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The Twenty-Seventh George Eliot Memorial Lecture: Ego, Anonymity, and Healing in George Eliot

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THE TWENTY-SEVENTH GEORGE ELIOT MEMORIAL LECTURE, 1998

Delivered by Professor Henry Alley

EGO, ANONYMITY, AND HEALING IN GEORGE ELIOT

Eliot's ultimate goal — morally, aesthetically — was to free the individual ego from the suffering of reflecting upon itself. Her fiction, which she saw as a series of evolving psychological phases, achieves this liberation through strongly argued models of balance and through the kinds of recognition linked to anonymous heroism. Mental anguish is to be escaped through the contemplation of others, and it would follow that Eliot's cumulative effort would clarify what it means to acquire achievements on the level of quiet and anonymous bequeathal, rather than self-aggrandizing glory.

Eliot discovered that a broad perspective beyond ego may be developed by slowing or speeding up time in her fiction. As we readers are, we can only live in the 'present', and therefore can only suffer from the imprisonment of believing that what we do is limited by our birth and death. As we read Eliot, however, her novels become a large means of entering such a time-frame which shows how what we might do today might bear tenable and communal fruit sometime beyond our interment in an unvisited tomb. This is one of the major comforts of anonymity, such as Eliot saw it. Coordinately, her books are our major means of making us an additional gender, giving us more scope, through an identification with a Dorothea, a Lydgate, or both.

The escape from pain and the subsequent experience of anonymity, then, constitute a paradoxical and healing process. On the one hand, one's ego shrinks; on the other, it expands. Just as one loses by becoming a reader, so does one gain. When the reader becomes Dorothea, he becomes both larger and smaller by becoming the woman he never could be; when she becomes Lydgate, she becomes both larger and smaller in the same way. Similarly, the moment we become the larger consciousness of *Middlemarch*, our ego both expands and contracts. We are bound by a short period of eighteen months; yet we are led to see our lives and the lives of others within the entire Western tradition. Applied to Eliot's characters, the paradox can be seen in the various tragic and epic states of Adam, Maggie, Romola, Tom, Mr Irwine, Felix, Esther, Lydgate, Dorothea, Gwendolen, Daniel. There is a fall from mental euphoria, frequently derived from a secure and private world of study or reflection; there is a subsequent littleness which 'crowds' in and enlarges the dimensions of their souls. Therefore one need not, in Eliot, suffer from a sense of insignificance or even loss, since the larger view is always at hand.

The pattern for healing from ego for these characters is quite consistent throughout her novels. Let us take a specific example. Prior to his coming to Raveloe, Silas Marner has become hardened, narrow-sighted, and traditionally masculine, much like Tom Tulliver, his predecessor in *The Mill on the Floss*. His previous life had caused him to discard his mother's 'bequest' (Ch. 1, 57) of healing herbal knowledge and dedicate his life to the invulnerable loom. He is the one who suffers the most from his isolation. When Eppie suddenly appears on his hearth, however, we witness a return to the 'remedial' memories of his mother and what he knew of her in his sister:

Could this be his little sister come back to him in a dream — his little sister whom he had carried about in his arms for a year before she died, when he was a small boy without shoes or stockings? (Ch. 12, 168)

Thus, *Silas Marner* is not simply the story of a withered man, restored through the love of a child but the story of an incomplete man, reawakened through the raising of a daughter, through contemplating a life greater than his own. This change, symbolized by his previous catalepsy and his sudden recovery of consciousness, shows Silas letting go of his egoistic concerns and welcoming not only Eppie but the memory of his little sister, who passed away, and who was the only one, most likely, who appreciated and acknowledged his heroic tenderness.

Eppie, then, must be named for Silas's mother and sister, since she draws together those memories of care and healing which are to be the wellspring of the life of the present and are to be the models for this special form of parenthood. If Hepzibah or Eppie for short means 'my delight in her', surely Silas is delighting in the new fullness of his psyche as well as in Eppie herself, and in a world no longer connected with trophies and recognition. Approaching this change from the standpoint of androgyny, Brian Swann writes in his study, '*Silas Marner* and the New Mythos', 'Eppie is that striven-for particle Silas lost in his mother and little sister, the feminine part of him' (108).

Once Silas begins attending to Eppie and his mind starts 'growing into memory', he also recalls his mother's lore, and looks 'for the once familiar herbs again' (Ch. 14, 185). With his new goals of motherhood and anonymous heroism, he is able to transcend a sulky disposition, and move on to the very thing which symbolizes an enlightened pity and therefore his own regeneration. Jennifer Uglow writes that 'they [the herbs] become part of his own healing, knitting together his broken spirit and soothing his wounded memory' (152).

Eliot in her often-quoted letter wrote, '[I felt] all through as if the story would have lent itself best to metrical rather than prose fiction, especially in all that relates to the psychology of Silas' (Letters III:382). In the 'Notes on Form in Art', Eliot speaks of 'rhythms & images' forming a 'natural history of mind' (435). Here the meter of the changing idyllic landscape lays before us the unique and dynamic process of Silas's healing mind, as well as its quest toward the anonymous heroism of parenthood. Healing is made visible and believable through a dense imagery and syntactical cadence which invoke a protected but poetically heightened world — in this case, in a prose context, where Silas sees beyond himself and recovers from disillusionment and self-containment.

In moving to a larger book, we find the more complex case of Tertius Lydgate, the healer of *Middlemarch*. In this novel, the healing process will not be so quick, because we are no longer in a charmed landscape, and we have so much more room to evolve in. Very slowly, Lydgate moves from a 'benevolently contemptuous' conceit (Ch. 15, 79), which causes him enormous pain, to 'that twice-blessed mercy [which] was always with Lydgate in his work at the Hospital or in private houses, serving better than any opiate to quiet and sustain him under anxieties and his sense of mental degeneracy' (Ch. 61, 720). More and more, Lydgate is seen as the caring physician who eventually finds self-healing in the process. That is, he turns his anguish into concern for others, and finds himself becoming more whole and less burdened, through pur-

suing his compassionate practice. Lydgate's own case clarifies the fact that healing in Eliot is no nostalgic return to childhood, but rather a growth into a mature vulnerability which acknowledges, among other qualities, the quests and sensibility one knew as a child.

Dorothea Brooke particularly serves to elucidate this process, and she also has a hand in Lydgate's special redemption. It is not too much to say that all points of *Middlemarch* meet in her, since she demonstrates on an even larger scale what healing in Eliot is. Relatively early in the book — and consistent with the role of a classical heroine — Dorothea passes through the Roman nightmare of 'ruins and basilicas [and] ... the dimmer but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world' (Ch. 20, 225), and undergoes rites of passage reminiscent of the classical heroines Antigone, Ariadne, and Goethe's Iphigenia.

Passing from her initial egoism and disillusion with her marital ambitions, Dorothea is able to lead men out of nightmare, because she has been through one herself. She heals through sympathy, and, like Silas and Lydgate, her willingness to reach out to an outsider. Her relationship with authority, having gone through many tests, and her resistance to deceit, make it possible for her to perceive the unacknowledged heroism of others and offer them succour, thereby releasing herself from bondage.

This clustering of the four heroine healers, Antigone, Ariadne, Iphigenia, and Dorothea, classical and Victorian alike, suggests that the solution is found in the acceptance of apparent loss, so that room can be made for the actual gain. The Antigone of Colonus accepts the fact of her father's death and wins the return to her final confrontation in Thebes. Ariadne offers help to Theseus, despite her captivity, and, Jennifer Uglow points out, is eventually rescued by Cupid. Goethe's Iphigenia offers herself as a sacrifice, and in so doing, wins Thoas over to her higher law and gains safe passage for her brother, now newly restored to sanity. Dorothea, in being prepared to submit to her husband's tyrannical request, is later able to perceive and act on a distinction between 'that devotion to the living, and that indefinite promise of devotion to the dead' (Ch. 48, 521). Dorothea thus affirms her desire to see Will Ladislaw and the truth that 'Life would be no better than candle-light tinsel and daylight rubbish if our spirits were not touched by what has been, to issues of longing and constancy' (Ch. 54, 583). For all four women, longing and constancy are initially at odds, and it is their willingness to ride through to difficult solutions that gives them their healing powers.

It is important at this stage to single out Goethe's model of Iphigenia, since she most accentuates the theme of healing which comes at the end of the novel. When Iphigenia, having been through a nightmare of recollecting her lineage, prays for the restoration of Orestes' sanity, she prays to 'You brother-sister pair' — Apollo and Diana (1317) — and speaks of how 'Thou dost, Diana, love thy gracious brother/Above all else that earth and sky can offer' (1321-2). The binary form of these entreaties foreshadows the actual family ritual where Orestes is shown breaking through to sanity as though through a curtain while being 'clasped in my sister's arms/And at my dear friend's heart' (1355-6), in a crisis which is compared to the formation of a rainbow, where 'Iris of the lovely hues with light/Hand parts the grey veils of the final clouds' (1353-4). At the end of this highly charged scene which closes the third act, Goethe's joint theory of colour and personality is made manifest — of sanity in diversity and

of the soul being like light; that is, it forms a prism, when subject to stress. The character grouping — Orestes, as flanked by his sister Iphigenia and his soulmate Pylades — represents an androgynous balance and represents the redemption of the soul through sympathy. To borrow one of Eliot's terms, which was indeed borrowed from Goethe, his soul — and his sister's — becomes iridescent in this scene.

Eliot mentions Iphigenia's archetypal story in her earlier notes on tragedy (Cross III, 32, 35), and Lewes, in agreeing with Schiller, comments that Goethe's version 'must for ever remain the delight and wonderment of mankind' (272). In the instance of the remarkable Chapter 76, where Dorothea gives Lydgate the one hearing he needs to make him whole again, surely Lydgate plays Orestes, returning to sanity, to Dorothea's Iphigenia, when she shows her healing touch: 'The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character' (Ch. 76, 819). There is something of Goethe's prism theory here, although, characteristic of Eliot, it is more subtle. The emphasis falls on the diversity within Lydgate's character; 'lights' are changed; he is not the bad man that society would have him be, any more than Orestes is the simple, lunatic matricide that the Furies would have him be. Thus what, in their edition of the German drama, Lewis A. Rhoades and Carl Selmer say of the healing relation between Goethe's Orestes and Iphigenia could equally be said of Lydgate and Dorothea:

At the same time his soul responds to the deep impression of her purity and love going out in tenderness and sympathy to him in his guilt, and because she can still believe in him and love him instead of avenging upon his crime, he believes in himself again. (xx)

It is important to emphasize, however, that in Eliot, healings of this kind are frequently symbiotic. While Dorothea perceives and articulates Lydgate's anonymous heroism, so does Lydgate perceive hers, and each is advanced in the process. When Dorothea says to Lydgate, 'There is no sorrow I have thought more about than that — to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail' (Ch. 76, 821), she is speaking with 'a keen memory of her own life' (823), and is said, in an earlier chapter, to have spoken of her first marriage 'looking through the prism of her tears' (Ch. 72, 792). Of course she has the privilege of applying the same balm to herself; her feminine side joins with the doctor's masculine side and she becomes whole in the process. When Lydgate speaks of his regrets about misleading Rosamond, she answers, 'I know, I know — you could not give her pain, if you were not obliged to do it', speaking for herself as well. When he says, later, 'Yet you have made a great difference in my courage by believing in me', one must say the difference, although 'not widely visible', is still critically significant, not only in the life of Lydgate, but her own as well. 'As Lydgate rode away, he thought, "This young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary"' (826). The two major protagonists recognize each other with burning hearts, affording Dorothea the greater honour of being compared silently to the Virgin Mary by an ultimately unknown kindred spirit, who cries 'soul to soul', a glory greater than the one owned by the widely celebrated St Theresa, who can only speak 'down' — from more saintly to less saintly, rather than from soul to soul, in the 'same embroiled medium'.

The equally celebrated Chapter 81, where Dorothea visits Rosamond, has an epigraph from *Faust, Part Two* and provides another key to Eliot's concept of anonymous hero as healer. In the context of the literary allusion, Faust, transported to a 'Pleasing Landscape' after the Gretchen nightmare, is found to be recovering, affirming life again and determining '*constantly to strive for the utmost of life*' (Hornback, ed. *Middlemarch* 545, italics Eliot's). The end of his speech, not quoted by Eliot, but implicit in the allusion, raises once again the concept of sanity and recovery as 'prism':

Out of this thunder rises, iridescent,
Enduring through all change the motley bow,
Now painted clearly, and now evanescent,
Spreading a fragrant, cooling spray below.
The rainbow mirrors human love and strife;
Consider it and you will better know:
In many-hued reflection we have life.
(4721-7, Kaufmann, trans.)

With such a heavy allusion, indeed it is impossible not to see healing as the principal theme in this extraordinary chapter. These German lines are part of a scene which assures the audience that Faust has survived his tragedy, and is now ready for an epic life. Likewise Dorothea, having gone through her dark night of the soul over thinking Will unfaithful, and having embraced magnanimity and affirming the 'pearly light' of Chapter 80, now moves forward into helping Lydgate and Rosamond, even though she is 'as dangerously responsive as a bit of finest Venetian crystal' (851). Like Silas, she once again reaches out to an outsider. Close, in her 'nervous exaltation', to the 'roar which is on the other side of silence', she embraces her alter-ego and 'the two women clasped each other is if they had been in a shipwreck' (856). Thus, a few chapters before the Finale, we witness anonymous heroism ramifying outward, into the growing good of the world. The symbiosis is also clear as well, since Rosamond, while not converted, is refreshed in spirit, and Dorothea is given the information which will release her from the past and from the false surmises concerning the man she will eventually choose.

Other changes exist in this chapter, as illuminated by the Goethean allusion of healing. Anonymous heroism, in being transferable, appears in Lydgate as well, even before Dorothea approaches Rosamond. He has written her a note of thanks, which he hands her directly, as tangible evidence that he has learned what it is to appreciate another person in her wholeness. 'When one is grateful for something too good for common thanks', he says, 'writing is less unsatisfactory than speech — one does not at least *hear* how inadequate the words are' (849). These are virtually the last words he articulates in the novel, emphasizing the point that his life in *Middlemarch* proper is not a failure, as some critics would have us believe, only one which grew anonymously toward the understanding the narrator had prepared for him. The healer ultimately experiences the healing of recognizing another for who she is, rather as Gwendolen of *Daniel Deronda* will recognize her helpmate for who he is, in a note which also ends a novel. Her 'it shall be better with me because I have known you' (Ch. 70, 882) to Deronda perfectly echoes Lydgate's parting

sentiment and even his words, spoken earlier: 'yet you have made a great difference in my courage by believing in me'.

The other illumination in the chapter has to do with a biographical note. The scene between Rosamond and Dorothea was the one which, according to Cross and later Uglow, Eliot used to illustrate the 'not herself' which visited her when she composed. While speculations are sometimes idle, it is gratifying and perhaps even thrilling to wonder what sorts of healing Eliot herself experienced when the two antipoles of her psyche were finally united in the clasp of the two women. 'Then abandoning herself', Cross writes, 'to the inspiration of the moment, she wrote the whole scene exactly as it stands, without alteration or erasure, in an intense state of excitement and agitation, feeling herself entirely possessed by the feelings of the two women' (III, 344).

The Finale itself presses the questions of healing and redemption forward, questioning whether prominence, visibility, and fame are necessary for vindication. Frequently, in the criticism of the past two decades, the quiet achievements of Dorothea, like those of Lydgate, have been seen as something of a failure, because, in her case, she started with lofty spiritual aims and ended in a state where 'many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother' (894). Gilbert and Gubar, for example, actually assume that Dorothea is absorbed into Will (530), when really it is only social opinion which says so. In another study, '*Middlemarch*: A Feminist Perspective', Ellen Ringler writes that

the web of connections she [Eliot] has carefully traced in *Middlemarch* is, as the author often acknowledges, significantly ruptured because the public roles of women are in no way commensurate with their personal force. It is when Eliot offers to mend the rupture, with rationalizations about the 'good' perpetuated by 'unhistoric acts' and the efficacy of 'hidden lives', that feminists must demur. The disjunctures between male and female social power illustrated throughout the novel simply cannot be adequately patched by those weak threads. (59)

The novel ultimately, however, is not concerned with power such as this view would suggest. We do not know, in fact, from the Finale that Dorothea did *not* advance the causes of the Woman's Movement in some form. Indeed from the cosmological standpoint of *Middlemarch*, we do, in some ways, have every reason to believe she did, the way ninety-nine percent of all reformers, whether devoted to the Woman's Movement or others, did — anonymously and without historical credit. To say Dorothea's life was lost because her acts received 'no great name' on earth would be to miss the overall vision of the novel and apply Casaubon's shortsightedness instead — a code of prestige which, ironically, has been perceived from the onset as highly masculine by the narrator.

Another critic, Lee R. Edwards, laments that Eliot never dramatized the world 'she forced into existence when she stopped being Mary Ann Evans and became George Eliot' (Hornback, ed. *Middlemarch* 690). But this is exactly the point. When Mary Ann Evans

became George Eliot, she remembered exactly what Dorothea and Mary Garth did and indeed what every 'hero', whether male or female, in the novel embraces — anonymity. Dorothea's history has 'no great name on earth', but the namelessness only serves to emphasize the greatness the specially privileged narrator and reader perceive. One way of looking at Dorothea's life is to say that she started out a high-minded potential reformer and ended a wife and mother; another is to say she started out in search of 'a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank into oblivion' (Prelude, 25) and became that sacred poet herself by acquiring the widest view of her community's anonymous heroism and embodying, more fully than any other character, the novel's cosmic alternative to prestige — a healer of self.

In order to show the individual's proportionate position in her great community of being, Eliot, like her disciple Tolstoy, had to create characters of towering psychology and then, by way of contrast, suddenly back up and present them in context — in this case, in a world of subterranean intellectuals. Jerome Beaty (Hardy, ed. *Approaches* 612) and Susan Meikle (Smith, ed. *George Eliot* 186) have pointed out the difference in nuance between the final sentence of Eliot's manuscript and what finally arrived in print. Originally she wrote, 'for the growing life of the world is after all chiefly dependent on unhistoric acts, and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is owing to many of those who sleep in unvisited tombs, having lived a hidden life nobly' (Smith, ed. 183). Although Meikle concludes that 'the conviction of, or even desire to believe in, the "good" of the world being affected by the acts of its individual members has been reduced to an almost reluctant acknowledgement of possibility' (186), it is clear that the real emphasis is on 'rest' and on 'faithfully', for 'nobly' would suggest some external recognition and end the novel offkey.

Death renders all audiences one or nothing at all. For Dorothea they are 'one'; for Casaubon they are nothing. Dorothea is the one who lives 'faithfully a hidden life'; Casaubon lives distrustfully, and therefore they are a universe apart; he is in a painful prison; she is in, ultimately, a state of prospective freedom. In between is Lydgate, who, like Casaubon, 'regarded himself as a failure' but who, like Dorothea, still knows exaltation because he believes, as shown in his final note, in her more compelling generosity, which encompasses him along with *Middlemarch*. Anonymous heroes are aware of this double perspective and enjoy the advantage that, while they celebrate themselves and each other in all their psychological magnitude, they transcend those superficial mirrors of external honour, which only cause their invaluable complex egos to become bigger than they need be and therefore to suffer. In the words of Sir Thomas Browne, whom Eliot assiduously studied during the composition of *Middlemarch*, 'the man of God lives longer without a tomb than any by one, invisibly interred by angels' (*Hydriotaphia* 46). For Eliot, there are two kinds of immortality — the frozen prestige of a name and the resurrection which comes from a death delivering over individual consciousness to the growing collective consciousness of the world. As in her poem, 'O May I Join the Choir Invisible', the dead 'live again in minds/Made better by their presence' (Pinion 131).

That is why the narrator speaks of the ‘many Dorotheas’ in the second-to-last paragraph of the novel; for it is here that the principal character enters fully into anonymity, an anonymity which is shared with the unnamed narrator and reader, who are in turn bridged by the sentence, ‘But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas’ (896), an experience which the novel’s eighty-six chapters have been gently and subtly pushing us toward. We become the heroine’s ‘interring angels’ as well as our own. Thus Dorothea is not so different from St Theresa — and certainly not Iphigenia — after all, because anonymous heroism becomes the Key to All Mythologies. The ‘unvisited tombs’ which includes ‘us’ as the novel closes does not mean so much oblivion as it means and provides freedom through resignation to one’s ultimate anonymity, if not in the here and now, certainly in the eventual graveyard of Eliot’s elegy. That is why the heroes ‘rest’ instead of ‘sleep’, for ‘sleep’ implies oblivion while ‘rest’, ironically, still suggests a resigned consciousness and immortality — actually life itself — but of another order, for heroine, community, narrator, and reader. Thus in *Middlemarch*, whose elegaic nature may perhaps be traced to Eliot’s own loss of her beloved stepson, and her own doubts and fears about her own ambition, death becomes the illness from which we eventually do recover, through the extraordinary nature of the novel’s carefully defined heroism.

It is telling, then, that for her last novel, Eliot chose a protagonist, Gwendolen, who must face the most formidable of egos of all — beyond anyone in the novelist’s canon. In her famous essay, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, Eliot outlines her aesthetic by writing, ‘The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies’ (Pinney 270). Of all Eliot’s characters, Gwendolen Harleth requires the greatest extension, both of herself and of us. It is fittest that as an artist of a special sort, she was the last and most extraordinary creation of the greatest novelist in English, who nevertheless, like her heroine, maintained her anonymity during the whole of her literary life, through the medium of words, and in Marian Evans’s case, as ‘George Eliot’.

During Klesmer’s audition of Gwendolen in Chapter 23 of *Daniel Deronda*, she is, then, perfectly positioned to hear the statement that Eliot has been making implicitly throughout her first seven books of fiction but has waited until now to voice directly: ‘you must not be thinking of celebrity: — put that candle out of your eyes and look only at excellence’ (299). When Klesmer informs her, ‘You would at first only be accepted on trial. You would have to bear what I may call a glaring insignificance’ (303), she is the dethroned queen facing a life of anonymity, recovery from ego — the only life, in Klesmer’s and Eliot’s terms, worthy of a true artist, a hidden life ‘lived faithfully’, where ‘you will hardly achieve more than mediocrity’ (303). Gwendolen’s flight to the imprisonment of Gadsmer and eventually Grandcourt’s yacht arises from her unwillingness to confront this uncertain prospect.

Having said all of this, however, we need to acknowledge what becomes enormously apparent as the sixty-nine-chapter novel moves towards its remarkable conclusion — the wide disparity of sympathy between Gwendolen on the one hand and almost everybody

else in the novel on the other, a disparity that at least one reading of this novel brings. It is here the book takes a turn away from anything we have seen in Eliot's previous fiction; for the spokesmen for the transcendence of ego in this novel, Klesmer, Deronda, and Mordecai, lose some of it in speaking in its behalf. In the audition, particularly towards the end, Klesmer teeters on the edge of self-inflation, as does Deronda, during the New Year's celebration at the Abbey, when he gives Gwendolen directions on making her fear a safeguard: 'Deronda, too was under that sense of pressure which is apt to come when our own winged words seem to be hovering around us' (Ch. 36, 508). Of all the characters in the vast *dramatis personae*, Gwendolen is, ultimately and ironically, the one we will expect never to act in bad faith once the novel is over, since her education unrelentingly divests her of ego, never leading her to full illumination until virtually the last paragraph. We embrace the initial egoist the way we never have before. In other words, she never has the chance to feel she has art (as does Klesmer) or religion (as do Deronda and Mordecai) at her back. In a novel which so closely links aesthetics and morality through a sense of anonymity, this means that the Gwendolen of the very last sentences is to be the more sympathetic soul: a status which causes the reader to re-evaluate her capacity for art and artistic receptivity itself.

To illustrate, we might say that during the audition, Gwendolen answers Klesmer's criticisms with 'I did not pretend to genius', a statement which ironically opens her up to the beauties of Mirah's and Klesmer's music later on and to sympathies which neither Deronda nor Klesmer can attract, because her ego is, from henceforth, peculiarly vulnerable. Moreover, some of the moments of sublimest aesthetic perception come from the 'Vandyke duchess', because her dethronement is an ongoing process, and because anonymity is a lofty aspiration for her rather than — as it is for her mentors — something nearly or already achieved. Although Eliot could have easily narrated the wonderfully orchestrated chapel epiphany through Deronda's eyes, Eliot gives Gwendolen's point of view one of the longest sentences in the novel, in an attempt to explain her heroine's 'Oh, this is glorious!' immediately afterwards, as well as her 'forgetfulness of everything but the immediate impression' (Ch. 35, 473).

In this sense, Gwendolen is a better vessel of poetry than even Mordecai, since 'the chief poetic energy' is earlier defined as 'the force of imagination that pierces or exalts the solid fact, instead of floating among cloud-pictures. To glory in a prophetic vision of knowledge covering the earth, is an easier exercise of believing imagination than to see its beginning in newspaper placards, staring at you from a bridge beyond the cornfields' (Ch. 33, 431). By this definition, what is more poetic than seeing the beauty of a chapel-as-stable? Although Hans Meyrick may refer to Gwendolen as the 'Vandyke duchess', the mock-heroism bows to our other impression that in some ways Gwendolen shares some of the properties of Vandyke, while providing a dynamism that goes beyond the allusion. Her resting point is not yet achieved, and never will be. Partly because anonymity arrives late for Gwendolen, she holds the singular position of always being in a process of becoming, of continuous healing, a role which makes her more artistic and attractive than the three male protagonists, who, lacking spontaneity at least, become fixed relatively early, appear ready-made; they say the right things almost immediately about yielding up one's

ego to higher concerns. In this sense, she fulfils Eliot's early model of an artist, as defined by her description of her friend Macarthy, who makes an elegaic appearance in her very early 'Poetry and Prose, from the Notebook of an Eccentric', and whose soul 'was of exquisite structure ... a bird endowed with rich and varied notes' but 'the poor bird ceased to sing, save in the depths of the forest or the silence of the night' (Pinney 14-15).

To put it a different way, Gwendolen begins by being completely self-absorbed, and yet ends up on the road to anonymity and healing anyway by making the wrong decision to marry Grandcourt, and finding the education of her supersensitive nature in a highly tragic quarter. Her eventual willingness to be schooled — and in particular by the opposite sex — in matters utterly foreign to her causes her to share an apparently unlikely kinship with Silas Marner. As she gives up recognition from the outside world, she also opens herself to the masculine side of her psyche. She acquires aspects of *Deronda*'s male and patriarchal character, just as Silas acquires female and matriarchal components from Dolly. Key moments in both novels come when the education issues in a defence of the beloved against male domination. Gwendolen rising up against Grandcourt's disparagement of *Deronda* as a shameless lord with a satellite mistress (Ch. 48) is parallel to Silas's refusal to bow, unquestioningly, to Godfrey's claims to counter-adoption.

The sense of unsettledness at the end of *Daniel Deronda* may stem at least in part from the fact that, contrary to the usual patterns of anonymous heroism, Mordecai and *Deronda* do not open themselves to schooling by the opposite sex and stand firmly planted on patriarchal premises. Thus they seem to burden Gwendolen at the novel's conclusion and cause us to question their triumph. The humbling evolution that we have seen in *Lydgate* — as a direct response to his personal suffering — we cannot ultimately find in *Deronda* on the final pages of the novel that bears his name. Mirah has learned from him, but what has he learned from Mirah, or indeed from any other woman in the book — his mother included?

In fact, earlier in the book, just at the moment when *Deronda*'s all-dominant presence should command more of our attention and cause us to rejoice in his emerging visions of the Holy Land, one of Eliot's most striking uses of sustained literary allusion turns our sympathies squarely in Gwendolen's favour, leaving *Deronda* behind. Just prior to the drowning, the narrator compares the heroine to Madonna Pia of the *Purgatory*, all at the former epic's expense:

And thus, without any hardness to the poor Tuscan lady who had her deliverance long ago, one may feel warranted in thinking of her with a less sympathetic interest than of the better known Gwendolen who, instead of being delivered from her errors on earth and cleansed from their effect in purgatory, is at the very height of her entanglement in those fatal meshes which are woven within more closely than without, and often make the inward torture disproportionate to what is discernible as outward cause. (Ch. 54, 731-2)

The quote thus provides a pivot. Because 'she had a root of conscience in her and the

process of purgatory had begun for her on the green earth' (733), Gwendolen overshadows the celebrated Tuscan lady, and her triumph becomes clear. After the jaunty reference to the Siennese husband having 'got rid of her there', the narrator works to put Gwendolen one level above even *The Divine Comedy*, because while Gwendolen is lesser known to the outer world, she is better known to the reader.

Also paradoxically, at the end of the novel, when Gwendolen is 'reduced to a mere speck' (Ch. 69, 875), her identity becomes huge, because her anonymity has outstripped that of any other character. Mary Wilson Carpenter has noted that

whereas Daniel has recently been given the key to his father's chest, suggesting a restoration of history for him, Gwendolen seems to have received no inheritance but that of a penitential existence at Offendene. . . . the union of the narratives in a history of humanity in exile still suggests a romantic fulfillment only from the Jewish perspective. (140)

Yet Gwendolen's absence from the last chapter is grandly, sublimely conspicuous; her renunciation is larger than any in the *Deronda* parts of the book, because her name has been spectacularly missing from her own story. While Mordecai dies in an orchestrated apotheosis, she is only granted a note much like Lydgate's at the end of her own story. Thus the superiority of her healing education is made abundantly manifest not only by her absence but because of it. As in the case of her narrator, her anonymity yields to omnipresence. Mordecai is given the novel's tragic and Miltonic epitaph from *Samson Agonistes*, but because Gwendolen is the unnamed heroine behind it, she receives the greater glory. And again she parallels her narrator. As the narrator of the novel is subsumed in the final chorus of Milton's last major work, so is Gwendolen, reminding us, in the reaffirmed heroic voice, that the book has had little to do with killing whole multitudes by pulling down Philistine pillars, but everything to do with a young woman who was totally self-centred at first but ended up most nobly accepting her anonymity. The road to the recovery from self has been clearly marked therefore — and yet it is one of complex psychology, uniting all the strands of her predecessors' histories — Silas's, Lydgate's, and finally Dorothea's.

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