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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ESCAPING THE NARROW ROUND: MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS IN THREE GEORGE ELIOT NOVELS

by

JEANNE WOOD

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled ESCAPING THE NARROW ROUND: MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS IN THREE GEORGE ELIOT NOVELS submitted by JEANNE WOOD in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

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Abstract

Mentor relationships appear throughout George Eliot's novels, but become prominent in her last three works, *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *mentor* as "an experienced and trusted counsellor," this definition is insufficient to characterise the mentor as he appears in George Eliot's works. George Eliot's mentors are often young and so cannot be considered "experienced" and "trusted" because of authority earned through age or experience. Rather, her mentors are distinguished by a superior level of moral awareness and integrity which drives them to aspire to a more difficult, but also more rewarding existence. In the course of the mentor's struggle against circumstance, his own weaknesses, and the weaknesses of those around him, he helps the heroine to develop her own intelligence and potential.

Central to all three mentor relationships is the heroine's growth beyond the initial egoism that entraps her within a narrow world and that confines her actions to the satisfaction of her own selfish desires. Each mentor helps the heroine to recognise her egoism and how it confines her to a world of morally inferior motives and desires. Each mentor re-educates the heroine and so helps to effect her moral growth and development beyond her initial egoism. Thus, each heroine transcends her original faults and weaknesses and grows beyond her moral mediocrity to become an exceptional person and to influence the lives of those around her.

In George Eliot's last three novels, mentor relationships form the core of each plot; these mentor relationships also appear as variations on a group of shared characteristics. In *Felix Holt*, Felix helps Esther to see the folly of her belief in the value of appearances and social status and so helps her to avoid marrying a man of superior class but inferior moral integrity. In *Daniel Deronda*, Daniel is unable to prevent Gwendolen from committing a serious moral error, but he helps her to develop her own potential for moral awareness. By helping to awaken her conscience, Daniel is able to lead Gwendolen away from her initial self-absorption,

through the purgatorial marriage which punishes her original egoism and arrogance, and ultimately beyond her initial weaknesses into a new moral awareness. The marriage of Casaubon and Dorothea in *Middlemarch* reverses the pattern of growth beyond one's initial egoism through contact with a superior moral nature established in *Felix Holt* and elaborated in *Daniel Deronda*; however, the mentor relationship nevertheless results in Dorothea's moral growth. Dorothea already has a superior moral nature at the opening of *Middlemarch*, but she develops even further through her contact with her self-chosen mentor, Edward Casaubon. Rather than being inspired by a superior example as Esther and Gwendolen are by Felix and Daniel, Dorothea is disillusioned by the inferiority and self-centredness of Casaubon's thoughts and actions. By reacting against those weaknesses in her husband which have so disappointed her, Dorothea is purged of the weaknesses which originally blinded her to her husband's real character and so develops a superior moral awareness.

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I. Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *mentor* as "an experienced and trusted counsellor." Such figures of authority abound in George Eliot's novels, starting with Mr Tryan of "Janet's Repentance" and ending with Daniel Deronda in her last novel. But the *OED* definition provides only the beginning for a discussion of mentor figures and the relationships they establish. While the definition provides a basic description of the authority and influence of all mentors in George Eliot's novels, it is not sufficiently accurate to indicate the complexity of certain mentor relationships.

A brief survey of George Eliot criticism (by no means comprehensive but, I hope, representative) does not help to simplify the concept of mentor and the resulting relationships as both appear in her novels. The different approaches and terminology used to address the subject make a more accurate definition of the term difficult to arrive at, nor can one list of mentor figures be established, because each critic's conception of the mentor results in a different group of characters who qualify. Barbara Hardy provides her list of the "hero as mentor,"

> beginning with Tryan, in *Janet's Repentance*, and ending with Daniel Deronda. Tryan, Philip, Savonarola, and Daniel, are the mentors whose intellectual direction does not have a romantic happy ending; Felix Holt and Mary Garth proselytize and love successfully. (*Study in Form* 57)

Bernard J. Paris provides his own list of mentors and their counterparts:

> . . . Romola and Savonarola, Janet Dempster and Mr. Tryan, Esther Lyon and Felix Holt, and Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda. Romola, Janet, Esther, and Gwendolen are initiated into the higher life—or at least into a new and higher level of consciousness—by their veneration for and emulation of their mentors. (223-24)

Paris also includes Eppie's drawing of Silas Marner into Raveloe society, Dinah Morris' influence on Hetty, Lisbeth Bede, and the Poysers, Bob Jakin's acts of kindness towards Maggie Tulliver, and Dorothea's "rescue" of Farebrother, Lydgate, Rosamond, and Will Ladislaw in his general discussion (224-25), and then chooses the relationships between Felix Holt and Esther Lyon, and Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth as representative of "the ethical and religious significance which

she [George Eliot] found in interpersonal relationships" (228).

The subject becomes increasingly complex when different critics discuss the same mentors and relationships using different terminology and different approaches. Barbara Hardy uses the term *mentor* to describe the heroes who "rescue" their respective heroines, and then characterises these "heroes":

> The hero is not only the male who is superior in education though with the same problems of feeling, but the lover with a particular understanding of the heroine's predicament, and often with an implausibly detached moral view of it. (*Study in Form* 53)

Bernard J. Paris may refer to Savonarola, Tryan, Felix Holt and Daniel as mentors (223-24), but they appear as only part of a much larger discussion entitled "Man and Man" and which concerns those of "George Eliot's characters [who] become aware of their connection with the general life of society or of the species through a personal relationship with someone who is stirred by religious or social passion and has a consciousness of the wider relations of things" (223). Thus for Paris a mentor relationship results in a growth in awareness and perspective in one character as a result of his or her interaction with another more enlightened figure.

Certain critics prefer to borrow religious terminology to discuss mentors and their effect upon other characters. Laurence Lerner considers the change that the mentor incites in others to be a secularised version of religious conversion, with the mentor, a character of "a nobler nature," taking the place of grace:

> Now if conversion is a human process, what corresponds to grace? The answer to this, given over and over in George Eliot's work, the foundation on which she builds the very structure of some of her novels, is the influence of a nobler nature. . . . What had usually been admitted, in the evangelical view, as a necessary stimulus—the minister whose preaching or conversion first opened the sinner's heart—is here moved to the centre of the process. It need no longer be a minister: but this finer person who catches the imagination of the penitent is now not merely the stimulus to but the cause of the change of heart. (47)

In addressing the same subject in *Daniel Deronda*, Albert R. Cirillo refers to the result of Daniel's influence on Gwendolen as her "salvation through overthrow":

> She [Gwendolen] voluntarily yields where she formerly desired to command and master. In her marriage to the aristocrat, Grandcourt, she had been forced to yield against her will; by allowing Daniel to "overthrow" her—by

falling in love with him and letting him rule her—Gwendolen breaks through the barriers of her narrow world and effects her own salvation. (207)

Still other critics do not directly address mentors or mentor relationships as an individual group but instead include them within a much larger discussion of perceived moral trends or characteristics in the body of Eliot's works. In *The Art of George Eliot*, W.J. Harvey speaks of the process of "moral enlargement" (42) undergone by many of the characters:

> What is centrally important is the process of awakening and extending moral insight and sympathy through the agency of the imagination working upon particulars. It is an emphasis which reverberates in the novels themselves; characters frequently have to struggle, often painfully, towards this enlargement of sympathetic vision. (40)

Harvey goes on to cite "dogmatism and egoism" (42) as two obstacles to this process. Although he does not directly address mentors and mentor relationships, certainly the process Harvey describes is effected by the mentor's influence, as well as by various other methods in the novels. Calvin Bedient's division of characters into the "Repentant Egoist," the "Unrepentant Egoist," and the "Confessor" (44) is another example of a larger, more comprehensive discussion that includes not only mentors, but other characters. Although primarily concerned with discussing Victorian novels as "'biblical romance'" containing "emblematic language" (14), Barry Qualls' characterisation of George Eliot's novels can be viewed as yet another manner of considering, among other themes and concerns, mentors and their influence on other characters:

> Each of George Eliot's novels is a spiritual biography or *Bildungsroman* focusing on Bunyan's question "What shall I do?" and charting the "civil war within the soul" (Mid: 67, epigraph) as answers are sought. (141)

The range in approach and terminology employed in discussing essentially the same material suggests an underlying complexity to the subject of mentors and mentor relationships. That different critics cite different mentors and relationships in their discussions suggests both the inadequacy of the *OED* definition and the difficulty of arriving at a more specific definition applicable to the numerous

mentor relationships in George Eliot's novels. Much of this difficulty arises from the variations in complexity of treatment and degree of influence of the mentor relationships as they appear in the novels. In the context of the *OED* definition of "an experienced and trusted counsellor," both Bartle Massey of *Adam Bede* and Daniel Deronda, for instance, qualify as mentors; the results of the counsel of each, however, are considerably different. The education, advice and companionship that schoolteacher Bartle Massey provides for Adam Bede make him a mentor in the tradition of the *OED* definition. Adam carefully considers and respects the suggestions and ideas provided by his schoolteacher, and Bartle himself is conscious of his influence on Adam, remarking as he watches his pupil walking in the distance: "'you wouldn't have been what you are if you hadn't had a bit of old lame Bartle inside you. The strongest calf must have something to suck at'" (292). The relationship, however, is a minor one within the novel and has virtually no significance to the outcome of the plot. Nor does Bartle provide any fundamental moral instruction or spark any profound growth in Adam's character; without Bartle, Adam might have been less well educated, but he still would have achieved the same level of strength and integrity, and so the relationship is incidental to the ending of the book. In contrast, Daniel's influence on Gwendolen provides one (and perhaps the most extreme) example of a crucial and fundamental change in character and moral outlook, and the relationship forms the core of the novel.

Between these two extremes (Daniel's influence on Gwendolen will be considered in a later chapter) lie many other examples of mentor relationships varying in degree of influence and complexity of treatment. Mary Garth's influence on Fred Vincy in *Middlemarch* is one example of a mentor relationship which receives limited treatment in the novel as a whole (it comprises only one of several plots) but which is nevertheless significant to its outcome. For most of the novel, Fred is concerned with the choice of vocation. After he is denied the substantial inheritance he had expected to be his, Fred is left with the decision of whether or

not to become a clergyman. It is here that Mary's influence becomes crucial, for Fred is anxious to receive her approbation of his choice. Mary, however, cannot approve the notion of Fred entering the clergy, as she explains to Mr Farebrother.

> "I could not love a man who is ridiculous . . . . Fred has sense and knowledge enough to make him respectable, if he likes, in some good worldly business, but I can never imagine him preaching and exhorting, and pronouncing blessings, and praying by the sick, without feeling as if I were looking at a caricature. . . . He would be a piece of professional affectation." (379)

Mary's integrity and good sense affect Fred in other ways than simply his choice of profession, for the thought of her balances his otherwise carefree and worry free attitude towards life, as George Eliot explains: "In fact, it is probable that but for Mary's existence and Fred's love for her, his conscience would have been much less active . . ." (177). Ultimately it is Fred's love for Mary, and his decision to follow no course that might prevent their marriage, that stop Fred from becoming "'a curate in debt for horse-hire and cambric pocket-handkerchiefs'" (609), and instead allows his success as assistant to Mary's father. Thus the degree of influence in this relationship is considerably larger than Bartle's on Adam Bede. Mary prevents Fred from living an unsuccessful and potentially damaging existence.

A much more problematic example of a mentor relationship is Philip Wakem's influence on Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. While Barbara Hardy calls Philip "[p]erhaps the most successful mentor and rescuer" (*Study in Form* 54) of her list, other critics, like Bernard J. Paris, for example, do not even include him in a general discussion. Certainly Philip exerts an important influence over Maggie, but the relationship that develops is unlike any other mentor relationship in the novels as a whole. In Maggie's troubled adolescence, she passionately embraces the teachings of Thomas à Kempis as an escape from her unhappy life, and it is Philip who indicates the naïveté and ignorance inherent in her doctrine of renunciation. When Maggie tells him, "'Is it not right to resign ourselves entirely, whatever may be denied us? I have found great peace in that for the last two or three years—even joy in subduing my own will.'" Philip points

out the folly and self-delusion of her philosophy:

> "Yes, Maggie," said Philip vehemently; "and you are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dulness all the highest powers of your nature. Joy and peace are not resignation: resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed—that you don't expect to be allayed. . . . *You* are not resigned: you are only trying to stupefy yourself." (288)

Although Philip helps Maggie by criticising her doctrine of renunciation, his convoluted relationship with her blurs his role as her mentor; this complexity and confusion emerge particularily when their relationship is compared to other mentor relationships. That Philip has influenced Maggie is evident in her statement to him that "'I had need have you always to find fault with me and teach me: so many things have come true that you used to tell me'" (363) as well as in her regard for him as

> a sort of outward conscience to her, that she might fly to for rescue and strength. Her tranquil, tender affection for Philip, with its root deep down in her childhood . . . seemed now to make a sort of sacred place, a sanctuary where she could find refuge from an alluring influence which the best part of herself must resist . . . . (360-61)

But the precise nature of their relationship is obscured by Philip's deep love for Maggie, which she can return only with an affectionate pity, as well as by the fact that in the moment of her temptation by Stephen Guest Maggie is not guided by an evocation of Philip specifically but rather by what Thomas Pinney calls the authority of the past. She tells Stephen, "'If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment'" (417). She explains to him that although she is strongly attracted to him she could never agree to marry him because of "'memories, and affections, and longings after perfect goodness, that have such a strong hold on me; they would never quit me for long; they would come back and be pain to me—repentance'" (418).[1]

Philip is undeniably an important part of the past Maggie calls upon in explanation of her rejection of Stephen, but he is not the sole influence and

[1] The importance of the past to Maggie's rejection of Stephen is discussed in "The Authority of the Past in George Eliot's Novels," by Thomas Pinney, and "Intelligence as Deception: *The Mill on the Floss*," by George Levine.

authority in her decision, as Mary Garth is for Fred Vincy or, as will become evident in later chapters, Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda are for Esther Lyon and Gwendolen Harleth. The strength and simplicity of the influence of these other mentor figures illustrate the comparative complexity and confusion of Philip's importance for Maggie. Philip forces Maggie to consider the imperfections of her doctrine of renunciation, and when she renounces Stephen, she recognizes the value of Philip's criticisms:

> Philip had been right when he told her that she knew nothing of renunciation: she had thought it was quiet ecstasy; she saw it face to face now—that sad patient loving strength which holds the clue of life—and saw that the thorns were for ever pressing on its brow. (413)[2]

But Philip is a mentor of a different type than characters like Daniel Deronda and Felix Holt. Perhaps this difference, and some of the confusion surrounding Philip's relationship with Maggie can be accounted for by the fact that *The Mill on the Floss* is not centred around a mentor relationship in the same way as *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda* are.

The range of critical approaches and terminology combines with George Eliot's own range of treatment of the mentor figure and mentor relationships to make a sufficiently complex and accurate definition of *mentor* relevant to each relationship difficult to establish. But those novels which centre around the moral growth of one character as a result of his interaction with another—*Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda*—reveal a pattern that appears in various manifestations in her work as a whole.[3] In Laurence Lerner's discussion of "the influence of a noble nature" (chapters 4 and 5 of *The Truthtellers*, Part One), he compares his term "'conversion'" to the "purgation of the tragic hero": "If we broaden conversion to include any intense emotional experience that causes us to change our

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[2] This is Barbara Hardy's perception of Philip's value: "George Eliot is showing implicitly what she made Philip tell Maggie explicitly—that renunciation hurts, that pain is unpleasant, that deprivation is destructive" (*Particularities* 66).

[3] Tryan's aid to Janet Dempster in "Janet's Repentance," the last story of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, is an early and simplified version of this pattern.

views or our conduct, then we can call the climax of most tragedies 'a conversion" (64). Lerner's "conversion" describes the outcome of most of George Eliot's mentor relationships, but the *OED* definition of *mentor* is insufficient to characterise the figure capable of sparking such a metamorphosis. A mentor in a George Eliot novel is characterised neither by his experience nor his trustworthiness (although ultimately he is trusted completely); rather, he can be identified by his superior level of integrity and moral awareness. It is his superior character in combination with the effect he produces upon another character's ways of thinking, reasoning, and acting that spark this other character's metamorphosis. For this reason it is necessary to examine the process and nature of the change undergone by the character being influenced, rather than to consider only the mentor figure.

George Eliot's seeming fascination with the process of moral redemption caused by the influence of another character is revealed by the repetition of this theme throughout her novels. I have chosen to focus on those mentor relationships central to the last three novels: *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*. Each mentor relationship is equally crucial to the central plot of its respective novel, and each is also a variation of certain shared elements and concerns. The fundamental characteristic of the mentor relationships is the heroine's growth beyond her initial egoism; each mentor triggers this growth in a manner most appropriate and effective for his respective heroine. The moral growth is difficult, and George Eliot uses references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* to underline the depth and pain required for the heroine's transformation. These references act as signposts for the nature of each heroine's moral weaknesses and failings, and also prefigure the moral resolution of each heroine's experience. The simple, straightforward mentor relationship of Esther Lyon and Felix Holt establishes this mentor paradigm. In *Daniel Deronda*, the terrifying ordeal of Gwendolen Harleth and the guidance she receives from Daniel appear as both a solidification of the basic characteristics established in *Felix Holt* and at the same time as a more elaborated and

sophisticated version of the mentor pattern. The marriage of Dorothea Brooke and Edward Casaubon proves to be a reversal of the established paradigm, but a reversal which allows the same growth and same resolution as the other mentor relationships. I will begin my discussion with the mentor relationship which establishes these basic traits and characteristics, that of Esther Lyon and Felix Holt.

II. Esther and Felix

The mentor relationship of *Felix Holt, The Radical* results in the "inward revolution" (389) of Esther Lyon. Through her association with Felix, she comes to see the "'good strong terrible vision'" (224) that prevents her from succumbing to what once would have been a fatal temptation: a life of comfort and ease—and likely great unhappiness—as wife to the heir of Transome Court. The process of re-education that Esther undergoes under Felix's tutelage results in a transformation as fundamental as "'inward revolution'" suggests. Felix challenges her initial shallow and petty values and shows Esther that she is capable of creating and sustaining a deeper appreciation of the world. This new approach to life is put to the test when Esther discovers her claim to Transome Court. Her mentor's success at Esther's re-education is proven by her decision to return to the more difficult—but now more valuable—lot of her former life, even if she might have to face the challenges alone, without the love and support of Felix.

The relationship which develops between Felix and Esther is well covered in critical discussions; most of these discussions concern themselves with the weaknesses in the characterisation of Felix Holt and the depiction of the moral growth of Esther Lyon. In his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Felix Holt*, Peter Coveney speaks of Esther's "'inward revolution'" (18) and its precise nature:

> Esther's 'inward revolution' lay in her moving morally from the surface of her life into depths below the superfice of social manners which were the outward expression of a moral emptiness within. Her ambition, as it is disclosed at the beginning of the novel, would have been fully realized in achieving the inheritance of Transome Court. The irony lies in the fact that when she acquires it in the second half of the work, she has been brought to realize the 'deluded brightness' for the delusion it is. The essence of Esther's initial delusion is to confuse social surfaces for moral content; and this delusion is at the heart of her confrontation with Felix. (46)

Peter Coveney also points out the weaknesses he perceives in Felix as a character—"He is more often a moral assertion than a live human being, becoming at times almost a visualized mannerism" (14)—as well as those flaws that arise from the "narrow time scale" of the plot, most notably the lack of conviction in Esther's

change: "The speed however with which the process of her moralizing revolution must be effected precludes a sense of the kind of moral development in Esther which we associate with *Middlemarch*" (38).

Other critics raise similar issues and criticisms. Laurence Lerner calls Esther "the only one of George Eliots' 'sinners' who is influenced mainly and directly as a consequence of falling in love with the noble nature" (*The Truthtellers* 47), and after a short discussion of how she and Felix do come to fall in love, ends with an analysis of the flaws in Felix Holt's characterisation—he is "too good to be true" (49). He pins the blame for Felix's weakness as a character to the fact that

> the author never sees him [Felix] with her own eyes. She sees his influence upon Esther, she understands how Esther's resistance gradually turns into idealisation—and then she accepts that idealisation as a true version of Felix. (52)

Bernard J. Paris states that "Esther Lyon was nurtured to vision and sympathy (rather too quickly to be artistically convincing) by her contact with the higher nature of Felix Holt" (*Experiments in Life* 228-29). He includes an extensive discussion of the novel, detailing how Felix shocks Esther "out of her self-complacency and subjectivity into a perception of a new set of values" (230), and how these new values affect her in the second part of the book. He suggests that

> Esther's visit to Transome Court completed her education; for it gave her an opportunity to see how limited were the life and the lover she had always dreamed of. (231-32)

Her ability to see Harold Transome's weaknesses comes from "[h]er admiration of Felix [which] acted as a touchstone by which she could discern the hollowness and egotism of Harold's nature" (232).

Joan Bennett calls Mrs Transome and Esther the "principal characters" of "the moral theme of the book," and while Mrs Transome "reaps the bitter fruit" of her past "fatally self-indulgent choice",

> Esther who is a charming and intelligent, but unconsciously selfish girl at the beginning of the book, develops selflessness and courage under the influence of the right choice, towards which she is gradually moving

> throughout the story. The juxtaposition and contrasting of these two women is an almost allegorical simplification of George Eliot's moral idea. (*Art of George Eliot* 157)

Barbara Hardy states that Felix offers Esther "both love and salvation" and that Esther's "progress [is] from mere 'good taste' towards a wider vision of herself and the world" (*Study in Form* 62). But she goes on to criticise the depiction of Esther's "moral choice" between marriage to Harold Transome or the more difficult but morally superior life of her past because it lacks "the conviction of a tragic ordeal":

> [Esther's] growth has not only been made with Felix's help but it is made also in order to prove herself worthy. Moral improvement is a fair and common means of promoting one's attractions and justifiable in this context, but the amorous motive weakens the moral choice. And the conclusion confirms our suspicions of complacency: Esther . . . . has too much to gain by her tragic ordeal . . . . (*Study in Form* 62-63)

She sums up her criticism by saying that "we are asked to applaud a renunciation and a moral reversal which seem weakened by the absence of pain and moral strength" (63). She also cites Felix, along with Dinah Morris and Daniel Deronda, as an example of those characters who "have the simplicity and great stature of abstractions in a Morality Play, and something of their magical power" (101).

Barbara Hardy's statement that Felix offers "both love and salvation" suggests one explanation for the initial attraction between Felix and Esther, for this attraction is difficult to characterise. In the opening chapters the two are in complete opposition to one another. A governess living with her step-father, the dissenting minister Rufus Lyon, Esther is vain and discontented because "she seemed to herself to be surrounded with ignoble, uninteresting conditions, from which there was no issue" (68). Her education in France and subsequent employment in "situations where she had contracted notions not only above her own rank, but of too worldly a kind to be safe in any rank" (67), has resulted chiefly in an extensive knowledge about the niceties of "'fine-ladyism'" (64)—Felix's term—and a system of judgement based solely on appearance and "fastidious taste" (68):

> [Esther] had a little code of her own about scents and colours, textures

> and behaviour, by which she secretly condemned or sanctioned all things and persons. And she was well satisfied with herself for her fastidious taste, never doubting that hers was the highest standard. She was proud that the best-born and handsomest girls at school had always said that she might be taken for a born lady. (68-69)

Felix is in complete contrast to Esther's doctrine of good taste, for he cares nothing for appearances and fashion. His own unorthodox appearance startles even the good-natured and generous Rufus Lyon:

> The minister, accustomed to the respectable air of provincial townsmen, and especially to the sleek well-clipped gravity of his own male congregation, felt a slight shock as his glasses made perfectly clear to him the shaggy-headed, large-eyed, strong-limbed person of this questionable young man, without waistcoat or cravat. (54)

His desire to "'stick to the class I belong to—people who don't follow the fashions'" (57) results in his rejection of his past education and medical training, as well as Mr Lyon's suggestion that since he can "'write a good hand and keep books, were it not well to seek some higher situation as clerk or assistant'" (57), in favour of "'watch and clock cleaning, and teaching one or two little chaps'" (56). His ambitions are in total opposition to Esther's dreams of ascending the social ladder, and he feels an obligation to the working classes:

> "Why should I want to get into the middle class because I have some learning? The most of the middle class are as ignorant as the working people about everything that doesn't belong to their own Brummagem life. That's how the working men are left to foolish devices and keep worsening themselves: the best heads among them forsake their born comrades, and go in for a house with a high doorstep and a brass knocker." (57)

That Felix and Esther with their entirely opposing ideals clash at their first meeting cannot be surprising; what is surprising is an underlying attraction that causes the acquaintance to continue and results in Esther's re-education. Felix is offended by Esther's belief that she does not "'mind about people having right opinions so that they had good taste'" which he calls "'making a boast of littleness'" (107), and Esther is equally offended by Felix's manner and outspokenness: "He was ill-bred, he was rude, he had taken an unwarrantable liberty" (110). But while this 'ideological' opposition explains their initial interest in

one another—manifested by each being deeply offended by the other—it cannot fully explain their continuing mutual fascination. Felix privately pronounces Esther "'A peacock!'" and then adds "'I should like to come and scold her every day, and make her cry and cut her fine hair off'" (65), and Esther, although she considers Felix "'very coarse and rude,'" is nevertheless anxious to question her father further about him, for "'he speaks better English than most of our visitors,'" and is "disappointed" (66) when her father explains Felix's situation. Laurence Lerner suggests that Felix is sexually attracted to Esther although he refuses to admit to it.[4] Such an attraction could account for his continuing interest in Esther, which ultimately results in her "salvation" and their marriage. Esther has a similar paradoxical reaction to Felix: she is annoyed and insulted by his criticism but also equally frustrated by the absence of any attraction to her: "Felix ought properly to have been a little in love with her—never mentioning it of course, because that would have been disagreeable, and his being a regular lover was out of the question" (105). Instead, she is aware only of Felix's sense of superiority over her, a superiority which she acknowledges as justified:

> But it was quite clear that, instead of feeling any disadvantage on his own side, he held himself to be immeasurably her superior: and, what was worse, Esther had a secret consciousness that he was her superior. She was all the more vexed at the suspicion that he thought slightly of her; and wished in her vexation that she could have found more fault with him—that she had not been obliged to admire more and more the varying expressions of his open face and his deliciously good-humoured laugh, always loud at a joke against himself. Besides, she could not help having her curiosity roused by the unusual combinations both in his mind and in

[4] Lerner cites Felix's impassioned diatribe against marriage, which he delivers immediately after leaving the Lyon household, as evidence "that his attraction to Esther is sexual" (*Truthtellers* 48). Bernard J. Paris's account of their attraction to one another is much closer to my own, beginning with their initial opposition to one another, moving to their second meeting with one another in which Felix begins to destroy Esther's complacency, and then the gradual diminishing of Esther's resentment against Felix at the same time as she develops "a strong desire to understand his philosophy of life better and to show him that she was not so petty as he thought her" (*Experiments in Life* 230). From there, she begins to desire Felix as a lover. Although I am not entirely sure Lerner's claim of sexual attraction is supported by the text, it does help to justify Felix and Esther's lingering fascination for one another, especially in light of the strong dislike and offence they feel for one other upon their first meeting.

his outward position . . . . (105-6)

Whatever the reasons for Felix's interest in Esther—attraction to her beauty and charm, belief in her intelligence, disgust at the smallness and shallowness of her vision—this interest prompts him to issue a challenge to Esther. He destroys her belief in the authority of good taste, which he defines as men's "'thoughts about small [subjects]'" as opposed to "'great subjects'" (107), and then suggests that she must learn to take responsibility for her life and her beliefs. He tells her, "'You have enough understanding to make it wicked that you should add one more to the women who hinder men's lives from having any nobleness in them'" (107), and then continues,

> "I want you to change. . . . by asking yourself whether life is not as solemn a thing as your father takes it to be—in which you may be either a blessing or a curse to many. You know you have never done that. . . . You are discontented with the world because you can't get just the small things that suit your pleasure, not because it's a world where myriads of men and women are ground by wrong and misery, and tainted with pollution. . . . I can't bear to see you going the way of the foolish women who spoil men's lives." (108-9)

Esther's reaction to Felix's challenge is complex and changes gradually over time. She is outraged and humiliated but at the same time flattered by the notice Felix has taken of her; she is also sensitive to every word he has spoken:

> He was ill-bred, he was rude, he had taken an unwarrantable liberty; yet his indignant words were a tribute to her. he thought she was worth more pains than the women of whom he took no notice. . . . But he wanted her to change. For the first time in her life Esther felt herself seriously shaken in her self-contentment. She knew there was a mind to which she appeared trivial, narrow, selfish. Every word Felix had said to her seemed to have burnt itself into her memory. She felt as if she should for evermore be haunted by self-criticism, and never do anything to satisfy those fancies on which she had simply piqued herself before without being dogged by inward questions. (110)

But although she acknowledges the truth behind Felix's criticisms, her pride prevents her from revealing this acknowledgement to him: "She could not bear that Felix should not respect her, yet she could not bear that he should see her bend before his denunciation" (110). It is this confused reaction resulting from the destruction of her complacency that is the genesis of Esther's "inward revolution."

The outward manifestations of Esther's "seriously shaken . . . self-contentment" appear first in her relationship with her step-father. Her pride may keep her from wanting to change herself, but she is determined to maintain an irreproachable relationship with her father: ". . . now she had been stung—stung even into a new consciousness concerning her father. Was it true that his life was so much worthier than her own? She could not change for anything Felix said, but she told herself he was mistaken if he supposed her incapable of generous thoughts" (111). Her new attention to her father appears trivial but is entirely appropriate, for it pleases Mr Lyon and marks an important change in Esther:

> . . . Esther took a towel, which she threw over her shoulders, and then brushed the thick long fringe of [her father's] soft auburn hair. This very trifling act, which she had brought herself to for the first time yesterday, meant a great deal in Esther's little history. It had been her habit to leave the mending of her father's clothes to Lyddy; she had not liked even to touch his cloth garments; still less had it seemed a thing she would willingly undertake to correct his toilette, and use a brush for him. But having once done this, under her new sense of faulty omission, the affectionateness that was in her flowed so pleasantly, as she saw how much her father was moved by what he thought a great act of tenderness, that she quite longed to repeat it. (170-71)

George Eliot makes clear that motive is as important as action: "Very slight words and deeds may have a sacramental efficacy, if we can cast our self-love behind us, in order to say or do them," adding that "the beginning of compunction is the beginning of a new life" (134). Certainly Esther's new affection for her father is the first outward sign of her "inward revolution."[5]

Esther's "resentment" against Felix's "too harsh conception of her character" (134) soon mellows into a lingering fascination with him and the criticisms he has

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[5] Esther's relationship with her step-father is an important gauge of the effect Felix has upon her. When Rufus Lyon finally tells Esther the story of her real parents—an action he has postponed for fear of losing her affection—he attributes her response of "'Father, father! forgive me if I have not loved you enough. I will—I will!'" (217) to "'the work of grace'" (217). George Eliot supplies the actual cause: "the mental preparation that had come during the last two months from her acquaintance with Felix Holt, which had taught her to doubt the infallibility of her own standard, and raised a presentiment of moral depths that were hidden from her" (216).

made of her life. She begins to recognise the "'idle fancy and selfish inclination'" (108) in her daydreams "of a possible somebody who would admire her hands and feet, and delight in looking at their beauty, and long, yet not dare, to kiss them." Now such dreams are interrupted by the thought of Felix: "But it was precisely this longing after her own satisfaction that Felix had reproached her with" (152). She also begins to acknowledge the merit of what Felix has told her, but is not yet able to see how she can incorporate his admonition to "'do better'" (109) into her present life:

> Did he want her to be heroic? That seemed impossible without some great occasion. Her life was a heap of fragments, and so were her thoughts: some great energy was needed to bind them together. Esther was beginning to lose her complacency at her own wit and criticism; to lose the sense of superiority in an awakening need for reliance on one whose vision was wider, whose nature was purer and stronger than her own. (152)

Her pride and complacency overcome by the recognition of Felix's superiority, she is no longer concerned "that he should see her bend before his denunciation" and Esther finds a pretence for a visit to the Holt household in order to begin the process of redeeming herself in Felix's eyes. Her distress and dissatisfaction at his dismissal of her as trivial is proven to be genuine by her lack of self-control and decorum as she says to him,

> "I wanted to tell you that I was not offended—that I am not ungenerous—I thought you might think—but you have not thought of it." (193)

Their interview marks an important stage in their relationship. Esther is impressed by the kindness and sensitivity of Felix's behaviour and George Eliot hints at Felix's growing affection for Esther.[6] Esther is now prepared to recognise both the respect and love she feels for Felix:

> Behind all Esther's thoughts, like an unacknowledged yet constraining presence, there was the sense, that if Felix Holt were to love her, her life

[6] These hints arise from her description of his reaction to Esther's rather emotional outburst. "Esther had her two little delicately-gloved hands clasped on the table. The next moment she felt one hand of Felix covering them both and pressing them firmly, but he did not speak. . . . His eyes had an expression of sadness in them, quite new to her" (193).

> would be exalted into something quite new—into a sort of difficult blessedness, such as one may imagine in beings who are conscious of painfully growing into the possession of higher powers. (197)

Felix's determination that marriage will interfere with his ambitions to "'try to make life less bitter for a few within my reach'" (225), prevents him from sharing in Esther's dream of their life together. But his growing love for Esther nevertheless manifests itself and in a manner as indicative of his character as Esther's dream of marriage is of hers. During a walk together, as Felix tells Esther of his plans and ambitions, he makes a statement which, in its concern for Esther's future, is as close as he will allow himself to come to a confession of how much he does care for her. He tells Esther that he is "'a man . . . . warned by visions'" and when she jokingly expresses a wish for the same powers, he responds with a seriousness and intensity which indicate his belief in her potential for good and his anxiety for her happiness:

> ". . . I want you to have such a vision of the future that you may never lose your best self. Some charm or other may be flung about you—some of your atta-of-rose fascinations—and nothing but a good strong terrible vision will save you. And if it did save you, you might be that woman I was thinking of a little while ago when I looked at your face: the woman whose beauty makes a great task easier to men instead of turning them away from it. I am not likely to see such fine issues; but they may come where a woman's spirit is finely touched. I should like to be sure they would come to you." (224)

Felix's words are prophetic for "'[s]ome charm or other . . . [is] flung about'" Esther when she discovers her claim to the Transome estate and then goes to stay at Transome Court at the invitation of the family. Equally prophetic is the mention of "'a good strong terrible vision'" which does in fact "'save'" Esther, and which she achieves only because of her relationship with Felix and the "inward revolution" he has begun.[7] But it still requires some time to achieve this vision

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[7] Bernard J. Paris makes precisely the same point when he says that "Felix was prophetic: for Esther was subjected to the temptation of ease and refinement; she was saved, in part at least, by a strong terrible vision of the future; and she did become a fitting help-mate for noble endeavor" (231). Barbara Hardy also acknowledges Esther's vision, and Felix's part in helping her to attain it: ". . . [Felix] gives her [Esther], by love, and by what she calls angry pedagogy, the strong vision which leads her away from the life of her romantic dream, where her

and much of this process involves Esther's growing recognition of her responsibility for her own actions. When she first leaves to go to Transome Court, her ideal of struggling to live a "higher" life is strongly associated with Felix, and she thinks to herself that his absence also means the absence of all moral ambition:

> He [Felix] was like no one else to her: he had seemed to bring at once a law, and the love that gave strength to obey the law. . . . The first religious experience of her life—the first self-questioning, the first voluntary subjection, the first longing to acquire the strength of greater motives and obey the more strenuous rule—had come to her through Felix Holt. No wonder that she felt as if the loss of him were inevitable backsliding. (227)

By the time she decides to leave the Transome family, she recognises the need within herself to try to achieve the higher ideal even without Felix's immediate presence and influence.

As Esther leaves the morally heightened atmosphere of her father's home, and at the same time puts herself out of the reach of Felix's influence to go to Transome Court, her mood changes. She loses her apprehension and initially enjoys the superficial ambience of pleasure and luxury, for she is still—despite her new receptivity to the ideals of both her father and Felix—attracted by such trappings: "[s]he had always thought that life must be particularly easy if one could pass it among refined people" (310-11). She also quickly comes to enjoy the companionship of Harold Transome—new heir to the estate—who is the embodiment of her original daydreams of a handsome chivalrous gentleman:

> In spite of all the grave thoughts that had been, Esther felt it a very pleasant as well as new experience to be led to the carriage by Harold Transome, to be seated on soft cushions, and bowled along, looked at admiringly and deferentially by a person opposite, whom it was agreeable to look at in return, and talked to with suavity and liveliness. . . . Her young bright nature was rather weary of the sadness that had grown heavier in these last weeks, like a chill white mist hopelessly veiling the day. Her fortune was beginning to appear worthy of being called good fortune. (313)

Esther also establishes a comfortable relationship with Mrs Transome, "whose beauty, position, and graceful kindness towards herself [Esther], made deference to her

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[7](cont'd) ladylike sensibility may be gratified" (*Study in Form* 61).

spontaneous" (321). Despite her recent association with Felix, Esther is still susceptible to the outward charms of Mrs Transome's life, like the "family stories that to Esther were like so many novelettes" (320) and fine clothes:

> . . . it was [pleasant] to be decked by Mrs Transome's own hands in a set of turquoise ornaments, which became her wonderfully, worn with a white Cashmere dress, which was also insisted on. Esther never reflected that there was a double intention in these pretty ways towards her; with young generosity, she was rather preoccupied by the desire to prove that she herself entertained no low triumph in the fact that she had rights prejudicial to this family whose life she was learning. (321)

Esther's recent association with Felix, however, has left too strong a mark for her easily to fall prey to the superficial charm of either Transome Court or its inmates. She quickly develops a fondness and affection for Harold Transome, and they spend a great deal of time together, exchanging witty conversation and genuinely enjoying one another's company. But as Harold and Esther converse, she is repeatedly interrupted by the thought of Felix:

> "Ah, how chivalrous you are!" said Esther, as Harold, kneeling on one knee, held her silken netting stirrup for her to put her foot through. She had often fancied pleasant scenes in which such homage was rendered to her, and the homage was not disagreeable now it was really come; but, strangely enough, a little darting sensation at that moment was accompanied by the vivid remembrance of some one who had never paid the least attention to her foot.

Later, when Harold offers, in a conventional, stylised manner to list Esther's "'perfections,'" she stops him by saying, "'Pray don't begin . . . it would be dangerous to our good understanding. The person I liked best in the world was one who did nothing but scold me and tell me of my faults'" (324).

Felix is quickly established as more than merely a memory for Esther, for he becomes her standard of judgement. Despite her fascination and fondness for Harold, the "'finished gentleman'" (106), she soon recognises his moral inferiority.

> . . . she found herself mentally protesting that, whatever Harold might think, there was a light in which he was vulgar compared with Felix. Felix had ideas and motives which she did not believe that Harold could understand. More than all, there was this test: she herself had no sense of inferiority and just subjection when she was with Harold Transome; there were even points in him for which she felt a touch, not of angry, but of playful scorn; whereas with Felix she had always a sense of dependence and possible illumination. (340-41)

Harold further reveals his inferiority when he speaks to Esther of Felix, and the probable outcome of his prosecution for manslaughter. When Harold suggests that Felix is "'[a] little queer and conceited, perhaps'" and then asks Esther if his "'eccentricity is a sort of fanaticism,'" Esther leaps to Felix's defense and asserts his superiority and integrity:

> "If it is eccentricity to be very much better than other men, he is certainly eccentric; and fanatical too, if it is fanatical to renounce all small selfish motives for the sake of a great and unselfish one. I never knew what nobleness of character really was before I knew Felix Holt. . . . I think I didn't see the meaning of anything fine—I did not even see the value of my father's character, until I had been taught it by hearing what Felix Holt said, and seeing that his life was like his words." (350-51)

It adds further evidence to Harold's moral inferiority that he is incapable of considering Felix in the light of a rival for Esther's affection. Although at this point Esther has virtually lost hope of ever becoming Felix's wife, it is the goodness and integrity that she sees in Felix which is the cause of her rejection of Harold as a suitor: "There may be a passion in the mind of a woman which precipitates her, not along the path of easy beguilement, but into a great leap away from it" (351).

As Esther's stay at Transome Court lengthens, her affection for the family grows at the same time as she senses a disturbing undercurrent to the life of the "refined people" (311) who inhabit the house. A discrepancy emerges between Esther's "day-dreams" (341) of what such a life might be like and the actual day to day existence she observes. She is unsettled by the "feeble-minded, timid, paralytic" Mr Transome: "Certainly this had never been part of the furniture she had imagined for the delightful aristocratic dwelling in her Utopia" (319). Equally disquieting is the sight of the melancholy Mrs Transome:

> . . . through all Mrs Transome's perfect manners there pierced some indefinable indications of a hidden anxiety much deeper than anything she could feel about this affair of the estate [i.e. Esther's claim to it]—to which she often alluded slightly as a reason for informing Esther of something. It was impossible to mistake her for a happy woman. (321)

The aura of sadness and dissatisfaction around her combines with her recognition of

Harold Transome's moral inferiority to bring Esther to a realisation:

> . . . this life at Transome Court was *not* the life of her daydreams: there was dulness already in its ease, and in the absence of high demand . . . . She would not have been able perhaps to define this impression; but somehow or other by this elevation of fortune it seemed that the higher ambition which had begun to spring in her was for ever nullified. (341)

Felix's imprisonment, Esther's sudden claim to what once was "the life of her daydreams," her recognition of "how difficult it was to fix a point at which the disturbance [of the Transome's possession of the estate] might begin" (322), and the evident desire of Harold to marry her all conspire to entrap Esther in the "air of moral mediocrity" (341) of Transome Court, and cause her momentarily to lapse in the moral ambition Felix had once inspired in her.

> . . . Harold had daily become more of the solicitous and indirectly beseeching lover; and Esther, from the very fact that she was weighed on by thoughts that were painfully bewildering to her—by thoughts which, in their newness to her young mind, seemed to shake her belief that life could be anything else than a compromise with things repugnant to the moral taste—had become more passive to his attentions at the very time that she had begun to feel more profoundly that in accepting Harold Transome she left the high mountain air, the passionate serenity of perfect love for ever behind her, and must adjust her wishes ~~to a~~ life of middling delights, overhung with the languorous haziness of motiveless ease, where poetry was only literature, and the fine ideas had to be taken down from the shelves of the library when her husband's back was turned. But it seemed as if all outward conditions concurred, along with her generous sympathy for the Transomes, and with those native tendencies against which she had once begun to struggle, to make this middling lot the best she could attain to. (357-58)

This lapse is particularily dangerous in light of a past statement Esther has made to Felix, that "'[a] woman can hardly ever choose . . . she is dependent on what happens to her. She must take meaner things, because only meaner things are within her reach'" (225). Her presence at Transome Court and the constant attentions of Harold Transome have a strong effect upon her, for "the gradual wooing of Harold had acted on her with a constant immediate influence that predominated over all indefinite prospects . . ." (360) and she begins to believe "that the love of this not unfascinating man who hovered about her gave an air of moral mediocrity to all her prospects" (341). Esther is no longer capable of

seeing beyond his influence:

> After all, she was a woman, and could not make her own lot. As she had once said to Felix, "A woman must choose meaner things, because only meaner things are offered to her." Her lot is made for her by the love she accepts. And Esther began to think that her lot was being made for her by the love that was surrounding her with the influence of a garden on a summer morning. (342)

What prevents Esther's "lot" from "being made for her by the love" of Harold Transome—for she does feel strong affection for him, despite his moral weaknesses—is the influence of Felix Holt. Esther's gradual "disenchantment" (359) and growing confusion regarding the Transome family and her own claim to the estate have taken place at the same time as Felix's arrest and imprisonment on charges of manslaughter for his part in the election riot. His trial marks not only the climax of his own proceedings but also the awakening of those higher motives in Esther's consciousness that have wilted in the absence of his influence. Esther and Felix meet briefly before his trial, and although Esther is disheartened by Felix's immediate assumption that she will marry Harold Transome, they have an important conversation. From the beginning of their relationship, Felix has challenged the assumptions upon which Esther has based her opinions; one challenge in particular which he issues regards Esther's belief in her dependence upon circumstance. He tells her that

> "If a woman really believes herself to be a lower kind of being, she should place herself in subjection: she should be ruled by the thoughts of her father or husband. If not, let her show her power of choosing something better." (108)

Esther's longstanding reaction to this advice, even after she willingly accepts Felix's superiority, is bewilderment; she understands the value of Felix's attitude but cannot yet envision how to exercise "'her power of choosing something better'" in her own life. Her conversation with Felix immediately before his trial, however, proves directly relevant and applicable to her immediate dilemma regarding Harold and her claim to the estate. Felix explains to her that failure would come to him only when he abandoned his integrity:

> "But I'm proof against that word failure. I've seen behind it. The only failure a man ought to fear is failure in cleaving to the purpose he sees to be best. As to just the amount of result he may see from his particular work—that's a tremendous uncertainty: the universe has not been arranged for the gratification of his feelings. As long as a man sees and believes in some great good, he'll prefer working towards that in the way he's best fit for, come what may. I put effects at their minimum, but I'd rather have the minimum of effect, if it's of the sort I care for, than the maximum of effect I don't care for—a lot of fine things that are not to my taste—and if they were, the conditions of holding them while the world is what it is, are such as would jar on me like grating metal." "Yes," said Esther, in a low tone, "I think I understand that now, better than I used to do." The words of Felix at last seemed strangely to fit her own experience. (364)

Whether consciously or subconsciously, this speech from Felix motivates Esther to undertake a series of actions for which she is solely responsible and which have far-reaching effects. The first action is her decision to testify at Felix's trial. Esther has been listening "with growing misery, in the sense that all had not been said which might have been said on behalf of Felix" (374). Her choice to explain to the court-room that Felix could have entertained no other motive than that which was "'brave and good'" (376) in his involvement in the riot is supported by her recognition, "painfully pressing on her inward vision . . . that the trial was coming to an end, and that the voice of right and truth had not been strong enough" (375). Harold later attributes to Esther's testimony at least partial responsibility for Felix's pardon for, as he tells her, "'You made all the men wish what you wished'" (388).

It is also Felix's influence that leads Esther to another, more difficult decision: the resignation of her claim to the Transome estate. This decision is fed by a "'good strong terrible vision'" that makes her realise her own responsibility in avoiding a similar fate. After the emotional climax of the trial in which Esther was urged by high and noble motives, she finds the atmosphere of Transome Court "oppressive" (386). She is especially affected by the portrait of Mrs Transome which hangs in the drawing-room:

> the youthful brilliancy it represented saddened Esther by its inevitable association with what she daily saw had come instead of it—a joyless,

> embittered age. The sense that Mrs Transome was unhappy, affected Esther more and more deeply as the growing familiarity which relaxed the efforts of the hostess revealed more and more the threadbare tissue of this majestic lady's life. (385)

Esther seems to herself more sensitive to her surroundings and her actions: "her mind was in that state of highly wrought activity, that large discourse, in which we seem to stand aloof from our own life—weighing impartially our own temptations and the weak desires that most habitually solicit us" (385-86). She jokes to herself that "'I think I am getting that power Felix wished me to have: I shall soon see strong visions'" (386).

In the course of what is her last evening at Transome Court, Esther does see a vision, and one strong enough to determine her life's course. Oppressed by the "deluded brightness" of the house (386), and saddened by Harold's troubled demeanour, she retires to her room to consider whether to continue with or to renounce her claim to the Transome estate.[1] By renouncing her claim, she would be in a position to pursue that course "which she now felt profoundly to be the best thing that life could give her" (389), but she would also be running a great risk, for she has no guarantee that she will actually marry Felix and "[e]ven with the fulfilment of her hope, she knew that she pledged herself to meet high demands" (390). Her other alternative, staying at Transome Court with her new inheritance and also the possibility of eventually marrying Harold, presents "a lot where everything seemed easy—but for the fatal absence of those feelings which, now she had once known them, it seemed nothing less than a fall and a degradation to do without" (390). Her brief stay at Transome Court has helped her to form a distinct vision of what her life might become:

> With a terrible prescience which a multitude of impressions during her stay at Transome Court had contributed to form, she saw herself in a silken bondage that arrested all motive, and was nothing better than a well-cushioned despair. To be restless amidst ease, to be languid among all appliances for pleasure, was a possibility that seemed to haunt the rooms

[1] Harold has formally withdrawn any claim to Esther's affection, thus ruling out an imminent marriage, but he offers to begin the process of turning over the estate to her.

> of this house, and wander with her under the oaks and elms of the park. And Harold Transome's love, no longer a hovering fancy with which she played, but become a serious fact, seemed to threaten her with stifling oppression. (390)

To remain at Transome Court would result in Esther's failure "'in cleaving to the purpose [s]he sees to be best.'"

As Esther considers this hypothetical vision of future misery, she is disturbed by the miseries of Transome Court's present inmates. She hears Mrs Transome pacing in the corridor and,

> [a]s Esther saw that image of restless misery, it blent itself by a rapid flash with all that Harold had said in the evening. She divined that the son's new trouble must be one with the mother's long sadness. (393)

Esther helps Mrs Transome—wretched because Harold has finally been made aware that Jermyn is his real father—to bed, stays by her through the night, and then persuades Harold to be by his mother when she wakes. This immediate image of misery becomes that "'good strong terrible vision'" that ultimately determines Esther's course.

> The dimly-suggested tragedy of this woman's life, the dreary waste of years empty of sweet trust and affection, afflicted her even to horror. It seemed to have come as a last vision to urge her towards the life where the draughts of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love. (393-94)[9]

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[9] George Eliot's "Introduction" to *Felix Holt* ends with a bleak suggestion of private and silent pain and sorrow for past deeds that make their mark upon future generations—this hints at the misery of Mrs Transome and the pain she passes on to Harold when he discovers that Jermyn is his real father—as well as a reference to Dante's *Inferno*: "The poets have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the underworld. The thorn-bushes there, and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams. These things are a parable" (11). Peter Coveney links the imagery and emphasis of the trees on the grounds of Transome Court to this passage: "The trees which shut in the aristocratic world of Transome Court from the public 'working-day world' are equally the trees of the private 'under world' which the Transomes inhabit—the trees indeed of Canto XIII of Dante's *Inferno* which, one might think, were referred to directly and seminally enough in the concluding paragraph of the Introduction . . ." (36). In the course of her stay at Transome Court, the "strong vision" which makes Esther decide to leave is, in these terms, in fact a vision of hell—or a vision of Mrs Transome's private hell—and she, like Dante, is given the opportunity to see this vision for her own benefit. Barry Qualls makes a similar connection between this reference to Dante and Mrs Transome's suffering: "Mrs

Esther is unable to "find . . . [her] home" among "the saddening relics and new finery of Transome Court" and she decides instead to return to her father (395).[10]

The novel ends with Felix's and Esther's decision to marry. Felix invites her to "'share the life of a poor man'" and warns her of the hardships of such an existence, adding "'It is very serious, Esther'" (396). Her response indicates that she wishes to marry Felix not only out of love for him but also out of respect for what he wishes to achieve in his life, his desire to "'try to make life less bitter for a few within . . . [his] reach.'"

> "I know it is serious," said Esther, looking up at him. "Since I have been at Transome Court I have seen many things very seriously. If I had not, I should not have left what I did leave. I made a deliberate choice." (396)

Rather than being "'dependent on what happens to her,'" Esther has instead shown "'her power of choosing something better,'" thus escaping Transome Court's "silken bondage" to live among the "fountains of reverence and devout love" giving forth their "draughts of joy."

Felix does indeed "proselytize and love successfully" (*Study in Form* 57); he instigates and nurtures Esther's "inward revolution," and then she demonstrates the effectiveness of his influence by ordering her life in accordance with his principles. Her short stay at Transome Court is crucial in illustrating to Esther the practical application of Felix's ideology. Early in their relationship, Esther tells Felix

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[9](cont'd) Transome is in 'bondage' (8: 99) utterly and forlornly as anyone in Dante's infernal forest" (164).

[10] While pointing out that *Felix Holt*'s conclusion "does not follow the conventions," Barry Qualls comments on Esther's decision to leave Transome Court: "The Cinderella of the tale cares not a whit for the prince of *her* palace. Her happy-ever-after life is based on her rejecting that myth of self-fulfillment. Esther's 'last vision' has directed her away from this grand material world of fairy-tale comfort towards 'the life where the draughts of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love' (50: 393-4)" (166). Qualls also comments on the guides who help Esther to achieve this vision: "Felix with his kind of vision, her father with his . . . . She is not like Maggie, stymied by books which she cannot see round, but like Philip Wakem: there are human voices to awaken her and pull her forward. Esther has the Dantes to force her towards those 'strong visions' which will not be found in the well-bred ease of her daydreams (49: 386)" (165).

can "'imagine . . . choosing hardship as the better lot'" (225), yet she enthusiastically accepts the invitation to Transome Court because "[s]he had always thought that life must be particularily easy if one could pass it among refined people; and so it seemed at this moment" (310-11). However, despite this momentary lapse, it is through Felix's influence that Esther is able to see the vision of misery at Transome Court; a vision that would otherwise have ecaped her had she been relying on her original doctrine of good taste. Felix has trained her to see "below the superfice of social manners . . . [to the] moral emptiness within" (Coveney 46). By the close of the novel, Esther's predominant concern is to be worthy of Felix's love: "She knew that he loved her: had he not said how a woman might help a man if she were worthy? and if she proved herself worthy?" (390). Esther's independent decision to leave Transome Court, which she achieves through her recognition of the superiority of Felix's values, provides this proof. She rejects the original "life of her day-dreams" and instead achieves a much greater happiness with Felix, a possibility which she was incapable of considering before she met him. Felix has awakened that "depth below" in Esther which had previously been "sleeping" (376).

III. Gwendolen and Daniel

While pointing out the similarities in character and patterning in George Eliot's novels, Barbara Hardy calls Gwendolen Harleth "a less successful Esther" (*Study in Form* 136). A comparison between the two heroines of *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda* is enlightening, for they share a considerable number of traits. Perhaps the most significant conclusion to be reached from this comparison also provides the basis for Barbara Hardy's statement, and that is Gwendolen's far greater complexity as a character. Each point of similarity between the two heroines suggests that Gwendolen's character represents an expanded, elaborated version. George Eliot has seemingly established the pattern of the heroine's re-education and moral redemption through interaction with her mentor in *Felix Holt*; *Daniel Deronda* contains a more complex variation of this pattern.

There are remarkable similarities in the character traits of Esther and Gwendolen. Both begin their respective novels as vain, shallow, and concerned with surface and appearance; both, however, also share a capacity for potential goodness that has been underdeveloped due to education and circumstance. Esther's potential is suggested initially through mention of her generosity. George Eliot explains that Esther "hated all meanness, would empty her purse impulsively on some sudden appeal to her pity, and if she found out that her father had a want, she would supply it with some pretty device of a surprise" (*FH* 69). Esther's almost immediate 'conversion' to Felix's point of view supplies all further evidence of her potential. Gwendolen's capacity for moral development, however, is painstakingly evoked in the opening books of *Daniel Deronda*. She is "The Spoiled Child" of Book One, but her portrait includes a depiction of irrational fears and weaknesses as well as brief flashes of generosity, all of which contribute to the suggestion that Gwendolen's character is far more complex than even she might wish it to be; she may be "The Spoiled Child," but she also contains the seeds to develop far beyond her present state.

The complexity of Gwendolen's character also adds depth to the relationship which develops with her mentor, Daniel Deronda. Felix and Esther develop an attraction to one another that is almost illogical in light of the discrepancies of their beliefs when they first meet one another. The problems which arise from trying to describe and characterise this initial attraction of mentor and heroine are dispelled in *Daniel Deronda* mainly through the peculiarities and complexities of Gwendolen's mind. Her tendency to superstitions and irrational fears supplies the basis for her initial interest in Daniel, and their future contact develops from this basis. The awkwardness of trying to establish why Esther and Felix would continue to be interested in one another since they both dislike one another upon first meeting is effectively solved by the "superstitious dread" (374) that initially draws Gwendolen to Daniel. Daniel's own carefully documented history of similar philanthropic undertakings also effectively explains his interest in Gwendolen.

Even when the similarities in character between Esther and Gwendolen end, a contrast of the two mentor relationships is still enlightening. Esther is 'saved' by her mentor before she has an opportunity to commit a serious moral error. She withstands her 'temptation'—the opportunity of living at Transome Court, possibly as Harold Transome's wife—through the influence of Felix and only witnesses a scene of potential misery and punishment in the person of Mrs Transome. Gwendolen, however, has seen Daniel only once—and spoken no words with him—before she commits a serious moral error through her decision to marry Grandcourt. Instead of only witnessing a vision of punishment, Gwendolen suffers for her error, and her marriage to Grandcourt becomes a purgatory in which she is chastened for her mistake and the moral flaws which led her to commit this mistake. She is, however, helped through her purgatory by Deronda, and emerges from it prepared to attempt to achieve a morally superior existence. Esther's ordeal—in fact, she is neither tempted nor does she suffer sufficiently to warrant this term—is simple by comparison with Gwendolen's; the happiness she gains

through marriage to Felix Holt also appears undeserved.[11] Gwendolen's character is far more complex than Esther's; this leads to a more serious moral error, a more intense suffering and punishment but also allows a more profound and significant moral growth. This chapter will chart Gwendolen's development from the "Spoiled Child" to the "crushed penitent" (771) through her relationship with Daniel Deronda.

Critical response to *Daniel Deronda* is united only in the recognition of the novel as a flawed work. Much attention is paid to the characterisation of Daniel and his relationship with Gwendolen, but different critics perceive different flaws in the presentation of this relationship. F.R. Leavis' reference to the "good half" and the "bad half" (97) of *Daniel Deronda*—Daniel and and the "Zionist inspiration" (97) representing the latter category, and Gwendolen the former—suggests his disapproval of George Eliot's attempt to link the two characters.[12] Leavis is entirely dissatisfied with the guidance and advice provided by Daniel, as mentor, and remarks, "since poor Gwendolen is not in a position to discover herself a Jewess, and so to find her salvation in Deronda's way, she might in time—when Deronda has gone off to Palestine with Mirah—come to reflect critically upon the depth and general validity of his wisdom" (102). Daniel may be satisfied by Zionism, argues Leavis, but Gwendolen cannot be: "There is no equivalent of Zionism for Gwendolen, and even if there were the religion of heredity or race is not, as a generalizable solution of the problem, one that George Eliot herself, directly challenged, could have stood by" (102-3). Joan Bennett is equally dissatisfied by the relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen. She speaks of the "initial emotional disturbance" that Daniel and Gwendolen cause in one another which "develops by

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[11] Barbara Hardy comments that "[i]t is only in Esther's case that we are asked to applaud a renunciation and a moral reversal which seem weakened by the absence of pain and moral strength. . . . Esther's progress is too painless and her end too complacent" (*Study in Form* 63).

[12] In fact, Leavis refers to "the good part of *Daniel Deronda*" as *Gwendolen Harleth* (103).

the end of the novel into passionate possessive love on her side and romantic, altruistic devotion on his." But although she recognises the relationship between the two, she is not satisfied by it:

> There is no inevitable connection between the perception of Gwendolen's predicament and of Deronda's as there is between Lydgate's and Dorothea's. The widely separate origins of the two themes, separate in kind as well as in time, create a fissure between them of which most readers have been conscious in spite of the bridges the author has built across it. (183)

While not always unreservedly approving of the novel or its main characters, other critics stress the importance of the formal relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen; the interdependence of the hero's and heroine's development results in Gwendolen's moral growth. Albert R. Cirillo states: "Gwendolen's psychological progress is bound up with the resolution of Daniel's own movement towards a centered purpose. . . . Through . . . confrontations the principal characters come to know themselves, each other, and the society into which they must inevitably project their sympathy and aspiration" (205-6). Cirillo believes that Daniel acts as a mentor to Gwendolen by "overthrow[ing]" her:

> Daniel is the great object who demonstrates what man is capable of, revealing to Gwendolen her own objective nature. To do this he must overcome her psychologically, since the characteristic mark of her narrow egoism is that she will not be ruled, that she must dominate. (204)

This "overthrow" is achieved by both mentor and heroine realising their personal destinies as formally determined by George Eliot:

> The subsequent interaction of these two characters is a gradual process whereby Gwendolen is overthrown by Daniel and made to realize that he represents the objectification of her own nature as it should be. To effect this in narrative terms Eliot makes Daniel a Messianic figure who commits himself to Mordecai and Mirah as representatives of the race to which he has been subconsciously committed all of his life. In this way Eliot fleshes out Daniel's portrait as a paragon, as a symbol, or personal savior. By devoting himself to a larger cause Daniel leaves Gwendolen, thus asserting a final mastery over her and forcing her to independence from him which she is ready to accept. Daniel's departure underscores Gwendolen's salvation. (204)[13]

[13] Most of Cirillo's article deals with "how the relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen . . . is articulated symbolically" (207), through gambling, through Gwendolen's two necklaces, and through music.

Barbara Hardy's comments on *Daniel Deronda* echo Cirillo's in her emphasis on the importance of the formal relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen. Whereas Joan Bennett speaks of "the bridges the author has built" between the two, Hardy applauds the connection as a master stroke.

> George Eliot has made an original and ironical link between a man of destiny, concerned with political life, problems of leadership and social order and value, and a very ordinary girl, whose immaturity and egoism show themselves in her total isolation, both in experience and in imagination, from the world of great causes. . . . [Gwendolen] lacks the imagination, the knowledge, and even the necessary environment, for she is presented as typically sheltered and ignorant, a woman brought up like most upper-middle-class women of her time. . . . [S]he is eventually to be brought into staggering contact with the real world of large events, when she finally turns to assume that Daniel Deronda will love and protect her only to find that he has roles and destinies in a world of which she knows nothing. The very qualities that equip him for leadership—understanding, altruism, empathy—make him influence, protect, change, and finally leave Gwendolen. From the very beginning of the novel George Eliot is creating a heroine whose character and development are bound up with Daniel's very different life. (*Daniel Deronda* 22-23)

She refers to Daniel's effect as mentor upon Gwendolen as "a moral rescue, a story of potent influence and redemption carried out by one human being for another" (*DD* 7).

Like Cirillo and Hardy, Barry Qualls comments on the formal relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen and the interdependence of their development: "each [character] exposes the other to worlds never before encountered, each gives leaven and needed pattern to the other's experience" (181). He states that "Gwendolen Harleth . . . successfully goes through a fire-baptism" that introduces her "to a world of 'fellowship' and 'movements of awe and tenderness' . . . undreamt of in her experience" (177). Qualls is most interested in George Eliot's use of "the language of religious romance" (179) in her account of Gwendolen's "fire-baptism," but he also provides his own analysis of Gwendolen's growth and transformation. He explains that the guilt and torment caused by Gwendolen's betrayal of Lydia Glasher "force her to *see* what she will call the 'two creatures' of her self (56: 756), two creatures she sees objectified by Deronda and Grandcourt." As the "total egoist," Grandcourt is "her 'worst self' personified." Deronda is "the savior":

> he is there to bring "that change of mental poise which has been fitly named conversion"; his "peculiar influence" will make of "heaven and earth" a "revelation" for Gwendolen . . . . He is her "recovered faith" . . . . In the course of her story he becomes "a part of her conscience". . . .

Qualls describes the solution available to Gwendolen:

> Standing between Grandcourt and Deronda, Gwendolen is poised between a hell of her own choice . . . and a world of possible rescue if she can "escape from herself" and "the evil within" (54:746). She learns "to see all her acts through the impression they would make on Deronda" (54: 737), and learns too (in his words) "more of the way in which your life presses on others, and their life on yours" (36: 508). And then: not healing, but its beginning—"the process of purgatory . . . on the green earth" (54: 733), "the awakening of a new life within her" (56:762). (179-80)

Qualls concludes that Gwendolen "has been to the center of her own inferno," and emerges with the ability to "see the world with new eyes, see its specialness apart from herself, see its 'natural supernaturalism'" (181).

Still other critics comment specifically on the nature of the mentor relationship in *Daniel Deronda*. Bernard J. Paris states that Deronda becomes "to Gwendolen what the suffering Christ is to the devout Christian" (238), and that by the close of the book,

> Clearly, Deronda was for Gwendolen a combination of the suffering, forgiving Christ—the God who is love—and God the lawgiver and judge, from whom the sinner inevitably suffers a sense of alienation. (240)

He adds that one of Gwendolen's "chief motivations" for her moral improvement "was her knowledge of the suffering which she could cause him" (238).

Laurence Lerner discusses the mentor relationship as Gwendolen's attempt to free herself from her egoism: "Deronda is the agent in this process, for she learns to regard him as her own better s[illegible] (57). He adds that

> During this slow awakening, Gwendolen needs Deronda, to sustain as well as to cause the process. She needs him; and her conversion is not complete until she has learned to do without him. (59)

Lerner devotes much of his discussion of *Daniel Deronda* to the "complexity and psychological subtlety" (57) of Eliot's presentation of Gwendolen's egoism. He speaks of the "vulnerability of her self-sufficiency," adding that "[b]ecause

Gwendolen is vulnerable from the beginning, the drama of her story lies within her, whereas that of *Middlemarch* lies in the interaction between Rosamund and Lydgate" (53).

The seeming consensus of these critics is that Daniel represents to Gwendolen "her own better self" (Lerner 57), that he is "the great object who demonstrates what man is capable of, revealing to Gwendolen her own objective nature" (Cirillo 204). The differences arise in determining precisely how Gwendolen comes to grant Daniel this moral authority over herself. I wish to suggest an argument very close to Laurence Lerner's, that "the drama of . . . [Gwendolen's] story lies within her." Gwendolen's conscience responds to her moral error from the very beginning, and her own idiosyncrasies make a link between her crisis of conscience and Daniel Deronda. Cirillo's argument helps to explain the creation of this connnection. At the opening of the novel, Gwendolen desires complete control of her surroundings; Daniel's presence while Gwendolen plays roulette in Leubronn presents her with "a consciousness that she cannot command, that pierces the void and creates a cold, vaguely understood accusation" (Cirillo 208). But it is still the nagging presence of her own conscience that allows this "accusation" to be created in Gwendolen's mind, and her relationship with Daniel intensifies at the same time as her need to satisfy her own conscience intensifies. Daniel is important for Gwendolen because her own conscience grants him this importance. Later in the novel, he is able to live up to the expectations she has created for him. But before Gwendolen's conscience creates this link with Daniel, she commits the huge moral error that rouses her conscience and it is important to an account of the moral growth of Gwendolen to understand the weaknesses that allow this error.

Unlike Esther, Gwendolen does not marry her mentor, but her marriage to Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt is nonetheless important to a discussion of the mentor relationship in *Daniel Deronda* because it results from her moral weakness; later, her marriage becomes the purgatory from which Daniel, as mentor, helps her

to escape. Gwendolen does not decide to marry Grandcourt out of love for him nor is she barred from marriage to him through her knowledge of Lydia Glasher, a former mistress of Grandcourt's who has borne him four children. Instead, she moves ahead with her plan to marry Grandcourt fueled by a complex of reasons and justifications. Not the least of these reasons are Gwendolen's sheltered upbringing, deficient education, and general inexperience in dealing with others.[14] Although she cannot take full responsibility for these weaknesses, she nevertheless uses them to create the faulty and flawed foundation which guides her actions and decisions. Rather than consider the possibility that she has had a sheltered and narrow childhood and adolescence, Gwendolen instead chooses to believe that her past prominence within a close circle of family and friends prefigures her future social success. She considers herself exceptional in every respect: her beauty, her charm, her destiny. George Eliot deflates Gwendolen's visions of grandeur, however, by suggesting the narrowness of her world and the smallness and pettiness of her ambition; this she shares with Esther Lyon's original dreams of being a fine lady.

> She [Gwendolen] rejoiced to feel herself exceptional; but her horizon was that of the genteel romance where the heroine's soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion, while her life moves strictly in the sphere of fashion; and if she wanders into a swamp, the pathos lies partly, so to speak, in her having on her satin shoes. (83)

It is this same combination of narrowness, inexperience and arrogance that guides Gwendolen in her dealings with Grandcourt and her decision to marry him. In keeping with her attitude towards other aspects of life, Gwendolen cannot envision herself in the same sort of marriage as other women have: "that her marriage would not be of a middling kind, such as most girls were contented with, she felt quietly, unargumentatively sure" (68). Her desire for an exceptional

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[14] In addition to her comment that Gwendolen "is presented as typically sheltered and ignorant, a woman brought up like most upper-middle-class women of her time" (*DD* 22), Barbara Hardy states that "Gwendolen, like Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, is seen as the product of a certain education, a certain breeding, a certain set of narrow and dangerous expectations about life, class, and money" (*DD* 16).

marriage derives not only from her ambition, but also from a distaste for the institution in general. She looks agreeably at the prospect of being "very much sued or hopelessly sighed for as a bride" (68), but the resulting state of matrimony repels her:

> . . . to become a wife and wear all the domestic fetters of that condition, was on the whole a vexatious necessity. Her observation of matrimony had inclined her to think it rather a dreary state, in which a woman could not do what she liked, had more children than were desirable, was consequently dull, and became irrevocably immersed in humdrum. (68)[15]

But Gwendolen's recognition of marriage as "social promotion" (68) combines with her essential egoism—"'My plan is to do what pleases me'" (100)—to produce an acceptable alternative scenario of marriage. Gwendolen decides that

> 'I will not put up with it [marriage] if it is not a happy state. I am determined to be happy—at least not to go on muddling away my life as other people do, being and doing nothing remarkable.' (58)

She envisions her ideal marriage: "Gwendolen wished to mount the chariot and drive the plunging horses herself, with a spouse by her side who would fold his arms and give her his countenance without looking ridiculous" (173).

Her desire for social promotion, independence, and power—desires which rest on the precarious foundation of inexperience and egoism—supplies the basis of her attraction to Grandcourt. His wealth and the likelihood that he will inherit a baronetcy and possibly become a peer make him the perfect husband with whom to ascend the social ladder. But Gwendolen's naïve arrogance allows her to misjudge Grandcourt's character. She interprets his "extremely calm, cold manners" as a sign of his potential to be "less disagreeable as a husband than other men, and not likely to interfere with his wife's preferences" (147). She can consider him only in the context of her own flawed vision of the ideal marriage and concludes that he will suit her purposes quite well:

> The prospect of marrying Grandcourt really seemed more attractive to her than she had believed beforehand that any marriage could be: the dignities,

[15] Cirillo attributes Gwendolen's "incapacity to love" to her "desire to control" and considers it "a manifestation of her lack of feeling and sympathy" (222).

> the luxuries, the power of doing a great deal of what she liked to do . . . . And Grandcourt himself? He seemed as little of a flaw in his fortunes as a lover and husband could possibly be. . . . He was adorably quiet and free from absurdities—he would be a husband to suit with the best appearance a woman could make. (173)

Gwendolen's youthful egoism will not allow her to consider that perhaps there is more to Grandcourt's character than those elements which she perceives to suit her purposes, or that she is not fully capable of judging Grandcourt as a prospective husband:

> Gwendolen had no sense that these men were dark enigmas to her, or that she needed any help in drawing conclusions about them—Mr Grandcourt at least. The chief question was, how far his character and ways might answer her wishes; and unless she were satisfied about that, she had said to herself that she would not accept his offer. (159)

Gwendolen's reaction upon learning of the existence of Lydia Glasher and the four children resulting from her liason with Grandcourt reflects the same naîveté and arrogance as her opinions regarding marriage to Grandcourt. Through the intercession of Grandcourt's disgruntled servant, Lush, Gwendolen and Lydia meet secretly. Lydia's former husband is now dead and she believes that she and Grandcourt should marry, and so further encourage Grandcourt to make their son his legal heir. Gwendolen's first reaction is to reply to Lydia's statement of her 'claim' to Grandcourt by saying, "'I will not interfere with your wishes'" (189), and to depart for the continent with some friends, vowing "'I am not going in any case to marry Mr Grandcourt'" (192). But circumstances quickly take their toll on Gwendolen's attempt to respond to the 'crisis' with integrity. The family fortune is lost in a business speculation, Gwendolen's hopes to support her mother and sisters by going on the stage are dashed by Herr Klesmer, and she views her only other alternative—a situation as a governess—as "entrance into a penitentiary" (315). With all opportunities for an exceptional future rapidly disappearing, leaving her with the prospect of an anonymous, monotonous life as a governess, Gwendolen is able to reconsider the possibility of marriage to Grandcourt in spite

of her original aversion to his 'past'.[16]

F.R. Leavis speaks of the force of circumstance on Gwendolen's "indocile egoism and her spoilt child's ignorance of practical realities" (118);[17] it is once again her arrogance and lack of experience that allow her to justify marriage to Grandcourt in spite of her knowledge of Lydia. She reasons to herself that she has promised Lydia only not to "'interfere'" with her wishes and that her marriage to Grandcourt does not necessarily commit this transgression:

> . . . would another woman who married Grandcourt be in fact the decisive obstacle to her [Lydia's] wishes, or be doing her and her boy any real injury? Might it not be just as well, nay better, that Grandcourt should marry? For what could not a woman do when she was married, if she knew how to assert herself? (342)

The combination of Gwendolen's ignorance about marriage—and about Grandcourt's character—with her astonishing arrogance allows her to believe in her ability to govern her future husband as well as to ignore her own conscience. She succeeds in persuading herself that marriage to Grandcourt is perfectly acceptable under the circumstances, and she plans to use her influence, once they are married, to ensure that Grandcourt makes financial amends to Lydia:

> It was striking, that in the hold which this argument of her doing no wrong to Mrs Glasher had taken on her mind, her repugnance to the idea of Grandcourt's past had sunk into a subordinate feeling. . . . She was thinking of him, whatever he might be, as a man over whom she was going to have indefinite power; and her loving him having never been a question with her, any agreeableness he had was so much gain. Poor Gwendolen had no awe of unmanageable forces in the state of matrimony,

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[16] Cirillo comments on the weakness of character that allows this moral reversal in Gwendolen: "Content to refuse Grandcourt after Lydia Glasher had presented her with the facts, Gwendolen reverses this decision when the loss of her family's fortunes presents her with an unbearable reality in which she would find herself an ordinary governess" (223). At this point, Gwendolen's egoism dictates that "she must be superior, she must be different" (Cirillo 208).

[17] Leavis is slightly more sympathetic to Gwendolen's change of heart regarding Lydia as a barrier to marriage with Grandcourt. Although he points out her immaturity and egoistic naïveté, he also suggests that Gwendolen is thrust into a claustrophobic situation from which there is really no other way out: "All her [George Eliot's] creative power works to the evoking of a system of pressures so intolerable to Gwendolen, and so enclosing, that her final acceptance of Grandcourt seems to issue, not from her will, but from them; if she acts, it is certainly not in freedom, and she hasn't even the sense of exercising choice" (118).

> but regarded it as altogether a matter of management, in which she would know how to act. (359)

Gwendolen's deficient education, lack of experience, and arrogance are not the only forces shaping her personality and actions, however. In fact, she possesses a much more complex personality than her egoism suggests and which even she would wish to admit to. Just as her marriage represents the culmination of those traits of arrogance and pride that have been carefully evoked in the opening chapters of the book, so does Gwendolen's complete misery after her marriage represent that other side of her personality that has been evoked with equal care: the often irrational fears that weaken her protective arrogance and egoism, and her conscience. It is once again her lack of experience that allows these traits to remain largely unexercised and underdeveloped. Being the charming but spoiled beauty that she is, her existing conscience and sense of right have never been challenged, nor, in her limited experience, have her 'crimes' been particularily large. It is only in her relationship with her mother that she has ever been morally tested: "Gwendolen dreaded the unpleasant sense of compunction towards her mother, which was the nearest approach to self-condemnation and self-distrust that she had known" (129). But, because of her mother's indulgent attitude towards her, Gwendolen is able "to make her penances easy" (53). The much-commented upon episode involving the panel hiding the painting of a dead face and Gwendolen's hysterical response when it flies open suggests that her protective shield of arrogance and self-control is not as firmly in place as she would like to believe, and that she is hiding fears and weaknesses.[11] She has a similar fear of open

[11] Several critics comment upon the hysteria Gwendolen experiences during that evening of charades, and they are unanimous in their belief that her reaction indicates great moral potential. Lerner regards the incident as one example of a "chink in Gwendolen's egoism": "Gwendolen's egoism, showing itself in proud self-control, has given way in this instant" (53-54). Leavis regards the episode as evidence of "[t]he potentiality in Gwendolen of a seismic remorse," for it shows her to be "a youthful egoist" capable of "dreading compunction and intelligent enough to dread also the unknown within" (117). Qualls suggests that the incident reveals a side to her character that Gwendolen would like to deny, but cannot: "as much as she would ignore the 'unmapped country within,' her unease upon first seeing

spaces: "Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself" (94-95). With the companionship of another person she is able to recover "her confidence, and felt the possibility of winning empire" (95). These instances of her reluctant recognition of her own insignificance and weaknesses suggest a potential for good, because Gwendolen is aware—even if the awareness is only slight—that her self-control is not complete. Gwendolen's desire to assume personas, to remake herself in another image, can never be completely achieved. Her weaknesses prevent her from sinking entirely into her egoism and so suggest a potential for something better.[19] As George Eliot says of Gwendolen early in the novel, "some of the goodness which Rex believed in was there" (99).

Gwendolen's potential for good reveals itself most strikingly in her reaction to Grandcourt's 'past' with Lydia Glasher and her misery after she has married Grandcourt in spite of this knowledge. All of those traits associated with Gwendolen's moral weakness—egoism, arrogance, naïveté—have rationalised and justified marriage to Grandcourt. But her self-control cannot completely quiet her conscience after she has accepted Grandcourt's marriage proposal, thus breaking the promise she has made to Lydia not to "'interfere'":

. . . her resolution [to marry Grandcourt] was dogged by the shadow of

[18](cont'd) Deronda and her fear of the picture of the dead head tell us that she is not —like Hetty—dead to any world above or below; the very fears show us that she is not a solipsist like Grandcourt" (178). Gwendolen's own thoughts after the incident, as related by George Eliot, indicate her helpless frustration with this side of her personality; such experiences are "like a brief remembered madness, an unexplained exception from her normal life; and in this instance she felt a peculiar vexation that her helpless fear had shown itself . . . in well-lit company" (94).

[19] Laurence Lerner deals extensively with the novel's opening portrait of Gwendolen and her egoism (52-57). He believes its importance derives from the illustration of "the vulnerability of her self-sufficiency" (53), "her fitful sensitivity to the feelings of others" (53), "the naked power of imagination in Gwendolen" (54), and her fear of those uncontrollable parts of her personality (56), all of which show the weaknesses in Gwendolen's egoism which in turn suggest her capacity to develop beyond it. Bernard J. Paris makes a similar point about Gwendolen's "fits of timidity and terror": "Gwendolen's armor of egoism had its weakness: it was out of her susceptibility to spiritual dread and her sensitivity to the opinions of others that her moral consciousness was to develop" (234-5).

> that previous resolve which had at first come as the undoubting movement of her whole being. . . . [She] was appalled by the idea that she was going to do what she had once started away from with repugnance. It was new to her that a question of right or wrong in her conduct should rouse her terror; she had known no compunction that atoning caresses and presents could not lay to rest. But here had come a moment when something like a new consciousness was awaked. She seemed on the edge of adopting deliberately, as a notion for all the rest of her life, what she had rashly said in her bitterness, when her discovery had driven her away to Leubronn:—that it did not signify what she did; she had only to amuse herself as best she could. That lawlessness, that casting away of all care for justification, suddenly frightened her: it came to her with the shadowy array of possible calamity behind it. (355-56)

Gwendolen chooses, in spite of her conscience, to marry Grandcourt, but not without having "to adjust herself, so that the spikes of that unwilling penance which conscience imposed should not gall her. With a sort of mental shiver, she resolutely changed her mental attitude" (373). Her hysterical reaction to Lydia Glasher's note—included with the Grandcourt diamonds Gwendolen receives on the day of her marriage—which ends with the words, "'The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse'" (406), and her subsequent misery as Mrs Grandcourt show the folly of Gwendolen's naïve belief that she is capable of ignoring her conscience.

Gwendolen's relationship with Daniel Deronda is linked very closely to her unsuccessful attempt to quell her conscience. George Eliot evokes Gwendolen's potential for good early in the novel by suggesting her irrational fears and lack of complete self-control;[20] Gwendolen's relationship with Daniel is conducted in the same irrational, illogical sphere of her personality. Their first 'meeting' establishes the superstition with which Gwendolen quickly comes to regard Deronda. In her repulsion at meeting Lydia Glasher and learning of Grandcourt's past Gwendolen goes to the continent with some friends and is observed by Deronda playing roulette in Leubronn. Disgusted by the "scene of dull, gas-poisoned absorption" of the casino (37), Daniel's attention is caught by the figure of Gwendolen at the roulette table. She pauses in the midst of her winning-streak to look "round her

[20] Once again, Lerner's discussion suggests that these weaknesses represent weaknesses in Gwendolen's arrogance and egoism.

with a survey too markedly cold and neutral not to have in it a little of that nature which we call art concealing an inward exultation" (38). In the course of her survey she becomes aware of Deronda's gaze and is made distinctly uncomfortable by it:

> The darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict. (38)

Gwendolen's belief—at this point unsubstantiated—in Daniel's assumed superiority over and criticism of her causes a momentary lapse in her self-control which corresponds with the end of her winning streak. But rather than attribute her loss and Daniel's presence to coincidence, she instead ascribes to him the powers of a talisman: "But Deronda's gaze seemed to have acted as an evil eye. . . . She had begun to believe in her luck, others had begun to believe in it . . ." (38). Enraged by Daniel's presumption, she continues to play, in a "mood of defiance" (39), until she has lost all of her winnings. It is a sign of the strength of Gwendolen's self-control and arrogance that she quickly recovers from the episode and even reconsiders her first impression of Deronda and his gaze. Perhaps, like most other people, he was simply admiring her beauty and exceptional character:

> In Gwendolen's habits of mind it had been taken for granted that she knew what was admirable and that she herself was admired. This basis of her thinking had received a disagreeable concussion, and reeled a little, but was not easily to be overthrown. (40)

Deronda's next unspoken action gives Gwendolen's arrogance more than a "disagreeable concussion," however. He returns to Gwendolen a turquoise necklace she has just sold to raise the money for her return to England. With the necklace he includes a note which reads, "'*A stranger who has found Miss Harleth's necklace returns it to her with the hope that she will not again risk the loss of it*'" (49). Gwendolen's egoism, which has withstood Daniel's gaze at the roulette table because "it was at least better that he should have kept his attention fixed on her than that he should have disregarded her as one of an insect swarm who

had no individual physiognomy" (40), is shaken by this episode. Once again she assumes that Daniel is acting out of a sense of superiority, and for all her arrogance, she is sensitive to his judgement of her.

> He knew very well that he was entangling her in helpless humiliation: it was another way of smiling at her ironically, and taking the air of a supercilious mentor. Gwendolen felt the bitter tears of mortification rising and rolling down her cheeks. No one had ever before dared to treat her with irony and contempt. (49)[21]

Daniel's criticism of her—whether actually intended by him or only attributed to him by Gwendolen's sensitivity—deeply affects her. Weeks later, as she prepares to leave Offendene to become a governess, she decides, upon second thought, not to sell the necklace Daniel has returned to her. She is unsure precisely why she decides this or what value the necklace holds for her.

> But the movement of mind which led her to keep the necklace, to fold it up in the handkerchief, and rise to put it in her *nécessaire* . . . was more peculiar, and what would be called less reasonable. It came from that streak of superstition in her which attached itself both to her confidence and her terror—a superstition which lingers in an intense personality even in spite of theory and science; any dread or hope for self being stronger than all reasons for or against it. Why she should suddenly determine not to part with the necklace was not much clearer to her than why she should sometimes have been frightened to find herself in the fields alone: she had a confused state of emotion about Deronda—was it wounded pride and resentment, or a certain awe and exceptional trust? It was something vague and yet mastering, which impelled her to this action about the necklace. There is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gusts and storms. (321)

Daniel's future as mentor to Gwendolen is thus established in their first encounters. Gwendolen's sensitivity to Daniel's perception of her thwarts her in her desire to do only what pleases her. He weakens further the flaws in her

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[21] Paris suggests that Deronda's "measuring gaze" hits the weaknesses in her "armor of egoism," especially her "extreme sensitivity to the world and to people when they did not respond to or echo her own consciousness" (234-35). Cirillo makes a similar point when he says that Daniel's gaze confronts Gwendolen "with a consciousness that she cannot command, that pierces the void and creates a cold, vaguely understood accusation" (208). My argument develops from these two points; Daniel catches Gwendolen's attention because she believes he is being critical of her and perceiving her weaknesses. His presence and attention make her more conscious of these weaknesses, and later, when she commits her huge moral error, he becomes strongly associated with her conscience.

self-control and egoism and thus becomes strongly associated with her potential for good. And as their relationship grows beyond these wordless encounters at Leubronn, Daniel becomes an outward manifestation of her conscience, for she begins to attribute to him, and then he begins to offer himself, those judgements and criticisms of her conduct which she knows to be correct but which in her arrogance and inexperience, she tries desperately to suppress.[22] As with Esther, Gwendolen must learn to accept responsibility for her actions, but for Gwendolen this entails the realisation and subsequent suffering for all the wrongs associated with her marriage.

Without the immediate presence and influence of Daniel, the clamourings of Gwendolen's underactive conscience are insufficient to overcome "that ambitious vanity and desire for luxury within her" demanding "gratification" (401); but her sense of right and wrong nevertheless causes her to view her marriage to Grandcourt as a gamble, rather than an assured success. On her wedding-day, she "thrust[s] down with a sort of exulting defiance" all self-doubt (402), and feels "herself standing at the game of life with many eyes upon her, daring everything to win much—or if to lose, still with *éclat* and a sense of importance" (402). Gwendolen loses her gamble, and in her misery as Mrs Grandcourt, finds her conscience increasingly difficult to ignore. Her hope of controlling Grandcourt after their marriage, particularily by encouraging him to make financial amends to Lydia Glasher, is ironically destroyed; Grandcourt exercises complete control over Gwendolen, and a considerable part of his power comes from Gwendolen's dread of "the mortal humiliation of confessing that she knew all [about Lydia and the children] before she married him, and in marrying him had broken her word" (478).[23] Gwendolen's previous assurance that by encouraging Grandcourt to settle his

[22] This is Lerner's point: " . . . [Daniel] takes on a peculiar moral authority in her eyes as she invests him with sanctions that are too weak to have an independent life in herself—and that becomes more rational when mediated by his thoughtful bluntness" (57).

[23] Grandcourt proves to be unsettling and disturbing. Several other characters attest

affairs with Lydia she would thus be releasing herself from blame is replaced by the image of Lydia and the words of the letter she enclosed with the diamonds. Lydia's prophecy that "'You will have your punishment. . . . The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse'" is fulfilled by Gwendolen's overwhelming guilt:

> The words had nestled their venomous life within her, and stirred continually the vision of the scene at the Whispering Stones. That scene was now like an accusing apparition . . . . (478)

But despite Gwendolen's guilt—and without Daniel's influence—she ignores the possibility of searching for a morally correct solution to her situation and instead tries to numb that "venomous life" of guilt within her by attempting to "carry her troubles with spirit, and let none suspect them" (483).

But Daniel, and the superstitious power she attributes to him deny her this refuge in her egoism and arrogance. Shortly after her engagement to Grandcourt, Daniel comes to Diplow for a short visit. Even before they speak to one another or are formally introduced (at Leubronn they exchanged no words, only glances), Gwendolen attributes to Daniel an almost supernatural power:

> Her anger [from their first encounter at Leubronn] towards Deronda had changed into a superstitious dread—due, perhaps, to the coercion he had exercised over her thought—lest that first interference of his in her life might foreshadow some future influence. It is of such stuff that superstitions are commonly made: an intense feeling about ourselves which makes the evening star shine at us with a threat, and the blessing of a beggar encourage us. (374-75)

Gwendolen also believes in Daniel's moral authority and is obsessed by the desire

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[13](cont'd) to his moral degeneration. Lydia Glasher tells Gwendolen that "'The man you have married has a withered heart'" (406), and Daniel considers Grandcourt a "'remnant'" who "had worn out all his natural healthy interest in things" (456). He desires to marry Gwendolen in order "to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him, and who perhaps would have been capable of mastering another man" (365), and she comes to fear and despise him shortly after their marriage. Barbara Hardy says of him that "He has a sense of style instead of a sense of value" (*DD* 15); in this way he resembles Esther before Felix has shown her the folly of her belief in the authority of good taste. Another striking trait is Grandcourt's boredom with the world; in this respect, he is a bizarre and disturbing extreme of Casaubon's inability to appreciate the world around him, an incapacity that is a great weakness in Casaubon's character and in George Eliot's moral world.

to know what he thinks of her and of her decision to marry Grandcourt. Still fresh from constructing the system of justifications for her marriage and not yet suffering the miseries of being Grandcourt's wife, Gwendolen wishes with "an uneasy longing to be judged by Deronda with unmixed admiration" (376-77). Deronda is a figure of authority for her—almost a manifestation of her conscience—and she wants to be assured by him that her decision to marry Grandcourt is acceptable. The "superstitious dread" that leads Gwendolen to believe in the value of Daniel's judgments and her desire to be acquitted by him on her own charges of guilt—especially regarding Lydia—lead her to confront Daniel. She asks him why he disapproved of her gambling and receives an answer applicable not only to roulette but to the moral gamble of her imminent marriage:

> 'I think it would be better for men not to gamble. It is a besotting kind of taste, likely to turn into a disease. And, besides, there is something revolting to me in raking a heap of money together, and internally chuckling over it, when others are feeling the loss of it. I should even call it base, if it were more than an exceptional lapse. There are enough inevitable turns of fortune which force us to see that our gain is another's loss:—that is one of the ugly aspects of life. One would like to reduce it as much as one could, not get amusement out of exaggerating it.' (382-83)

Gwendolen's desperate attempt to excuse her own situation by saying "'But you do admit that we can't help things . . . . I mean that things are so in spite of us; we can't always help it that our gain is another's loss,'" is destroyed by Daniel. He insists upon each person accepting as much responsibility as his situation will allow, and replies, "'Clearly. Because of that, we should help it where we can'" (383).

Gwendolen has already granted Daniel the authority of her own weak and unexercised conscience. His power and significance multiply further when she discovers that, Daniel is widely considered to be Sir Hugo Mallinger's illegitimate son. She immediately makes a link between Daniel and Lydia Glasher's eldest son, both of whom are not allowed to inherit their father's estates because of the circumstances of their birth. Gwendolen is deeply affected and disgusted by the

thought that children like these must suffer for their parents' deeds and demands of her mother, with whom she has been discussing Daniel's peculiar social position, "'Haven't children reason to be angry with their parents? How can they help their parents marrying or not marrying?'" (379). As she reconsiders the reasons against her own marriage—"reasons which . . . were unexpectedly mirrored in the story of a man [Daniel] whose slight relations with her had, by some hidden affinity, bitten themselves into the most permanent layers of feeling" (379-80)—she is "led on to a condemnation which seemed to make her own marriage a forbidden thing" (379). Barbara Hardy comments on the connection Gwendolen makes between Daniel and Lydia: the "coincidence of Daniel's position and that of Lydia Glasher's son acts as a moral warning to Gwendolen. Her inadequate imagination clothes itself in individual cases, but even this particularized sympathy is the beginning of a growth away from self-interest" (*Study in Form* 125). Gwendolen's deficient imagination requires that she be presented with a living example of the effect her marriage may have on others, but it is her conscience—weak, but not inert—that makes this connection between Daniel and Lydia's son. Her reflections upon Daniel's situation, particularily her speculations on what his life might have been, had he been Sir Hugo's legal heir, mark "a new epoch" for her. Because of what Daniel now represents to Gwendolen, he forces her conscience to become increasingly active:

> These obvious, futile thoughts of what might have been, made a new epoch for Gwendolen. She, whose unquestioning habit it had been to take the best that came to her for less than her own claim, had now to see the position which tempted her [i.e. becoming Grandcourt's wife] in a new light, as a hard, unfair exclusion of others. What she had now heard about Deronda seemed to her imagination to throw him into one group with Mrs Glasher and her children; before whom she felt herself in an attitude of apology—she who had hitherto been surrounded by a group that in her opinion had need be apologetic to her. (380-81)

As Gwendolen's gamble at marriage to Grandcourt becomes a "last great gambling loss" (496), Daniel becomes an increasingly important part of her battle with her conscience and her attempts to cope with the miseries of her marriage. Daniel is "unique" to her among men, because he had impressed her as being not

her admirer but her superior: in some mysterious way he was becoming a part of her conscience . . ." (468). She begins to think of him less as an outward "rebuke" to her actions (500) and more as a potential source of help for her miseries:

> This hidden helplessness [regarding the consequences of her marriage to Grandcourt] gave fresh force to the hold Deronda had from the first taken on her mind, as one who had an unknown standard by which he judged her. Had he some way of looking at things which might be a new footing for her—an inward safeguard against possible events which she dreaded as stored-up retribution? . . . Deronda had lit up her attention with a sense of novelty: not by words only, but by imagined facts, his influence had entered into the current of that self-suspicion and self-blame which awakens a new consciousness. (484-85)

Her belief in his superior wisdom and powers of guidance leads her to confront Daniel once more about her situation. Speaking in terms of gambling, Gwendolen explains that she has made her "'gain out of another's loss'" (500)—precisely what he has spoken against—and then makes an appeal to him: "'What should you do if you were like me—feeling that you were wrong and miserable, and dreading everything to come?'" (501).[24] When Daniel responds only in vague and general terms, Gwendolen loses her patience. Her speech betrays the importance that Daniel now holds for her conduct, for he seemingly represents her own conscience:

> 'You must tell me then what to think and what to do; else why did you not let me go on doing as I liked, and not minding? If I had gone on gambling I might have won again, and I might have got not to care for anything else. You would not let me do that. Why shouldn't I do as I like, and not mind? Other people do.' (501)

Although she may jokingly explain to Sir Hugo Mallinger that she is "'afraid'" of Daniel because "'now whatever I do before him, I am afraid he will cast an evil eye upon it'" (462), her outburst shows that she evidently believes in Daniel's 'powers.' In fact, his powers match very closely Gwendolen's own battle with her

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[24] Barbara Hardy explains that the language of gambling becomes "a kind of moral password for Gwendolen" (*Study in Form* 133), and that the significance of gambling "changes and intensifies as the action moves on, covering selfish disregard, misplaced security in Luck, robbery, worldly values, and blind submission to the future. We begin with coincidence and end with a generalization and a symbol" (*Study in Form* 134).

conscience. Her naïve belief that she could thrust down her misgivings about marrying Grandcourt in order to enjoy the luxuries and position of being his wife has been overwhelmed by her struggling conscience. Her interest in and sensitivity to Deronda and his opinion of her betrays the battle with her conscience which Gwendolen once wished to deny and now wishes to keep hidden.

The awakening of conscience that Daniel has helped to effect in Gwendolen makes the misery of her marriage even harder to bear, for she must accept her share of the responsibility. Her guilt and Grandcourt's manipulation of her create a "new gambling in which the losing was not simply a *minus*, but a terrible *plus* that had never entered into her reckoning" (659). She can no longer even attempt to thrust down her conscience, and her marriage becomes a punishment or purgatory for those weaknesses of her character that had once allowed her to believe that her marriage to Grandcourt could be justified.[25] "Any romantic illusions she had had in marrying this man had turned on her power of using him as she liked. He was using her as he liked" (659). Her new terror of her husband forces her to look back in awe at the blindness with which she had regarded Grandcourt: "[t]he poor thing had passed from her girlish sauciness of superiority over this inert specimen of personal distinction into an amazed perception of her former ignorance about the possible mental attitude of a man towards the woman he sought in marriage" (480). Grandcourt views his complete control of Gwendolen as a right in return for "the rank and luxuries he had to give her": "He knew quite

[25] Although George Eliot uses references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* to suggest that Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt is a purgatory, these references are not specific enough to determine when Gwendolen enters purgatory or if she is actually in the inferno for part of her marriage. At the beginning of Chapter 54, George Eliot gives a short account of Madonna Pia—a woman murdered by her husband—who makes a brief appearance in the *Purgatorio*. In his comments, John Sinclair includes Madonna Pia as part of a group who "appeal to Dante for the help of his prayers . . . for their admission to active purgation" (II, 79); this suggests that despite Gwendolen's misery and guilt from the beginning, her purgation does not actually begin until shortly before or just after her husband's death. However, her desire for entrance into active purgation has likely existed for some time, and is due to the sense of guilt and clamourings of conscience that Daniel has created in her.

well that she [Gwendolen] had not married him—had not overcome her repugnance to certain facts—out of love to him personally; . . . he had fulfilled his side of the contract" (732). Gwendolen feels powerless against Grandcourt and can only submit "to a yoke drawn on her by an action she was ashamed of, and worn with a strength of selfish motives" (617). The effect of her conscience on her over her betrayal of Lydia Glasher and her fear lest her husband should discover her 'secret' make her marriage into an effective punishment for her original hubris:

> With all her early indulgence in the disposition to dominate, she was not one of the narrow-brained women who through life regard all their own selfish demands as rights, and every claim upon themselves as an injury. She had a root of conscience in her, and the process of purgatory had begun for her on the green earth: she knew that she had been wrong. (732-33)

Grandcourt becomes "the husband to whom she had sold her truthfulness and sense of justice, so that he held them throttled into silence, collared and dragged behind him to witness what he would, without remonstrance" (733).

Daniel becomes even more important to Gwendolen as her growing conscience increases the misery of her marriage. For much of their relationship, Gwendolen has been affected by her own—and her conscience's—perception of Daniel's nature and his judgement of her actions. But Daniel's role as mentor alters, and he changes from being the symbol of Gwendolen's guilt and conscience—his original significance for her—to the more active position of being her advisor and guide. He was the agent in the awakening of her conscience—"to many among us neither heaven nor earth has any revelation till some personality touches theirs with a peculiar influence, subduing them into receptiveness" (484)—and she now looks to him as a source of comfort and guidance for her suffering. She thinks to herself about Daniel: "'I wish he knew that I am not so contemptible as he thinks me—that I am in deep trouble, and want to be something better if I could'" (485). She approaches Daniel with both a confession and an appeal:

> 'I can't help feeling remorse for having injured others. That was what I meant when I said that I had done worse than gamble again and pawn the necklace again—something more injurious, as you called it. And I can't

> alter it. . . . I have thrust out others—I have made my gain out of their loss—tried to make it—tried. And I must go on. . . . But what can I do? . . . I must get up in the morning and do what every one else does. It is all like a dance set beforehand.' (505-7)

Fortunately for Gwendolen, Daniel is able to fulfill her high expectations when his position as mentor requires that he become her active advisor. Indeed, Daniel has a history of interest in and generosity towards others: "Persons attracted him . . . in proportion to the possibility of his defending them, rescuing them, telling upon their lives with some sort of redeeming influence" (369). He is as fascinated from afar by Gwendolen as she has been by him, especially by "[t]he drama of that girl's marriage" (369). This interest, in combination with his own habitual generosity towards others, makes him willingly respond to the appeals Gwendolen makes to him:

> The peculiarities of Deronda's nature had been acutely touched by the brief incidents and words which made the history of his intercourse with Gwendolen . . . . It was not vanity—it was ready sympathy that had made him alive to a certain appealingness in her behaviour towards him . . . . (466).

The advice and guidance that Daniel bestows upon Gwendolen reflects his own "meditative yearning after wide knowledge" (217).[26] When Gwendolen deduces from Daniel's responses to her that "'You mean that I am selfish and ignorant'" (502), she lights upon precisely those weaknesses Daniel has always desired to overcome in his own life.[27] In his recognition of Gwendolen's evident remorse and misery regarding her marriage, Daniel thinks to himself, "'it seems to me that she has a dreary lack of the ideas that might help her'" (466). Just as Felix Holt

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[26] Barbara Hardy explains that "Daniel preaches to Gwendolen the lesson of the transmutation of self" and that the "logical end, for him" of this lesson "is the Zionist vocation which keeps them irrevocably apart" (*Study in Form* 112).

[27] Cirillo says that "Daniel embodies Eliot's concept of the unselfish life" (203) and Hardy comments that "He lives at the extreme of altruism, and his centre of self exists chiefly as a mirror for other lives" (*DD* 23-24). Says Qualls: "He [Daniel] yearns towards rescuing others, towards 'telling upon their lives with some sort of redeeming influence,' towards saintliness (28: 369)." This "yearning towards rescue and the love it brings has been for Deronda a way of escaping that isolated because unrooted self which has been his birthright" (174). Thus Daniel advises Gwendolen to guide her life by the same precepts he struggles to fulfill in his own life.

re-educates Esther, it becomes part of Daniel's role as mentor to Gwendolen to re-educate her, or more specifically, to enlarge the horizons of her thought. He tells Gwendolen to

> "Look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action—something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot.' (501-2)

Gwendolen's difficulties have made her despair of life in general and she demands of Daniel, "'what is the good of trying to know more, unless life were worth more?'" (507). Daniel's response indicates that much of her difficulty and present miseries come from the narrow scope of her present life; his response also betrays his desire to broaden his own experience, which he achieves by the close of the novel, through his involvement with Zionism. He explains to Gwendolen that

> '. . . life *would* be worth more to you: some real knowledge would give you an interest in the world beyond the small drama of personal desires. It is the curse of your life—forgive me—of so many lives, that all passion is spent in that narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it.' (507)

By comparison, Felix Holt's desire to "'try to make life less bitter for a few within my reach'" (*FH* 225) is both concrete and easily attainable. Daniel is very much concerned with a spiritual state of mind or approach to existence, and he tells Gwendolen that

> 'The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities. The few may find themselves in it simply by an elevation of feeling; but for us who have to struggle for our wisdom, the higher life must be a region in which the affections are clad with knowledge.' (507-8)[21]

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[21] Daniel and Gwendolen also converse about music. After Klesmer's unwelcome criticisms of her abilities, Gwendolen has given up her musical aspirations completely and says to Deronda: "'I don't feel able to follow your advice of enjoying my own middlingness.'" Deronda replies by explaining that he enjoys listening to accomplished musicians even when he knows that he can never achieve the same excellence for "'Excellence encourages one about life generally; it shows the spiritual wealth of the world'" (491). In his article, Cirillo discusses extensively the symbolism of music in *Daniel Deronda*, and suggests the significance of a conversation such as this one by stating that "Music is the double-faceted means through which we see Gwendolen's failure to participate in humanity while she

Gwendolen tries to "get a point of view nearer to . . . [Daniel's] level" (608) by reading authors like Descartes and Bacon, but she soons becomes absorbed in the misery of her marriage. Her own guilt combines with her hatred of Grandcourt to create nightmarish temptations of retribution and vengeance against the sadistic cruelty of her husband. She explains to Deronda that she has come to fear the impulsive and violent urges within herself which she cannot completely control:

> 'I am frightened at myself. When my blood is fired I can do daring things—take any leap; but that makes me frightened at myself. . . . But if feelings rose—there are some feelings—hatred and anger—how can I be good when they keep rising? And if there came a moment when I felt stifled and could bear it no longer—' (508-9)

When Grandcourt insists that Gwendolen accompany him on a yachting expedition, in order "to feel more securely that she was his to do as he liked with, and to make her feel it also" (732), her "'hatred and anger'" intensifies as does that "process of purgatory [which] had begun for her on the green earth." She suffers an "inward torture disproportionate to what is discernable as outward cause" (732), and is tormented by her own evil impulses:

> she was afraid of her own wishes, which were taking shapes possible and impossible, like a cloud of demon-faces. She was afraid of her own hatred, which under the cold iron touch that had compelled her to-day [i.e. Grandcourt] had gathered a fierce intensity. . . . the strife within her seemed like her own effort to escape from herself. (745-46)

Her hatred begins to translate itself into the desire to perform "some fiercely impulsive deed," and she fears a loss of self-control that would result in even worse guilt and misery than she is presently suffering:

> her vision of what she had to [illegible] took more decidedly than ever the form of some fiercely impulsive deed, committed as in a dream that she would instantaneously wake from to find the effects real though the images had been false: to find death under her hands, but instead of darkness, daylight; instead of satisfied hatred, the dismay of guilt; instead of freedom, the palsy of a new terror—a white dead face from which she was for ever trying to flee and for ever held back. . . . In Gwendolen's consciousness Temptation and Dread met and stared like two pale phantoms, each seeing itself in the other—each obstructed by its own image; and all the while her fuller self beheld the apparitions and sobbed

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[21](cont'd) reaches for participation through proud attempts" (218).

for deliverance from them. (737-38)

At her worst moment, Esther only observes misery and suffering; Gwendolen is forced to endure misery and torment as a purgatorial punishment for her past deeds and those evil impulses which still exist within her.

Her only refuge is in the thought of Deronda and the advice he has given her, and she clings to this refuge "with a more anxious tenacity, as a Protestant of old kept his Bible hidden or a Catholic his crucifix" (655). She thinks of his words to her: "'Turn your fear into a safeguard. Keep your dread fixed on the idea of increasing your remorse. . . . Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you'" (738). She receives further courage by thinking of "all her acts through the impression they would make on Deronda: whatever relief might come to her, she could not sever it from the judgment of her that would be created in his mind" (737).[19] Her one respite from the torment Grandcourt inspires in her is the determination, "'I will not mind if I can keep from getting wicked,'" buoyed by the thought of "Deronda's presence and words, of the sympathy he might have for her, of the direction he might give her" (738).

In the chapter heading to Chapter 35, George Eliot begins, "Were uneasiness of conscience measured by extent of crime, human history had been different . . ." (455); so uneasy has Gwendolen's conscience become under the torment of the hatred and anger inspired by Grandcourt that she holds herself responsible for his death by drowning during their yachting expedition. But in the impassioned confession she feels compelled to deliver to Deronda after Grandcourt's death, he can find no grounds for her self-accusation and exonerates her from the responsibility for her husband's death. Grandcourt's end does not mark the end of Gwendolen's suffering, however; with the immediate pressure of her inner torment

[19] Paris argues for "Deronda becoming to Gwendolen what the suffering Christ is to the devout Christian" (238); he also makes the point that her fear of causing Deronda more suffering helps her to fight her "destructive impulses" (238).

relieved, Gwendolen now looks back over the actions of the past months in order to assess her own culpability. With the moral authority Daniel has now gained for her, it is to him that she delivers the "confession" she is "bent on" (754).

Gwendolen's confession is important because in it she willingly recognises the moral error in her decision to marry Grandcourt: "'. . . I ought not to have married. That was the beginning of it. I wronged some one else. I broke my promise. I meant to get pleasure for myself, and it all turned to misery. I wanted to make my gain out of another's loss—you remember?—it was like roulette—and the money burnt into me'" (757). She explains the justification she used to allow herself to marry Grandcourt: "'There was some one else he ought to have married. And I knew it, and I told her I would not hinder it. And I went away . . . . But then we became poor all at once, and I was very miserable, and I was tempted. I thought, "I shall do as I like and make everything right." I persuaded myself'" (764). She also explains the misery and torment that quickly followed her mistake in judgement: "'It was all dreadful. Then came hatred and wicked thoughts'" (764). She could recognise her guilt and evil desires but could not overcome them: "'But yet all the while I felt that I was getting more wicked. . . . It was all like a writing of fire within me. Getting wicked was misery—being shut out for ever from knowing what you—what better lives were'" (760-61). Thoughts of Daniel and his advice gave temporary relief but "'the evil longings, the evil prayers came again and blotted everything else dim'" (761).

Although Daniel has "dreaded the weight of this woman's soul flung upon his own with imploring dependence" (754), he recognises the importance and significance of her compulsion to confess her guilt:

> But her remorse was the precious sign of a recoverable nature; it was the culmination of that self-disapproval which had been the awakening of a new life withing her; it marked her off from the criminals whose only regret is failure in securing their evil wish. (762)

Just as Daniel has given her advice and guidance in the past, he now tells Gwendolen to regard her past suffering as a preparation for the future in which

she will go on to achieve a "'higher,'" "'larger'" life. The heading to Chapter 64 from Dante's *Il Purgatorio* translates "'This mountain is such that it is always hard at the start below and the higher one goes it is less toilsome'" (Sinclair II: 61); like Dante, Gwendolen has begun the ascent of the mountain of Purgatory in preparation for the entrance to Paradise.[30] This is what Daniel explains to her:

> 'This sorrow, which has cut down to the root, has come to you while you are so young—try to think of it, not as a spoiling of your life, but as a preparation for it. . . . See! you have been saved from the worst evils that might have come from your marriage, which you feel was wrong. You have had a vision of injurious, selfish action—a vision of possible degradation; think that a severe angel, seeing you along the road of error, grasped you by the wrist, and showed you the horror of the life you must avoid. And it has come to you in your spring-time. Think of it as a preparation. You can, you will, be among the best of women, such as make others glad that they were born.' (839-40)

Throughout the entire novel, Daniel's importance to Gwendolen as her mentor is enormous. Because of his original link with the workings of her own conscience, "[s]he identified him with the struggling regenerative process in her which had begun with his action" (841). As her conscience is awakened and the resulting "doom of penance" (407) takes its toll upon Gwendolen, Daniel helps her battle against her own evil instincts; she says to him, "'I should have been worse, if it had not been for you. If you had not been good, I should have been more wicked than I am'" (767). Now that her immediate suffering is ended, she is nonetheless still in need of guidance and assumes that her mentor will always be present to assist with her spiritual struggle and healing:

> . . . she did not imagine him [Daniel] otherwise than always within her reach, her supreme need of him blinding her to the separateness of his life . . . . And the future which she turned her face to with a willing step was one where she would be continually assimilating herself to some type that he would hold before her. Had he not first risen on her vision as a corrective presence which she had recognised in the beginning with resentment, and at last with entire love and trust? She could not spontaneously think of an end to that reliance, which had become to her imagination like the firmness of the earth, the only condition of her walking. (867)

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[30] I thank Dr Sara Stambaugh for pointing out the significance of the Dante references in *Daniel Deronda*.

Esther Lyon only witnesses the kind of suffering Gwendolen endures, and then marries her mentor; she spends the rest of her life with Felix so that she can be "continually assimilating herself" to the "type that he would hold before her." Gwendolen is not allowed this painless ending to her suffering; instead, she is taught the final lesson of enlarging "'that narrow round'" of her life which has been the original source of her own mistakes. While Gwendolen has been enduring her private miseries, Daniel has discovered his Jewish parentage and made plans to marry Mirah Lapidoth and to work for the Zionist cause. The fulfillment of his desire to find "'some ideal task, in which I might feel myself the heart and brain of a multitude—some social captainship, which would come to me as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize'" (819) also fulfills Gwendolen's need to enlarge her horizons and learn one final lesson.[31] When Daniel tells her of his plans, her chastened but still existent selfishness and egoism receive one more shock from this reference to a world existing outside her immediate experience, but which nevertheless affects her:

> That was the sort of crisis which was at this moment beginning in Gwendolen's small life: she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her

[31] Both Cirillo and Hardy stress the formal relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen and both emphasize that while Daniel works towards fulfilling his destiny—the Zionist cause—he is helping Gwendolen to move towards the fulfillment of her destiny: her escape from "'that narrow round'" of her egoism. Thus Daniel must achieve his destiny in order for Gwendolen to achieve hers. Cirillo states: "Essential to Daniel's overthrow of Gwendolen and to her salvation, however, is his departure. . . . Only by Daniel's absence can Gwendolen really be saved. . . . Daniel's departure puts this precept into action; Gwendolen must do without him even though his presence is the consolation that her egoism demands" (243). Barbara Hardy refers to the "traumatic climax" of the close of the novel and explains how this climax coalesces: "as we follow her movement through a narrow world which to her is the whole world, we also follow the separate movement of Deronda in the world of new ideas and sympathies. . . . We also follow the conflicting tensions of her dependence on Daniel and his separate and incompatible plans and discoveries" (*DD* 27-8). She says that "Gwendolen is left alone, and for her the loneliness seems to be the only appropriate state. . . . Gwendolen thinks that she has suffered in her marriage, and she thinks she has learnt a tragic lesson, but her egoism is to meet another violent shock" (*Study in Form* 151-52). But her egoism demands this "violent shock," and it allows "a moral conclusion: Gwendolen is 'redeemed' . . . and her letter to Daniel has a moral finality" (*Study in Form* 153).

> supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving. All the troubles of her wifehood and widowhood had still left her with the implicit impression which had accompanied her from childhood, that whatever surrounded her was somehow specially for her, and it was because of this that no personal jealousy had been roused in her in relation to Deronda: she could not spontaneously think of him as rightfully belonging to others more than to her. But here had come a shock which went deeper than personal jealousy—something spiritual and vaguely tremendous that thrust her away, and yet quelled all anger into self-humiliation. (876)

Although her immediate response to Daniel's news reflects her basic selfishness—"'I said I should be forsaken. I have been a cruel woman. And I am forsaken'" (877)—she soon rallies and shows that her compunction and suffering have deeply affected her. Daniel has been responsible for "the raising of a self-discontent [in Gwendolen] which could be satisfied only by genuine change" (737); her final letter to Daniel which he receives on his wedding-day illustrates the beginnings of this "genuine change." Her note indicates that she has recognised her selfishness—and its cruelty to him—and also suggests that Gwendolen is only at the beginning of a long journey towards becoming "'among the best of women.'" The note reads,

> Do not think of me sorrowfully on your wedding-day. I have remembered your words—that I may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born. I do not yet see how that can be, but you know better than I. If it ever comes true, it will be because you helped me. I only thought of myself, and I made you grieve. It hurts me now to think of your grief. You must not grieve any more for me. It is better—it shall be better with me because I have known you. (882)

Although very much interested in the "openness" of the end of *Daniel Deronda*, Barbara Hardy still acknowledges Gwendolen's "moral conclusion" (*Study in Form* 153). Gwendolen's letter to Daniel suggests that her purgation has only just been effected and that she still has a long struggle ahead. Nevertheless, that Gwendolen has achieved even this assurance of her potential to develop further marks the fundamental nature of her change from her former all-engrossing egoism. Because so much of Gwendolen's struggle has been with her own conscience—and her conscience as represented by Daniel Deronda—, it seems likely that her "root of conscience" still would have responded to her betrayal of Lydia Glasher without

the intervention of Daniel. However, it also seems likely that without Daniel, Gwendolen would have developed a protective shield of "hardness and defiance" (460) to hide her misery and perhaps have become consumed by that "demonic force" (459) ever present within her. Through Daniel's assistance, her moral error has been transformed into a difficult but beneficial opportunity to develop from her original immaturity and selfishness to an awareness of the world around her and of the effects of her behavior upon others. Gwendolen is at least partially responsible for the beginning of her transformation, for she initially links Daniel with the clamourings of guilt and conscience which she has been trying to suppress and ignore. This results in the disturbance of those "satisfactions of . . . pride, on which . . . [Gwendolen] nourished her strength" (468). Their relationship develops as Gwendolen's guilt develops into an uncontrollable presence, and she looks to Daniel for ways to appease this guilt, and when that proves impossible, to co-exist with this guilt and try to avoid any action that might further increase it. These attempts result in "the raising of a self-discontent which could be satisfied only by genuine change" (737). Daniel becomes to Gwendolen "a terrible-browed angel" with ultimate moral authority. Fortunately for Gwendolen, she has bestowed this authority upon a person worthy of it. In one passage of *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot raises the issue of Daniel's final significance to Gwendolen:

> Would her remorse have maintained its power within her, or would she have felt absolved by secrecy, if it had not been for that outer conscience which was made for her by Deronda? It is hard to say how much we could forgive ourselves if we were secure from judgment by an other whose opinion is the breathing-medium of all our joy—who brings to us with close pressure and immediate sequence that judgment of the Invisible and Universal which self-flattery and the world's tolerance would easily melt and disperse. In this way our brother may be in the stead of God to us, and his opinion which has pierced even to the joints and marrow, may be our virtue in the making. That mission of Deronda to Gwendolen had begun with what she had felt to be his judgment of her at the gaming-table. . . . Deronda had not spoiled his mission. (832-33)

Rather than becoming forever lost in the inferno of her own "demonic force," Gwendolen has instead, with Daniel's help, been able to transform her error and guilt into a purgation of her weaknesses so that she can develop beyond them, into

a woman "who makes others glad that . . . [she] was born."

IV. Dorothea and Casaubon

Upon first consideration, few, if any, similarities appear between the mentor relationships of *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda* and the marriage of Dorothea Brooke and Edward Casaubon. Gone is the initially weak and reprehensible heroine replaced by one who is intensely religious and consumed by a desire for knowledge. Esther and Gwendolen are vain and shallow and view marriage as social promotion and advancement; Dorothea is oblivious to her appearance, draws plans of cottages as a hobby, and considers marriage an opportunity to advance her learning: "The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it" (8). Whereas Gwendolen and Esther are complacent, Dorothea is constantly yearning to develop beyond her present state, to find "a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly" (47). Esther and Gwendolen need their mentors to help them develop their own potential for moral growth; Dorothea is seemingly already aware of this need to grow and develop, and certainly the mentor she chooses, Casaubon, does not directly aid her moral growth.

Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon, however, for all its reversals, bears remarkable similarities to the experience of Gwendolen Harleth Grandcourt. Both heroines are naïve and inexperienced and both are, in their own ways, egoists. Neither heroine is a fit judge of her prospective husband; both have their own theoretic ideas about what marriage should be, and neither looks beyond her theory to know or understand the actual man she marries. Both marriages become a type of purgatory, punishing each heroine for the weaknesses that led her to that marriage, and both heroines are saved from their marriage-punishments and develop far beyond their original weaknesses because of the experience of their marriages. The main difference arises from Dorothea's nature. She is morally stronger at the beginning of *Middlemarch* than is Gwendolen at the opening of *Daniel Deronda*, but in her own way, she equals Gwendolen in naïveté. Convinced that the pursuit

of knowledge will end her dissatisfaction with life and teach her how best to live that life, Dorothea desires to marry a mentor who will guide her intellectual—and its resulting moral—development. Dorothea's desire for this husband/mentor is as representative of those flaws in her character as Gwendolen's misguided belief in marriage as social promotion and independence is representative of her flaws. Dorothea chooses the wrong man for her mentor, but this is inevitable, for she makes her choice in her moral infancy; her marriage reinforces those weaknesses that allowed Dorothea to make this wrong choice.

Just as Gwendolen's marriage purges her of her moral weaknesses, Dorothea's purges her of her naïveté and misconceptions. Perhaps the differences in intensity of suffering reflect Dante's mountain of Purgatory, where the worst sins are punished more severely at the foot of the mountain, and as the penitent is purged of each sin, he ascends the mountain and the punishments become less severe. Gwendolen's betrayal of Lydia Glasher and her decision, despite severe moral qualms, to marry a man whose past actions she despises in order to gain social status and wealth is a serious moral crime, and her horrifying marriage and intense guilt and suffering reflect this seriousness. Dorothea does not commit a moral crime; rather, she is seriously misguided, "gravely deluded" as Barbara Hardy says (*Study in Form* 65). She marries Casaubon because she is convinced that he will suit perfectly her desire for a husband/mentor—for this reason she loves him—and it takes the disappointment and misery of her marriage to make her realise how gravely deluded she is.

Unlike Gwendolen's horrifying purging of those most basic sins that allowed her serious moral error, Dorothea's suffering and purging allow her to develop into an even more exceptional human being, a "finely-touched spirit" (612). Whereas Gwendolen must learn basic lessons like why her marriage to Grandcourt is wrong, Dorothea instead polishes her exceptional character, and her misery as Mrs Casaubon allows her to break out of her own immaturity and egoism and become selfless

and generous by doing everything within her power to help those around her. This is perhaps the highest achievement in George Eliot's moral world. It is Felix's aim: "'to make life less bitter for a few within my reach'"; indirectly it is Daniel's aim as he helps Gwendolen from her "'narrow round'" to "'the world beyond the small drama of personal desires.'" It is the type of heroism Esther learns when she decides to testify at Felix's trial and then helps Mrs Transome in her intense misery. Dorothea's ability to achieve this highest aim comes through her marriage to her mentor.

Although prepared to argue the deficiencies of George Eliot's presentation of characters like Dorothea and Will Ladislaw, critics of *Middlemarch* unanimously recognise Dorothea's marriage to Edward Casaubon as the medium for her moral growth. Barbara Hardy explains that "Dorothea, like Maggie and Esther, makes a tragic error: she is gravely deluded. Her ordeal, like Maggie's though not like Esther's, takes the form of an awakening from the desirable dream to the hard, unexpected pressures of life as it is." Hardy notes that this "awakening" begins with "her marriage with Casaubon . . . [which] turns out to be the exact reversal of all her hopes" (*Study in Form* 65). At least part of Dorothea's "dream" can be attributed to her "lack of education": "It contributes to her illusions—it combines fatally with her theoretic mind, her inexperience and youth, and her social ardour" (*Study in Form* 49-50). This fatal combination leads her to the mistake of marriage to Casaubon: "Dorothea is presented as both 'theoretic' and ardent, and she makes her initial mistake because of her ardour for knowledge. . . . Dorothea is the ardent creature whose intellectual longings are born of intellectual inexperience" (*Study in Form* 63-64). Hardy also points out that Dorothea "tries to be an ascetic" but that "Like Maggie, she knows too little about her own instincts to be able to adopt the ascetic role with safety" (*Particularities* 21). Hardy also elaborates on the "desirable dream" that Dorothea's inexperience creates for herself: "She has theoretical ideals of marriage ominously expressed in references to fathers

and teachers, Milton and Hooker. She creates an image of her own nature and an image of ideal marriage which matches Casaubon's with fatal perfection" (*Particularities* 21).

In his introduction to *Middlemarch*, W. J. Harvey calls the stories of Dorothea and Lydgate "twin studies in defeated aspiration" (*M* 8), thus making Dorothea's situation and dilemma a "search for one's true vocation" (*M* 13). He sees Dorothea's disastrous marriage to Casaubon as arising, then, not only from her being "the innocent idealist" but also because she exists in "a world which cramps and confines her ardour so that she dwindles into marriage with the pedantic and sterile Casaubon" (*M* 8). Harvey elaborates his point:

> Dorothea's nature is 'altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent' and it is 'hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty causes, in a maze of small paths that led no whither.' Provincial society seems to her a prison from which she longs to escape by doing great good or by espousing a noble cause; with this we can sympathize and we pity her when she equates freedom with Casaubon's claustrophobic world. For as the word *theoretic* suggests, Dorothea is innocent, ignorant of her self and the world; she is morally, as well as literally, myopic. It is in her marriage that her painful self-education must begin . . . . (*M* 15)

Much of Dorothea's "self-education" revolves around her learning to recognise "an equivalent centre of self' in another person"; this "is the beginning of self-transcendence" (*M* 15) and marks a significant change from her original "reforming passion" which is "streaked with egoism" (*M* 16).

Joan Bennett also identifies the stories of Lydgate and Dorothea as parallel and central to the novel, and she and Harvey share the belief that through marriage Dorothea seeks a vocation. Whereas Lydgate, as a man, could conceivably keep marriage incidental and independent of his career, for Dorothea, as a woman,

> marriage is the only conceivable career. Consequently, she chooses a mate in the hope of finding, through him, her opportunity to serve humanity. She hopes to find a husband with gifts of character and intelligence superior to her own. (165)

Bennett considers Dorothea's marriage to Ladislaw a reflection of what she has learned during her marriage to Casaubon. The "illusion" which caused her to marry

Casaubon is replaced in her marriage to Will with "an appreciation of the man as he is; their love for each other comprises mutual sympathy, understanding and respect." Casaubon and Dorothea "each thought the other corresponded to a pre-existing idea in their own mind" but Will and Dorothea "respect one another for what they discern in one another" (176). Bernard J. Paris has a similar response to Dorothea's second marriage. He states that "[b]y the time she married Will, Dorothea knew that she would never find the grand life of which she had dreamed when she was courted by Mr. Casaubon." By marrying Will, she instead satisfies "the needs of her affection" as well as her need for "'beneficent activity'" (227). Paris adds that "George Eliot is not without a strong sense of the waste in Dorothea's lot, but it is clear that she regards Dorothea's as a worthy life—one whose influence upon the sum of human good is hidden but not unimportant" (227-28).

Barry Qualls is also concerned with the ultimate effect of her marriage with Casaubon upon Dorothea, an effect which he views as "the necessity of giving up our fictions if we were ever to live adequately—albeit never heroically—in the 'real'" (170). This "forsaking of romance" involves not only a realisation of the truth but also something of a compromise, for "[a]ll vision narrows to domestic dimensions" (170). Qualls also acknowledges that a part of Dorothea's growth is a movement away from egoism:

> This woman [Dorothea] whose central concern, "Tell me what I can do" (Mid: 30: 213), has a Bunyanesque resonance far beyond its immediate application, breaks out of her "theoretic" imprisonment, out of self-absorption: "I used to pray so much—now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and I have too much already" (39: 287). . . . It is the process of the visionary moment for all who are saved in George Eliot's novels, this breaking out of self-fancy, this understanding of how we dream, and this insight about the burdens that we must all carry and share *here*. (165-66)

The agreement amongst the critics that Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon effects her moral growth makes it unnecessary to detail elaborately the process of Dorothea's development through her marriage. Instead, I wish to suggest that

Dorothea's experience bears striking parallels to Gwendolen's, with the differences between the two heroines' experiences accounted for by their moral differences. They share a very similar pattern of experience, and this similarity begins with the disastrous marriage which reflects each character's original faults and weaknesses.

As Barbara Hardy points out, Gwendolen's and Dorothea's original naïveté and inexperience can be accounted for as resulting from "a certain education, a certain breeding, a certain set of narrow and dangerous expectations about life, class, and money."[32] But whereas Gwendolen's limited experience combines with her nature to create "The Spoiled Child," Dorothea's intense, emotional nature combines with her own narrow backround and her own peculiar disposition to make her "ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent," and to give her a "religious disposition" (21), and an "insistance on regulating life according to notions" (7). At the opening of *Middlemarch*, she as yet has not been able to determine how best to regulate her life: "For a long while she had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do, what ought she to do?" (20). Just as Gwendolen's inexperience and arrogance cause her to make certain assumptions about marriage, Dorothea's "theoretic" nature causes her to believe in the pursuit of knowledge as the solution to her difficulties and in marriage to a man of superior intelligence as the best way in which to gain this knowledge: "The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it" (8). Her inexperience causes her to make high demands of this husband who is to be "'above . . . [her] in judgment and in all knowledge'" (30), for Dorothea believes that intellectual development exists concomitantly with moral and ethical development. Knowledge will provide her with the ultimate "[illegible] according to which she can regulate her life:

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[32] See Chapter III, n. 14

> But something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent; and since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil . . . .(64)

Dorothea puts tremendous store in "[t]hose provinces of masculine knowledge" which are

> a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly. As it was, she constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance . . . . Perhaps even Hebrew might be necessary—at least the alphabet and a few roots—in order to arrive at the core of things, and judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian. (47)

Dorothea's theoretic nature and her general inexperience and naïveté about life combine dangerously to form her attraction to Mr Casaubon. She is immediately attracted to his research—"To reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the highest purposes of truth" (13)—and even to his appearance, because of his resemblance to Locke. And in her passionate enthusiasm, she makes the dangerous assumption that Casaubon's capacity as a scholar immediately grants him a large moral and spiritual capacity: "Here was a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could illuminate principle with the widest knowledge: a man whose learning almost amounted to a proof of whatever he believed!" (16). Casaubon's proposal of marriage shortly after they first meet is for Dorothea the exhilarating prospect of finally gaining that knowledge which will show her what she "ought . . . to do":

> Her whole soul was possessed by the fact that a fuller life was opening before her: she was a neophyte about to enter on a higher grade of initiation. She was going to have room for the energies which stirred uneasily under the dimness and pressure of her own ignorance and petty peremptoriness of the world's habits. Now she would be able to devote herself to large yet definite duties; now she would be allowed to live continually in the light of a mind that she could reverence. (32)

Dorothea's desire to marry a mentor, and her decision that Casaubon is a mentor, reveal as much about her failings and weaknesses as Gwendolen's belief that Grandcourt is her ideal husband reveals about her more serious weaknesses. Dorothea desires a union which "would deliver her from her girlish subjection to

her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path" (21). Those words, "voluntary submission to a guide," describe precisely the final authority both Esther and Gwendolen grant their mentors. But even though Dorothea desires this mentor, even though she already possesses "an active conscience and a great mental need" (20), she is still immature and somewhat egoistic. She wants a marriage that will make her supremely happy and that will answer all her needs for a "binding theory" (63), but she gives almost no thought to what this theoretic husband might also want or need from their marriage, aside from her capacity as "lamp-holder" to his great work (13). This self-absorption works to her disadvantage, for she cannot look beyond her own preconceptions of the perfect husband to really know or acquaint herself with Casaubon. She believes that knowledge will give her the key to an emotionally and spiritually full life, and she assumes that because Casaubon has knowledge, he is also morally and spiritually superior. She attributes to Casaubon all her ideals and wishes without looking closely to ensure that he does in fact possess them: "Dorothea by this time had looked deep into the ungauged reservoir of Mr Casaubon's mind, seeing reflected there in vague labyrinthine extension every quality she herself brought" (17). Even Casaubon's measured and formal manner does not disturb Dorothea, although it contrasts sharply with her own emotional, intense nature:

> His efforts at exact courtesy and formal tenderness had no defect for her. She filled up all blanks with unmanifested perfections, interpreting him as she interpreted the works of Providence, and accounting for seeming discords by her own deafness to the higher harmonies. (55)

Even her reluctant reservations about Casaubon's scholarship cause her only momentary apprehensions, for she assures herself that the "higher initiation in ideas" that their marriage will bring will "give the remotest sources of knowledge some bearing on her actions" (63). Despite her "active conscience and great mental need," Dorothea is as naïve and self-centred as Gwendolen, and her marriage is as much a reflection of these faults as Gwendolen's is of hers.

Because Dorothea has chosen her mentor guided by her immature and naïve theoretic notions, her marriage to Casaubon cannot succeed and she reluctantly recognises Casaubon's incapacity to give her the much anticipated knowledge and guidance—in other words, his incapacity to be her mentor—shortly after their marriage. Instead of the "large vistas and wide fresh air" she had hoped to find "in her husband's mind," she discovers only "anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither" (145). She is perhaps most disturbed by Casaubon's inability to experience strong emotion, or even to appreciate anything around him. During their wedding journey to Rome, Casaubon conscientiously arranges for Dorothea to see everything that, in "'the opinion of conoscenti'" (146), ought to be seen. But his equally conscientous recitals of the scholarship and assessments written by these "'conoscenti'" on the paintings and works of art which she sees leave Dorothea with the sickening sense that Casaubon's knowledge has not helped him to "'care'"(146) about the world:

> This kind of answer [Casaubon's recital of other people's opinions and ideas] given in a measured official tone, as of a clergyman reading according to the rubric, did not help to justify the glories of the Eternal City, or to give her the hope that if she knew more about them the world would be joyously illuminated for her. There is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in a blank absence of interest or sympathy. (146)

Instead of that "standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly," Dorothea has discovered that her husband possesses only "a lifeless embalmment of knowledge" (146). She is also quickly forced to the realisation that her husband's great work reflects his moral deficiencies. Early in their marriage, she demands of him, "'All those rows of volumes—will you not now do what you used to speak of?—will you not make up your mind what part of them you will use, and begin to write the book which will make your vast knowledge useful to the world?'" (148). This demand is equally frightening to both husband and wife. Dorothea has realised that her hopes of improving and perfecting her life through the acquisition of her mentor's knowledge are now futile, and Casaubon fears that this demanding

young idealist whom he has married is yet another unsympathetic critic of his work: "Instead of getting a soft fence against the cold, shadowy, unapplausive audience of life, had he only given it a more substantial presence?" (150).

When Gwendolen discovers that her marriage is a horrible mistake and that she has only a life of misery to look forward to, her first instinct is to fall back upon those traits of her character which brought her to this marriage in the first place; she thinks of ways to "carry her troubles with spirit, and let none suspect them." If it had not been for the existence of Daniel Deronda, Gwendolen might have degenerated into a character with the hardness and depravity of Grandcourt himself. Dorothea's higher moral nature, however, suffers in the disappointment that her mentor has failed her, but she continues to grow. Albert R. Cirillo suggests that Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon is a purgatory in which she is purged of her weaknesses. He cites the epigraph to Book II, Chapter XIX which translates, "Look at the other one sighing who has made a bed for her cheek with her palm," and explains its significance:

> Dante's original refers to one of the late repentant kings in Purgatory whose preoccupation with earthly ambition has distracted him from higher things. . . . The chapter describes the meeting of Will and Dorothea in Rome. The artist, Naumann, sees her in an art gallery as she stands in a reverie, "one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face." The Dantean epigraph reminds us that Dorothea, who married Casaubon because she was distracted from true values, is now finding her purgatory in late repentance. (n. 10, 317)

But Dorothea can only have a "late repentance" if she recognises her previous errors, and so even though her mentor cannot provide her with the intellectual and moral guidance she desires, her marriage to this failed mentor has nonetheless forced her to recognise her weaknesses. And because Dorothea is already guided by "an active conscience and a great mental need," her misfortune and unhappiness allow her to develop even further her already superior moral nature.

Even though Casaubon is a failed mentor, his nature urges Dorothea forward in a way similar to the effect that Felix and Daniel have on Esther and

Gwendolen. Barbara Hardy says that Felix and Daniel "have the simplicity and great stature of abstractions in a Morality Play"; as abstractions, they represent opposite extremes to the original moral weaknesses and faults of their respective heroines. Felix Holt shows Esther that a man can exist contentedly, with integrity and dignity, in the lower classes, and in fact achieve a better life than in the priveleged upper classes. Daniel Deronda's altruism and desire to view life with the widest possible scope contrasts sharply with Gwendolen's egoism and self-absorption, and it is his wideness of vision that helps Gwendolen to achieve her moral growth. Casaubon, too, is something of a moral abstraction but a negative one; in this way, he shows Dorothea exactly how dangerous it is to assume that the world shares her high and noble motives and aims. He is the scholar so lost amongst his research that he has lost sight of its purpose; his "lifeless embalmment of knowledge" only leaves him "'liv[ing] too much with the dead'" (13). His haunting fear that others will discover his deficiences as a scholar makes him cold and proud and immediately suspicious and bitter towards anyone around him who attempts to interest himself in his work. This suspicion extends even towards Dorothea: "there had entered into the husband's mind the certainty that she [Dorothea] judged him, and that her wifely devotedness was like a penitential expiation of unbelieving thoughts" (306). Casaubon's alienation from mankind, his coldness, pettiness and suspicion towards those around him, combine to make his nature almost as extreme an opposite to Dorothea's as possible. His complete incapacity to experience emotion, as ultimately manifested in his heart disease, is another difference from her.

When Esther and Gwendolen are presented with extremes of virtues in the persons of their mentors, they struggle to change their natures in order to aspire to a similar level of virtue. Dorothea is already virtuous, and when confronted with the extreme of human pettiness and failure in her husband, she struggles against his example and the effect he has upon her nature, and so increases her

virtue. Part of Dorothea's original weakness is her inability to think of Casaubon as anything more than the manifestation of her ideal husband, and in her first disappointment and sadness after their marriage, she can think only of her sorrows: "She was as blind to his inward troubles as he to hers: she had not yet learned those hidden conflicts in her husband which claim our pity. She had not yet listened patiently to his heart-beats, but only felt that her own was beating violently" (148-49). But despite her disillusionment and sadness, Dorothea still determines to salvage her marriage, to find in it that "duty [which] would present itself in some new form of inspiration and give a new meaning to wifely love" (202). This duty ultimately reveals itself as Dorothea's frustrating and costly attempt to satisfy her husband and to battle his selfishness and pride with her own generosity and devotion.

Dorothea's first disappointment at the real outcome of her marriage—rather than her imagined, idealised hopes—reflects her "moral stupidity" (156), but by the time of her husband's death, she has learned of and been moved by his "equivalent centre of self" (157). Their marriage is also a disappointment to Casaubon, and he reluctantly concedes that "Marriage, like religion and erudition, nay, like authorship itself, was fated to become an outward requirement, and Edward Casaubon was bent on fulfilling unimpeachably all requirements" (207). Unfortunately for Dorothea, Casaubon's 'unimpeachable fulfillment' cannot begin to satisfy her, and as his suspicions and pettiness towards the world around him leave him "proudly, bitterly silent" (277), Dorothea begins "to see that she had been under a wild illusion in expecting a response to her feeling from Mr Casaubon" (156). As she begins to realise more clearly the worthlessness of Casaubon's studies and the deficiencies of his character—especially his suspicions and criticisms of Will Ladislaw—her life becomes a "nightmare . . . in which every energy was arrested by dread" (275).

Dorothea's battle against Casaubon—and against her own growing dislike of him—changes immeasurably when he suffers a heart-attack. Casaubon's heart disease can be seen as symbolic of his entire inability to care deeply or feel strongly about anything. George Eliot explains this deficiency:

> To know intense joy without a strong bodily frame, one must have an enthusiastic soul. Mr Casaubon had never had a strong bodily frame, and his soul was sensitive without being enthusiastic: it was too languid to thrill out of self-consciousness into passionate delight; it went on fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying. (206)

When Casaubon suffers the heart-attack which signals not only his lack of emotion and intensity but also his intolerance of criticism and contradiction, Dorothea is given the ultimate challenge to her character. She has begun to consider her husband as "stupidly undiscerning and odiously unjust" (208) and his work as offering no worth or use to the rest of the world. She is beginning to appreciate the "moral imprisonment" (202) that her marriage could easily become, and now, because of the severity of his illness, she learns that she cannot fight back against those traits in his nature which so disturb her, for fear of causing another attack. Her fear of Casaubon's illness affects her deeply, and she begs of Lydgate to tell her all he can about Casaubon's attack, and how another might be avoided, explaining, "'I cannot bear to think that there might be something which I did not know, and which, if I had known it would have made me act differently'" (212). She is moved by the thought that Casaubon's health may force him to abandon his work, and tries to make Lydgate see the tragedy of such an abandonment: "'He has been labouring all his life and looking forward. He minds about nothing else. And I mind about nothing else—'" (214). Despite her recognition of the worthlessness of Casaubon's Key, Dorothea is able to look beyond her own distaste to her husband's "equivalent centre of self" and apprehend the full significance for her husband of the failure of his life's work. Dorothea does not suffer from Gwendolen's deficient imagination, and she is moved by the thought of how failure might affect her husband.

> She was no longer struggling against the perception of facts, but adjusting herself to their clearest perception; and now when she looked steadily at her husband's failure, still more at his possible consciousness of failure, she seemed to be looking along the one track where duty became tenderness. (267)

Perhaps it is because Casaubon's coldness, hardness, and pettiness repel Dorothea so much that she is able to fight against them so valiantly. It is difficult for her always to remember the pity and emotional generosity which she desires to be the motivation for all her actions towards her husband. When, on the day that Lydgate explains to Casaubon the extent and severity of his illness, Dorothea summons up her courage to go to her husband and comfort him, she is repulsed by the cold reaction she receives. She tries to counteract his "chill" by "pass[ing] her hand through his arm," but Casaubon refuses to acknowledge this act of tenderness: "Mr Casaubon kept his hands behind him and allowed her pliant arm to cling with difficulty against his rigid arm" (312). Dorothea responds with astonished anger, and asks herself, "'What have I done—what am I—that he should treat me so?'" (312). She thinks of all her efforts to please her husband and realises how much she has compromised her own nature in order to suit his:

> If he had drawn her towards him, she would never have surveyed him—never have said, "Is he worth living for?" but would have felt him simply a part of her own life. Now she said bitterly, "It is his fault, not mine." In the jar of her whole being, Pity was overthrown. Was it her fault that she had believed in him—had believed in his worthiness?—And what, exactly, was he?—She was able enough to estimate him—she who waited on his glances with trembling, and shut her best soul in prison, paying it only hidden visits, that she might be petty enough to please him. In such a crisis as this, some women begin to hate. (312-313)

That Dorothea could be driven this close to hatred of her husband suggests not only the severity of the trial of her marriage, but also the difficulty with which she conquers her hatred. Her "noble habit of the soul reasserts itself," and she reminds herself of those thoughts which originally inspired her pity for her husband:

> That thought with which Dorothea had gone out to meet her husband—her conviction that he had been asking [Lydgate] about the possible arrest of all his work, and that the answer must have wrung his heart, could not

> be long without rising beside the image of him, like a shadowy monitor looking at her anger with sad remonstrance. It cost her a litany of pictured sorrows and of silent cries that she might be the mercy for those sorrows—but the resolved submission did come . . . .(313)

Despite Casaubon's earlier repulsion of her affection, Dorothea awaits her husband's exit from the library and joins him. He is surprised and moved by this act of kindness and tells her, "'Come, my dear, come. You are young, and need not to extend your life by watching.'" Dorothea can no longer feel any resurgance of love in response to this 'show' of affection; she experiences instead the "thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature" (314). Dorothea's superior moral nature is able to overcome the frustration and hatred which Casaubon's behavior inspires in her, but it is a difficult battle and requires that she ignore all concerns of self. In this manner, she is purged of her egoism through her struggle to satisfy Casaubon.

Dorothea's "stores of patience" (315) are further tried when Casaubon tries to extract from her a promise that she will complete his Key to all Mythologies after his death. Once again, the strength and extreme of emotion in Dorothea's response suggests the intensity of the battle required to overcome her own instincts in the attempt to please her husband. Dorothea is troubled by the thought that her husband's life work can have no significance or importance to anyone else and for this reason desires no further involvement with it:

> The poor child had become altogether unbelieving as to the trustworthiness of that Key which had made the ambition and the labour of her husband's life. . . . And now she pictured to herself the days, and months, and years which she must spend in sorting what might be called shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition which was itself a mosaic wrought from crushed ruins—sorting them as food for a theory which was already withered in the birth like an elfin child. (350-51)

But her determination that despite her instincts she will cede to her husband's desire shows the nobility and generosity of her spirit:

> Neither law nor the world's opinion compelled her to this—only her husband's nature and her own compassion, only the ideal and not the real yoke of marriage. She saw clearly enough the whole situation, yet she was fettered: she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated hers. If that were weakness, Dorothea was weak. (353)

Like Gwendolen, the trials of purgatory decrease for Dorothea after her husband's death; also like Gwendolen, the purgatory of her marriage has effected significant changes in her character. When she first desired to marry Casaubon, Dorothea had an "active conscience and great mental need," but she had not yet emerged from that "moral stupidity" in which "the world . . . [is] an order to feed our supreme selves" (156). Despite her egoism, Dorothea has always desired "the fullest truth, the least partial good" (151) and marriage to Casaubon tries these noble but "lofty conception[s]" (6). In the words of Barry Qualls, "[a]ll vision narrows to domestic dimensions" (170). Dorothea does not lose her noble aims and motives; instead, she learns how they can and must affect the day-to-day actions of one's life. In the midst of the trial of her marriage, Dorothea explains to Will Ladislaw her "'belief.'" It is still of "lofty conception" but it also represents that new emergence from "moral stupidity" that her marriage has forced her to undergo in order to maintain her integrity. Dorothea tells Will of her "'belief'":

> "That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower. . . . It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much—now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and I have too much already." (287)

Even after Casaubon's death, Dorothea continues to think of others before herself, and this "'belief'" becomes the motivation in her desire to help clear Lydgate's name of the scandal associated with Bulstrode. She begs of him to let her talk of his situation to other Middlemarch citizens: "'They would know that I could have no other motive than truth and justice. I would take any pains to clear you. I have very little to do. There is nothing better that I can do in the world'" (559). It is this same selflessness that leads her to comfort Rosamond about her husband's troubles, thrusting aside her own disappointed hopes.[33] Dorothea has

[33] She has seen Will and Rosamond together the day before, and suspects that

always been exceptional; it has taken the failed marriage to her mentor to show her how to transform those "lofty conceptions" and "notions" into "fine issues" (612) that affect those people immediately around her.

Thus Dorothea, like Esther and Gwendolen, emerges from her own "'theoretic' imprisonment" and "self-absorption" (Qualls 165) through her relationship with her mentor. Like Gwendolen in her self-absorption, she makes an incorrect judgement and finds herself in a marriage with a man she distrusts and dislikes. But whereas Gwendolen's marriage purges her of her egoism and pride, Dorothea is purged of her "distract[ion] from true values" (Cirillo 317). When she first thinks of marrying Casaubon, she says to herself, "'There would be nothing trivial about our lives'" (21); however, she spends most of her marriage fighting the pettiness of her husband's attitudes and work. Dorothea never gains more than an introduction to the knowledge and learning by which she hopes "'to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by'" (21), but when she stops being "distracted" by her theoretic notions and instead concerns herself with "the effect of her being on those around her" (613) and her desire to pursue "'what is perfectly 'good,'" she achieves the same end which she once sought to achieve through the pursuit of knowledge: "I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here—now—in England'" (21). Although her vision must narrow to "domestic dimensions" and much of her energy must be put into "wifely 'help'" (611) to her second husband, Will Ladislaw, her achievement is still monumental. Bernard J. Paris states that Dorothea "had learned . . . that life can be given a religious meaning and sanctification if we can respond to those opportunities for beneficence and rescue that come our way" (227). Thus Dorothea's movement from "lofty conceptions" to "domestic dimensions" is less a compromise than it is part of that escape from her original "distraction."[34] As with Esther and Gwendolen, it

[33](cont'd) perhaps they are lovers. She is also deeply hurt by what she perceives as Will's insincerity in his avowal of love for her.

[34] Only Daniel is allowed to pursue any "lofty conceptions," and this pursuit begins at the close of *Daniel Deronda*. Other characters, Felix and Esther for instance,

is only through her mentor—even though Casaubon fails her original hopes—that this moral growth can be effected.

[34](cont'd) content themselves with influencing and aiding a more immediate group of people on a much smaller scale, "'mak[ing] life less bitter for a few within . . . [their] reach'" (*FH* 225).

V. Conclusion

The three mentor relationships central to *Felix Holt*, *Daniel Deronda*, and *Middlemarch*, suggest that while mentor figures are an important trigger of moral growth, they are of less interest and complexity than the heroines who follow their guidance. Certainly their function as idealised figures opposing the moral weaknesses and failings of the heroines implies that little change or growth is necessary in their own characters. The necessity that the mentor oppose the heroine's weaknesses also requires that his character be formally and schematically determined. His portrait is seemingly dependent upon the character of the heroine, rather than the other way around. Thus, for a proper appreciation of the mentor figure in George Eliot's novels, one must examine the relationship he establishes with the heroine.

Although the circumstances and weaknesses of each heroine are different, each mentor helps the heroine to escape from what Daniel calls "that narrow round'" of her life. Esther, Gwendolen, and Dorothea initially share an egoistic view of existence which confines them to the satisfaction of their own desires. Each heroine's mentor reveals her desires as selfish and petty (or, in Dorothea's case, misguided); by challenging the basis of these desires, each mentor helps the heroine to [illegible]d her narrow life. But the heroine cannot simply adopt a new set of values; she must learn to believe in their merit and feel that they are worthy of being pursued. In the words of Bernard J. Paris, the heroines are "initiated into the higher life—or at least into a new and higher level of consciousness—by their veneration for and emulation of their mentors" (223-24).

This initiation to a higher level of moral awareness is achieved by the heroine's recognition of her egoism and weaknesses and by the misery and suffering which results from this recognition. George Eliot's references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* underline the necessity of suffering to effect moral growth. Guided by Virgil, Dante journeys through the Inferno viewing the punishments of others and then himself suffers the punishments of the Purgatorio; this experience results in a

spiritual cleansing and purging profound enough to allow his entrance into the Paradiso. By refering to Dante, George Eliot seemingly indicates the depth of the change her heroines undergo and shows that suffering is an intrinsic part of their moral growth. George Eliot does not want her heroines simply to recognise their weaknesses; she wants her heroines to be purged of the[illegible]

The varying degrees of suffering and p[illegible]ect the heroines' different moral failings and moral errors. Like Dante[illegible] allowed a vision of hellish misery and suffering [illegible] Mrs Transome's life; this vision prevents her from committing a similar [illegible]. Gwendolen is the weakest of the three heroines, and her suffering [illegible]rrespondingly the most intense. She makes a decision which she knows to be wrong and is punished accordingly; her punishment and misery aid her own awareness of her weaknesses and mistakes, and by the close of *Daniel Deronda* the reader is assured that Gwendolen will grow beyond her initial egoism to a higher level of moral [illegible]ness. Dorothea already exists at a higher moral level, yet she has her own weaknesses that must be purged through marriage to Casaubon. Because her failings are less severe than Gwendolen's and because she exists at a higher moral level, *Middlemarch* ends with the suggestion that Dorothea is worthy of entering the Paradiso, whereas Gwendolen still requires considerable development beyond her state at the end of *Daniel Deronda*. George Eliot desires her heroines to undergo a fundamental change which gains much of its value from its great cost.

The mentor relationships discussed in these chapters share other characteristics. One is the complete and absolute reliance and authority which the heroine grants her mentor. Esther and Gwendolen must first overcome their petty dislike of their mentors—a dislike which arises from and represents their moral failings—before they realise the merit of their mentor's advice and guidance; having reached this point, they trust their mentors completely and accept advice and guidance from no one else. Before Dorothea realises that she has deceived herself

about Casaubon, she also trusts him completely and anticipates receiving advice and guidance solely from him. This contrasts with the mentor relationship in *The Mill on the Floss*, in which Maggie never grants Philip Wakem sole authority, nor does she unreservedly trust him. Similarily, as she battles the temptation of Stephen Guest's marriage proposal, Philip is not the sole moral authority in her decision as Felix is for Esther's decision to leave Transome Court, or as Daniel is in Gwendolen's battle with her own inner demons as she suffers her life as Mrs Grandcourt. Maggie draws upon moral authorities other than Philip as she chooses to reject Stephen; she resembles Dorothea in her innate strength and superior moral character. But whereas Dorothea's moral growth is spurred by a reversal of the mentor paradigm, Maggie's growth is effected in other ways, of which her relationship with Philip is only part.

George Eliot's mentor relationships also contain an implied criticism of society and its institutions. Almost always the character in need of a mentor is female, and many of the difficulties which cause her to require this mentor arise from an arrogance and inexperience developed by the heroine's limited, often stultifying existence. Fred Vincy is one exception to this generalization, but his story nevertheless contains the suggestion that his difficulties arise because he is not suited to the alternatives for which his education and social status have prepared him. Fortunately, his mentor, Mary Garth, prevents him from pursuing a vocation which he does not wish to pursue and for which he is not suited; because of her guidance, he instead achieves integrity and happiness.

While the heroines suffer because of the limitations of their place in society and their education, the mentors try to transcend such limitations.[35] As the mentors challenge society's rules and expectations, they help the heroines to realise that

[35] Both Felix and Daniel reject the socially acceptable alternatives for which they have been prepared through education and upbringing and search for vocations which will allow them to pursue their higher aims. Casaubon's willingness to settle comfortably in the niche created by society's perception of him is in keeping with the reversal of the mentor paradigm in his marriage to Dorothea.

although society sanctions certain behavior (and it certainly sanctions Esther's belief in the authority of appearance and good taste, Gwendolen's advantageous marriage to a wealthy, socially superior man, and Dorothea's misguided marriage to a man old enough to be her father), this sanction does not necessarily make their behavior correct or acceptable. Each person must accept responsibility for his or her actions. The mentors willingly accept this responsibility and search for the most effective way by which to achieve their high aims; in the course of their search, they help the heroines to realise their responsibility for their own actions and to fight against the moral inertia which society so easily overlooks.

In George Eliot's novels, the mentor figure is only as important as the change he effects in the heroine. Felix and Daniel are exceptional, admirable characters when one considers their lives and beliefs; however, the petty and selfish Edward Casaubon sparks a moral change in Dorothea as profound and important as Felix's and Daniel's effect upon Esther and Gwendolen. What seems most important is not the mentor himself, but the effect he has upon the psychology—and correspondingly, the moral awareness—of each heroine.

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