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## Supplementary Annotations to *Daniel Deronda*

By Rodney Stenning Edgecombe

The annotations to the first and second Penguin Classics editions of *Daniel Deronda*, by Barbara Hardy and Terence Cave respectively, and those of the Oxford World's Classics edition, by Graham Handley, weave a web like that attributed by Marvell to Cromwell – 'a net of such a Scope'<sup>1</sup> that very little has escaped its threefold curtain. Even so, one or two leavings that they missed or deliberately passed over might be worth recording here.

### **Chapter 1, p. 42:<sup>2</sup> Do you mean that old Adonis in the George the Fourth wig?**

Terence Cave passes over this entirely, but Barbara Hardy comments that it's 'A very mid-Victorian allusion to the bad old days before the image of the monarchy had been made respectable and domestic'.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it is a *Regency* allusion, recalling the words that landed Leigh Hunt in jail when, in the *Examiner* of 22 March, 1812, he referred to the Prince Regent, the future George the Fourth, in the following dismissive terms: 'this *Conqueror of hearts* was the dissembler of hopes!— ... this *Exciter of desire* ... this *Adonis in loveliness*, was a corpulent gentleman of fifty!'<sup>4</sup>

### **Chapter 9, p. 123. Some readers of this history will doubtless regard it as incredible that people should construct matrimonial prospects on the mere report that a bachelor of good fortune and possibilities was coming within reach.**

This echoes (and assumes for its irony) the opening sentences of *Pride and Prejudice*:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings and views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.<sup>5</sup>

### **Chapter 30, p. 390. ... her chief thought of herself seen in the glass was, 'How changed!'**

George Eliot liked Verdi – as witness G. H. Lewes's confession to his son that the 'Mutter and I have come to the conclusion that the music of the future is not for us', and that 'Schubert, Beethoven, Mozart, Gluck or even Verdi ... is what we are made to respond to'<sup>6</sup> – and Mrs

Glasher, Grandcourt's cast-off mistress, finds herself in a plight resembling that of Violetta Valery in *La traviata*. She is warned of the loveless future her unsanctified union has in store – 'Un dì, quando le veneri il tempo avrà fugate'<sup>7</sup> – and, when that future arrives, takes stock of herself in a looking glass<sup>8</sup> and utters the words 'Oh come son mutata'<sup>9</sup>.

**Chapter 31, p. 407. Truly here were poisoned gems, and the poison had entered into this poor young creature.**

Mrs Glasher stands in relation to Gwendolen as Medea does to Creusa in Euripides' *Medea*, and, by giving her the diamonds shortly after her marriage to Grandcourt, duplicates the sorceress's gift of a wedding diadem to the woman who has displaced her in Jason's affections:

Then she came to, poor girl, and gave a frightful scream,  
As two torments made war on her together: first  
The golden coronet round her head discharged a stream  
Of unnatural devouring fire ...<sup>10</sup>

In a note to Chapter 36 of the Oxford World's Classics edition of the novel, Graham Handley relates the *explicit* Creusa allusion it contains to Cherubini's *Médée*, which Eliot saw on the stage. However, in that redaction of the myth (by François-Benoît Hoffmann), the Creusa figure is called Dircé, so we must assume that the author had the original Greek source in mind.

**Chapter 32, p. 413. ... a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social pattern, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real?**

This develops out of an earlier allusion to Theseus' speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1<sup>11</sup> in Chapter 5 of the novel, where Gwendolen fences with Mrs Arrowpoint. It has the effect of offering 'airy nothing' as an underlying gloss for 'a yearning disembodied spirit', and so renders her both insubstantial and deracinée: 'and gives to airy nothing/A local habitation and a name' (5.1.16-17).

**Chapter 37, p. 523. If people have thought what is the most beautiful and best thing, it must be true. It is always there.**

Mirah seems here to be alluding to the final lines of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', but in no way resolving the aesthetic difficulties that they generate: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty", – that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'<sup>12</sup>

**Chapter 40, p. 562. ... nature's imperfect effort on behalf of the purer Caucasian to shield him from the shame and spitting to which purer features would have been exposed in the times of zeal.**

The phrase 'shame and spitting' originates in Isa. 50.6 ('I hid not my face from shame and spitting'), where it characterizes the pains of the soterial 'suffering servant', partial type of the role that Deronda conceives for himself (or rather which Mordecai conceives for him, and which he adopts) with regard to the patrilial restitution of the Jews.

**Chapter 62, p. 804. She immediately thought of her father, and could no more look round than if she had felt herself tracked by a ghost. To turn and face him would be voluntarily to meet the rush of emotions which beforehand seemed intolerable.**

This passage is reminiscent of lines from 'The Ancient Mariner':

Like one, that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turned round, walks on,  
And turns no more his head;  
Because he knows, a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread.<sup>13</sup>

**Chapter 64, p. 832 Even strangers, after glancing from China to Peru ...**

This obviously alludes to Dr Johnson's 'Vanity of Human Wishes', and mocks its own obviousness by making the observers superficially 'glance', in contrast to the triple tautology that centres the idea of observation in the original:

Let Observation, with extensive view,  
Survey mankind from China to Peru:<sup>14</sup>

Notes

- 1 Andrew Marvell, *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, rev. Pierre Legouis and Elsie Duncan-Jones (Oxford, 1971), I:92.
- 2 All page references to George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Barbara Hardy (Harmondsworth, 1967).
- 3 *Ibid.*, 886.
- 4 'The Prince on St Patrick's Day', *The Examiner*, 22 March 1812, 177-80 (179); Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (London, 1867), 207.
- 5 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. and intro. Tony Tanner (Harmondsworth, 1972), 51.
- 6 Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford, 1968), 424.
- 7 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata. Opera in Three Acts, by Verdi. With Italian Words and a New English Adaptation by Robert Reece*, ed. Arthur Sullivan and J. Pittmann (London, no date), 93.
- 8 There is no stage direction to this effect in my vocal score, but in Julian Budden's commentary on the opera, we read, 'She looks at herself in the mirror. "How I am changed"'. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (London, 1973-81), 2:157.
- 9 *La traviata*, op. cit., 210.
- 10 Euripides, *Medea and Other Plays*, trans. and intro. Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth, 1963), 53.
- 11 Metathesized by Terence Cave as 1.5 in the Penguin edition of *Daniel Deronda*, op. cit., 815.
- 12 John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale', *Poetical Works*, ed. H. W. Garrod (London, 1970), 207.

- 13 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Including Poems and Versions of Poems Herein Published for the First Time*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London, 1912), 203.
- 14 Samuel Johnson, 'The Vanity of Human Wishes. The Tenth Satire of Juvenal, Imitated', *The English Parnassus: An Anthology Chiefly of Longer Poems*, intro. and annotated by W. Macneile Dixon and H. J. C. Grierson (Oxford, 1909), 217