real, human unrest of the time.

The quick translation of 'mischief thou art afoot' into 'at present there was no evidence of any distinctly mischievous design' suggests that ground-level experience cannot help but be subsumed into overview *because* of temporal distance – a syntactic inevitability characterised by the mixed tenses of 'at present there was'. That Eliot

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<sup>57</sup> Although they do elsewhere, particularly in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*, as Adeline Buckland shows in *Novel Science: Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> For more on Eliot's research for the novel, see Fred C. Thomson, 'The Genesis of Felix Holt', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (PMLA), 74 (1959), 576-84.

witnessed real, political resistance as a thirteen-year-old is unimportant both in her planning and in the events she chooses to describe in the novel. Instead of trusting her memory of 21 December 1832, she seeks out, one imagines 'from a series of rollers', the account of the trial of the Nuneaton rioters in *The Times*, 9 April 1833.<sup>59</sup> This is both connotative of Eliot's characteristically rigorous research approach but also of the 'abnegation of self in subservience to the archive' noticed by Helen Kingstone.<sup>60</sup> For Victorian writers, Kingstone argues, there was no need for memory, as 'facts themselves' offered 'the impersonal objectivity comparable to collective hindsight'<sup>61</sup>. So it is with 'abnegation', not Harold's vanity, that Eliot retrieves archival materials 'from a series of rollers occupying a compartment among the bookshelves', but the effect is similar. Both Eliot and her character, look to the source in order to draw an alternate reality. But if the source has its graphic biases then so, too, does the ensuing representation.

In *Felix Holt: The Radical*, Eliot lets an extraordinarily active period in British mapping infuse her mediation of the historical moment. The construction of England's electoral maps offered Eliot a print-culture parallel, whereby movements of reform could be sketched at the same time as graphic significance was given to a landed gentry that had stayed put. She also exploits the differences between a growing state-funded industry and the continued presence of private estate mappers to inform her characterisations. By so doing, she carves a middle path that is contextually informed, not 'pure and disinterested'. However, by using the map motif in partnership with a narrative mode that aims to capture 'the real', she risks repeating the same flattening and summarising techniques of the cartographers who continued to delineate the effects of 1832 retrospectively throughout the century. This is particularly pertinent in the riot scene. The 'objectivity' promoted by the cartographic gaze risks belittling Felix's

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<sup>59</sup> John W. Cross (ed.), *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals*, vol. I (Edinburgh and London, 1885), pp. 27-9; Thomson, 'The Genesis of Felix Holt', p. 579.

<sup>60</sup> Helen Kingstone, *Victorian Narratives of the Recent Past: Memory, History, Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 43.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

personal and era-specific motives for political resistance; after all, 'reduced to a map, our premises seem insignificant'.<sup>62</sup>



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<sup>62</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p.111