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Gwendolen's Story From DANIEL DERONDA

Gabriel Woolf

Rosalind Shanks

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**Audio Cassette: *Gwendolen's Story* from *DANIEL DERONDA*, read by Gabriel Woolf and Rosalind Shanks. Concessionary price (Fellowship members only):
£6.00 + 50p postage and packing.**

(Obtainable from the Secretary, Mrs Kathleen Adams, 71 Stepping Stones Road, Coventry, CV5 8JT. Further details from the Secretary.)

In 1902, the essayist, Leslie Stephen, wrote that *Daniel Deronda* was 'two stories put side by side' and the 'Gwendolen Story' taken by itself was a 'masterly piece of social satire'. In his biography of George Eliot, Gordon Haight makes a general reference to 'Gwendolen's story' as part of the whole narrative of *Daniel Deronda* including the Jewish portion. He showed some disdain towards 'careless readers' who thought the Jewish elements could be separated from the story of Gwendolen.

George Eliot herself, writing to Barbara Bodichon, seemed displeased with readers who 'cut the book up into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there'. The character Daniel is central to the novel in holding together the strands of the narrative.

Gabriel Woolf originally separated the Gwendolen strand of the novel for his serial reading for the BBC Woman's Hour programme. There is also a stage adaptation, as well as this tape recording, for the two voices of Rosalind Shanks and Gabriel Woolf.

I listened to this recording in the company of two others who had not read George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. All of us felt that great concentration was needed to grasp the story, but we responded readily to the dramatic dialogue between the two voices. Those who had not read the novel were puzzled by the beginning and the flashbacks. We agreed that, before listening, it was essential to read the synopsis of the novel on the tape notes. The careful reader of the novel receives some help from the author when s/he reads the mottoes which begin each chapter. The motto at the beginning of Chapter 1 makes it quite clear that we are plunging into the middle of things.

The reader of the novel in its complete form misses, in the recording, the interaction of the two stories. Daniel seems to be a quite minor character in *Gwendolen's Story* until towards the end. This is not to say that the adaptation has failed. Two worlds are described in the novel; the tape concentrates on one world only, and leaves Daniel on the fringe instead of in the centre. Many readers, it seems, have found Daniel rather unsatisfactory as a hero. Rosemary Ashton calls him a 'semi-outsider', and 'indeterminate'. Certainly he is not shown as being successful in any undertaking except in relation to Gwendolen, and possibly Mirah.

However, Gwendolen's story is what we have, and the story turns out to be a complete and single whole. The 'dynamic quality' possessed by Gwendolen inspires the first side of the tape, and the opening scene in the German gambling casino arrests the attention immediately. George Eliot's dialogue is powerful, and the interaction of the voices of Gabriel Woolf and Rosalind Shanks bring the various characters vividly to life. The highlight is the conversation, with pauses, between Mr Grandcourt and Gwendolen at their first meeting at the archery gath-

ering, the pauses being filled with Gwendolen's thoughts and fantasies. Side 1 ends with Grandcourt's offer of marriage rejected.

Side 2 begins with the offer repeated and accepted, and everything is to be as Gwendolen likes. Nevertheless, the story of the marriage is dramatic and tragic, and the main events are played out, mainly in dialogue, until Grandcourt has the mastery and Gwendolen is helpless. There is a splendid exchange between Grandcourt and Lush with Gabriel Woolf playing both parts. Rosalind Shanks produces some varied voices for Gwendolen and the other ladies. The story builds to an emotional climax in a boat in the Mediterranean where Grandcourt is drowned. The anguish of the ending is sensitively shown, and the finale has a note of hope.

Gwendolen will live.

Kathleen Porter