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Roder-Bolton, Gerlinde, "Review of George Eliot and Goethe: an Elective Affinity Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality in 'Antigone', 'Middlemarch,' 'Howards End' and 'Women in Love'" (1998). *The George Eliot Review*. 328.

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Gerlinde Röder-Bolton, *George Eliot and Goethe: an Elective Affinity* (Amsterdam-Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1998). ISBN 90 420 0359 6, pp. 290.
Masako Hirai, *Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality in 'Antigone', 'Middlemarch', 'Howards End' and 'Women in Love'* (London and New York: Macmillan and St Martin's Press, 1998). ISBN 0 312 21421 9, pp. xii+221.

George Eliot's admiration for Goethe is well known but how exactly it impinges on her own fiction is less clear and hence Gerlinde Röder-Bolton's useful attempt to analyse her creative use of him. As the sub-title of this study is perhaps intended to suggest, however, it either combines, or slips between, two different arguments. It looks closely at three parallel texts: *The Mill on the Floss* and *Elective Affinities*; *Daniel Deronda* and *Faust*; *Daniel Deronda* and *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. In the first case, evidence is adduced, along with an interpretative argument, to suggest that Goethe's novel significantly aided the composition of George Eliot's. In the latter two cases, the point of the parallel is rather to suggest similarities and differences with an implicit hint, rather than an argument, in favour of creative influence. This gives the thesis as a whole a running unclarity of purpose despite the interest of its individual elements.

In this regard the opening discussion of *The Mill on the Floss* and *Elective Affinities* is the most tellingly focused. It is particularly useful since readers have always, since the early reviewers, found the last part of the story less satisfactory; almost to the extent of its being a different book. Dr Röder-Bolton's comparison bears simply on this last section of the narrative in which Maggie finds herself involuntarily breaking up her cousin's relationship with Stephen Guest. The interrelated questions of passion and determinism and renunciation, which are explicitly thematized in Goethe's work, suggest a thematic and structural focus for Eliot by which the modern reader might appreciate something beyond the unconvincing emotional object generally found in Stephen. While this argument does not turn an unsatisfactory dramatization into a successful one, it helps to explain why we have the one we have. In the discussion of the other books, the precise claims, and benefits, of the parallel constantly shift. An allusion to Grandcourt (132) as Mephistopheles becomes more illuminating, less casual, as part of a more general perception of Gwendolen Harleth's having made a conscious pact against her better knowledge and conscience. But the comparison suggested in the next chapter between Gwendolen's turning to marriage as an escape and Wilhelm Meister's turning to theatre seems too general to be ascribed to influence or creative reworking.

At such moments the argument seems driven by the need to find comparisons at all costs and has the narrow focus of a thesis. One wants to feel the counterweight of the differences between these writers, as well as the internal momentum of Eliot's own narratives. In some respects Goethe feels more modern than Eliot with his refraining from authorial judgement while calmly demonstrating the processes of emotional, moral and social life. Yet he achieves this by examples and training which are classically oriented and socially conservative. If he strikes an important modern note his instrument is in important ways deliberately unmodern

as compared to the narrative world of *Daniel Deronda*. Dr Röder-Bolton is aware of this but does not allow it to become a determining structure in her argument. Part of Eliot's epochal difference from Goethe, for example, is her critical awareness of the social position of women even as she privileges renunciation. The application of the Faust myth to Gwendolen (110-1), for example, would raise questions about its intrinsic masculinity and, if the Mephistopheles allusion in relation to Grandcourt is more than casual, its applicability to Gwendolen would be interestingly problematic.

The myth that focuses the female problematic is, above all, the story of Antigone. Dr Röder-Bolton indeed refers to the importance of the *Antigone* for Eliot (60) and this theme is taken up centrally by Masako Hirai. The major theme of the play is usually taken to be the clash between personal and familial feeling or loyalty as opposed to social authority but Professor Hirai focuses on the relationship between Antigone and Ismene as reworked by three English novelists: George Eliot in *Middlemarch*, D. H. Lawrence in *Women in Love*, and E. M. Forster in *Howards End*. All use the relationship between sisters as their central structural device. More importantly, Eliot's novelistic sense of tragedy as diffused through, and perhaps ameliorated by, the everyday texture of life stands in contrast to the stark concentration of theatre. Professor Hirai suggests how the Antigone story represented for Eliot the 'the great primitive emotions' aroused by the clash between 'the duties of citizenship' and 'sisterly piety' (26-7). It therefore acts as a template for the 'diminished myth' (74) of personal moral action, sacrificial in a private rather than public sense, with which the Dorothea narrative ends.

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