

STUDIES IN STRUCTURE

An analysis of four of the novels of George Eliot.

by

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Page references are to the Everyman editions of George Eliot's novels.

Except for quotations specifically indicated in the text, and such help as I have acknowledged in the preface, this thesis is wholly my own work.

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PREFACE

I should like to thank all those who have helped me in the shaping and in the production of this thesis.

First, there are those authors, most of whom I have not met, whose minds have stimulated and challenged mine. My greatest debts are, I think, to Wayne Booth, R. S. Crane, Gordon Haight, Barbara Hardy, and, of course, George Eliot herself.

Then there are my teachers; in particular, Austin Wright of the University of Cincinnati; and my students, who by their eagerness to learn and their responsiveness to George Eliot's works have given me more than they knew.

Finally, there are my friends: Gwyneth Robertson, who helped me with some of the preliminary bibliographical work; Shirley Bell, who typed the thesis; Robert Jones, whose perceptive advice led me to just the right books at the right time; Sylvia Johanson and Robert Wyllie, whose encouragement and honest criticism over a long period have helped me to discover more precisely what I wanted to do; and Raymond Sands, who is also my supervisor, and whose kindness, quick understanding, and exacting standards have made me constantly glad that I undertook this task, and grateful that I was working with him.

CHAPTER 1

PRINCIPLES AND METHOD.

... a novel is not only an artefact to be
investigated, but a world to be walked in...

J. M. S. Tompkins¹

1. 'A Plea for Ancient Lights', Middlemarch : Critical Approaches to the Novel, ed. Barbara Hardy, p. 174.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE.

The aim of these studies is to explore the principles of coherence in four of George Eliot's novels, and to give an account of their structure. I have chosen The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner, Middlemarch, and Daniel Deronda because these seem to me to exhibit great variety in their structures, and will therefore show something of the range of the method I am using. While I shall concentrate on what this method reveals in these particular novels, I believe that it yields valuable insights when applied to any novel, and I hope that its general usefulness will become apparent.

The type of analysis which I am attempting I shall call formal analysis, since it is an analysis of the form of the novels. Its essence lies in its treatment of a work of literature primarily as a whole work, and in its attempt to describe the interrelationship of the parts that make it what it is, and the relationship of these parts to the whole. This fundamental principle derives from Aristotle, and is recognizably present in George Eliot's own thinking about literature. In an essay entitled 'Notes on Form in Art (1868)', she writes

Plain people, though indisposed to metaphysical subtleties, can yet understand that Form, as an element of human experience, must begin with the perception of separateness...; and that things must be recognized as separate wholes before they can be recognized as wholes composed of parts, or before these wholes again can be regarded as relatively parts of a larger whole.

Form, then, as distinguished from merely massive impression, must first depend on the discrimination of wholes and then on the discrimination of parts.¹

1. Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney, p. 432.

By proceeding from an impression of a work as a whole, the formal critic attempts to discover the principle upon which it is constructed, and which will account for the particular relationship of the parts. Critics have for many years applied such a discipline to poetry, sometimes explicitly, and sometimes implicitly and intuitively; its application to fiction is more recent, and much more difficult, largely because of the extended pattern of responses which is the reader's experience of the novel.

In a formal analysis all critical problems are treated in the context of this relationship between parts and whole. Some considerations are clearly never valid unless they are thus treated in context: an extreme example would be an attempt to evaluate George Eliot's writing by a study of the conversation of Mr Brooke, without the placing given it by the rest of Middlemarch. There are other considerations which are perfectly valid in other studies, but out of place in a formal analysis: questions relating to literary biography and cultural history are usually irrelevant to formal criticism. They may indeed be positively misleading by appearing to substitute personal or cultural motivation for the artistic motivation which a formal critic's fundamental assumption should lead him to look for. The question of Marian Evans's attachment to her brother Isaac is relevant to a biographical study; it is irrelevant to a formal analysis, in which the proper question might be, 'What contribution does it make to The Mill on the Floss that Tom Tulliver is as he is, and that we are invited to evaluate him in certain ways at certain points in the novel?' The final point of reference for the formal critic is always the artistic wholeness of the work itself.

The value and limitations of formal analysis.

The value of any method is most fully apparent when its scope and limitations are clearly recognized. The usefulness of formal analysis may be summarized briefly as follows. It is a way of making articulate our intuitions and judgments about a work of literature in its wholeness, and of pointing to the unity which is a condition of its formal excellence. In long and complex

works which are difficult to grasp as a whole, the formal analysis may assist the reader's discernment of the unity, and thus add an extra dimension to his experience of the novel. Finally, by clarifying the nature of a particular work, such analysis is able to promote critical agreement about what the work is, or at least to clarify the grounds of disagreement.

Because it is a clearly defined discipline with clear limits, its adherents do not make exclusive claims for it. It cannot do everything. It is one way to treat literature; but there are others, also useful, which are related to it in various ways: by contributing to it, as close textual analysis and history of ideas both do; by supplementing it, as archetypal criticism does; or by relating the particular works treated by the formal critic to larger and more general patterns, as both literary biography and cultural history do.

It is not suited to the treatment of parts of works out of context, since in such cases the parts cannot be related to the whole. Neither is it intended to make evaluative judgments beyond a single work. The formal critic looks at what a work is rather than at what it is not, and a formal analysis of Middlemarch will not determine whether or demonstrate why it is a greater book than Nostromo. All that can be claimed is that a critic who has contemplated works such as these in their artistic wholeness will have a strong sense of what he is evaluating, and, if he wishes to make comparisons, will be in a better position to do so than he would if he were to begin by considering the details of their similarities and differences.

I hope it will appear from my analysis of George Eliot's novels that although the principles upon which I proceed are formal, the kind of form in which I am interested in not separable from the vitality of the novel. On the one hand, a story, to be worth telling, must be different from life. It has a beginning, an end, a shape, and a significance; whereas such beginnings and ends as appear in life are beginnings and ends only when seen from

particular points of view, and any shape that is discernible, even in a single life, depends at least partly upon a selective vision which leaves out the many irrelevant details of an ordinary day. Life is 'all inclusion and confusion', and art is 'all discrimination and selection'.¹ But on the other hand, a story must be recognizably like life. This recognizable familiarity need not be at all incompatible with the kind of shaping that makes a story memorable. Indeed, it can reasonably be argued that the pattern of development in a novel, its artistic shaping, is not interesting unless we recognize it as familiar; that is, unless it bears some resemblance to the patterns in which real experience seems to offer itself, or in which we tend to interpret it. The kind of shaping which I aim to analyse is not the shaping of theme or imagery or symbolism, although in all George Eliot's novels these patterns are enrichingly present; it is the shaping of the human materials, the changes in character, event and outlook which enlist our sympathies and evoke our responses.

Objective work and subjective response.

Clearly formal criticism depends, even more than most other kinds of criticism, on the assumption that the work to be studied has some kind of objective reality; that it exists and endures independently of the mind which created it, of the society to which it originally related, and of the attention of readers who might read it. As soon as we begin to think about this assumption, however, we see that it is true only in a limited sense, and that it needs to be supplemented by a recognition of the subjective nature of the experience of reading. On the one hand, a finished novel exists in a fixed form: the words are printed in their proper order, and simply await the attention of a reader. On the other hand, the printed text of a closed book means nothing: it requires the attention of a reader before its meaning can be actualized and communicated from the text to the reader, or, more accurately,

1. Henry James, 'Preface to The Spoils of Poynton', The Art of the Novel, p. 120.

from the author through the text to the reader. It is worth examining this paradox, since the method of formal analysis depends upon the relationship between the objective existence of the text and the subjective experience of the reader.

Since we are dealing with novels, let us consider the sense in which a novel can be regarded as an objective entity. It is a finished structure, and its whole medium is language. This is so ordered that it makes present to the mind of the reader a recognizable world of places and things and people; people who perceive and think and feel; who speak and act and enter into relationship with the places, things, and people around them; and who are not only conscious of these relationships, but are sometimes very sensitively aware of themselves as elements in these relationships.

The world created even in a simple novel is a very complex one. It would be complex seen even as a static world at any given stage in the novel, but its complexity is increased by the fact that it is a moving, changing world, in which several different kinds of development are possible. Things happen to the people in a novel, and they in turn cause other things to happen. There is therefore the possibility of event and action, and of changes of circumstance and fortune. There is also the possibility of moral change: the novelist's people are able to make, within their situations, some moral assessment not only of their actions, but of their intentions. They are capable of choice, and capable of change. And because some, at least, are endowed with critical self-awareness and are capable of perceiving and interpreting their experience in relation to themselves, there is a third possible development: that of a change in understanding or outlook, or a readjustment of point of view.

The narrative element is essentially a process, or a combination of processes. What happens in a novel may be in the realm of action, or it may be a moral change, or it may be a change in vision or understanding; often it is a complex combination of all three.

The novel thus conceived is an objective reality. It can endure because it is made of other materials than life, and because it has form and significance. It is this perpetual and common accessibility of a work of literature that makes criticism possible at all. For all its close imitation of the world of real experience, a novel does not share the elusive transience of things as they happen in that world: it will not escape while our backs are turned; it is always there, always recoverable. This is the reality which linguistic and historical scholars labour to make or to keep accessible; which formal critics attempt to describe; and which literary historians and cultural critics must grasp before they can proceed.

This is half the truth. The other, the paradoxical half, is that this same formal fixity which makes a novel permanently and generally accessible makes it also a dormant thing. It is there, but it does not come to life for me until I read it; it is not even accessible to me except through the process of reading. And as soon as I begin to read receptively and sympathetically, I become an involved participant rather than a detached observer. Though we have thought of a novel as having an objective existence in the sense that it is a permanent and reproducible text, it is clear that as soon as we approach it as readers we enter into a relationship that is quite different from the relationship that exists between a scientist and the object he is investigating. We cannot scrutinise a novel or measure it or examine its structure as we might examine a plant or a shellfish. Like the speech of another person, a novel demands an attentiveness, a receptivity, and a capacity to be moved. The relationship of a reader to a novel is a relationship between subjects, and the novel takes the attention of the reader beyond the text on the page into a world created by the author, and shared with him. It would be more accurate, therefore, to think of the novel as an element in an intersubjective relationship rather than as an object to be studied. As a living reality bringing into being communication between author and reader, it requires the presence of a reader to complete its significance, and it is accessible only through the response and involvement

of its readers. Direct objective scrutiny of a novel is not possible, for it cannot be separated from the reader's experience of it.

The pattern of responses and the structure of a novel.

Fortunately it is clear from what several authors say about their work that the response of the reader is not an incidental side-effect of their art, but the end towards which their activity is directed. It appears to be closely related, too, to what we might call the novelist's moral purpose: not necessarily to a series of statements or demonstrations of what is good or bad, but to an invitation to see and feel and understand in a certain way. Writing for the Westminster Review in 1856, George Eliot said:

The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment.¹

In spite of George Eliot's generally recognized didacticism, and in spite of her own frequent professions of a high moral purpose, it is clear that this purpose was not expressed primarily in moralistic statement. There are many moral generalizations in her novels, it is true; but these are always part of the rhetorical structure of the work.² They function either to draw attention to a similarity or contrast within the novel, or to invite from the reader a closer sympathy and understanding. They are never made for their own sake; they are always related to living situations, and it is the living situations which most effectively extend our sympathies.

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1. 'The Natural History of German Life: Riehl', Essays and Leaves from a Notebook, pp. 192-3.
 2. Barbara Hardy demonstrates this very fully in Ch. VIII of her book, The Novels of George Eliot. So does R. T. Jones in George Eliot: see especially the chapter 'Adam Bede'.

George Eliot herself made an interesting comment on the abstractable moral propositions to be found in her novels. The occasion was the republication of a compilation by Alexander Main entitled Wise, witty and tender sayings, in prose and verse, selected from the works of George Eliot. Blackwood had written to her complaining that Main's preface, which George Eliot had not yet seen, seemed to 'put the case rather too strong in favour of his compilation as compared with the Works'. This was her reply:

Unless my readers are more moved towards the ends I seek by my works as wholes than by an assemblage of extracts, my writings are a mistake. I have always exercised a severe watch against anything that could be called preaching, and if I have ever allowed myself in dissertation or in dialogue (anything) which is not part of the structure of my books, I have there sinned against my own laws.

I am particularly susceptible on this point, because it touches deeply my conviction of what art should be, and because a great deal of foolish stuff has been written in this relation.

The George Eliot Letters, V, pp. 458-9.

George Eliot clearly intended that it should be her 'works as wholes' which would move the reader, and that her educational purposes should be effected through this moving power of the whole. Ideally, the movement of sympathy and the accompanying emotions that the reader feels as he becomes involved in the novel are predictably and accurately controlled by the author through the text: they are not idiosyncratic and private responses, but the intended responses to that particular structure. Actually, the author's control will probably not be perfect; and the reader may be careless or prejudiced, or so different in cultural background that he cannot share the author's judgment. Nevertheless, given a good novel and an attentive and receptive reader, the total pattern of responses is the best guide to structure; it is the counterpart, in subjective experience, of the structural arrangement of the novel in its objective form.

Method.

The formal critic must begin, therefore, with his own responses. My method in analysing these four novels has been first to immerse myself in them and read them as sympathetically as possible, and then to examine my responses in relation to one another, to try to discover their pattern and their direction. Inevitably there have been some passages to which my response does not seem, even to myself, to be that intended by the author, and in such cases I have considered three possible reasons for the discrepancy. One is that my variant response may be conditioned by my particular position in history in a way that George Eliot did not foresee: my distrust of passionate nationalism obviously interferes with my acceptance of Mordecai in Daniel Deronda. Another possibility is that I may have made a wrong assumption about the form of the novel, and may therefore have looked for a pattern of response which bears no relation to my actual responses: for several years I read The Mill on the Floss as a novel about the development of Maggie's character, and was always disappointed, because read with this expectation it does not reveal a coherent and significant pattern. The third possibility, which I have tried to regard as a last resort, is that there may really be some discrepancy between intention and achievement, some flaw in the construction of the novel. In this I am likely to be wrong, but no critic can be sure of being right, and the test of coherence which is so useful a positive confirmation does not operate negatively. We cannot finally escape the relativity of our own viewpoint, and such criticisms as I have made should be recognized as the relative judgments that they are.

From an examination of the total pattern of my intuitive responses to the novel, I have attempted a description of the structure of the novel. The first formulation of the principle upon which a work is organized is necessarily a hypothesis, for since it is that principle which accounts for the nature, order, and proportion of all the parts, its formulation cannot be conclusive until all the parts have been accounted for in terms of their relation to the whole. Theoretically, the enquiry ought to be extended even

to the smallest units, to every detail of scene and character and conversation and movement; practically, this is out of the question for a lengthy novel, and I have chosen to confine myself to a study of the relationships of the larger units, and to stop when my hypothesis seems sufficiently qualified or confirmed. Nevertheless, since the little details which I have omitted from my analysis have a significant effect on the reader's response, I have been attentive to them in my reading, and have tried to allow them their full influence in determining my responses.

Didactic and Mimetic Structures.

In describing the structure of the novels, I have recognized and used the useful Aristotelian division of works of literature into two categories, depending on whether they are organized primarily to present ideas or to represent life. Aristotle makes this distinction at the beginning of his Poetics when he is discussing the difference between Homer's epics, which are mimetic, and Empedocles' treatises in verse, which are didactic. Coleridge makes a similar distinction in the Biographia Literaria, Ch. 14, when, before going on to distinguish poetry from other imitative works, he first distinguishes the whole class of which the immediate end is pleasure from those of which the immediate end is truth. Both Aristotle and Coleridge recognize that we may get pleasure from discovering 'truth', and that we may learn through the pleasure which representational art offers; but the distinction is made on the basis of the immediate end towards which the organization of the work is directed.

I have accepted the classification of unifying principles of works of literature, as either didactic or mimetic. Although the works I am treating happen all to be mimetic (that is, representational), as most works of fiction are, the distinction cuts right across the distinctions of genre, and ought neither to be forgotten nor taken for granted. Questions which it would be appropriate to

1. i.e. works intended for reading. I have excluded the kind of work that is intended only for the clarification of the writer's ideas or for the expression and control of his emotions.

ask of Rasselas, which is organized on a didactic principle to make and illustrate a series of connected propositions about human happiness, are questions which it would be inappropriate to ask of Middlemarch, which is organized on a mimetic principle. There are didactic elements in Middlemarch, certainly, but they are part of its mimetic structure; just as the mimetic elements in Rasselas are part of its structure as discourse.

The central story, and the concept of mythos.

Having made this primary distinction, my next step is to try to discover the particular structural principle. Of the many people who inhabit the novel, which of them has a story of any significant shape? And, of the several who have such stories, which is the main one? I use the word 'story' to mean simply 'a complete action, or something significant happening to someone'. When I come to consider the form of each story, I have used the Greek word mythos. Aristotle defines a mythos as

an imitation of an action that is one and entire,
the parts of it being so connected that if any
one of them be either transposed or taken away,
the whole will be destroyed or changed.

Poetics, V, p.20.

R. S. Crane uses the word 'plot' in this sense;¹ but I have avoided the English word because of its association with the rather attenuated causal structure which E. M. Forster postulates in Aspects of the Novel, and which he sees as being constantly at war with character.² In the concept of mythos I include both character and thought or theme, so that the principle of coherence in the novel remains a very complex thing, involving people's feelings, ideas, and attitudes, their position in history, and their relation to society. Forster uses a simple example to distinguish plot from story:

'The king died and then the queen died,' is a
story. 'The king died, and then the queen
died of grief,' is a plot.³

1. For a full discussion of this, see his article, 'The Concept of Plot and the Plot of "Tom Jones"', Critics and Criticism, pp. 616-647.
2. op. cit., Pelican, p. 102.
3. ibid., p. 93.

A formulation of the mythos in these terms would involve a description of the relationship between the king and the queen: an account of what sort of people they were, why and how they loved each other, and what significance this relationship gave to their lives so that the queen could not live without the king. The mythos thus conceived is not a separate element existing either in subordination to character and theme or co-equal with them: it is rather the principle shaping, controlling and synthesizing character, thought, and action, and ultimately controlling also the language of which the whole work is created.

Types of mythos.

For this concept of mythos I am greatly indebted to R. S. Crane's thought and writing,¹ and I have borrowed also his classification of the three basic patterns of organization. He relates them to the Aristotelian elements of character, thought, and action; but I think they can also be related to the kinds of change that are possible in life itself. If this is so, then the experience of recognizing the familiar in a work of fiction belongs not only to the details but to the whole process: this recognition of a total pattern as something lived and understood seems to me an important factor in the reader's sense of the significance of a novel.

The first pattern Crane calls a 'plot of action'. In a plot of action, the emphasis is on what happens to the protagonist, and interest is concentrated on the change in his situation. Character and thought are not irrelevant, but they are contributory and subordinate. Crane describes this type of plot or 'synthesizing

1. It is very close also to Barbara Hardy's concept of theme in The Novels of George Eliot.
e.g. '... the process of the tragedy is chiefly, though not entirely, the education of Adam's sensibility and imagination beyond this initial egoism. It is the first version of the main theme of all the later novels.'
op. cit., p. 38.

principle' as

a completed change, gradual or sudden, in the situation of the protagonist, determined and effected by character and thought.¹

In my discussion of George Eliot's novels I have called this pattern a mythos of action.

The second basic pattern Crane calls a 'plot of character': its defining characteristic is that it focusses the reader's attention on what happens to the moral character of the protagonist. This may improve or deteriorate gradually, or it may change through a crisis or a series of crises. Action and thought contribute to it, and are a manifestation of it. The synthesizing principle, in this case, is

a completed process of change in the moral character of the protagonist, precipitated or molded by action, and made manifest both in it and in thought and feeling.²

This pattern I have called a mythos of character change.

The third pattern is what Crane calls a 'plot of thought'. Here the synthesizing principle is

a completed process of change in the thought of the protagonist and consequently in his feelings, conditioned and directed by character and action.³

This I have called a mythos of education or a mythos of self-discovery.

Compound and complex structures.

So far this discussion has assumed, with Crane, that the interest is vested in a single protagonist, whose change, whether of situation or character or thought, is the mythos controlling the structure of the whole. This holds for each of the tales in

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1. 'The Concept of Plot and the Plot of "Tom Jones"', Critics and Criticism, p. 620.
 2. *ibid.*, p. 621.
 3. *ibid.*

Scenes of Clerical Life, and for The Mill on the Floss, but for none of George Eliot's other novels. As early as her first novel, Adam Bede, she was experimenting with the combination of related stories; and in her last novel, Daniel Deronda, she was still experimenting with new relationships in the combination. Clearly in these cases the formal critic's task does not end with the description of the mythos of each story in the novel, or even with the isolation of one mythos as the most important. If there are several stories within one novel, the unity has yet to be accounted for. This I have taken to be the most interesting part of my task.

CHAPTER 2

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS (i)

The 'working power of the plot'.

And what is a structure but a set of relations selected and combined in accordance with the sequence of mental states in the constructor, or with the preconception of a whole which he has inwardly evolved?

George Eliot, 'Notes on Form in Art',
Essays of George Eliot, ed. Pinney,
pp. 433-4.

The 'working power of the plot'.

One of the puzzling things about The Mill on the Floss is that it seems to have a much greater impact on its readers than its critics can account for. It stands accused of many grave faults: its ending is unprepared for, and 'shocks the reader most painfully';¹ the ending is the fulfilment of a romantic dream, or the timely intervention of a Providence in a world in which Providence is not believed in;² its heroine is degraded by throwing herself away 'upon a low creature',³ of whose unworthiness George Eliot herself is not aware;⁴ the writer is too closely involved with Maggie's problems to understand them or to 'place' them for the reader.⁵ Certainly, some of these critics answer one another: Henry James does not mention any aversion to Stephen Guest, and Barbara Hardy demonstrates that there is, in one sense, a great deal of preparation for the end, and that Maggie's 'sense of Stephen's irresistibility' and her 'soulful side' are clearly criticized, both in the comments of Philip and in the authorial comment.⁶ But the list of dissatisfactions remains a formidable one, according oddly with the fact that the book as a whole seems to retain its power to move and involve us as readers, often in spite of ourselves. What Crane calls 'the working power of the plot'⁷ is somehow effective in a way which transcends the particular faults of the book. This, with the lack of consensus among critics about what these faults are, except that the ending is somehow wrong, suggests that there may be some other way of viewing the organization of the book that will make better sense of its parts.

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1. Henry James. 'The Novels of George Eliot', The Atlantic Monthly, October, 1866.
 2. Barbara Hardy. 'The Mill on the Floss', Critical Essays on George Eliot, p. 49.
 3. Leslie Stephen. 'George Eliot', The Cornhill Magazine, February, 1881.
 4. Ibid., and later, F. R. Leavis in The Great Tradition.
 5. F. R. Leavis. The Great Tradition, pp. 51-58.
 6. Barbara Hardy. The Novels of George Eliot, pp. 54-55.
 7. See above, Ch. 1

The problem of the mythos.

Much of the critical difficulty seems to stem from a confusion about the nature of the mythos upon which the book is constructed. In almost any good novel, developments in character, thought, and action are intertwined and interdependent, so that confusion is possible about which development is central. In a story about a young girl growing up, such confusion is particularly likely, since everything changes as she matures, even the kind of external events that are likely to happen, or likely to be important to her. The problem is to determine how the elements are ordered, and to what end the details are subordinated. My hypothesis is that The Mill on the Floss reveals its greatest unity if we view its mythos as one of action, involving complexities of thought and moral character, certainly, but concerned centrally with what will happen to Maggie, and not with what she will become or what she will learn. Then some at least of the critical problems fall away, while others appear in a different light.

It is easy enough to see that The Mill on the Floss is not a 'novel of education' in the sense of being primarily about what Maggie learns: she does learn something from experience, but the emphasis is not on the process of her learning, as it is, for instance, on Marlow's in Heart of Darkness or Strether's in The Ambassadors. Indeed, as Leavis points out, Maggie's interpretation of her experience is marked by immaturity, and there is much in Maggie that she herself never fully understands, though it is clear to the reader.¹ Her fine intelligence is subordinated, in the artistic structure of the book, to the moral and emotional complexities that make up her response to her world. Its growth is not central, and I do not know of any critic who claims that it is: those who talk about the book as 'a novel of education'² quite clearly mean moral education.

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1. The Great Tradition, pp. 53-57. I shall discuss later my disagreement with Leavis's contention that what is clear to the reader is sometimes not clear to the author.
 2. e.g. Barbara Hardy. 'The Mill on the Floss', Critical Essays on George Eliot, p. 52.

While the whole structure of the book makes it impossible to see the mythos as one of sudden or radical moral change, the possibility of its being one of gradual moral evolution must be considered seriously. Much time and space are devoted to Maggie's moral and emotional struggles, even those of her childhood, and we are made to see that these struggles arise as much from her imaginative responses as from her rebellious passions. Her moral possibilities greatly exceed Tom's, because she does not bring rigid rules into operation, but tries to grasp the whole of a situation in an imaginative vision which includes the effect of her conduct on other people's feelings and on her own. It is just because this flexibility implies a changing response to a changing situation, or to her changing perception of a situation, that any decision by Maggie contains within it the possibility of its own reversal. Allied to her impetuosity, her need for affection, and her natural generosity, Maggie's approach to moral problems makes her a very interesting person, and there is obviously material here for an interesting plot of moral evolution. But it is still my contention that this interest is subordinated to the question of what she will do or what will happen to her.

Problems related to the moral evolution hypothesis.

This contention can perhaps be clarified by considering the critical problems which arise if we take Maggie's moral evolution as central. The most serious is the inadequacy of the dramatic situation for the expression of the climax of this evolution. So much can be said against Maggie's renunciation of Stephen, and is said, within the world of the novel, both by the impassioned Stephen himself and by the wise and disinterested Dr Kenn, that it is difficult for any reader, and particularly any modern reader, to accept Maggie's decision as right. That it is right for Maggie, because she is Maggie, is as much as we can confidently assent to.

Compare Stephen's feelings for Maggie with his feelings a few weeks earlier for Lucy:

A man likes his wife to be pretty: well, Lucy was pretty, but not to a maddening extent. A man likes his wife to be accomplished, gentle, affectionate, and not stupid, and Lucy had all

these qualifications. Stephen was not surprised to find himself in love with her, and was conscious of excellent judgement in preferring her to Miss Leyburn, the daughter of the county member, although Lucy was only the daughter of his father's subordinate partner; besides, he had had to defy and overcome a slight unwillingness and disappointment in his father and sisters - a circumstance which gives a young man an agreeable consciousness of his own dignity. Stephen was aware that he had sense and independence enough to choose the wife who was likely to make him happy, unbiased by any indirect considerations. He meant to choose Lucy: she was a little darling, and exactly the sort of woman he had always most admired.

Book 6, Ch. 1, p. 348.

The incompleteness and immaturity of Stephen's feelings here, and of Lucy's when she says that she would rather not be engaged, because she wants things to go on just as they are, prepare the reader to respond sympathetically to Stephen when, in response to Maggie's admission that she considers herself engaged to Philip, he bursts out:

'It is unnatural - it is horrible. Maggie, if you loved me as I love you, we should throw everything else to the winds for the sake of belonging to each other. We should break all these mistaken ties that were made in blindness, and determine to marry each other.'

Book 6, Ch. 11, p. 422.

'I would rather die than fall into that temptation,' says Maggie, speaking for a moment like a Dodson before she goes on to consider the complexity of her feelings for Stephen and Philip and Lucy and Tom.

There is a great measure of sympathy for Stephen's position here, and most readers will feel that he makes a valid point. That we are meant to do so is confirmed by Dr Kenn's opinion, and by the author's own comment:

When Maggie had left him, Dr. Kenn stood ruminating with his hands behind him, and his eyes fixed on the carpet, under a painful sense of doubt and difficulty. The tone of Stephen's letter, which he had read, and the actual relations of all the persons concerned, forced upon him powerfully the

idea of an ultimate marriage between Stephen and Maggie as the least evil, and the impossibility of their proximity in St. Ogg's on any other supposition, until after years of separation, threw an insurmountable prospective difficulty over Maggie's stay there. On the other hand, he entered with all the comprehension of a man who had known spiritual conflict, and lived through years of devoted service to his fellow-men, into that state of Maggie's heart and conscience which made the consent to the marriage a desecration to her; her conscience must not be tampered with: the principle on which she had acted was a safer guide than any balancing of consequences. His experience told him that intervention was too dubious a responsibility to be lightly incurred - the possible issue either of an endeavour to restore the former relations with Lucy and Philip, or of counselling submission to this irruption of a new feeling, was hidden in a darkness all the more impenetrable because each immediate step was clogged with evil.

The great problem of the shifting relation between passion and duty is clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it: the question whether the moment has come in which a man has fallen below the possibility of a renunciation that will carry any efficacy, and must accept the sway of a passion against which he had struggled as a trespass, is one for which we have no master-key that will fit all cases. The casuists have become a byword of reproach, but their perverted spirit of minute discrimination was the shadow of a truth to which eyes and hearts are too often fatally sealed - the truth that moral judgements must remain false and hollow unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot.

Book 7, Ch. 2, p. 468.

Joan Bennett's analysis of this problem is one of the clearest and most convincing; but having shown how George Eliot sets her own view side by side with Maggie's immature one, she concludes:

Dr. Kenn's reflections indicate the complexity of George Eliot's conception; but they are too undeveloped to communicate it fully... the total effect that George Eliot seems to be trying to produce is more complex than she can achieve in the form of fiction she is using. To express her own consciousness of the subtle discriminations necessary to the just solution of a moral problem, and

to set against this the gropings of a girl who has little to rely on except her instincts, required more space and a different artistic form.¹

If the book is about Maggie's moral development, this failure of the climactic situation is a serious fault indeed; the structure is weak at the centre.

Equally serious, on this hypothesis, is Maggie's failure to arrive at moral clarity about 'the great problem of the shifting relation between love and duty'. If we look carefully at the reasons she gives for her decisions - and this applies also to her earlier renunciation of Philip - we find that her moral reasons require reinforcement before they can have any consistent effect on her conduct. When she returns to Tom after she has left Stephen, she says,

'I want to be kept from doing wrong again.'

Book 7, Ch. 1, p. 457.

Her consciousness, as she approaches the gate, reveals the same ambiguity:

In her deep humiliation under the retrospect of her own weakness - in her anguish at the injury she had inflicted - she almost desired to endure the severity of Tom's reproof, to submit in patient silence to that harsh disapproving judgement against which she had so often rebelled; it seemed no more than just to her now - who was weaker than she was? She craved that outward help to her better purpose which would come from complete, submissive confession - from being in the presence of those whose looks and words would be a reflection of her own conscience.

pp. 455-6.

If we are meant to regard Maggie's decision as a triumphant moral victory, it is curious that it should be so intertwined with what looks like a defeat - a submission to Dodson standards.

No wonder, then, that the ending should appear to Joan Bennett, and to other critics who see it in this light, 'a dishonest

1. George Eliot: Her Mind and Art, pp. 128-9.

contrivance':

George Eliot has cut the knot she was unable to unravel. She has placed Maggie in a dilemma in which no preconceived principle could direct her choice - she has let her choose and then she has refused to imagine the results of her choice.¹

A similar objection to the book is made by Barbara Hardy, who analyses with great clarity the pattern of Maggie's moral crises and reversals, and then admits that 'it is not very easy to say what George Eliot is doing in creating this oscillation and eddy',² 'this flattening and erasing of the conventional diagram of moral evolution'.³ An impression of moral wavering may contribute to the illusion of life - and this is what Barbara Hardy suggests - but its perpetuation cannot shape a novel. Yet if we look at Maggie's decisions in isolation from the emotions that control them, moral wavering comes very near to describing their pattern.

This pattern becomes clearer if we see that most of Maggie's conflicts are between the promise of an extension of experience offered by a new relationship,⁴ and the claims imposed by existing relationships. When she is 'tempted' by Philip's friendship, it is her sense of the incompatibility of this with her feelings for her father and Tom that makes her feel guilty. Significantly, when she finds herself falling in love with Stephen, Philip's role shifts so that he becomes a force in alliance with her duty to Tom, 'a sort of outward conscience to her that she might fly to for rescue and strength'. (Book 6, Ch. 7, p. 386.) And later, even Stephen takes his place among the claims of the past:

And here - close within her reach - urging itself upon her even as a claim - was another future in which hard endurance and effort were to be exchanged for easy delicious leaning on another's

1. Op. cit., p. 130.

2. 'The Mill on the Floss', Critical Essays on George Eliot, p. 56.

3. Ibid., p. 58.

4. This is close to the view of R. T. Jones, that 'In outline, this novel traces the conflict between, on the one hand, individual impulse - all that makes Maggie Tulliver unique - and, on the other, the loyalties and obligations that she has incurred...' George Eliot, p. 19.

loving strength! And yet that promise of joy in the place of sadness did not make the dire force of the temptation to Maggie. It was Stephen's tone of misery, it was the doubt in the justice of her own resolve that made the balance tremble, and made her once start from her seat to reach the pen and paper, and write "Come!"

Book 7, Ch. 5, pp. 484-5.

Probably it is the universality of this conflict between an existing relationship and a new one that involves the reader so fully in Maggie's problems. The disturbance of the old love by the new is close to everyone's experience, and provides the necessary link of recognition that makes Maggie's world relevant to ours. The conflict is one for which there is seldom a completely satisfactory solution; and if the author intended us to regard Maggie as having solved it by her renunciation, there would be little point in ending the book by sweeping her away before her resolve can be fully tested. If the ending is to be justified at all, and if we are to attempt to account for the frequent admission of readers (and sometimes of critics₁) that they are moved by it, in spite of their critical objections, we must look for another pattern, one which will reveal the logic of this conclusion.

A mythos of action: another hypothesis.

I intend now to consider in detail the hypothesis suggested at the start of this chapter: that the principle which gives shape and coherence to the book is a mythos of action, the interest hinging on what will happen to Maggie, situated as she is, and being the kind of person that she is. This does not make irrelevant the moral interest which we have already traced; but it shows it to be subordinate to a different informing principle. Like Henry James in his creation of Isabel Archer, George Eliot gives us our heroine, and asks, 'Well, what will she do?'₂

I am going to begin by looking at two parts of the novel which have been given general critical approval: the childhood chapters,

1. e.g. Joan Bennett, op. cit., p. 130.

2. Henry James, 'Preface to The Portrait of a Lady', The Art of the Novel, p. 53.

and the chapters about the Dodson family. It will be my assumption that they exist for the sake of the whole, rather than vice-versa; and that a consideration of the direction in which they lead will throw some light on the structure of the novel. Then I shall consider the significance of the epitaph which concludes the book, and which is also used as an epigraph for the whole novel.

(i) The direction of the early chapters.

Even in the opening chapters, the setting begins to assume a symbolic function, preparing the reader for character and event, and directing attention to Maggie's position in her world. Chapter 1 emphasises the beauty of the river, and the peace and prosperity of St. Ogg's and the surrounding plain. It is a prosperity that is dependent on the river: subjugated and domesticated, the river irrigates the fields, turns the mill wheel, and bears the cargo ships to the harbour town. We are reminded of its power by 'the unresting wheel sending out its diamond jets of water', and the emotional power of which it is to become a symbol is suggested by the personification of the first sentence:

A wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries
on between its green banks to the sea, and the
loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage
with an impetuous embrace.

The conflict between Maggie's passionately impetuous nature and the prosperous conservatism of St. Ogg's is close to the central conflict of the novel, and we are introduced to it at the outset in the opposition of the river and the town co-existing in an interdependence of which the stability is only apparent.

The next three chapters quickly fill out some of the hints of the first one. Having moved from the distant perspective of the Floss and St. Ogg's to the Ripple and Dorlcote Mill, the book focusses attention on the Tulliver household, on Mrs Tulliver's presuppositions, and Maggie's rebellion against them:

'O mother,' said Maggie, in a vehemently cross tone, 'I don't want to do my patchwork.'

'What! Not your pretty patchwork, to make a counterpane for your aunt Glegg?'

'It's foolish work,' said Maggie, with a toss of her mane, 'tearing things to pieces to sew 'em together again. And I don't want to do anything for my aunt Glegg - I don't like her.'

Book 1, Ch. 2, p. 9.

Then we move to the centre of Maggie's life - her attachment to her father, and her even stronger attachment to Tom:

These angry symptoms were keenly observed by Maggie, and cut her to the quick. Tom, it appeared, was supposed capable of turning his father out of doors, and of making the future in some way tragic by his wickedness. This was not to be borne, and Maggie jumped up from her stool, forgetting all about her heavy book, which fell with a bang within the fender, and, going up between her father's knees, said, in a half-crying, half-indignant voice: 'Father, Tom wouldn't be naughty to you ever, I know he wouldn't.'

Book 1, Ch. 3, p. 12.

Maggie's relationship with Tom is clearly central to her childhood, and there could hardly be a greater contrast than that between the two children. In spite of a certain degree of boyish independence in Tom about the courtesies due to aunts and uncles, he fulfils the expectations of the Dodson family completely. He always does the right thing, or thinks he does. He makes a simple, unimaginative distinction between right and wrong, and lives wholly and smugly within the Dodson conventions. He inherits his father's obstinacy, but is otherwise completely his mother's child, and shows up by contrast Maggie's failure to conform.

Much more important, however, is the potential for conflict between a brother and a sister so different, and so mutually attached. Maggie can never break Tom's influence over her, in spite of her recognition of the injustice of his prejudices. She is hardly touched by the way of life of her mother or her Dodson aunts: we always see her in opposition to them, and in protest against them. But her proud independence does not extend to Tom,

because she loves him; and because he is such a thorough conformist to Dodson standards, it is in him that she meets the full force of their demands, and feels their incompatibility with her own nature. Many of the early chapters make us feel very strongly this tie between Tom and Maggie, while others make us see critically, as Maggie does, the world of conventional prejudice in which Tom moves, and which all his decisions express. This prepares us to understand the nature and force of the clash between them. The first two books have been generally praised for their vivid realism, but an even greater merit is the contribution they make to the design of the whole.

(ii) The direction of the Dodson chapters.

Once the importance of Maggie's relationship with Tom has been admitted, the function of the detailed treatment of their family and social background becomes clear: it is not the negative one of making us understand the Dodson world, in which Maggie is so alien that it makes little claim upon her, but the positive one of helping us to understand Tom and the nature of the claim that he can and does make.

The same focussing technique which we noticed in the early chapters is used again at the beginning of Book 4, but with a social emphasis that leads us to a perception of the spiritual and social desolation of the adolescent Maggie. The purpose of the sociological detail is made explicit:

I share with you this sense of oppressive narrowness, but it is necessary that we should feel it if we care to understand how it acted on the lives of Tom and Maggie.

Book 4, Ch. 1, p. 254.

Then follows a fine analysis of the religious and moral ideas of the Dodsons: it is made in general terms, yet we can see that everything we have so far learned about the Dodson family is consistent with these general principles. The individual traits of the four sisters are now seen to be variations of the same general concern for propriety and decorum: to be laid out in the

best sheets, to leave more money in one's will than people expect, and to keep one's pill boxes for display after death; all these are expressions of the limited Dodson imagination, which habitually sees everything in terms of its value in creating a social impression. Moreover, what follows of Dodson behaviour in the rest of the book, even such an apparent surprise as Mrs Glegg's refusal to believe ill of her own kin, is consistent with this analysis, and forms part of a coherent conception.

The religion of the Dodsons consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable: it was necessary to be baptized, else one could not be buried in the churchyard, and to take the sacrament before death as a security against more dimly understood perils, but it was of equal necessity to have the proper pall-bearers and well-cured hams at one's funeral, and to leave an unimpeachable will. A Dodson would not be taxed with the omission of anything that was becoming, or that belonged to that eternal fitness of things which was plainly indicated in the practice of the most substantial parishioners, and in the family traditions - such as, obedience to parents, faithfulness to kindred, industry, rigid honesty, thrift, the thorough scouring of wooden and copper utensils, the hoarding of coins likely to disappear from the currency, the production of first-rate commodities for the market, and the general preference for whatever was home-made. The Dodsons were a very proud race, and their pride lay in the utter frustration of all desire to tax them with a breach of traditional duty or propriety. A wholesome pride in many respects, since it identified honour with perfect integrity, thoroughness of work, and faithfulness to admitted rules, and society owes some worthy qualities in many of her members to mothers of the Dodson class who made their butter and their fromenty well, and would have felt disgraced to make it otherwise. To be honest and poor was never a Dodson motto, still less to seem rich though being poor; rather, the family badge was to be honest and rich, and not only rich, but richer than was supposed. To live respected, and have the proper bearers at your funeral, was an achievement of the ends of existence that would be entirely nullified if, on the reading of your will, you sank in the opinion of your fellow-men, either by turning out to be poorer than they expected, or by leaving your money in a capricious manner, without regard to degrees of kin.

The right thing must always be done towards kindred. The right thing was to correct them severely if they were other than a credit to the family, but still not to alienate from them the smallest rightful share in the family shoe-buckles and other property. A conspicuous quality in the Dodson character was its genuineness: its vices and virtues alike were phases of a proud, honest egoism which had a hearty dislike to whatever made against its own credit and interest, and would be frankly hard of speech to inconvenient "kin", but would never forsake or ignore them - would not let them want bread, but only require them to eat it with bitter herbs.

Book 4, Ch. 1, pp. 255-6.

In spite of the credit given to the 'wholesome pride' and the genuineness of the Dodson clan, the emphasis is on their limitedness. Twice the principle governing their behaviour is expressed negatively: 'A Dodson would not be taxed with the omission of anything that was becoming...' and 'their pride lay in the utter frustration of all desire to tax them with a breach of traditional duty or propriety'. Compare this with Tom's reaction to Maggie's disgrace:

'But I will sanction no such character as yours: the world shall know that I feel the difference between right and wrong. If you are in want, I will provide for you - let my mother know. But you shall not come under my roof. It is enough that I have to bear the thought of your disgrace: the sight of you is hateful to me.'

Book 7, Ch. 1, p. 457.

The potential cruelty of Tom's moral attitude is already present in the outlook of the whole family; though this outlook is treated with humour in the early analysis, its harmful possibilities are easily discernible.

The Dodson view of life is critically assessed through the presence of the contrasting figure of Mrs Moss, as well as by contrast with Maggie's superior sensibility. Mrs Moss is all Tulliver, without her brother's pugnacity. Her generosity and warmheartedness are symbolised in her fertility:

Mrs Moss had eight children, but could never overcome her regret that the twins had not lived.

Book 1, Ch. 8, p. 75.

In contrast, the Gleggs and the Pullets are childless, while the Deanes and the Tullivers have one and two children. Mrs Moss's values are soundly human, and it is significant that Maggie loves her and takes after her. But it is significant, too, that Mrs Moss has not done well for herself, and that, by Dodson standards, her warm-heartedness has got her nowhere. Her position as an outsider is an expression of the same kind of spiritual incompatibility as that between Maggie and those closest to her.

(iii) 'In their death they were not divided'.

Further emphasis is given to the importance of Maggie's relationship with Tom by the epigraph which appears on the title page, and which is also the epitaph on their tomb. This draws attention to the movement of the story from their attachment in childhood to their union in death; and it implies what the whole book makes apparent: that it is only in death that they are undivided. Life, particularly adult life, evokes such painfully incompatible responses from them that the accord which Maggie longs for is clearly impossible without either some growth of tolerance in Tom or some submission in her. That Maggie wills this accord, and that its price is death, either emotional or physical, becomes increasingly clear with every crisis; and the movement towards this conclusion is the tragic pattern that gives shape and coherence to the book. This is the pattern to which readers respond most deeply and instinctively; either naively if they are critically unsophisticated, or 'in spite of themselves' if they have focussed attention on issues which become critical problems when they are moved from their contributory position.

CHAPTER 3

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS (ii)

The Tragic Pattern.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the details of the mythos of action identified in the last. It involves tracing the course of Maggie's emotional life through those relationships in which her love finds expression, and trying to understand the importance of each in the context of those that have gone before. I have omitted Maggie's relationship with her father, because, although it is important to her, it is overshadowed even in early childhood by her love for Tom.

Maggie and Tom.

By the time we meet Tom, home for the holidays, he has already assumed the protective and punitive role that he is to keep:

'... he was very fond of his sister, and meant always to take care of her, make her his house-keeper, and punish her when she did wrong.'

Book 1, Ch. 5, p. 34.

We have already noted Maggie's sensitivity to all that concerns Tom; and even in the early days, when they are shown as sharing the fantasy that 'they would always live together and be fond of each other' (p. 35), Tom's matter-of-fact response to Maggie's emotional need leaves her intense and frustrated. Most of her perversity in childhood is linked to the frustration of her love for him, and to her intuitive consciousness that while he is central to her life, she is only on the circumference of his.

Her crucial realization that he does not need her as she would like to be needed comes after their father's failure, when she is home from school, with no means either of occupying herself or of alleviating the misery of the family. Because Tom is three years older and a boy, he is able to assume adult responsibilities, and his resolute and efficient approach to life fits him well for the role of protector and provider, while she is made to feel the helplessness of her position. In addition, she has already outstripped him intellectually, and can neither share any of her mental life with him, nor look to him to supplement her interrupted education.

Her recognition of the difference between her values and his reaches a crisis at the end of Book 3, when Tom writes the grudge against Wakem into the family Bible:

'Now write - write as you'll remember what Wakem's done to your father, and you'll make him and his feel it if ever the day comes. And sign your name Thomas Tulliver.'

'O no, father, dear father!' said Maggie, almost choked with fear. 'You shouldn't make Tom write that.'

'Be quiet, Maggie!' said Tom. 'I shall write it.'

(p. 249).

This protest begins Maggie's attempt to assert herself against Tom; his peremptory response sets the pattern for his subsequent victories.

Maggie and religion.

George Eliot's sensitive treatment of the childhood relationship between Maggie and Tom has been generally admired, but what has perhaps not been so fully understood is Maggie's devotion to Thomas à Kempis, and the relation of this phase to her other loves. I want to deal with it in this chapter because it is so clearly substitutionary and supplementary, fulfilling some of the same functions as a personal relationship, and occurring at a period in Maggie's life that is otherwise barren. Leavis, in The Great Tradition, draws attention to the suppressed eroticism in Maggie's 'blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it'.¹ Having justly criticised Leslie Stephen for accepting 'the soulful side of Maggie' with 'a remarkable absence of criticism', Leavis goes on, I think unjustly, to say, 'It is offered by George Eliot herself - and this of course is the main point - with a remarkable absence of criticism... Obviously there is a large lack of self-knowledge in Maggie (about the connection between her 'blind unconscious yearning' and her passionate response to Stephen Guest)₂ - a very

1. The Mill on the Floss, Book 3, Ch. 5, p. 219.

2. My parenthesis.

natural one, but shared, more remarkably, by George Eliot.'¹

The subtle analysis in Middlemarch, Ch. 20, of Dorothea's frustration in marriage, makes it evident that George Eliot sees 'exalted enthusiasms and self-devotions'² as originating from the same source as passionate love;³ and the careful placing of this phase in Maggie's growth establishes the connection in The Mill on the Floss. The 'placing' of Maggie's immaturity 'by relating it to mature experience' is what Leavis finds to be missing in this part of the book; but I think it is sufficiently implied by the relation of Maggie's religious phase to the rest of her experience. It is in the direct line of her development from her childish attachment to Tom to her first experience of passionate love; it is presented in a context which gives it importance as a stage in this emotional development, yet its limitations are clearly shown. It seems certain that George Eliot knew exactly what she was doing.

The substitutionary and supplementary nature of Maggie's religious zeal is emphasised by the careful preparation for it in Book 4:

Under all this grim melancholy and narrowing concentration of desire, Mr. Tulliver retained the feeling towards his "little wench" which made her presence a need to him, though it would not suffice to cheer him. She was still the desire of his eyes, but the sweet spring of fatherly love was now mingled with bitterness, like everything else. When Maggie laid down her work at night, it was her habit to get a low stool and sit by her father's knee, leaning her cheek against it. How she wished he would stroke her head, or give some sign that he was soothed by the sense that he had a daughter who loved him! But now she got no answer to her little caresses, either from her father or from Tom - the two idols of her life.

Book 4, Ch. 2, p. 261.

This failure of response on the part of her father and brother is the greatest of Maggie's miseries at this time. Not only

1. Op. cit., pp. 54-56.

2. Leavis, op. cit., p. 57.

3. See discussion below, pp. 83-89.

does she feel unloved, but they seem not to need her, so that she cannot compensate for their lack of response by acts of devoted service.

The desolation of her emotional condition is underlined by the imagery of spring growth. There are continual reminders that Maggie ought to be part of this living, growing world around her:

One afternoon, when the chestnuts were coming into flower, Maggie had brought her chair outside the front door, and was seated there with a book on her knees. Her dark eyes had wandered from the book, but they did not seem to be enjoying the sunshine which pierced the screen of jasmine on the projecting porch at her right and threw leafy shadows on her pale round cheek...

Book 4, Ch. 3, p. 262.

Maggie's deprivation is intellectual as well as emotional, and her need for ideas that bear some relevance to her real situation is expressed in her rejection of her old school books and of Scott's novels and Byron's poems:

... they were hardly what she wanted. She could make dream-worlds of her own - but no dream-world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life - the unhappy-looking father, seated at the dull breakfast-table; the childish, bewildered mother; the little sordid tasks that filled the hours, or the more oppressive emptiness of weary, joyless leisure; the need of some tender, demonstrative love; the cruel sense that Tom didn't mind what she thought or felt...

Book 4, Ch. 3, p. 267.

It is in this state of emotional and intellectual frustration that Maggie begins to read Thomas à Kempis, with a sense of excited discovery of a meaning that seems relevant to her present world. Her new faith provides an outlet for her emotional energy, giving her, temporarily, a new cause to devote herself to. It also provides a sense of purpose for her unanswered devotion to her father and Tom, and an immediate reward, of a kind, for her necessary sacrifice and suffering. In addition, it provides material for intelligent thought, and therefore contains the possibility of mental growth. Though George Eliot is critical of Maggie's

exaggeration and self-dramatization, her criticism of the philosophy itself is at this stage confined to gentle hints about 'volcanic upheavings of imprisoned passions' (Book 4, Ch. 3, p. 274). In Book 4, the emphasis is on Maggie's needs, and the partial satisfaction which her new religious zeal gives. It is left to Philip in a later chapter to voice the real objection to Maggie's way of life, and to warn her of its dangers.

It is, of course, clear to the reader (and I think it is meant to be) that there is still a great deal missing from Maggie's life. Her doctrine leaves no room for the possibility that her self-affirmation is also a good, and that her aesthetic needs are important and legitimate. Music, books, and happiness appear to her only as material for renunciation, and the Maggie whom we meet at the beginning of Book 5 has obviously won a temporary peace of mind at the cost of some repression. Though Maggie at seventeen is a happier person than Maggie at thirteen, and though the implication is that her religious phase is a positive stage in her growth, the final impression is that it is temporary and incomplete. In spite of the real sublimation of feeling involved, she cannot manage for long without human love, and the recognition and encouragement which it brings. It is this lack which prepares the way for the renewal of her friendship with Philip.

Maggie and Philip.

Maggie's response to Philip, when she meets him in the Red Deeps, is complicated by all that has gone before, particularly by the deficiencies of her existing relationships. With his world of books, music, and art, he offers her a recovery of the cultural life of which poverty and her own renunciation have deprived her. Yet mingled with this is her awareness that Philip needs her as she wishes her father and brother would need her, and in her attitude there is an attempt to recover the old relationship in which she could say to Philip,

'No, not better, because I don't think I could love you better than Tom. But I should be so sorry - so sorry for you.'

Book 2, Ch. 6, p. 170.

To Maggie's rigorous conscience, the element of pity becomes an acceptable rationalization which justifies her submission to the otherwise inadmissible temptation to repossess all that she has renounced:

Here suddenly was an opening in the rocky wall which shut in the narrow valley of humiliation where all her prospect was the remote unfathomed sky, and some of the memory-haunting earthly delights were no longer out of her reach. She might have books, converse, affection - ... and it would be a kindness to Philip, too, who was pitiable...

Book 5, Ch. 3, p. 305.

In addition, Philip offers Maggie the love and recognition which she needs, and towards which her imagination has already reached in her adolescent day-dream that 'she would go to some great man - Walter Scott, perhaps - and tell him how wretched and how clever she was'. (Book 4, Ch. 3, p. 269.)

Philip therefore offers Maggie perfect conditions for her education: he has the imagination to understand what she will enjoy, the experience to have plenty to offer her, and the affection that makes the sharing of experience a delight to them both. And Maggie's perspective is restored: though she still retains her capacity for self-sacrifice, she no longer regards pleasure as evil in itself. In spite of the author's warning about the dangers of a clandestine relationship, the reader is made to feel its good. It is very largely Philip who frees Maggie to develop intellectually, and, as Lucy puts it, to 'come to know Shakespeare and everything'.

Nevertheless, the reader is also aware that there is something important missing in this relationship: Maggie's claim to love Philip is made in the context of extreme sexual naivety, and her feelings for him are of the same kind as her feelings for her brother, except that, as Maggie admits, they are not as strong. She commits herself to loving Philip in this limited sense without understanding the further possibilities of love. Her perplexity is apparent in her surprise when he talks of love, and in her difficulty in answering his direct question. She finally answers him very much as she did in the love scene of their childhood:

'I think I could hardly love anyone better:
there is nothing but what I love you for.'

Book 5, Ch. 4, p. 314.

This absence of sexual awareness on Maggie's part places her obligation to Philip in the same light as her earlier promise to kiss him when she saw him again; and it greatly increases the reader's sympathy for her in the bondage that she creates for herself in this otherwise valuable relationship.

A further complication in Maggie's response to Philip arises because of Tom. She is never happy when she is in conflict with Tom, or even when she is risking such conflict:

But the severe monotonous warning came again and again - that she was losing the simplicity and clearness of her life by admitting a ground of concealment, and that, by forsaking the simple rule of renunciation, she was throwing herself under the seductive guidance of illimitable wants.

Book 5, Ch. 3, p. 306.

It is perhaps difficult for the modern reader to share George Eliot's approval of Maggie's filial piety here. She sees Maggie's submission to Philip's pleas to meet him as a moral defeat, and commends her 'true prompting against a concealment that would introduce doubleness into her own mind, and might cause new misery to those who had the primary natural claim on her'. (Book 5, Ch. 3, p. 310.) What is vivid and credible is the conflict engendered in Maggie, and the relief that comes when it is ended, even though she does not assent to the means of its ending:

And yet, how was it that she was now and then conscious of a certain dim background of relief in the forced separation from Philip? Surely it was only because the sense of a deliverance from concealment was welcome at any cost.

Book 5, Ch. 5, p. 327.

Soon after this comes Tulliver's death, and with it one of a number of reconciliations between Tom and Maggie, all of them sharing the same childlike quality, and all of them communicated in the simple language of childhood:

Tom and Maggie went downstairs together into the room where their father's place was empty. Their eyes turned to the same spot, and Maggie spoke, 'Tom, forgive me - let us always love each other,' and they clung and wept together.

Book 5, Ch. 7, p. 338.

In this way the final reconciliation is fully prepared for; it is not at all unlikely, because throughout the book we are given instances of Maggie's and Tom's need for this kind of reconciliation, and of their capacity to meet only at the level of childhood, where the emotion of the moment seems the only significant reality, and where there are no problems of mature existence to face.

We find, then, a mixture of motives in Maggie's relinquishment of Philip's friendship. She gives him up mainly because Tom makes her, with an officious injustice that rankles for many years, and makes her see Philip as a victim. But she submits also because her conscience assents to some of Tom's reasons: that discovery would cause her father pain (and does in fact cause Tom pain); and that her first duty is to her family. In addition, there is the fact, clear to the reader but barely understood by Maggie, that she does not love Philip except in the sense of feeling pity and affection for him. Though what he has to offer is a great advance on what she has gained from anyone else, it is still not enough; she needs the love of a man whom she does not have to stoop to kiss.

Maggie and Stephen.

The progression of Maggie's central relationships from Tom through Thomas à Kempis and Philip reveals a recognizable pattern: each contributes something that the other has lacked. Each offers her some new possibility of growth, and each conflicts in some way with her need to cling to the stability of the past. After the futility and boredom of her family life, Thomas à Kempis's teaching provides her with a new sense of meaning and purpose; after her years of self-denial and narrow discipline, it is the range of Philip's culture and the quality of his imagination which promise compensation for what she lacks.

It is in this context that we ought to see the stress on Stephen's physical attractiveness and its effect on Maggie; the element of sexual attraction which is missing in Maggie's feeling for Philip is now the new element that is offered. Some readers feel that it is overstressed, and that Stephen represents a base, merely physical force in opposition to the life of the mind offered by Philip; but this is to misunderstand the relationship which the writer sees between sex and the rest of life, and to oversimplify the conflict in the book. A recent critic, R. T. Jones, has pointed out that 'the ordinary nature of the fascination' which Stephen holds for Maggie, and which Leavis disparages, 'is precisely what the novel requires; it is an "ordinary" destiny that Maggie yearns for'.¹ Within the context of the progressive pattern of Maggie's growth, Stephen can be seen as offering more, not less than Philip.

Maggie's meeting with Stephen follows another period of drudgery and self-sacrifice - this time, not gladly embraced, but chosen as an alternative to dependence on Tom or Aunt Glegg. Now Maggie understands better what she is missing:

Memory and imagination urged upon her a sense of privation too keen to let her taste what was offered in the transient present; her future, she thought, was likely to be worse than her past, for after years of contented renunciation she had slipped back into desire and longing; she found joyless days of distasteful occupation harder and harder - she found the image of the intense and varied life she yearned for, and despaired of, becoming more and more importunate.

Book 6, Ch. 2, p. 352.

Her first experience of sexual attraction begins as a response to attention, but it is different in quality from her previous responses to Philip:

It was very charming to be taken care of in that kind of graceful manner by some one taller and stronger than one's self. Maggie had never felt just in the same way before.

Book 6, Ch. 2, p. 360.

1. R. T. Jones, George Eliot, p. 20.

Like her previous awakenings, this one occurs in the season of natural growth:

Life was certainly very pleasant just now: it was becoming very pleasant to dress in the evening, and to feel that she was one of the beautiful things of this spring-time. And there were admiring eyes always awaiting her now; she was no longer an unheeded person, liable to be chid, from whom attention was continually claimed, and on whom no one felt bound to confer any.

Book 6, Ch. 6, p. 377.

Under this attention, Maggie blossoms into a self-awareness that has not been part of her relationship with Philip. Her romantic yearnings towards 'the half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight' (Book 6, Ch. 3, p. 362) are now associated with Stephen, and the poetry and romance of her day-dreams now seem to be within her reach.

Stephen, too, begins to know himself in response to Maggie. Too little critical attention has been given to the limitations of his relationship with Lucy - limitations which indicate that when Stephen first meets Maggie, he is as emotionally naive as she is.¹ His initial self-confidence belongs to this false position, and much critical antipathy to Stephen stems from these first impressions. But they are only first impressions, for it is soon apparent that beneath the suave complacency of Lucy's fiancé is a real person, capable of pain and embarrassment and devotion, and showing in his encounters with Maggie a sincerity that his relationship with Lucy has failed to evoke. To the criticism that Stephen's possibilities are not sufficiently developed to be convincing, the answer is simply that the book is not about Stephen. As Leavis says,

'Stephen himself is sufficiently "there" to give the drama a convincing force.'²

I would add, too, that the possible good offered to Maggie by Stephen is sufficiently clearly indicated to make the reader feel her deprivation when she has to give him up, and that

1. See above, Ch. 2, p. 20.

2. F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 53.

this response in the reader makes its appropriate contribution to the tragic pattern.

The springs of Maggie's action.

We have already glanced at the mixed motives in Maggie's decision to renounce Stephen. What she ought to do, she decides on moral grounds, after having imagined vividly the effect on others of her breach of faith. Her feelings for Lucy and Philip give her some power over her contrary impulses, but not enough; and she reinforces them by a recollection of her love for Tom. In the passages already discussed,¹ and in her conversation with Dr Kenn about the reasons for her return to St. Ogg's, we see this process as a conscious one; but in her dream on the steamer to Mudport we find the same process operating unconsciously, with the effect of releasing sufficient power to act. Post-Jungian readers perhaps take for granted the relation between Maggie's dream and her waking world, yet the more one looks at this dream, the more impressive it becomes, both in its diagnostic accuracy and in its faithfulness to the manner in which troubled people actually do work out their emotional problems. It enables Maggie to know herself more fully, and to respond to impulses that lie even deeper than her concern for Lucy and Philip.

She had fallen asleep before nine, and had been sleeping for six hours before the faintest hint of a mid-summer day-break was discernible. She awoke from that vivid dreaming which makes the margin of our deeper rest: she was in a boat on the wide water with Stephen, and in the gathering darkness something like a star appeared, that grew and grew till they saw it was the Virgin seated in St. Ogg's boat, and it came nearer and nearer, till they saw the Virgin was Lucy and the boatman was Philip - no, not Philip, but her brother, who rowed past without looking at her; and she rose to stretch out her arms and call to him, and their own boat turned over with the movement, and they began to sink, till with one spasm of dread she seemed to awake, and find she was a child again in the parlour at evening twilight, and Tom was not really angry.

Book 6, Ch. 14, p. 443.

1. See Ch. 2, pp. 22-24.

The complexity of Maggie's adolescent conflicts is beautifully compressed in the dream confrontation with those towards whom she feels guilty. The dream begins with a realization of her almost-grasped freedom - 'She was in a boat on the wide water with Stephen', having apparently escaped the restricting community and its demands. But the escape is only apparent: the community overtakes her first in the persons of Lucy and Philip, whose claims on her Maggie cannot ignore; and then, by a brilliant stroke of dream-logic, the boatman turns out to be not Philip, but Tom. The relation of Maggie's conscience to Tom's disapproval, her anguished impulse to call to him, and the disastrous effect of this on the boat she is in with Stephen, are accurately diagnostic of Maggie's actual state and situation, and therefore accurately prophetic of what she will do. Even her dream waking has its counterpart in subsequent action as well as in her present longings. To find herself a child again, and Tom not really angry, is what the immature part of Maggie most deeply wants; and having clarified this in her dream, she awakens to act in such a way that this is exactly what she gets.

The appropriateness of the ending.

It will now be clear that if we focus attention on the process of Maggie's unsuccessful struggles to free herself from Tom, instead of on her moral development, the ending takes on a new appropriateness. Far from being unprepared for,¹ or without symbolic or metaphorical value,² it is a dramatic acting out of what has already occurred. The force of Maggie's tie to Tom in determining her decisions is felt too often to be overlooked, and her rejection first of Philip and then of Stephen because of her brother's disapproval is, each time, a step towards emotional death. It is true that Maggie also has complex moral reasons for her choices, reasons which it is possible to recognize as valid because they arise from her loving

1. Henry James, 'The Novels of George Eliot', The Atlantic Monthly,

October, 1866.

2. F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 58.

impulses and are shaped by her intelligence. But as we have seen, it is not these that inform the structure of the book: the informing principle is rather the struggle within Maggie between the forces of life and those of death.

This then, is the mythos that shapes the book, and it evokes the pity and terror characteristic of classical tragedy. We see Maggie moving towards a 'death' which she chooses because of her particular emotional make-up; and the critical death is not her physical drowning, but her return to the mill and her submission to Tom's injustice. This is the pity of it, that Maggie chooses not to realize the possibilities that we have seen for her, and that she has seen for herself. The terror of it, and the reason perhaps for the involvement that so many readers admit, lies in the familiarity of Maggie's conflict. Her dividedness, her impossible longing to claim the future without relinquishing the past, and, above all, the death-dealing power of her primary filial attachment, invest her predicament with a universality likely to move even the best adjusted of readers. Perhaps this is why the novel has such a powerful effect.

The remaining problem concerns the tone of the conclusion. The widespread critical dissatisfaction about this part of the book is evidence that several different responses are possible at this point, and that perhaps there is some uncertainty in the tone that reveals an uncertainty about the author's attitude to the concluding action, and therefore also about the response expected of the reader. The particular passage that raises doubt begins on the last page of the last chapter:

It was not till Tom had pushed off and they were on the wide water - he face to face with Maggie - that the full meaning of what had happened rushed upon his mind. It came with so overpowering a force - it was such a new revelation to his spirit of the depths in life that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear - that he was unable to ask a question. They sat mutely gazing at each other; Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face - Tom pale with a certain awe and humiliation. Thought was busy though the lips were silent, and

though he could ask no questions, he guessed a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort. But at last a mist gathered over the blue-grey eyes, and the lips found a word they could utter: the old childish - 'Magsie!'

Maggie could make no answer but a long deep sob of that mysterious wondrous happiness that is one with pain.

(p. 490)

And then, following a concretely detailed description of the wooden machinery that bears down on them, comes this passage:

'It is coming, Maggie!' Tom said, in a deep hoarse voice, loosing the oars, and clasping her.

The next instant the boat was no longer seen upon the water - and the huge mass was hurrying on in hideous triumph.

But soon the keel of the boat reappeared, a black speck on the golden water.

The boat reappeared - but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted, living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together.

(p. 491)

The charge of sentimentality needs to be reformulated if it is to be helpful as criticism; perhaps the impression of sentimentality arises from an inconsistency between the response that seems expected of the reader here, and all our previous responses to Tom. Almost all the earlier encounters have taught us to be critical of Tom's claim on Maggie, to dread his hold over her, and to desire her freedom. Consistency would seem to require us to see this final claim, this union in death, as the ultimate stage in the tragic process, and to take their 'one supreme moment' in a tragic light. Maggie's joy in the reconciliation we can understand, and the image of the two children clasping their little hands in love and roaming the daisied fields together comes near, we know, to what Maggie wants; but it is hardly what we want for her. We have been taught by the author what to want, for through almost all the book there is such a careful control that we know at each stage how we are expected to feel. But here we are no longer sure. We seem to be abandoned to Maggie's point of view and Maggie's rush of

feeling, and to lose sight of the wider tragic perspective in which we can place her reconciliation with Tom and the final claim of her love for him. The wider perspective is there: the whole book has created it, and it is only because it has done so that we are able to resist complete identification with Maggie's feelings. But we need some reassurance that we are right in doing so, and it is this reassurance that seems to be missing.

It is at this point that the critically unsophisticated reader is likely to be at an advantage over the trained critic. The hints we are looking for are sufficiently there to exercise the necessary control, but they do not operate in the usual way, and tend to elude critical analysis. They depend upon the reader's whole complex of responses towards Maggie and Tom, a complex which has been carefully organized, and which is evoked by the very phrases which raise doubts - 'a mist gathered over the blue-grey eyes', and 'the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together'. This is the tone that has recurred at intervals throughout the book, always very briefly, and each time at the point at which the love between Maggie and Tom asserts itself as a force greater than all the differences that divide them. It is a reminder that the bond between them has its origins in their childhood, and that its force depends on these origins. All their childhood quarrels conclude in this tone, and we have already noted¹ the way in which the quarrels and reconciliations of their maturer years repeat the same pattern, and are expressed in the language of childhood.² Each successive reconciliation therefore recalls those of the past, and gathers to itself the significance that we have learned to see in the others, so that we feel the emotional reality it has for Tom and Maggie, even while we see its impossibility as the basis of a working relationship in the adult world. It is, each time, an attempt to re-enter 'the

1. See above, Ch. 3, pages 38-39.

2. See the conclusions, in The Mill on the Floss, of Book 3, Ch. 2; Book 5, Ch. 7, and Book 6, Ch. 4.

golden gates of their childhood', a state of harmony which was not a practical reality even in their childhood, and which is impossibly out of reach for the adults they have now become.

In this context, then, even our suspicion that the final pages are sentimental has its relevance in the total pattern of responses that makes up our experience of the book. The tone of the conclusion is a very subtle hint that what Maggie wills for herself does not ask our endorsement, but simply our understanding. Our sorrow that the final reconciliation has been purchased at the price of Maggie's mature emotional life is a response that is fully appropriate to our discernment of the tragic pattern.

CHAPTER 4

SILAS MARNER (i)

Structure and Background.

To a certain extent, I think Silas Marner holds a higher place than any of the author's works. It is more nearly a masterpiece; it has more of that simple, rounded, consummate aspect, that absence of loose ends and gaping issues, which marks a classical work.

Henry James, 'The Novels of George Eliot',
The Atlantic Monthly, October 1866.

Legendary tale and realistic treatment.

Most early reviewers praised Silas Marner for its realism; most modern critics commend its formal perfection, and remark on its fairy-tale quality. Both modes are demonstrably present, and their harmonious co-existence goes back to the genesis of the tale. George Eliot described this genesis in a letter to her publisher:

It came to me first of all, quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by my recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen-weaver with a bag on his back; but, as my mind dwelt on the subject, I became inclined to a more realistic treatment.

Letter to John Blackwood, 24 February, 1861.¹

The successful mixture of realism and romanticism is worth noticing, both for its own sake and as a preparation for the more ambitious attempt to mix the two modes in Daniel Deronda. The success, in Silas Marner, seems to depend upon a double point of view: we see the main events of the story in two lights. The disappearance of the gold and the appearance of Eppie have sordid human causes: they can be, and are, explained in terms of selfish greed and irresponsibility. But they are transfigured by the imagination of Silas and by their relation to him; and they become mystical interventions of providence, with a power to redirect his sympathies and transform his personality. There is no ironic discrepancy between these two views; we are not required to reject one and assent to the other. They present themselves as two different kinds of truth, each appropriate for its context.

The blend of realism and romanticism is most marked in the person of Eppie herself. There is a good deal of realism in her childish responsiveness, in her mischievousness as a toddler, and in her shocked response to Godfrey's disclosure of her parentage. But the details of her life are selected with

1. The George Eliot Letters, 111, p. 382.

a strict formal economy, and it is this, as much as the nature of Silas's vision, which gives the tale its legendary quality. Questions which we find ourselves pondering about Maggie Tulliver are simply excluded in relation to Eppie. The problems of childhood and adolescence as they would appear to her are not relevant, for Silas Marner is not her story. She exists for the reader only in relation to Silas, and like the royal children of Shakespearian romance, appears first as a loved and loving infant, and then reappears sixteen years later as a loved and loving young woman. What we see of her is fully realistic and convincing, but it is not a complete picture. Artistic selection operates more visibly in Silas Marner than in any other of George Eliot's works, and everything is subordinated to the central mythos. One can see why Henry James admired it so much.

The Structural Balance.

The mythos of the book would seem quite clearly to be the change that takes place in Silas when he learns to love. This is essentially a moral change, involving a rearrangement of all his previously held values, and a discovery of new purposes for activities that were once ends in themselves. The whole process is recognizably one of emotional development and moral integration, and the complex relation between love and morality is carefully worked out in the apparently simple story. Several critics¹ have remarked on the importance of coincidence in the novel, and on the fact that Silas is rather a passive character, one to whom things happen without much deliberate choice on his part. This is so; it is made credible by Silas's catalepsy, and its effect is to focus attention on Silas's response:² on his numb withdrawal after the loss of his gold, and on the new kindling of his emotions when he

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1. e.g. E. S. Dallas, 'Silas Marner', A Century of George Eliot Criticism, p. 19. Barbara Hardy, The Novels of George Eliot, p. 84.
 2. We have already noted the converse of this in The Mill on the Floss, in which the stress on Maggie's character directs our interest to what happens to her.

finds Eppie. Until almost the end of the book, he is without the struggle between self and duty which we find in George Eliot's most memorable characters; he is engaged in a more fundamental struggle, which must be decided before either self or duty can have any significance for him. It is a moral struggle, but it takes place at a prevoluntary level, and has more to do with the survival of the personality than with virtue in the conventional sense.

Silas's story is supported and balanced by a subordinate one that evokes a different kind of interest. Godfrey's response, in any given situation, is predictable; it is the events that are uncertain. We know that he is weak-willed, and that the insecurity of his position, when his story opens, is largely the result of the kind of man he is. His marriage to Molly, his susceptibility to Dunstan's blackmail, and his increasing involvement with Nancy before he is free to marry her, can all be traced to his tendency to choose whatever is immediately easy or pleasant, without calculating the consequences.

This predictability in Godfrey's character concentrates attention on what is likely to happen to him. We are made aware that he is living in a world where choices have consequences, often in ironic opposition to the motivation determining the choice. We know that he lives precariously, on the brink of discovery, and the suspense in the early chapters depends on our wondering whether this discovery can be avoided. The question seems to be answered in chapter 13, when Molly dies, and the dreaded exposure is narrowly missed. At this point we share Godfrey's relief; and though we also respond to the author's censure, the effect of this censure is less to make us wish for his moral improvement than to remind us of the moral order which he is violating. By the time the question is reopened in chapter 18, when Dunstan's skeleton and the stolen gold are found, our interest in Godfrey has become subordinated to our anxiety about how his decisions will affect Silas; what we now care most about is that Silas should be allowed to keep Eppie.

Godfrey does, of course, make a number of important discoveries in the later chapters, and there is an element of moral progress in his story. Especially important is his discovery that he has underestimated his wife:

'I oughtn't to have left the child unowned: I oughtn't to have kept it from you. But I couldn't bear to give you up, Nancy. I was led away into marrying her - I suffered for it.'

Still Nancy was silent, looking down: and he almost expected that she would presently get up and say she would go to her father's. How could she have any mercy for faults that must seem so black to her, with her simple, severe notions?

But at last she lifted up her eyes to his again and spoke. There was no indignation in her voice - only deep regret.

'Godfrey, if you had but told me this six years ago, we could have done some of our duty by the child. Do you think I'd have refused to take her in, if I'd known she was yours?'

At that moment Godfrey felt all the bitterness of an error that was not simply futile, but had defeated its own end. He had not measured this wife with whom he had lived so long. But she spoke again, with more agitation.

'And - Oh, Godfrey - if we'd had her from the first, if you'd taken to her as you ought, she'd have loved me for her mother - and you'd have been happier with me: I could better have bore my little baby dying, and our life might have been more like what we used to think it 'ud be.'

The tears fell, and Nancy ceased to speak.

'But you wouldn't have married me then, Nancy, if I'd told you,' said Godfrey, urged, in the bitterness of his self-reproach, to prove to himself that his conduct had not been utter folly. 'You may think you would now, but you wouldn't then. With your pride and your father's, you'd have hated having anything to do with me after the talk there'd have been.'

'I can't say what I should have done about that, Godfrey. I should never have married anybody else. But I wasn't worth doing

wrong for - nothing is in this world. Nothing is so good as it seems beforehand - not even our marrying wasn't, you see.'

Ch. 18, pp. 219-221.

This failure to measure Nancy's possibilities is part of Godfrey's general failure of imagination: he cannot understand how anyone else is likely to feel. He is a slow learner, because he does not apply what he has learned. It remains for him a particular lesson valid only for a single experience, and therefore learned bitterly and too late. He goes straight on to make a similar error, this time underestimating the feelings that Eppie and Silas have for each other. It is true that through their shared suffering Godfrey and Nancy learn to know each other better, and to accept the shortcomings of their life together; and that this is moral progress for them both. But Godfrey's moral education is never of more than peripheral concern; our greater interest, as readers, arises from our perceiving the unfolding irony of his having defeated his own desires so effectively; and this, in turn, is subordinated to our relief at his failure to frustrate Silas's happiness. Considered by itself, Godfrey's story is informed by a mythos of action; but within the larger whole its function is to contribute to Silas's story, the mythos of which is a moral change.

The Thematic Background.

One of the few puzzling features of the book is the number of attempts on the part of almost all the characters to articulate some kind of belief about the nature of existence and their own relation to the forces around them. A glance at the first three chapters will show how consistently the author is concerned with the tendency of the human mind to move from the particular to the general, and to assume spiritual causes behind visible events. Chapter 1 opens with a discussion of the Raveloe distrust of strangers, and their superstitious interpretations of what they do not understand; it ends with Silas's bitter conclusion that 'there is no just God that governs the earth

righteously, but a God of lies that bears witness against the innocent'. This leads on, in chapter 2, to Silas's sense of alienation in a strange region which he cannot begin to interpret, and which becomes for him a place of exile 'in which the past becomes dreamy because its symbols have all vanished, and the present too is dreamy because it is linked with no memories'. His inability to construct a metaphysical interpretation of any kind at all is not presented as a critical advance on his Lantern Yard theology; it is shown rather as a silence symptomatic of his failure to discover any relationship at all between himself and the life around him, or to orientate himself in such a way that any relationship becomes possible. It is a silence expressive of the attitude that issues in his insect-like response to his situation,¹ and in the narrowing of his world to his work and his gold.

Chapter 3 introduces us to the Raveloe landlords, thriving 'in that glorious war-time which was felt to be a peculiar favour of Providence towards the landed interest'. It moves towards a first glimpse of Godfrey Cass's habit of 'warding off the evil day', which is developed more fully in subsequent chapters so that we see it clearly as a consistent attitude to life.

These are not isolated examples: if we were to list all the statements of belief made by the characters themselves, together with those offered by the author on behalf of characters or groups, it might be difficult to avoid the conclusion that Silas Marner was a book about metaphysical belief, and that Silas's progress was a simple one from error to truth. Yet this is clearly absurd, in the light of his inchoate gropings towards an explanation that is never given;²

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1. He is described as weaving 'like the spider, from pure impulse', and as having his life reduced to 'the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect'. Ch. 2, p. 18.
 2. 'It's dark to me, Mrs. Winthrop, that is; I doubt it'll be dark to the last.'...
'... Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die.' Ch. 21, pp. 241-2.

and of our sense that judgments about the truth-value of his metaphysical statements are of very minor significance: what is significant is the attitude expressed in such statements. They reveal that Silas has moved from an attitude of mind which isolated and inhibited him to one which enables him to respond to love and friendship.

In this light, the metaphysical views expressed by the other characters can be seen as indications of opposing and contrasting attitudes to life. We need to understand them for two reasons: because they are effective psychological and social forces working upon Silas, and in part shaping his responses; and because they form a thematic background clarifying and highlighting those responses, making us more fully aware of the possibilities of life that come within his range at each stage of his development.

Attitudes which highlight and clarify Silas's attitude.

(i) Inclusion and exclusion - Lantern Yard.

Two aspects of the life of the Lantern Yard community are relevant. The first is the warmth of its fellowship, and the concern of the group for each of its members. Accepted by this group, Silas is happy, busy, and purposeful. The second relevant aspect, the corollary of this close fellowship, is its exclusiveness. It is a closed group, containing in its doctrine and attitude the possibility of rejection and exclusion. It is of course the ignorance and superstition of its members (including Silas himself) which give power to the treacherous William Dane, and result in the injustice done to Silas; but it is the very warmth and unity of the group that give his rejection the force that it has. Without warning he is cut off from the element which has sustained him, and which he has identified with the expression of the will and power of God.

(ii) Inclusion and exclusion - Raveloe.

Raveloe, too, is ignorant and superstitious. Its easy-going prosperity is much more attractive than the stern discipline

of Lantern Yard, and the basis of its membership is traditional and geographical rather than doctrinal, but it is none-the-less exclusive and unfriendly. There is no painful rejection of Silas; there is simply no acceptance, and this effectively completes his isolation.

(iii) Opportunism and the religion of favourable chance.

At first glance, Godfrey Cass's approach to life appears to have little in common with either the dogmatic theology of Lantern Yard or the traditional outlook of Raveloe. His actions are impulsive rather than calculated, and it is the author's voice, rather than Godfrey's, that traces a recurrent pattern in his impulses, and shows that his actions are the expressions of a consistent attitude:

He fled to his usual refuge, that of hoping for some unforeseen turn of fortune, some favourable chance which would save him from unpleasant consequences - perhaps even justify his insincerity by manifesting its prudence. And in this point of trusting to some throw of fortune's dice, Godfrey can hardly be called specially old-fashioned. Favourable Chance, I fancy, is the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in.

Ch. 9, p. 99.

Though he lacks the active malevolence of William Dane, and though he does not go so far as to manipulate events to serve his purpose, he takes advantage of them with such consistent selfishness that the result is much the same. The immorality of his irresponsibility is measured at the crisis of Molly's death:

'No, I'll stay, now I'm once out - I'll stay outside here,' said Godfrey, when they came opposite Marner's cottage. 'You can come and tell me if I can do anything.'

'Well, sir, you're very good: you've a tender heart,' said Dolly, going to the door.

Godfrey was too painfully preoccupied to feel a twinge of self-reproach at this undeserved praise. He walked up and down, unconscious that he was plunging ankle-deep in snow, unconscious of everything but trembling suspense about what was going on in the cottage,

and the effect of each alternative on his future lot. No, not quite unconscious of everything else. Deeper down, and half-smothered by passionate desire and dread, there was the sense that he ought not to be waiting on these alternatives; that he ought to accept the consequences of his deeds, own the miserable wife, and fulfil the claims of the helpless child. But he had not moral courage enough to contemplate that active renunciation of Nancy as possible for him: he had only conscience and heart enough to make him for ever uneasy under the weakness that forbade the renunciation. And at this moment his mind leaped away from all restraint toward the sudden prospect of deliverance from his long bondage.

'Is she dead?' said the voice that predominated over every other within him. 'If she is, I may marry Nancy; and then I shall be a good fellow in future, and have no secrets, and the child - shall be taken care of somehow.' But across that vision came the other possibility - 'She may live, and then it's all up with me.'

Ch. 13, pp. 159-160.

For all its weak negativity, Godfrey's essential selfishness has very positive issues, being expressed first in his desire for Molly's death, and then, more ~~damagingly~~, in his rejection of Eppie. This dramatic expression of his habitual attitude throws into relief the sudden reawakening of Silas's humanity, expressed in his insistence on keeping Eppie. Godfrey's refusal and Silas's offer of shelter and succour are neatly and naturally juxtaposed, and their difference measured by their practical consequences for Eppie. The psychological consequences for Silas remain to be unfolded.

(iv) Ignorance and the religion of duty.

Though very different in moral intention, Nancy's rigid principles are in practice almost as harmful as Godfrey's weakness, since they are inflexibly applied from a position of unrecognized ignorance. In this way her attitude resembles that of 'the church assembling in Lantern Yard': her code is

as unalterable as theirs, and her assurance that she knows the will of Providence is just as secure. Nancy's impulses are more trustworthy than her ideas: in her awareness of the feelings of other people she shows greater moral possibilities than she actually realizes. She is sensitive to the injured feelings of the ugly Gunn sisters, to the depth of Godfrey's disappointment in their marriage, and to some of the disturbance to Eppie that disclosure of her parentage must cause. But in cases of conflict these intuitive promptings are always over-ruled by her moral rectitude, and she insists that duty must be done.

We see the shortcomings of her attitude early in the book, in her conviction that sisters should dress alike, and in her failure to take account of Priscilla's different needs. Much more serious is the result of her opposition to adoption, which, together with Godfrey's unwillingness to disclose his past, effectively prevents the restoration of Eppie's rights and the expiation of Godfrey's wrong. The irony of Nancy's discovery is that she has, through her ignorance, opposed what she would have regarded as the will of Providence, had she known the suppressed facts.

Nancy's moral attitude is exactly the reverse of Godfrey's, and it is interesting to notice that it is her position he arrives at when Dunstan's body is discovered, and he decides to confess the past. His new honesty is certainly superior to his earlier attitude, but it is still inadequate. It involves both of them in a clumsy and insensitive attempt to take Eppie from Silas so that they may do their duty; and this attempt, too, they have to recognize as an error.

The moral attitude which Silas develops is a much more creative one, in which duties emerge as expressions of love, and are not moral absolutes to be imposed in opposition to it. Even his painful decision not to hinder Eppie if she should choose to leave him is a duty only in this sense, for it is a measure of his love for her that he should leave her free. In its context,

this decision shows up particularly clearly as a moral victory.

(v) Humility and the religion of love.

Dolly Winthrop's attempts to articulate her faith are confused and cryptic, but her life expresses it clearly. She finds fulfilment in helping others, and though she is described as 'a woman of scrupulous conscience, so eager for duties, that life seemed to offer them too scantily unless she rose at half-past four',¹ her actions seem to arise from her own energetic response to perceived needs rather than from any effort to conform to externally imposed conventions. She is imaginative, understanding, and tolerant, and in contrast to the well-meant but ill-considered efforts of the rest of Raveloe, her reassurances to Silas are exactly right:

'See there,' said Dolly, with a woman's tender tact, 'she's fondest o' you. She wants to go o' your lap, I'll be bound. Go, then: take her, Master Marner; you can put the things on, and then you can say as you've done for her from the first of her coming to you.'

Ch. 14, p. 167.

Her sense of a loving purpose at work comes from her own loving impulses; it is no rationalization or conventional acceptance:

'Well, then, Master Marner, it come to me summat like this: I can make nothing o' the drawing o' lots and the answer coming wrong; it 'ud mayhap take the parson to tell that, and he could only tell us i' big words. But what come to me as clear as the daylight, it was when I was troubling over poor Bessy Fawkes, and it allays comes into my head when I'm sorry for folks, and feel as I can't do a power to help 'em, not if I was to get up i' the middle o' the night - it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor what I've got - for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me... And all as we've got to do is to trusten, Master Marner - to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten. For if us as knows so little can see a bit o' good

1. p. 107.

and rights, we may be sure as there's a good
and a rights bigger nor what we can know - I
feel it i' my own inside as it must be so.
And if you could but ha' gone on trustening,
Master Marner, you wouldn't ha' run away
from your fellow-creatures and been so lone.'

Ch. 17, pp. 194-5.

Dolly Winthrop's responsiveness to life provides the moral norm in the book. Her trust in 'Them above' is a reflection of her trust in people, a trust which is a prerequisite of a human relationship in any depth. This is the condition to which Silas is restored through his love for Eppie, and which makes possible his adjustment to the Raveloe community, and his subsequent development.

CHAPTER 5

SILAS MARNER (ii)

A mythos of character change.

The Central Story.

I have already suggested (p. 54) that I see as the mythos of Silas Marner the change that takes place in Silas's emotional and moral responses when he loses his gold and finds Eppie. This change is essentially a process, though it has its climactic moments, and much of the success of the book depends on its power of engaging the reader's interest in the process without dramatising much more than the climactic moments. In spite of the brevity and economy of the book, we have a sense first of the slow deterioration of Silas's human responses over a long period, and then of the continuing unfolding of them over an equally long period.¹

The order of narration in the opening chapters is interesting. In her 'Leaves from a Note-book', George Eliot discusses the best way of telling a story, and suggests that our interest in fiction may well be aroused in the same sort of way as our interest in actuality:

Very commonly our first awakening to a desire of knowing a man's past or future comes from our seeing him as a stranger in some unusual or pathetic or humorous situation... We make inquiries in consequence, or we become observant and attentive whenever opportunities of knowing more may happen to present themselves without our search.

Essays and Leaves from a Note-book, pp. 297-8.

Silas Marner's story is unfolded in just this way.

The first three pages present him as he is shortly before the loss of his gold. We see his isolation from the village community, the superstitious suspicious of him, and the prosperity of the district in which he has chosen to make his living. Then, as if to answer the questions raised by this picture, we are taken back fifteen years to his arrival in Raveloe, and shown the nature and origin of the prejudices against him, and the ineffectualness of his attempts to overcome them. The result of his isolation is hinted at here, but not developed:

1. For an analysis of the temporal symmetry in Silas Marner, see W. J. Harvey, 'The Treatment of Time in Adam Bede', Haight, pp. 305-6.

At the end of fifteen years the Raveloe men said just the same things about Silas Marner as at the beginning: they did not say them quite so often, but they believed them much more strongly when they did say them. There was only one important addition which the years had brought: it was, that Master Marner had laid by a fine sight of money somewhere, and that he could buy up 'bigger men' than himself.

Ch. 1, p. 7.

After this pointer forward, we are taken still further back in time, to find the answers to our questions about who Silas Marner is, where he has come from, and whether he deserves the suspicion he has incurred.

The immediate effect of the Lantern Yard account is to win sympathy for Silas. Juxtaposed with the Raveloe villagers' view of him, we now have another view which shows him as happy, purposeful, trusting, and responsible, and obviously capable of enjoying love and companionship. The account of his betrayal by William Dane, with its violent dislocation of his whole emotional, social, and religious life, enables us to understand his disillusion, and to regard his miserliness as a symptom of his deprivation rather than as the expression of an evil nature. Our sympathies are now firmly aligned with Silas.

This discrepancy between Silas as the villagers see him and Silas as the author and the reader see him, is an essential element in the mythos. We need to understand the reasons for his alienation without losing sympathy either with him or with the Raveloe community, for his acceptance by this community is later to become a measure of his changed life. At the same time, we need to recognize his human possibilities, so that we respond intelligently to the effect on him of their frustration, and feel his recovery of them as an affirmation of a life that we know to be within his capacity.

Silas's miserliness.

The development of Silas's miserliness is presented in such a way that it seems the natural consequence of his shocked and friendless

state.

His first movement after the shock had been to work in his loom; and he went on with this unremittingly, never asking himself why, now he was come to Raveloe, he worked far on into the night to finish the tale of Mrs. Osgood's table-linen sooner than she expected - without contemplating beforehand the money she would put into his hand for the work. He seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse, without reflection. Every man's work, pursued steadily, tends in this way to become an end in itself, and so to bridge over the loveless chasms of his life. Silas's hand satisfied itself with throwing the shuttle, and his eye with seeing the little squares in the cloth complete themselves under his effort. Then there were the calls of hunger; and Silas, in his solitude, had to provide his own breakfast, dinner, and supper, to fetch his own water from the well, and put his own kettle on the fire; and all these immediate promptings helped, along with the weaving, to reduce his life to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect.

Ch. 2, pp. 18-19.

The diminishment of his humanity is suggested by the imagery: he weaves, 'like the spider, from pure impulse', and his life is reduced 'to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect'. Yet lest we should view him with too superior a detachment, the gap between the 'spinning insect' and ourselves is narrowed by a generalization that links Silas's behaviour to that of common humanity:

Every man's work, pursued steadily, tends in this way to become an end in itself, and so to bridge over the loveless chasms of his life.

This link draws us fully into Silas's experience, and we do not need to be weavers to understand how 'Silas's hand satisfied itself with throwing the shuttle, and his eye with seeing the little squares in the cloth complete themselves under his effort'. The deflection of intelligence and energy from original purposes to intermediate ones is common experience; and having recognized it here, we are well prepared to understand Silas's growing interest in the accumulating money:

Marner wanted the heaps of ten to grow into a square, and then into a larger square; and every added guinea, while it was itself a satisfaction, bred a new desire.

Ch. 2, p. 22.

Silas's affection for his guineas, and the suggestion that it is a personal attachment to these particular guineas rather than any interest in their value or power, confirm the impression that his miserliness is the perversion of something good. His distorted values arouse pity rather than censure.

His lingering capacity for human affection is most clearly discernible in his love for his coins:

... (he) thought fondly of the guineas that were only half-earned by the work in his loom, as if they had been unborn children...

Ch. 2, p. 25.

And accompanying this impression of a real emotional force still at work is an impression of waste and diminishment, as the simile of the unborn children reminds us of a better purpose for his affections.

The loss of the gold.

Once again, a consideration of the order of narration helps to clarify the pattern of our intuitive responses. Chapter 4 tells of Dunstan Cass's theft of the gold, and chapter 5 describes Silas's discovery. There is a great deal of suspense in the opening paragraph of chapter 5; but since it results from our knowledge of the theft, rather than from our ignorance, it takes the form of anxiety about the effect on Silas of the discovery of his loss. Our painful recognition of what his miserliness is doing to his character is very carefully balanced by our dread that he should lose his last remaining support:

In his truthful simple soul, not even the growing greed and worship of gold could beget any vice directly injurious to others. The light of his faith quite put out, and his affections made desolate, he had clung

with all the force of his nature to his work and his money; and like all objects to which a man devotes himself, they had fashioned him into correspondence with themselves. His loom, as he wrought in it without ceasing, had in its turn wrought on him, and confirmed more and more the monotonous craving for its monotonous response. His gold, as he hung over it and saw it grow, gathered his power of loving together into a hard isolation like its own.

As soon as he was warm he began to think it would be a long while to wait till after supper before he drew out his guineas, and it would be pleasant to see them on the table before him as he ate his unwonted feast. For joy is the best of wine, and Silas's guineas were a golden wine of that sort.

Ch. 5, pp. 54-5.

Our knowledge of Silas's previous desolation contributes greatly to our anxiety about this deprivation; just as both incidents affect our response to the third crisis, when he is again threatened with the loss of what he has loved.

At this stage, the loss of his gold seems too great a shock for Silas to adjust to. The insect-imagery recurs, suggesting another diminishment:

Marner's thoughts could no longer move in their old round, and were baffled by a blank like that which meets a plodding ant when the earth has broken away on its homeward path.

Ch. 10, p. 102.

The winter weather reflects the bitterness of his Christmas day, when his first desperate hopes of recovering the money have left him, and his numb submission to misery seems to threaten both physical and emotional death:

In the morning he looked out on the black frost that seemed to press cruelly on every blade of grass, while the half-icy red pool shivered under the bitter wind; but towards evening the snow began to fall, and curtained from him even that dreary outlook, shutting him close up with his narrow grief. And he sat in his robbed home

through the livelong evening, not caring to close his shutters or lock his door, pressing his head between his hands and moaning, till the cold grasped him and told him that his fire was grey.

p. 121.

This self-enclosing and isolating misery is thrown into relief by the general celebration in Raveloe, where 'the bells rang merrily, and the church was fuller than all through the rest of the year'; by Aaron's 'carril' and Dolly's lard-cakes; and by the concentration of festivities at the Red House. We become aware of a vital and cheerful community life from which Silas is excluded.

This community life, united and gathered in the village church, is divided in its social expression between the Red House and the Rainbow. The division is not so absolute as to be completely exclusive, though it indicates status and position. So it comes about that just as there are some spirits-and-water drinkers in the kitchen of the Rainbow when Silas announces his loss, there are many villagers present (though among the servants, and in the role of spectators) when he interrupts the party at the Red House to announce his find. Each time the announcement is made to the gathered community, and each time his disruption of the gathering emphasises his position as an outsider, and underlines his need to join his life with theirs.

Silas's renewal.

The reawakening of his human affections is linked by the circumstances of the story, and in the mind of Silas himself, with the redirection of his feelings for his lost gold. For the readers the gold has become an ambivalent symbol, relating both to our sympathetic understanding of its value to Silas as a necessary emotional compensation, and to our anxious recognition of its inadequacy in this role. Silas can arrive at this recognition only when the gold has ceased to grip him; and he does so not by a logical process of abstraction and generalization,

but by thinking it out in terms of the symbol. The process by which he does so is both interesting and credible, and to understand it is perhaps also to understand how it is that the book communicates such a complex insight so simply and precisely.

There is a sound practical connection, as well as a symbolic one, between the lost gold and the open door through which the light of Silas's fire draws Eppie in over the snow. The door is open because he is looking out, 'not with hope, but with mere yearning and unrest', unusually excited and disturbed by the joking suggestion of some of the villagers that his gold may come back to him with the new year:

Since the on-coming of twilight he had opened his door again and again, though only to shut it immediately at seeing all distance veiled by the falling snow.

Ch. 12, p. 150.

What appears to be a superstitious gesture is something more important: it is the expression of a psychological disposition that is a necessary prerequisite for Eppie's reception. Silas's life has to be completely empty before he is ready to receive her, and the specific appetite created by the gold has to be reduced to a generalized need before it can be redirected. In contrast to his earlier solitary and self-sufficient expressions of delight in his hoarded wealth, Silas's action now expresses an appeal for help from outside himself. The snowfall, by exaggerating the distance between him and the rest of humanity, contributes to our sense, and his, of the mysterious entry of an agent from a different world; and it recalls the equally mysterious disappearance of his money into the mist. The timing of the incident, at the turn of the year, emphasises the crucial turning point in the death-and-rebirth process that Silas is going through.

It is significant that his first perception of Eppie is in terms of her resemblance to his gold; his second, in terms of her difference from it:

Turning towards the hearth, where the two logs had fallen apart, and sent forth only a red uncertain glimmer, he seated himself on his fireside chair, and was stooping to push his logs together, when, to his blurred vision, it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in front of the hearth. Gold! - his own gold - brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he was unable to stretch out his hand and grasp the restored treasure. The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. In utter amazement, Silas fell on his knees and bent his head low to examine the marvel: it was a sleeping child - a round, fair thing, with soft yellow rings all over its head.

Ch. 12, p. 151.

The difference is suggested by 'the soft warm curls' where he has expected 'the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline'; and we are reminded of an earlier image of Silas as he felt the first five guineas in his palm, and looked 'at their bright faces, which were all his own'. (Ch. 2, p. 19.) Now, instead of a mere reflection of himself, he finds a responsiveness and a vitality that awakens a new responsiveness in him. First, it takes the form of the revival of childhood memories of his love for his little sister, as if these very early emotional roots are being rediscovered; then it becomes an active response of attention to the child's needs; and finally it is expressed, with an intensity that surprises Silas himself, in his sudden and unpremeditated refusal to part with her.

The full implications of the difference between loving the gold and loving a child can only emerge for Silas over the course of years, but the difference in the quality of his life is clear from the start. Eppie's needs and her responsiveness reawaken his emotional life, and the love which was once concentrated on the gold now meets an answering love which becomes a creative force. Eppie extends Silas's interest beyond

herself, taking him out into the sunshine, making him aware of other families, and linking him with the people of Raveloe, now eager to advise and help. Her christening is really an initiation ceremony for Silas, marking his willingness 'to do everything as can be done for the child... whatever's right for it i' this country', and ratifying his entry into the community from which he has so long kept aloof. His clearest attempt, at this stage, to articulate his new experience, is simply to link the gold and the child, and to say 'that the child was come instead of the gold - that the gold had turned into the child'. (p. 174.)

The measure of the change.

The change that Eppie brings about in Silas is perhaps most clearly shown in chapter 19. The gold has been recovered, and Silas is able to reflect on the fuller significance of the earlier exchange:

Silas's face showed that sort of transfiguration, as he sat in his arm-chair and looked at Eppie. She had drawn her own chair towards his knees, and leaned forward, holding both his hands, while she looked up at him. On the table near them, lit by a candle, lay the recovered gold - the old long-loved gold, ranged in orderly heaps, as Silas used to range it in the days when it was his only joy. He had been telling her how he used to count it every night, and how his soul was utterly desolate till she was sent to him.

'At first, I'd a sort o' feeling come across me now and then,' he was saying in a subdued tone, 'as if you might be changed into the gold again; for sometimes, turn my head which way I would, I seemed to see the gold; and I thought I should be glad if I could feel it, and find it was come back. But that didn't last long. After a bit, I should have thought it was a curse come again, if it had drove you from me, for I'd got to feel the need o' your looks and your voice and the touch o' your little fingers. You didn't know then, Eppie, when you were such a little un - you didn't know what your old father Silas felt for you.'

The very disposition of the scene reinforces what Silas is saying: his love is now only for Eppie, and he values the gold only as a means of securing her comfort. It has been relegated to its proper place.

Not only are Silas and Eppie as happy as they can possibly be, but they know that they are happy, and they measure their happiness against Silas's remembered misery. One effect of this scene is to show this climax of Silas's enlightened consciousness. But it gains additional intensity from the fact that it is also a dramatic preparation for the confrontation with Godfrey and Nancy Cass, whom the reader knows to be on their way to claim Eppie as their daughter. This knowledge gives an ironic force to Silas's comment that he used to think that Eppie might be changed into the gold again, and his speculation about how he would react greatly increases our dread of the coming shock. Our knowledge of his lack of resilience on the previous occasions contributes to the tension and suspense: once again he is threatened with total loss, and just before the threat breaks we are made fully aware of what he has to lose.

Or rather, we think we are; for in the ensuing painful struggle for Eppie a further dimension of their relationship emerges. Once before, a member of the Cass family took from Silas all that he loved and valued; but this time the attempt is thwarted by Eppie's feelings. Unlike the gold, she returns Silas's love, and refuses to be parted from him. Her faithfulness is an expression of her natural feelings, not an imposed duty in conflict with them; indeed, it is in conscious opposition to the notion of duty which Nancy seeks to impose. Eppie's love is tested, and she emerges from her testing having confirmed and enhanced her value.

Silas is tested too, and shows himself to have reached a moral maturity far beyond his instinctive responses to the earlier crises. In his love for Eppie there is a good proportion of natural possessiveness, and the impulse that first led him to insist on keeping her is still active. It is this that he must

recognize and control in order to give Eppie her freedom as an adult, and his struggle to do so is as painful as the struggle of any biological father:

For many moments he was mute, struggling for the self-conquest necessary to the uttering of the difficult words. They came out tremulously.

'I'll say no more. Let it be as you will. Speak to the child. I'll hinder nothing.'

Ch. 19, p. 232.

This willingness to relinquish Eppie if it should be necessary for her welfare is a measure of the maturity of his love for her. He has moved far beyond the stage where she was a substitute for the gold, and he is able now to make a response that is fully integrated with his intelligence, imagination, and will power. He has spoken earlier about what Eppie saved him from; and we have understood something of that salvation in terms of its emotional vitality. Now we understand its moral dimension, and the story of Silas's metamorphosis is complete.

CHAPTER 6

MIDDLEMARCH (1)

Dorothea.

Henry James, on Middlemarch:

We can well remember how keenly we wondered, while its earlier chapters unfolded themselves, what turn in the way of form the story would take - that of an organized, moulded, balanced composition, gratifying the reader with a sense of design and construction, or a mere chain of episodes, broken into accidental lengths and unconscious of the influence of a plan. We expected the actual result, but for the sake of English imaginative literature... we hoped for the other... Middlemarch is a treasure-house of details, but it is an indifferent whole.

'George Eliot's Middlemarch', Galaxy, 15 (March 1873),

424 - 428.

George Eliot, on Middlemarch:

I don't see how I can leave anything out, because I hope there is nothing that will be seen to be irrelevant to my design...

Letter to Blackwood, July 1871.

The working power of the plot.

In the hundred years since the publication of Middlemarch, critical opinion has come to support very decidedly George Eliot's own assessment of the work, as against James's view that 'Middlemarch is a treasure-house of details, but it is an indifferent whole'. George Eliot saw what she was doing in a way that the contemporary critic could not; and subsequent critics have the great advantage of seeing the book in an established place in the range of English literature. Since it has continued to make a powerful impression on its readers, and since it is difficult to believe that a work that is 'a mere chain of episodes' could make such an impression, the present-day critic is able to begin from the assumption that the organized structure is there.

To discover the structure, however, and to give an account of it, is not an easy task when the work is as complex as Middlemarch, but besides Barbara Hardy's analysis in The Novels of George Eliot, there are two recent studies by David Daiches₁ and Ian Milner₂ which do so admirably. Both Daiches and Milner agree in seeing as the central theme Dorothea's growth 'from adolescent illusion to a fuller understanding of herself and of the world'.₃ This view accounts for very much more of the book than does the view that Dorothea's story is another example, like Lydgate's, of unhappy compromise forced upon a promising individual by conditions of his social environment.₄ It involves, certainly, the admission of a

1. George Eliot: Middlemarch.

2. The Structure of Values in George Eliot.

3. Milner, op. cit., p. 72. Milner's italics.

4. Among the critics who take this to be the main theme of Dorothea's story are the following:

Joan Bennett, George Eliot: Her Mind and her Art, p. 167.

Lord David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists, p. 242.

Edward Dowden, 'Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda', A Century of George Eliot Criticism, p. 114.

Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, p. 172.

Edith Simcox, 'Middlemarch', Haight, op. cit., p. 76.

Leslie Stephen, 'George Eliot', Haight, op. cit., p. 206.

discrepancy between the suggestions offered by the St. Theresa analogy in the Prelude, and the main substance of the book. Henry James was the first to notice this discrepancy, and his adverse criticism of Middlemarch is based partly upon the fact that George Eliot does not confine her narrative to the single germ outlined in the Prelude. But if there is a structural flaw, it is more profitable, as well as more generous, to see it in the Prelude rather than in the narrative; for a false start, particularly one made in theoretic terms before the introduction of any of the characters, is easily forgotten once the story begins. Those who take the Prelude quite seriously find themselves involved in a good deal of uncertainty about the author's tone in both the narrative and the Finale, particularly where she implies an attitude towards Dorothea's marriage to Ladislaw, and the subsequent course of her life. The view of these critics argues a weakness at the centre of the book, from which it can hardly be redeemed by its good parts. It is difficult to account for its total effectiveness in these terms, and I do not think that any of this group of critics has done so. The reader's intuitive sense of 'the working power of the plot', and his awareness that the experience of reading Middlemarch has consisted in a complex of intellectual and emotional responses that are significantly integrated and controlled, require some better explanation than one which depends upon his admiration of any, or even all, of the particular parts.

In this study of Middlemarch I propose to begin from this intuitive experience of the book as a whole, and to assume as a working hypothesis the unity which this experience implies. The assumption involves two specific implications, which are simply mentioned here, but which will be examined in due course. The first is that Dorothea's and Lydgate's stories are closely related, not merely by the interaction of character and event, but in some way which causes each to illuminate the other. The second implication concerns the relevance of the stories of Bulstrode and Fred Vincy, which are clearly subordinate to the other two, but which must be related to them in some way which

highlights and interprets them, and which will account for the reader's sense that he has responded to a single unified work, rather than to four separate stories. To discover the nature of these relationships is the task of this chapter and the next two.

A mythos of education.

Dorothea's part of the book seems to be essentially an account of the process of her education as she learns to know herself more fully and to understand more clearly the world of other people which surrounds her. The connection between enlightenment and morality is always a subtle one, and a case might be made for viewing Dorothea's change as a moral one; but in order to preserve the distinctions between the kinds of mythos in the books being examined, I have used the term 'moral change' in a restricted sense to mean a change in the attitude of the protagonist from pure selfishness to a love and concern for others, as in *Silas Marner* and *Gwendolen Harleth*; or the reverse of this process, as in *Tito Melema*. Dorothea's moral life is undoubtedly enriched by her growing experience and by the emotional integrity which she achieves, but her moral nature is never at stake in the way in which *Fred Vincy's* is, or sometimes *Lydgate's*. We do not wonder whether she will turn out well or ill: our attention is concentrated on the process of her learning to see.

She is introduced to us with both sympathy and humour:

Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects...

Vol.I, Ch. 1, p. 2.

Her love of intensity and greatness and her tendency towards extremes are treated with some irony by the author, but her generous impulses are clearly genuine. Even her rashness is the manifestation of good impulses in need of education: though

it contributes to the disaster of her first marriage, and to her husband's jealousy of Ladislav, as she grows in awareness it ceases to be dangerous rashness, and becomes an intuitive responsiveness that is very valuable on the right occasion.

Two aspects of Dorothea's predicament are presented in the first chapter. One is the difficulty of finding a channel for 'the hereditary strain of Puritan energy' and giving some practical form to her yearning to find a useful place in the world around her. The other is the measure of repression which operates to disguise the sensuous and aesthetic side of her nature, which does not fit her immature idea of herself. Her love of riding gives her qualms of conscience, and her pleasure in the beauty of her mother's jewels has to be interpreted in mystical terms before it becomes acceptable. The uneasiness of the truce between her two selves is indicated by her touchiness towards Celia, of whose pagan delight in the jewels Dorothea is severely critical simply because it matches her own. The aesthetic repression hints at a sexual repression which is at this stage too hidden to show at all, but which operates as a real force in her infatuation with Casaubon, and in her subsequent disenchantment.

Dorothea's state of ignorance.

At the start of the book, then, we see that Dorothea has much to learn about herself before she can respond fully and genuinely to the experiences that life offers. She cannot even see things clearly, for because of the dividedness of her nature her mind sifts and interprets her impressions in the terms which her ignorance and prejudice provide. The quarrel with Celia over the jewels is trivial, but symptomatic; far more serious is her insistence on seeing Casaubon's 'great soul' when Celia, also prejudiced, but with a different bias, sees his two white moles. Her error about Casaubon is a particular expression of her general tendency to make allowances and to believe the best of other people; like her impetuosity, this is potentially good,

and plays its part in her relationships with both Will Ladislaw and Lydgate; but in the context of her ignorance and inexperience, it is very dangerous indeed.

In addition to the positive prejudice which causes Dorothea to misinterpret what she sees, there is a severe limitation on what she is able to imagine, because she is so ignorant of the possibilities in human relationships and of the realities of marriage. Her sense of herself in relation to a man takes the form of a childish desire for a position of intellectual dependence:

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.

Vol. 1, Ch. 1, p. 4.

Marriage with Casaubon seems to offer Dorothea this longed-for mentor and father-figure, as well as a precise realization of the ideal which she has yearned to devote herself to. Part of the irony of her choice is that it arises from her consciously recognized but misinterpreted needs: she needs education, and she needs to love, but her very ignorance of the possibilities causes her to choose the man who can least help her.

She believes, too, that marriage will give her the necessary position in which to carry out her plans for the improvement of cottages in Tipton and Lowick. The real warnings against this marriage come not from Celia - for Celia's judgment is not infallible - but from Casaubon himself:

Mr. Casaubon apparently did not care about building cottages, and diverted the talk to the extremely narrow accommodation which was to be had in the dwellings of the ancient Egyptians, as if to check a too high standard.

Vol. 1, Ch. 3, p. 25.

Casaubon's ignorance.

It would be a mistake - and George Eliot is quite explicit about this - to see the unfortunate marriage as a trap only for Dorothea. Casaubon is just as badly trapped as she is, and just

as ironically, through his own error. Even in the early chapters there is a careful balance between Dorothea's blindness and his; and between her vision of him as the answer to her needs, and his vision of her in like terms. Their illusions, though different, are perfectly matched, and so conspire to blind them to the impending disaster.

Casaubon's letter of proposal reveals very much more of what he actually is than Dorothea can grasp.

This was Mr Casaubon's letter.

My dear Miss Brooke,- I have your guardian's permission to address you on a subject than which I have none more at heart. I am not, I trust, mistaken in the recognition of some deeper correspondence than that of date in the fact that a consciousness of need in my own life had arisen contemporaneously with the possibility of my becoming acquainted with you. For in the first hour of meeting you, I had an impression of your eminent and perhaps exclusive fitness to supply that need (connected, I may say, with such activity of the affections as even the pre-occupations of a work too special to be abdicated could not uninterruptedly dissimulate); and each succeeding opportunity for observation has given the impression an added depth by convincing me more emphatically of that fitness which I had preconceived, and thus evoking more decisively those affections to which I have but now referred. Our conversations have, I think, made sufficiently clear to you the tenor of my life and purposes: a tenor unsuited, I am aware, to the commoner order of minds. But I have discerned in you an elevation of thought and a capability of devotedness, which I had hitherto not conceived to be compatible either with the early bloom of youth or with those graces of sex that may be said at once to win and to confer distinction when combined, as they notably are in you, with the mental qualities above indicated. It was, I confess, beyond my hope to meet with this rare combination of elements both solid and attractive, adapted to supply aid in graver labours and to cast a charm over vacant hours; and but for the event of my introduction to you (which, let me again say, I trust not to be

superficially coincident with foreshadowing needs, but providentially related thereto as stages towards the completion of a life's plan), I should presumably have gone on to the last without any attempt to lighten my solitariness by a matrimonial union.

Such, my dear Miss Brooke, is the accurate statement of my feelings; and I rely on your kind indulgence in venturing now to ask you how far your own are of a nature to confirm my happy presentiment. To be accepted by you as your husband and the earthly guardian of your welfare, I should regard as the highest of providential gifts. In return I can at least offer you an affection hitherto unwasted, and the faithful consecration of a life which, however short in the sequel, has no backward pages whereon, if you choose to turn them, you will find records such as might justly cause you either bitterness or shame. I await the expression of your sentiments with an anxiety which it would be the part of wisdom (were it possible) to divert by a more arduous labour than usual. But in this order of experience I am still young, and in looking forward to an unfavourable possibility I cannot but feel that resignation to solitude will be more difficult after the temporary illumination of hope.

In any case, I shall remain,

Yours with sincere devotion,

EDWARD CASAUBON.

Vol. 1, Ch. 5, pp. 33-34.

Apart from its artificial and pedantic tone, which seems incompatible with the existence of any genuine feeling, the letter subjects Dorothea to the kind of flattery, perhaps the only kind, to which she is susceptible. Casaubon appreciates her 'elevation of thought' and 'capability of devotedness', qualities in which Dorothea has already shown, in her dealings with Celia, an unbecoming pride. He offers, too, the kind of argument to which she responds, viewing their meeting as 'not superficially coincident with foreshadowing needs, but providentially related thereto as stages towards the completion of a life's plan'; and we remember with anxiety Dorothea's yearning 'after some lofty conception of the world which might

frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there'. It seems to Dorothea that Casaubon's offer is an answer to her prayer, and she sees no more incongruity in it than he does.

Dorothea's response to Casaubon's proposal.

Dorothea responds to these suggestions as her prejudices incline her. What she does not notice is that when Casaubon claims to have given an accurate statement of his feelings, he has spoken only of his pleasure in finding in her those qualities that he has preconceived, and that this pleasure relates entirely to what he imagines she will be able to do for him. This is not love, but it is exactly what Dorothea, with her dream of emulating Milton's daughters, thinks she wants. Because of her own naivety about the nature of love, she does not notice his, and the force of his metaphor about 'an affection hitherto unwasted' is lost on her. It is doubtful, indeed, whether he recognizes this as a metaphor at all, since all his thinking at this stage, as well as his disappointment later, seems to be based on the view that love is some independently existing entity of fixed measure, which can be accumulated and hoarded for greater enjoyment at some consciously chosen moment. His disillusionment begins early, before the marriage, when having determined 'to abandon himself to the stream of feeling', he discovers it to be 'an exceedingly shallow rill'. Having no real experience to judge it by, he concludes that the poets must have 'much exaggerated the force of masculine passion' (Vol. 1, Ch. 7, p. 51.); and so he, too, misses the warning that comes to him.

Her disillusionment.

Our first glimpse of Dorothea's disillusionment shows her sobbing bitterly, having begun to make surprising discoveries not only about her husband's limitations, but about her own responses.

But now, since they had been in Rome, with all the depths of her emotion roused to tumultuous activity, and with life made a new problem by new elements, she had been becoming more and more aware, with a certain terror, that her mind was continually sliding into inward fits of anger and repulsion, or else into forlorn weariness... her husband's way of commenting on the strangely impressive objects around them had begun to affect her with a sort of mental shiver.

Vol. 1, Ch. 20, p. 173.

Casaubon's failure to share her intellectual and imaginative experience is accompanied by failure at another level, his resistance to her demonstrations of affection:

With all her yearning to know what was afar from her and to be widely benignant, she had ardour enough for what was near, to have kissed Mr Casaubon's coat-sleeve, or to have caressed his shoe-latchet, if he would have made any other sign of acceptance than pronouncing her, with his unfailing propriety, to be of a most affectionate and truly feminine nature, indicating at the same time by politely reaching a chair for her that he regarded these manifestations as rather crude and startling. Having made his clerical toilette with due care in the morning, he was prepared only for those amenities of life which were suited to the well-adjusted stiff cravat of the period, and to a mind weighted with unpublished matter.

Vol. 1, Ch. 20, pp. 174-5.

Dorothea thus suffers a double disappointment and frustration: the 'ungauged reservoir of Mr Casaubon's mind' (p. 16) has turned out to be 'an enclosed basin' (p. 172), and her hitherto sublimated passion, finding a possible object, meets with a frigid response. In addition, she finds that there is no retreat; for the high-minded ideals which once provided the only form of expression for this passionate energy, appear to have vanished with its frustration:

And by a sad contradiction Dorothea's ideas and resolves seemed like melting ice floating and lost in the warm flood of which they had been but another form. She was humiliated to find herself a mere victim of feeling, as if she could know nothing except through that

medium: all her strength was scattered in fits of agitation, of struggle, of despondency, and then again in visions of more complete renunciation, transforming all hard conditions into duty. Poor Dorothea! she was certainly troublesome - to herself chiefly; but this morning for the first time she had been troublesome to Mr Casaubon.

Vol. 1, Ch. 20, p. 175.

This analysis communicates clearly George Eliot's perception that idealistic yearning and passionate relationships have a common motive power. Nowhere does she suggest either that the ideals are thereby invalidated, or that the passionate expression is the inferior; but by showing their relationship, she puts them in their place. Dorothea never loses her desire to do good, but she does lose the romantic feelings accompanying this desire, as Maggie Tulliver does in The Mill on the Floss. The transference of Dorothea's ardour from her vague idealistic yearnings to the person of Ladislav is almost certainly meant to be seen as a natural step in the process of her growth. Leavis's objection to it (in both forms) as a manifestation of George Eliot's own 'soul-hunger'¹ seems to be beside the point, if it is Dorothea's education on which attention is focussed, for each form has its proper place in this process.

With Dorothea's recognition of the difference between her real lot and the imaginary opportunities offered by her dreams, there comes a recognition of her own weakness, of her inadequacy to face the actual problems that confront her. The greatest of these problems is, of course, Casaubon himself, and the several detailed and sympathetic analyses that we are given of Casaubon's mind serve to show us how much there is to understand. The sudden shift of sympathy that we are required to make when the narrative switches to Casaubon's point of view corresponds to the imaginative effort that is required of Dorothea as she begins, slowly and painfully, to replace her illusions about Casaubon with an understanding of him as he actually is.

1. The Great Tradition, p. 87.

The outcome of her frustration and disappointment is a quarrel, and one result of the quarrel is, for her, a new light on her own situation:

To-day she had begun to see that she had been under a wild illusion in expecting a response to her feeling from Mr Casaubon, and she had felt the waking of a presentiment that there might be a sad consciousness in his life which made as great a need on his side as on her own.

We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling - an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects - that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference.

Vol. I, Ch. 21, p. 186.

Her acceptance of his limitations.

As Dorothea begins to understand the nature of her husband's defences against the world, (an understanding which is made particularly difficult because they are also defences against her), the only attitudes open to her seem to be rebelliousness and pity. The pity is as unacceptable to him as her affection, and the conflict between them reaches a crisis after the discovery of his heart disease. This occasions another fit of rebellion and resentment in Dorothea, and almost results in her provoking another quarrel with him. Her victory over her resentment on this occasion is a major one, which makes all her earlier 'spiritual' victories and minor renunciations look like the child's play that they were. The reconciliation that follows, subdued and diminished by Casaubon's limitations, brings her as close to him as she ever comes:

'Dorothea!' he said, with a gentle surprise in his tone. 'Were you waiting for me?'

'Yes, I did not like to disturb you.'

'Come, my dear, come. You are young, and need not to extend your life by watching.'

When the kind quiet melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea's ears, she felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature. She put her hand into her husband's, and they went along the broad corridor together.

Vol. 1, Ch. 52, pp. 378-9.

This is a great diminishment of Dorothea's possibilities, but it is one that, in this relationship, she learns to accept.

The final conflict comes over Casaubon's attempt to exact from Dorothea a promise that she will complete his work after his death. In the light of her certainty that it is not worth completing, and her doubt whether there exists, in the mass of detailed notes, any form that can be completed, this request amounts to a demand for the futile sacrifice of the rest of her life. And yet she is well aware that a refusal is likely to cause such agitation in her husband as to endanger his life. Her decision to submit to his wishes is consistent with her previous decisions, and is the logical outcome of her initial error. We see her accepting the responsibility for this error, but accepting it in the full knowledge that it will mean a violation of part of her nature. The irony of her romantic notions of self-sacrifice is now fully apparent even to her.

Her freedom.

It is tempting to see Casaubon's sudden death as a timely rescue from the yoke that he would have imposed, but the situation is more complicated than that. Dorothea's delirium is full of the unspoken promise, and her desire to examine the will herself is related to her suspicion that there may be some instructions for her regarding his work. There is no indication that she considers herself freed by his death.

Her freedom comes later, and quite suddenly, when she hears about the codicil that Casaubon has added to his will.

She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form, that she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs. Everything was changing its aspect: her husband's conduct, her own duteous feeling towards him, every struggle between them - and yet more, her whole relation to Will Ladislaw. Her world was in a state of convulsive change; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew. One change terrified her as if it had been a sin; it was a violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband, who had had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said and did. Then again she was conscious of another change which also made her tremulous; it was a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw. It had never before entered her mind that he could, under any circumstances, be her lover: conceive the effect of the sudden revelation that another had thought of him in that light - that perhaps he himself had been conscious of such a possibility, - and this with the hurrying, crowding vision of unfitting conditions, and questions not soon to be solved.

Vol. II, Ch. 50, p. 55.

Discovering the jealous suspicions that her husband has harboured has the effect of releasing into the light the two feelings that Dorothea has repressed: repulsion from her dead husband, and attraction towards Will Ladislaw. The innocence of her relationship with Ladislaw Barbara Hardy finds unconvincing,¹ but I think it is explicable in the light of the tendency Dorothea has already shown to repress those elements of her nature that are incompatible with her idea of what she ought to be. When her 'duteous feeling' as a wife is suddenly altered by her altered knowledge, the repressed feelings assert themselves with a vitality which betrays their pre-existence. This is Dorothea's most climactic discovery

1. The Novels of George Eliot, p. 65 and p. 145.

about herself: what she goes on to become after this is made possible by the self-knowledge she gains here.

Dorothea and Will Ladislaw.

If the progress of Dorothea's relationship with Casaubon is seen as a process of disillusionment and discovery of error, the progress of her relationship with Will Ladislaw can be seen as a counterbalancing process in which she discovers new desires in herself and recognizes new possibilities undreamed of in her 'blind' state. This second process is partly contemporaneous with the first, though, as we have seen, her recognition of it is for some time completely repressed.

First impressions of Ladislaw.

Our response to Ladislaw is complicated (and for some readers it seems to be permanently confused) by the ambiguity of his introduction, and by the uncertainty of Dorothea's initial judgment of him. The reason for this ambiguity is perhaps related to the nature of the lesson that she learns from Casaubon. We have seen that in Dorothea herself there are three factors which play a large part in the error of her first marriage: her failure to understand the nature of her own emotional and aesthetic needs; her failure to see Casaubon as he is in relation to her; and her tendency to make generous judgments of other people. The first two of these three factors clearly need correcting if Dorothea is not to go on to other errors disastrous to her happiness. But the third factor, her faith in other people, is a basic necessity in human relationships. To cease to be willing to trust anyone is not a development, but a retrogression; and Silas Marner's early history is a pitiable instance of withdrawal after disappointment. The kind of courage that Dorothea shows in human relationships is her strongest quality, and her education, to be complete, must give her both self-knowledge and discernment without diminishing this courage. She must continue to take

risks if she is to continue to live fully, and it is perhaps to show this that the author makes her take, in marrying Ladislaw, a second risk that seems to those around her just as foolish as the first.

Perhaps the 'insubstantial' nature of Ladislaw that is so commonly complained of by critics (from Henry James, onwards) has its origin in the conflicting responses that seem possible at the outset. He appears to be an arrogant young man, conscious of his own powers, but unwilling to accept the discipline of applying them to anything in particular.

Indeed, Will had declined to fix on any more precise destination than the entire area of Europe. Genius, he held, is necessarily intolerant of fetters: on the one hand it must have the utmost play for its spontaneity; on the other, it may confidently await those messages from the universe which summon it to its peculiar work, only placing itself in an attitude of receptivity towards all sublime chances.

Vol. 1, Ch. 10, p. 69.

The arrogance and immaturity of the attitude are mocked by the ironic metaphor; but they are also modified by it, for the irony is Will's own, as well as the author's. This particular passage occurs as if in explanation of Casaubon's cold reticence about Will's departure, and it conveys not the author's impression of Will as he is in any permanent sense, but her impression of what he becomes in relation to Casaubon. His justifiable rebellion against Casaubon's values and way of life is coloured by the sense that he ought not to be ungrateful to a benefactor, and the irony is his characteristic mode of defence.

The clue is given at the end of the preceding chapter, when Casaubon is recounting the conflict, from his own point of view:

1. 'George Eliot's Middlemarch', Galaxy 15 (March 1873), 424-428.
(Haight, p. 83.)

See also Leavis, The Great Tradition, pp. 88 - 89.

'I have pointed to my own manuscript volumes, which represent the toil of years preparatory to a work not yet accomplished. But in vain. To careful reasoning of this kind he replies by calling himself Pegasus, and every form of prescribed work "harness".'

Vol. 1, Ch. 9, p. 68.

We learn in the next chapter that the half-joking, extravagant claims are Will's alternative to laughter or anger:

Will saw clearly enough the pitiable instances of long incubation producing no chick, and but for gratitude would have laughed at Casaubon, whose plodding application, rows of note-books, and small taper of learned theory exploring the tossed ruins of the world, seemed to enforce a moral entirely encouraging to Will's generous reliance on the intentions of the universe with regard to himself.

Vol. 1, Ch. 10, p. 70.

A caution against a too hasty judgment closes the paragraph; it is a necessary reminder that we do not yet know very much about Will, and that our first impressions may be misleading.

Another complication in our judgment of Will comes from the role that he takes on in relation to Dorothea when they meet in Rome. His aestheticism is a corrective to her moral earnestness, and consequently tends to be overstated. He presents a way of looking at life that she has not encountered before:

'The best piety is to enjoy - when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth's character as an enjoyable planet. And enjoyment radiates.'

Vol. 1, Ch. 22, p. 194.

In isolation, Will's philosophy sounds merely hedonistic; but it occurs not in isolation but in reaction - first against Casaubon's arid pedantry, and then against Dorothea's puritanical anxiety. That Will, too, has a concern for the downtrodden appears only later, but even here the effect of his extreme statement of his view is modified by its context. Enjoyment of beauty and pleasure is something that Dorothea really needs to learn.

His sensitivity to Dorothea.

Will's sensitivity to Dorothea's attitudes and feelings gives him a function like that of Philip Wakem in The Mill on the Floss, and of Piero di Cosimo in Romola: he often acts as a kind of chorus, discerning what Dorothea herself does not see, and expressing the response of the reader to the situation. And in spite of his idealization of her, this sensitivity is a sound basis for his relationship with her. He is capable of that effort of the imagination which Casaubon cannot make, that of perceiving her 'equivalent centre of self'. It is this recognition of her that gives Dorothea such a sense of expansiveness in Will's company, and causes her, long before she acknowledges the nature of her feelings for him, to associate him with light and brightness, so that

the mere chance of seeing Will occasionally was like a lunette opened in the wall of her prison, giving her a glimpse of the sunny air.

Vol. I, Ch. 37, p. 318.

This sensitive responsiveness is probably a more important qualification than a worthy steadiness of character.

Will's idealization of Dorothea.

Even Will's romantic idealization of Dorothea can be seen as part of the author's design, and the reader's response of impatience as part of the complex of responses invited by the book. Will habitually thinks of Dorothea in romantic terms, as 'an angel beguiled' or as a captive princess 'shut up in that stone prison at Lowick'. Such extravagances are usually followed by some wry comment indicating that while he is assuming in relation to Dorothea a role which is not quite genuine, (because it is not quite human), he knows that he is doing this, and can laugh at it:

Dorothea, he said to himself, was forever enthroned in his soul: no other woman could sit higher than her footstool... She had once said that she would like him to stay;

and stay he would, whatever fire-breathing dragons might hiss around her.

Vol. II, Ch. 47, p. 36.

We have already noticed that in his uncomfortable relationship with Casaubon Will's defence is to assume a role in which he can resist Casaubon's pressure without showing dishonourable ingratitude. His idealization of Dorothea is his equivalent defence in a situation in which he believes that he cannot honourably love her, except from a distance. He does not repress his feelings, as she does, and he does not sublimate them; but he simplifies them by thinking of them in metaphors drawn from romantic literature. This makes them manageable. As Dorothea's knowledge of herself increases, however, and as her situation changes, Will's romantic metaphors become less and less appropriate to the situation as the reader sees it. It is this inappropriateness that causes the reader's response of impatience.

This impatience is strongly registered by Leavis in his discussion of Will and Dorothea in The Great Tradition (pp. 86-93); but whereas he sees it as evidence of the failure of George Eliot's creative vitality, I see it as a sign of an intention achieved. For the impatience is consistent with the rest of the responses that make up the total effect of the book, and it has a clear place in that whole. After Dorothea's great crisis of self-discovery in Chapter 50, when she recognizes that she loves Will, and until her self-conquest in Chapter 80, when she believes that he loves Rosamond Vincy, her story moves into a lower key. Psychological interest centres in Lydgate and Bulstrode, and interest in Dorothea is focussed on the question of whether the obstacles separating her from Will can be overcome. The greatest of these is clearly Will's tendency to think of her as unattainable; it forms a barrier that very nearly prevents communication between them. Our response of impatience with Will makes an important contribution to the suspense of this part of the book, keeping alive our interest in Dorothea even while the narrative is more profoundly concerned with Lydgate and Bulstrode. That we should feel such

impatience is an indication that Will is sufficiently substantial for his part in the book.

Dorothea's idealization of Will.

Dorothea's idealization of Will is another element that makes an important contribution to the mythos. Her habit of seeing him in terms of sunshine and brightness emphasises the role that he plays in her psychological drama; and while she is married to Casaubon this role is as necessary a protection for her against her own feelings as it is for Will against his.¹ She does not see the whole person, but she sees what Will is in relation to her. This is not the disastrous illusory idealization of her first marriage, in which the roles created by each for the other are incompatible; it is the simplifying idealization of two people in the process of falling in love. They discern the good in each other, overlooking the faults, and each grows in response to the other's discernment.

George Eliot has frequently been accused of idealizing the character of Will, but David Daiches has argued, I think quite conclusively, that the descriptions we are given of Will when Dorothea is present are not the author's detached impressions, but 'a sort of author's parody of Dorothea's view'. Discussing the description of Will in his confrontation with Casaubon while calling on Dorothea in Rome Daiches quotes and comments as follows:

The first impression on seeing Will was one of sunny brightness, which added to the uncertainty of his changing expression. Surely, his very features changed their form; his jaw looked sometimes large and sometimes small; and the little ripple

1. In The Appropriate Form Barbara Hardy complains of the absence of sexuality in Dorothea's relationship with Will:

'George Eliot spends a fair amount of energy criticizing Dorothea's ignorance and short-sightedness but here remains romantically identified with this innocence.'

I think that the innocence and idealization are Dorothea's rather than George Eliot's, and that they are credible responses in her situation.

in his nose was a preparation for metamorphosis. When he turned his head quickly his hair seemed to shake out light, and some persons thought they saw decided genius in this coruscation. Mr. Casaubon, on the contrary, stood rayless.

Whose impression is being described here? Not Casaubon's certainly. Is it the author's? But consider the tone - the force of that 'surely', the humorous reference to classical mythology in the phrase, 'a preparation for metamorphosis'. Consider the dry sentence, 'Mr. Casaubon, on the contrary, stood rayless.' There is obvious ironic humour in the fact that whereas Casaubon has devoted his life to writing, in a particularly dead fashion, about mythology, his wife is here being assaulted by a real live myth, a sunny figure on the point of metamorphosis (and we think here, however briefly, of Ovid's Metamorphoses, that great repository of classical myth). The irony is far from being all at Casaubon's expense, however. 'Some persons thought they saw decided genius in this coruscation.' The language gives away a certain flippancy of tone, a certain refusal to commit the author to this view. Indeed, the view of Will which we are given here is not quite the author's, and not quite Dorothea's; it is a sort of author's parody of Dorothea's view. Dorothea, rather than Will, is being gently laughed at. At the same time the Apollo aspect of Will is emphasised, and plays its part in weaving the texture of the story.¹

Daiches further points out that in his confrontations with both Bulstrode and Rosamond, Will does not behave like an ideal, and indeed comes in for some of the author's adverse criticism.

If the idealization is not George Eliot's, but Dorothea's, its relation to the rest of Dorothea's education becomes clear. Though the book ends with her marriage to Will, the Finale reminds us² that

Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning...
It is still the beginning of the home epic -

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1. Daiches, David. George Eliot: Middlemarch, p. 44.
 2. cf. Daiches, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

the gradual conquest or irremediable loss
of that complete union which makes the
advancing years a climax, and age the
harvest of sweet memories in common.

Vol. II, p. 358.

In her first marriage, Dorothea has shown herself capable of that imaginative effort necessary for adjustment in a relationship - that recognition of the 'equivalent centre of self'. She has also shown herself willing to learn. But it is a necessary condition for a happy marriage (and it is therefore a reassurance required by the reader) that she should prove herself capable of relinquishing the ideal Will without ceasing to love the actual person. This is the strength she gains in her last moral struggle when, believing Will to be in love with Rosamond, she overcomes her bitterness sufficiently to persist in her intention of visiting Rosamond and offering help.

There were two images - two living forms
that tore her heart in two...

Here, with the nearness of an answering smile,
here within the vibrating bond of mutual
speech, was the bright creature whom she had
trusted - who had come to her like the spirit
of morning visiting the dim vault where she
sat as the bride of a worn-out life; and now,
with a full consciousness which had never
awakened before, she stretched out her arms
towards him and cried with bitter cries that
their nearness was a parting vision: she
discovered her passion to herself in the
unshrinking utterance of despair.

And there, aloof, yet persistently with
her, moving wherever she moved, was the Will
Ladislaw who was a changed belief exhausted
of hope, a detected illusion - no, a living
man towards whom there could not yet struggle
any wail of regretful pity, from the midst of
scorn and indignation and jealous offended
pride. The fire of Dorothea's anger was not
easily spent, and it flamed out in fitful
returns of spurning reproach.

Vol. II, Ch. 53, pp. 319-320.

Even in her anguished loss, there is a recurrence of the imagery associated with Dorothea's view of Will: she sees him as 'the

bright creature whom she had trusted - who had come to her like the spirit of morning visiting the dim vault where she sat as the bride of a worn-out life'. The counterpart of this romantic view is the embittered one: Will is 'a changed belief exhausted of hope, a detected illusion'. But this is quickly corrected, even in Dorothea's 'scorn and indignation and jealous offended pride': he is not an illusion or a belief, but 'a living man'. It is towards this realization that she struggles, discovering the depths of her own jealousy as she tries to accept her changed view of him. This is a necessary adjustment in her attitude before she can act creatively, and she makes it without any clear idea of what it will involve in practical action. But the crisis has for her the significance of an initiation, as her change of clothing symbolises. It marks another stage in her growth.

It had taken long for her to come to that question, and there was light piercing into the room. She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby: in the field she could see figures moving - perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light: and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.

What she would resolve to do that day did not yet seem quite clear, but something that she could achieve stirred her as with an approaching murmur which would soon gather distinctness. She took off the clothes which seemed to have some of the weariness of a hard watching in them, and began to make her toilet.

Vol. II, Ch. 80, pp. 321-2.

Her new, creative attitude has issues which would be quite impossible if she were to cling either to the vision of Will as a bright spirit who could do no wrong, or to her sense of him as a detected illusion. Her directness with Rosamond belongs

to her conception of Will as a living man, and moves even Rosamond to a communication of truth that unexpectedly vindicates him.

That Will is not, after all, guilty as she has supposed, does not mean that her idealized view of him is justified: Will himself comments on the generosity of her interpretation of him.

'You are sure to believe me better than I am in everything but one,' said Will, giving way to his own feeling in the evidence of hers. 'I mean, in my truth to you...'

Vol. II, Ch. 83, p. 339.

Neither does it mean that Dorothea's experience has been wasted. She has proved herself capable of looking beyond the idealization of youthful love to discern the real person. In the closing scene between Dorothea and Will the mythical images have disappeared; we have instead a picture of awkward humanity struggling for expression, followed by the simple imagery of childhood, suggesting, as Daiches points out, innocence on the brink of experience, the new beginning to which the Finale directs us. It is very much more hopeful than the beginning of her first marriage.

The process of her education.

Dorothea's education, then, is largely a process of growing to understand herself. When the book closes, her acquaintance with the world has not been very much increased, but what she has learned about herself from her two close relationships is considerable. Her increased discernment is the result not of her wider acquaintance with other people, but of the removal of those factors in herself which previously distorted her judgment.

The central drama is an interior one, and it gains a good deal of ironic force from the scepticism of those around Dorothea. Celia, Sir James, and Mrs Cadwallader, the most vociferous critics of her first marriage, are just as violently opposed to her second.

To Celia, Dorothea seems to have learned nothing:

'And how can you marry Mr Ladislav, that we none of us ever thought you could marry? It shocks James so dreadfully. And then it is all so different from what you have always been. You would have Mr Casaubon because he had such a great soul, and was so old and dismal and learned; and now, to think of marrying Mr Ladislav, who has got no estate or anything. I suppose it is because you must be making yourself uncomfortable in some way or other.'

Vol. II, Ch. 84, p. 349.

The reader, however, is assured that this time Dorothea is not wrong. In receiving Will in the library, Dorothea is conscious that she is defying her late husband's prohibition; she needs to do this in order to be free. But she needs also to defy the pressures of Celia, Sir James and Mrs Cadwallader; their values are not hers, and their reasons for objecting to the marriage are not valid. Their conversations about both marriages are very cleverly contrasted, so that we cannot help seeing that by their standards Dorothea appears to be making another mistake. All that we have learned of her, however, conspires to leave us with the sense that her marriage to Will brings her the fulfilment that she needs.

The perspective changes in the Finale, and we see Dorothea from a distance, and more generally. The tone is complicated by an interesting interplay between Dorothea's contentment with her lot, and other people's opinions of it.

Dorothea could have liked nothing better, since wrongs existed, than that her husband should be in the thick of a struggle against them, and that she should give him wifely help. Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done - not even Sir James Chettam, who went no further than the negative prescription that she ought not to have married Will Ladislav.

Vol. II, Finale, pp. 361-2,

The conventional Middlemarch view of Dorothea's marriages, voiced in the narrative by Celia and Mrs Cadwallader, is restated and given wider currency:

Those who had not seen anything of Dorothea usually observed that she could not have been 'a nice woman', else she would not have married either the one or the other.

p. 363.

As with the various opinions of Will Ladislaw, the conventionally materialistic view is set against the romantic and idealistic one, and the human truth is shown to be different from either. The book has moved away from the regret expressed in the Prelude that heroic aspirations should suffer diminishment in order to conform to existing social realities; it seems finally to celebrate the unhistoric, unspectacular goodness, and to show it, not as 'dispersed among hindrances',¹ but as truly realized in the human encounters of ordinary life.

1. Vol. I, Prelude, p. xiv.

CHAPTER 7

MIDDLEMARCH (ii)

Lydgate.

The hierarchical structure of Middlemarch.

While the complication of the quadruple plot of Middlemarch is an enrichment for the reader, it presents a difficulty as well as an additional interest for the critic, for it is apparent that the principle upon which the several stories are united is rather different from anything in the other works. There is nothing like the structural economy of Silas Marner, which results from an exclusion of all problems not directly relevant to the central mythos; nor is there the balancing of two opposing or closely related processes which we find in Adam Bede, Silas Marner, Romola, or Daniel Deronda. In Middlemarch George Eliot attempts something new. She tells Dorothea's story economically, refusing to develop some of the interesting problems which enter the mind of the reader, and which in Middlemarch, unlike Silas Marner, are allowed to do so. Then she explores some of these problems by making them central to the other stories, so that instead of a single story or a balanced structure of two contrasting stories there is a thematic hierarchy, in addition to the ordinary connections of character and event.¹

The mythos of Dorothea's story is, as we have seen, the process of her education. One problem raised but put aside in the interests of the mythos is the effect of her unhappy marriage on her personal development. We see enough of it, before Casaubon's death, to become very interested, and very concerned about her frustration; but, though relevant, the problem has a subordinate place, and it disappears with Dorothea's liberation from her dead husband. 'What would have happened had Casaubon not died?' may not be a legitimate form

1. I think my sense of the hierarchical structure of Middlemarch has its origin in the chapter entitled 'Possibilities' in Barbara Hardy's book, The Novels of George Eliot. Barbara Hardy discusses the way in which George Eliot's novels overlap in their explorations of similar themes, and the way in which unacted possibilities are suggested in all the novels. She stops short of the recognition that this method of working determines the structural principle of Middlemarch, but I am conscious of an indebtedness to her for a fruitful suggestion.

of question to ask about a work of fiction; but the general form of the question is certainly relevant, and we are encouraged to ponder on the effects of such a marriage on individual happiness and social usefulness. The problem is not shelved, but is transferred to Lydgate's portion of the book.

Other interests raised in Dorothea's story are shifted in a similar way, to become new centres. The part she plays in Will's growth to maturity is only hinted at, but the power of a similar relationship is dealt with very fully in the story of Fred Vincy. In the same way the relationship between personal integrity and public service, a theme that is significant but subordinate in both Lydgate's and Dorothea's stories, becomes the crucial one in Bulstrode's.

This hierarchical structure is extended to include many of the minor characters, who can hardly be said to have a story of their own, but who, in the glimpses we have of them, exemplify or caricature qualities that we have seen in the main characters.¹ The effect is something like that of a Rembrandt painting, in which significant relationships are established between a central group and others just falling within the circle of light, while figures of less importance recede into the dimness. There is depth without oversimplification, and variety without irrelevance.

Lydgate's story: a mythos of action.

In many respects Lydgate's story is like Dorothea's: they share rather similar ambitions about their life's work, and they make, largely through their own blindness, similar mistakes in marriage. But the emphasis is different, for while Dorothea's education is the central process to which all the elements in her story are subordinated, at the centre of Lydgate's story is the process of his failure to achieve what he sets out to do.

1. See next chapter, pp. 124-128.

Our interest in his story is largely the sympathetic fascination of watching him make, perfectly consistently, one error after another, so that each choice puts his ultimate intention further out of reach. His errors, like Dorothea's, are the result of a particular area of blindness in an otherwise perceptive intelligence, and his worst error, like hers, is in marriage. But while he, too, learns to see how foolish he has been, interest is concentrated not on his education, but on the process of his downfall, and his discoveries serve mainly to underline the irony of his own part in it.

Even in the early chapters, there are hints of an ironic discrepancy between Lydgate's intentions and his probable achievement. He is introduced as 'something rather more uncommon than any general practitioner in Middlemarch':

And this was true. He was but seven-and-twenty, an age at which many men are not quite common - at which they are hopeful of achievement, resolute in avoidance, thinking that Mammon shall never put a bit in their mouths and get astride their backs, but rather that Mammon, if they have anything to do with him, shall draw their chariot.

Vol. I, Ch. 15, p. 123.

This irony invites us to temper with a measure of scepticism our sympathy with Lydgate's professional ambitions, and we are soon led to locate the scepticism not in the unpracticality of his hopes and schemes themselves, but in their close connection with his professional and moral life. His intellectual passion is sufficiently convincing, and it is healthily allied to a professional enthusiasm, 'a youthful belief in his bread-winning work'. He is clearly capable of doing a great deal of good in Middlemarch, and perhaps making a significant contribution to medical knowledge as well. It is his emotional immaturity that makes the outcome doubtful.

The shape of Lydgate's story is outlined in general terms on p. 125:

In the story of this passion, too, (i.e. the intellectual passion) the development varies: sometimes it is the glorious marriage, sometimes frustration and final parting. And not seldom the catastrophe is bound up with the other passion, sung by the Troubadours. For in the multitude of middle-aged men who go about their vocations in a daily course determined for them much in the same way as the tie of their cravats, there is always a good number who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little. The story of their coming to be shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the gross, is hardly ever told even in their consciousness; for perhaps their ardour in generous unpaid toil cooled as imperceptibly as the ardour of other youthful loves, till one day their earlier self walked like a ghost in its old home and made the new furniture ghastly. Nothing in the world more subtle than the process of their gradual change!

The reader is by no means sure at this stage that Lydgate will come 'to be shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the gross'; the nature of his story requires that there should be uncertainty not only about how events will turn out for him, but about how he himself will develop. This uncertainty is made explicit at the outset:

The risk would remain, even with close knowledge of Lydgate's character; for character too is a process and an unfolding. The man was still in the making, as much as the Middlemarch doctor and immortal discoverer, and there were both virtues and faults capable of shrinking or expanding.

Vol. I, Ch. 15, p. 130.

As we learn more about Lydgate, we discover that he has serious weaknesses: his 'spots of commonness', which are ordinary prejudices about the way of life proper to a man of his birth; a sentimentality about women; and an arrogant assurance about his professional and moral independence. The combination of these weaknesses, which are quite unrecognized by him, leads him to emotional and financial disaster, and later to a condition which he, at least, regards as a moral failure.

The encounter with the French actress shows Lydgate to be a poor judge of women; but, more important than that, it shows that

he does not learn easily. Though he is horrified by what he discovers Laure to be, the loss of this particular illusion simply confirms his confidence in his judgment:

But he had more reason than ever for trusting
his judgment, now that it was so experienced...

p. 134.

For him, Laure has been the disappointment, the misleading illusion; it is she who is hollow. He fails to see the romantic weakness in his own judgment that has blinded him to her nature. This is emphasised by the calm assurance with which she admits the murder of her late husband: it is no artfully hidden streak of cruelty that Lydgate has failed to see, but a part of her nature which she recognizes and accepts, and of which her friends are well aware.

In this respect there is a great difference between Lydgate's response to experience and Dorothea's. In failing to identify the element in himself that has clouded his judgment, he exposes himself to the possibility of repeating his error; whereas Dorothea, in learning more about her husband, also learns more about herself, and the new integration which she then achieves makes it much less likely that she will make the same kind of error again. Lydgate makes no equivalent self-discovery through his relationship with Laure, and he therefore continues to look for the source of his error outside himself, in the other person, learning too late that he has made a mistake, but not knowing why. The difference between Lydgate's story and Dorothea's, then, is not that Dorothea is given a second chance and he is not; the effect of the inclusion of the episode of Laure is to indicate clearly that the novel is focussing on his second chance.

The language in which Lydgate formulates his notion of the ideal woman at once betrays the unreality of that notion, and draws attention to his fallacious inference from beauty to virtue:

Lydgate felt sure that if ever he married,
his wife would have that feminine radiance,
that distinctive womanhood which must be
classed with flowers and music, that sort

of beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure and delicate joys.

Vol. I, Ch. 16, p. 143.

The sentimentality of this language can hardly fail to recall a like sentimentality in the expression of Casaubon in attributing to Dorothea the text-book qualities of ideal womanhood:

The great charm of your sex is its capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own.

Vol. I, Ch. 5, p. 40.

Lydgate and Casaubon may have learned from different text-books, but they share a romantic sentimentality about women which blinds them to the reality of the individual woman each is choosing.

In the contribution of his sentimental illusions to his unfortunate marriage, Lydgate's plight resembles Dorothea's as much as it does Casaubon's. Indeed, the partners in each pair reveal the same basic failure to understand each other, the same acceptance of romantic illusion in place of reality, and the same misinterpretation of each other's illusions and expectations. Some of the horror with which we watch Lydgate's growing submission to Rosamond is due to our insight into Dorothea's predicament, and it is certainly no accident that the chapter in which Lydgate's engagement is seen to be inevitable, Chapter 27, is immediately followed by the account of Dorothea's return from Rome to Lowick Manor. The impression of her imprisonment in her boudoir, among the shrunken furniture and faded tapestry and 'volumes of polite literature' (Vol. I, p. 240), looking out on 'the still white enclosure which made her visible world' perceptibly increases our dread of Lydgate's coming imprisonment. The two situations are juxtaposed, and each illumines the other.

Lydgate and Rosamond.

The positive power and the particularity of Rosamond's illusions become apparent long before Lydgate has felt anything more than surprised admiration for her accomplishments:

But Rosamond had registered every look and word, and estimated them as the opening incidents of a preconceived romance - incidents which gather value from the foreseen development and climax. In Rosamond's romance it was not necessary to imagine much about the inward life of the hero, or of his serious business in the world: of course, he had a profession and was clever, as well as sufficiently handsome: but the piquant fact about Lydgate was his good birth, which distinguished him from all Middlemarch admirers, and presented marriage as a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people, and perhaps at last associate with relatives quite equal to the county people, who looked down on the Middlemarchers.

Vol. I, Ch. 16, p. 145.

Rosamond has very little imagination, and therefore little capacity for seeing any other point of view than her own. Even before this emerges in significant human relationships, it is evident in her speech and in her mode of thought. There is no metaphor in Rosamond's thought: even her most romantic day-dreams are full of literal details of rank, position, furniture, dress, and practical arrangements. She does not deliberately scheme to entrap Lydgate, but she does not need to; her dreams have the force, the particularity, and the 'shaping activity', of an inflexible plan.

Once made submissive to Rosamond's illusions by the nature of his own, Lydgate makes several vain attempts to recover his enthusiasm for his studies. His research to discover the 'primitive tissue' is meant to be taken more seriously than Casaubon's Key to all Mythologies, but there is just sufficient similarity to suggest another parallel. Both men fail to estimate the difference that marriage will make, or in Casaubon's

case, ought to make, to their work. In Lydgate's argument for hastening his marriage there is an echo of Casaubon's reasoning:

Certainly, being in love and being expected continually by some one who always turned out to be prettier than memory could represent her to be, did interfere with the diligent use of spare hours which might serve some 'plodding fellow of a German' to make the great, imminent discovery. This was really an argument for not deferring the marriage too long, as he implied to Mr Farebrother, one day that the Vicar came to his room with some pond-products which he wanted to examine under a better microscope than his own, and, finding Lydgate's tableful of apparatus and specimens in confusion, said sarcastically,

'Eros has degenerated; he began by introducing order and harmony, and now he brings back chaos.'

'Yes, at some stages,' said Lydgate, lifting his brows and smiling while he began to arrange his microscope. 'But a better order will begin after.'

'Soon?' said the Vicar.

'I hope so, really. This unsettled state of affairs uses up the time, and when one has notions in science, every moment is an opportunity. I feel sure that marriage must be the best thing for a man who wants to work steadily. He has everything at home then - no teasing with personal speculations - he can get calmness and freedom.'

Vol. I, Ch. 36, pp. 306-7.

Already we know enough of Rosamond to fear that calmness and freedom are the last qualities she is likely to bring to the marriage.

Lydgate's difficulties arise from a combination of circumstances, no one in itself sufficient to destroy him, but each strong enough to contribute to his undoing. All are linked, too, to the man that Lydgate is, so that although we have a sense of watching him being trapped by circumstance, this is tempered by a sense that the troublesome circumstances are largely of his own choosing. The professional prejudice against him, almost inevitable for such a man in such a situation, becomes an intolerable hostility only because of his close

connection with Bulstrode. '... as to the hostility in the town', Farebrother tells him, 'you'll weather it, if you are prudent.' (Vol. II, Ch. 45, p. 23.) But the prudence Farebrother recommends turns out on elucidation to be a matter of keeping himself 'separable' from Bulstrode, and keeping out of debt, and by the time Lydgate awakens to his position, neither of these courses is open to him. His extravagance and Rosamond's have made them impossible.

Lydgate's careless assumption that 'if things were done at all, they must be done properly' (Vol. II, Ch. 58, p. 141) is matched by the attitude of Rosamond, who 'never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide'. (Vol. I, Ch. 27, p. 236.) Both are at fault, but so unconsciously and naturally that it is hard for them to admit it, or to see how they could live differently.

Once Lydgate faces his financial difficulties, and speaks to Rosamond about his plans to curb their spending, her deficiency in love becomes a more positive factor in his misery. Her refusal to involve herself either imaginatively or practically in his trouble expresses itself in the chilling neutrality of the question 'What can I do, Tertius?' (Vol. II, Ch. 58, p. 146) - the rhetorical tone reverberating by its contrast with the same question asked with a different intention by Dorothea, and implied in the actions of Mrs Bulstrode and Mary Garth. Rosamond's withdrawal shows up as particularly cruel against the possibilities of help inherent in the relationships of the other three women. Whereas their faithful love is capable of bringing out what is good in their husbands, her response is a denial of any potential good in Lydgate:

The thought in her mind was that if she
had known how Lydgate would behave, she
would never have married him.

(p. 148)

Our sympathy for Lydgate is perhaps at its greatest in his conflicts with Rosamond and in his anger against her. Her acts of interference in his affairs are sufficiently damaging, but

far worse is her pitiless refusal of sympathy, and her negation of his existence as an equivalent centre of self. The suffering this causes him is much greater than his suffering from other causes; but it, too, gains an increased bitterness from his knowledge that Rosamond is of his own choosing. Lydgate has now begun to learn his vulnerability, and his increasing readiness to accept responsibility for his past mistakes evokes a corresponding increase in the reader's sympathy.

While we are not required to feel much sympathy for Rosamond, we are required to see that her cruelty is not deliberate or malicious. It is simply the result of what she is, of her limited imagination and her deficient humanity. Characteristically, she will not put herself in the wrong by leaving her husband; her notions of rectitude demand a preservation of appearances, without the least obligation to sympathise or even to permit confidence. Our sense of the extra and more intense suffering that this causes Lydgate is counterbalanced by the sense that Rosamond, too, is unhappy, in her limited way, and that both are victims of themselves and of the circumstances which they have chosen for themselves.

Their disillusionment.

Rosamond's disillusionment in Lydgate is a straightforward matter: she discovers that he cannot, after all, give her the comfort and social distinction which she has expected. Her disappointments are actual hardships and particular deprivations which she can charge against him without the least sense that her own attitude needs to be examined. In her narrow unimaginative view of human relationships, all the justice seems to be on her side.

For Lydgate, as for Dorothea, the process of disillusionment is more complex. He has expected less tangible goods from his marriage, and his disappointment involves him in a constant readjustment of his attitude as he learns more about Rosamond.

He has to admit that he has been wrong, and that instead of the wifely submissiveness and sympathetic understanding that he has looked for, Rosamond has a 'victorious obstinacy', a 'terrible tenacity' against which he is powerless. Her defence is to cease to love him; but, in contrast to his earlier response to Laure, this time he permits himself no such defence, and his struggle is to accept what she is without ceasing to love her. It is a struggle which becomes increasingly difficult as his discovery progresses, and as he realizes the depth of the incompatibility between his plans and hers.

Lydgate and Dorothea.

In engaging in this struggle and finally winning resignation and acceptance, Lydgate shows himself to have much in common with Dorothea, and he already knows enough about her attitude to learn something from it that helps him. As he tastes the bitterness of Rosamond's withdrawal from him, his first reaction is to connect her with Laure, and to conclude, 'It is the way with all women.' (Vol. II, Ch. 58, p. 145.) But then he remembers Dorothea's passionate concern for her husband, a concern which we know to have been won in a spiritual struggle that parallels Lydgate's own; and this memory counterbalances his bitterness and enables him to see the falsity of the generalization. He has matured since his encounter with Laure, and it is Dorothea who has helped him to do so.

Another way in which Dorothea's life influences his is through her conscious and deliberate expression of trust in him when he finds that he has been discredited because of his link with Bulstrode. Initially, she is concerned about Lydgate's public difficulties, and her practical help is effective in freeing him financially and morally from Bulstrode. But it is her intervention in re-establishing his relationship with Rosamond that is even more important to him, and this, as we have seen, issues from another great spiritual crisis. Both the fact that she makes the visit to Rosamond at all, and the fact that Rosamond is moved to an unusual responsiveness, are possible only because

Dorothea has already won a victory over herself. In her restoration of Lydgate's honour, and in her reopening of the limited possibilities of his marriage, we see 'the effect of her being on those around her', and the significance of that private unhistoric influence to which the Finale points as an alternative to the public heroic action.

In spite of the many links and parallels between the two stories, the mythos of Lydgate's is of a different kind from the mythos of Dorothea's. It is a mythos of action, closely related to the kind of person that he is. His confidence becomes a hubris, increasing the reader's sense of his certain fall. There is at first no doubt in his own mind that he will be able to achieve his ambitions; the reader's doubt arises from the perception that it is in just those areas where Lydgate feels most secure that he will most certainly have difficulty. His unwarranted belief that he will be able to preserve his professional independence, and his confidence in his own judgment of women, are the shaky foundations of his intention to make a name for himself. His belated discovery that he has been wrong in both these beliefs leads him to the more public error of accepting help from Bulstrode. His subsequent disgrace, while it is unmerited in its reflection upon his moral integrity, bears an ironic justice in that it is the consequence of a chain of events set in motion by Lydgate himself, and related to weaknesses in his own character. Though he is rescued from the worst of his disgrace by Dorothea's faith in him, he is nevertheless defeated by Rosamond. He has to relinquish his ambitions entirely, and submit himself to hers. Although by her standards, and on the evidence of a flourishing and remunerative practice, he becomes a success, he sees himself as a failure: 'he had not done what he once meant to do'.

CHAPTER 8

MIDDLEMARCH (iii)

The other stories.

The hierarchical principle.

Lydgate's story, we have seen, is related very closely to Dorothea's, without resembling it in mythos. It is only slightly less prominent, and claims a good proportion of the reader's sympathy and involvement. Two other stories emerge as distinct stories with a narrative interest of their own: they are those of Fred Vincy and Bulstrode, and though they are of considerably less bulk than the main ones, they too are significant parts of the hierarchical structure of the whole. Like Lydgate's story, they each develop centrally and fully a problem that has been raised elsewhere, making an important contribution to the reader's understanding of themes on the periphery of the main stories, and themselves gaining interest from the echoes and cross-references that this relationship makes possible.

The Garth-Vincy story: a mythos of character change.

The story of Mary Garth and Fred Vincy explores some of the possibilities of growth offered by a happy love relationship. This, too, is a theme raised in the main stories and transferred to a subordinate one. In that part of Dorothea's story which concerns her relationship with Will Ladislaw, she works out, as we have seen, her discovery of the positive potential in herself and in life; having learned through her marriage to Casaubon what she is not, she goes on to discover, through her love for Will, what she is and what she can become. The process of this discovery is clearly visible to the reader, and it completes the mythos; but the corresponding process in Will is merely suggested. We do not become sympathetically involved in his growth, since we see him almost always in relation to Dorothea, and since it is her changing response to him that is most significant. To have shown in detail how he matures in response to her would have diverted attention to him, and might have obscured the central mythos.

In Lydgate's story, too, the theme is present, though in a negative form. The absence of any possibility of growth in his relationship with Rosamond, and the spiritually crippling effect of this on Lydgate, are explicitly stressed, and make an important contribution to the mythos. He fails to become the man he might have become, and one of the main reasons for his failure is that he lacks the sort of marriage relationship in which he would be free to realize himself. What such a relationship can achieve and the way it functions is worked out in detail in the third story of Middlemarch.

Our first introduction to Mary Garth draws attention to the contrast between her and Rosamond.

Rosamond and Mary had been talking faster than their male friends. They did not think of sitting down, but stood at the toilette-table near the window while Rosamond took off her hat, adjusted her veil, and applied little touches of her finger-tips to her hair - hair of infantine fairness, neither flaxen nor yellow. Mary Garth seemed all the plainer standing at an angle between the two nymphs - the one in the glass, and the one out of it, who looked at each other with eyes of heavenly blue, deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings an ingenious beholder could put into them, and deep enough to hide the meanings of the owner if these should happen to be less exquisite. Only a few children in Middlemarch looked blond by the side of Rosamond, and the slim figure displayed by her riding-habit had delicate undulations. In fact, most men in Middlemarch, except her brothers, held that Miss Vincy was the best girl in the world, and some called her an angel. Mary Garth, on the contrary, had the aspect of an ordinary sinner: she was brown; her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low; and it would not be true to declare, in satisfactory antithesis, that she had all the virtues. Plainness has its peculiar temptations and vices quite as much as beauty; it is apt either to feign amiability or, not feigning it, to show all the repulsiveness of discontent: at any rate, to be called an ugly thing in contrast with that lovely creature your companion, is apt to produce some effect beyond a sense of fine veracity and fitness in the phrase. At the age of two-and-twenty Mary had certainly not attained that perfect good sense and good principle which are

usually recommended to the less fortunate girl, as if they were to be obtained in quantities ready mixed, with a flavour of resignation as required. Her shrewdness had a streak of satiric bitterness continually renewed and never carried utterly out of sight, except by a strong current of gratitude towards those who, instead of telling her that she ought to be contented, did something to make her so.

Vol. I, Ch. 12, pp. 96-97.

Rosamond looks into the glass at herself, as if the contemplation of her own beauty were a sufficiently sustaining vision; her eyes seem to reflect meanings put into them by a beholder, while they hide her own. This calm picture contains the possibility of Rosamond's later withdrawal, of her refusal to communicate with Lydgate, and of her complacent rectitude.

What we are most aware of in Mary, on the other hand, is her responsiveness. She knows, as does her creator, that virtue and happiness are not ready-mixed qualities, instantly available, but that they come into being in response to love and recognition. Her gratitude is 'towards those who, instead of telling her that she ought to be contented, did something to make her so'. One of these, Mary later confesses, is Fred, and an important part of her feeling for him is her gratitude for the love that he has felt for her ever since the umbrella-ring espousal in their childhood. Discussing the nature of the attraction that both Fred and Farebrother feel for such a 'brown patch' as Mary, George Eliot comments:

It was certainly not her plainness that attracted them (and let all plain young ladies be warned against the dangerous encouragement given them by Society to confide in their want of beauty). A human being in this aged nation of ours is a very wonderful whole, the slow creation of long interchanging influences; and charm is a result of two such wholes, the one loving and the other loved.

Vol. I, Ch. 40, pp. 361-362.

This principle of creative responsiveness which makes Mary attractive, although she is not pretty, operates also in Mary's

influence on Fred, and makes him lovable, although he is not worthy. It operates, moreover, in such a way that under her influence Fred grows in moral stature, becoming the kind of person that without her love he could not be. In the sterile relationships of Dorothea and Casaubon, and Lydgate and Rosamond, the great deficiency is the failure of one of the partners to recognize and respond to the other; and in the creative relationship of Dorothea and Will it is this recognition and response that make growth possible, giving life to a relationship that seems unpromising by the standards of a worldly society. The story of Mary and Fred is muted in tone, and we become less involved in it than we do in the others; but it forms a positive standard against which the other more central relationships may be measured.

For all Fred Vincy's faults, he is superior in his discernment of Mary's worth. He refuses to be bound by the Vincy snobbery towards the Garths, and persists in his admiration of Mary and her family. This recognition of Mary opens him to her influence, and the mythos of this particular story is the development of Fred's character as he responds to her. In the context of their love for each other, her honest recognition of his weaknesses and her insistence on his own honesty with himself are effective forces which help him to change. Having a vision of his possibilities (which are very different from his own illusions), and knowing that anything less will be a violation of his personal integrity, she refuses to accept him until she sees signs that he means to realize this integrity. It is her firmness that helps him to do so.

Part of Fred Vincy's story approaches very closely the central theme in Dickens's Great Expectations, and perhaps a fruitful comparison could be made between the two. Like Pip, Fred has to relinquish his expected fortune and his illusions of gentility before he can live responsibly and independently. And, like Pip, while he is in the expectant state he finds himself in the company of jealous and grasping relatives, all jostling for attention. He is degraded by entering into competition with the

Wauls and the Cranches, whose various characters and attitudes are developed in some detail.

But while the function of the Featherstone relatives is clear, perhaps neither their function nor their intrinsic interest quite justifies the amount of attention that is given them. They are caricatures, significant to the reader, of the undignified behaviour of Fred; but their significance is more limited than that of Miss Havisham's relatives in Great Expectations, because Fred never comes to understand fully, as Pip does, the humiliating position in which he has placed himself, and their crudities make no contribution to his enlightenment. He is able rather to maintain a superior detachment and a certain smugness towards them; and because he is not connected to them by any emotional or social ties, they matter less as a force than do the Dodsons in The Mill on the Floss. They are also less interesting, and it is possible that sketchier treatment of the Featherstone family would have produced a welcome reduction in their proportions without necessarily altering their function. As it is, the Featherstone chapters are the least successfully integrated with the other stories. They seem longer than they are, and are longer than they need be, forming something of an intrusive interruption to the main lines of interest in a way that the other parts of the novel do not.

Fred is most interesting in relation to Mary, and it is his gradual change of attitude under her influence that is the most important part of his story. Not least among his illusions is his implicit trust that Mary will always be there, and that she exists exclusively for him. She can do little about this, because she too believes that she will always be there. It takes the prompting of Farebrother, and the presence of serious competition, to clear Fred's vision in this respect, and then he is free to become the person that Mary believes he is capable of becoming.

The Garth-Vincy story, then, contributes to the novel in two important ways. It provides a contrasting positive standard for the reader's better comprehension of the stifling effects of the unhappy marriages in Middlemarch. And, less obviously, but equally significantly, it contains within it the answer to the critics of Dorothea's second marriage - critics within the world of Middlemarch, as well as those in the world outside. The responsiveness on which the relationship of Will and Dorothea is based is clearly shown, in the story of Mary and Fred, to be a more important qualification for a happy marriage than any prior worthiness or steadiness of character.

Bulstrode.

While the story of Mary and Fred relates most closely to the private lives of Dorothea and Lydgate, the story of Bulstrode relates to their public and social aspirations. Dorothea begins by yearning for 'some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there'. (Vol. I, Ch. 1, p. 2.) She ends by relinquishing her fortune, and the power for good that this represents, in order to marry Will Ladislav. Lydgate starts out intending to do 'good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world'. (Vol. I, Ch. 15, p. 129.) He ends by abandoning his scheme for reform, and setting himself to achieve the kind of success that Rosamond demands. Both Dorothea and Lydgate, therefore, fail in what they once hoped to do; but whereas Dorothea willingly relinquishes her plans in favour of an emotional integration which her marriage to Ladislav completes, Lydgate is forced to abandon his because he must bend himself to Rosamond's will. His submission appears as a defeat, and Dorothea's does not. The implication of this is that the measure of success is not the accomplishment of reform or public service in itself, but the degree to which this visible public life is an expression of an integrated personality.

This problem of the relationship between public life and personal

integrity is fully explored in the story of Bulstrode, who appears, superficially, to have the same conjunction of wide purpose and specific intention, and to have, in addition, the means which the others lack. He seems, at first, to be using his money as Lydgate thinks money should be used, and as Dorothea would like to use hers. Even his early assurance 'that God intended him for special instrumentality' (Vol. II, Ch. 61, p. 167) sounds like the kind of assurance for which Dorothea longs; yet in the light of the personal history which emerges and the motives which are subsequently clarified, Bulstrode turns out to be a hollow mockery of the public-spirited philanthropist that he claims to be.

The reader's impression of Bulstrode is coloured by suspicion from the start. In his first discussion with Lydgate about the future of the new infirmary, it is apparent that there are ulterior motives - albeit 'spiritual' ones - in Bulstrode's philanthropy.

'I have devoted myself to this object of hospital-improvement, but I will boldly confess to you, Mr. Lydgate, that I should have no interest in hospitals if I believed that nothing more was concerned therein than the cure of mortal diseases. I have another ground of action, and in the face of persecution I will not conceal it.'

Mr. Bulstrode's voice had become a loud and agitated whisper as he said the last words.

Vol. I, Ch. 13, p. 109.

Bulstrode's agitation is the immediate result of his involvement in particular quarrels about the hospital, but its expression here, in the absence of any provocation from Lydgate, betrays a defensiveness and a habitual tension likely to impair judgment. His reasoning and self-justification are suspect from the beginning.

Bulstrode's exclusive concern for the spiritual welfare of his beneficiaries, and his narrow interpretation of the nature of this welfare, are very different from Dorothea's and Lydgate's attitudes. It is not surprising to discover, a few pages later,

that

It was a principle with Mr. Bulstrode to gain as much power as possible, that he might use it for the glory of God.

Vol. I, Ch. 16, p. 135.

Bulstrode's 'religious' motives are really self-centred, and it is perfectly consistent that he should see Joshua Rigg's willingness to sell Stone Court as 'a cheering dispensation of Providence'¹ towards himself, while he lightly disregards Rigg's own destiny as belonging

to the unmapped regions not taken under the providential government, except perhaps in an imperfect colonial way.

Vol. II, Ch. 53, p. 82.

It is certainly significant that this ingenious rationalization immediately follows the account of Farebrother's representations to Mary on Fred's behalf. Farebrother does not talk about Providence at all, but in his concern for human weakness, and in his willingness to take responsibility in human relationships, he expresses a serious attitude to life, an attitude of which Bulstrode's is a mockery.

Causal connections.

One of the important ways in which Bulstrode's story contributes to Lydgate's is that Bulstrode's use of money to gain power forms a trap for Lydgate, whose arrogant belief that he can accept the money without submitting to the power is matched only by his certainty that Rosamond will be a docile wife. That he should be prevented from accomplishing his purposes by the very circumstances that he has freely and confidently chosen for himself is the nemesis towards which his story moves, and Bulstrode is an important agent in that nemesis.

1. Compare with this Casaubon's view that Dorothea has been providentially provided for him, and Rosamond's Providence 'who seemed to have arranged Fred's illness and Mr. Wrench's mistake in order to bring her and Lydgate within effective proximity'. (Vol. I, Ch. 27, p. 232.)

A mythos of action.

But Bulstrode's story is itself the story of a nemesis, and holds an interest of its own. His mental suffering is communicated in great depth, so that we become sympathetically involved in the process of his rationalization, even while seeing the hypocrisy of his self-justification. The suspense, which in Lydgate's story is dependent upon his false confidence, is maintained in Bulstrode's by the increasing desperation of his rationalization. We become involved in his mental dread, as we do with Godfrey Cass in Silas Marner, and with Tito Melema in Romola. The more Bulstrode tries to evade discovery, the more clearly we see that it is inevitable. His story, which begins by being the story of a philanthropist whose good deeds are corrupted by his hypocrisy, turns out to be also the story of a criminal who tries to cover his tracks and fails.

The characters of Joshua Rigg and Raffles have been criticised as grotesque and bizarre, and their part in the plot as melodramatic.¹ This is certainly true; but it ought to be said in the author's defence that extremes belong to Bulstrode's temperament and outlook, and that he is convincingly presented as the sort of person to attract the bizarre and to create melodrama. His original failure to admit his moral error, his need for self-justification without recognizable dishonesty, and his desperately, religiously persistent hope of averting exposure, all make him vulnerable to threat and blackmail, and incline him to wait for the crisis to gather force instead of meeting it while its proportions are manageable. His hidden imaginative life is melodramatic, and Raffles is a fitting embodiment of that horrifying past which Bulstrode has chosen for himself, and which he continues to choose until all choice is taken from him.

Bulstrode's judgment, like both Dorothea's and Lydgate's, is clouded by his illusions about himself. Unlike them, however, he cannot relinquish his illusions voluntarily, for they are too much a part of his defensive relationship with the world

1. Joan Bennett, George Eliot: Her Mind and Art, p. 171.

around him, and too closely connected with his spiritual pride. His failure is a progressive one, because once he has rationalized his neglect to disclose the existence of Sarah Dunkirk, each subsequent opportunity to do so challenges him to a greater sacrifice. Having embraced a theology which permits him to interpret external events as having been arranged with an intention specially protective towards himself, he loses his freedom to respond to those events, and becomes the victim of an inexorable chain of circumstances which look as if they have been conjoined to crush him. Only when he has been utterly crushed does he face clearly what he has been.

Bulstrode's disgrace is shattering and complete: it is what we have expected and dreaded for him, and what we feel, in a sense, he deserves. Since he is older than Lydgate, and already prosperously established, his idea of himself is more firmly rooted, and he is more dependent on the good opinion of others. He therefore has further to fall, and his fall is greater. Lydgate is partly rescued by Dorothea, but of Bulstrode's professional and social life, almost nothing remains.

A contrast of detail.

In one important respect, however, the contrast is in Bulstrode's favour, and that is in the faithful devotion of his wife. In her everyday life Mrs Bulstrode is rather an ordinary little woman, but in her capacity to face the truth about her husband and to accept him as he is, she achieves a greatness close to that of Dorothea. She shares with Dorothea a refusal to disguise the truth, and a certainty about where her duty lies; but for her, too, the acceptance of her husband in a new light takes time and resolution and suffering.

But this imperfectly-taught woman, whose phrases and habits were an odd patchwork, had a loyal spirit within her. The man whose prosperity she had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly cherished her - now that punishment

had befallen him it was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him. There is a forsaking which still sits at the same board and lies on the same couch with the forsaken soul, withering it the more by unloving proximity. She knew, when she locked her door, that she should unlock it ready to go down to her unhappy husband and espouse his sorrow, and say of his guilt, I will mourn and not reproach. But she needed time to gather up her strength; she needed to sob out her farewell to all the gladness and pride of her life. When she had resolved to go down, she prepared herself by some little acts which might seem mere folly to a hard onlooker; they were her way of expressing to all spectators visible or invisible that she had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation. She took off all her ornaments and put on a plain black gown, and instead of wearing her much-adorned cap and large bows of hair, she brushed her hair down and put on a plain bonnet-cap, which made her look suddenly like an early Methodist.

Vol. II, Ch. 74, pp. 287-288.

Like Dorothea on another occasion, Mrs Bulstrode puts on fresh garments, symbolising the new self she has become, and indicating her altered relationship with the world around her. The renewal of her love for her husband in their changed circumstances is in direct contrast to Rosamond's failure towards Lydgate: 'It was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him.' And in the general qualifying statement that follows, Rosamond's behaviour is anticipated: 'There is a forsaking which still sits at the same board and lies on the same couch with the forsaken soul, withering it the more by unloving proximity.'

This part of Bulstrode's story is developed in more detail than the mythos strictly requires; but it is vitally interesting both intrinsically and in its relation to an important theme in the other stories. It serves to emphasise the role of the wife in the other three stories, gaining additional depth from the reader's prior interest in the theme, and making an important contribution to the richness of texture in Middlemarch.

Other minor contrasts.

A number of other characters who play relatively minor parts in the four stories nevertheless contribute to the theme in the way that Mrs Bulstrode does. Celia is a clear example. Totally unlike Dorothea, she appears to represent the extreme of domestic femininity which Dorothea can never reach. Dorothea needs, at the outset, to become more conscious of herself as an emotional and sexual being, and more willing to take account of her own nature. Celia is justifiably critical of her spiritual pretensions, and understandably resentful of her authority; and we are inclined, briefly, to admit the validity of her views.

Yet Celia is soon proved to be only shallowly feminine. Happy in her marriage, and very successful after the fashion of the world, she is too limited in imagination to see beyond the standards of the world. More complaisant than Rosamond, and therefore less harmful, she nevertheless shares some of Rosamond's limitations. Like Rosamond's, her speech shows an absence of metaphor, and her thought turns mainly on social and domestic conventions.

'It would be very nice, though, if he were a Viscount - and his lordship's little tooth coming through! He might have been, if James had been an earl.'

Vol. II, Ch. 84, p. 343.

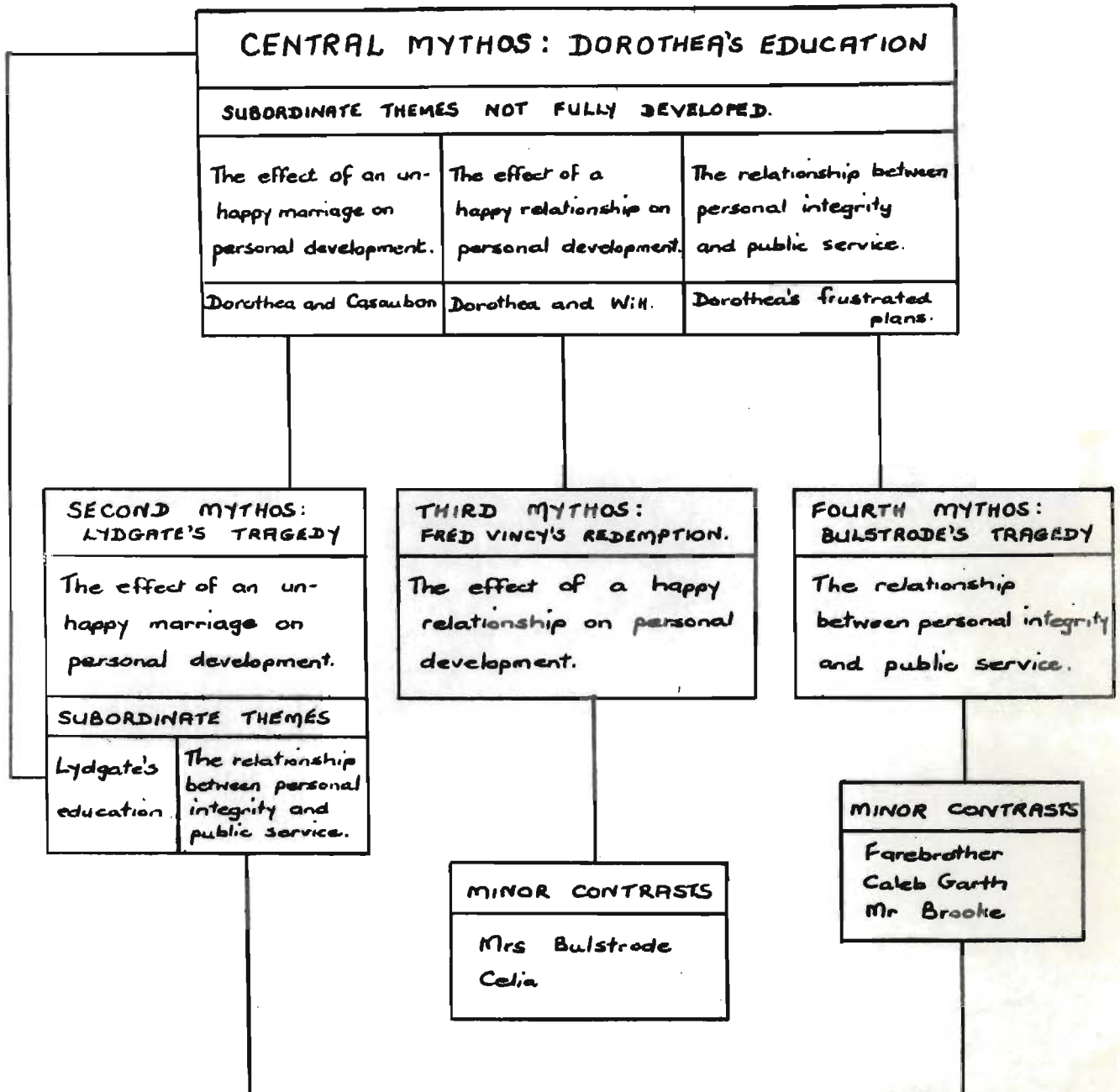
Playful though this remark is, like almost everything Celia says it affirms her uncritical place in conservative English society, in the world of Sir James Chettam, of Mrs Cadwallader, and of the Dowager Lady Chettam. It is the world of which Will Ladislaw is the antithesis, and which Dorothea, in choosing to marry him, finally rejects. That Celia is so happy in it convinces us that Dorothea never could be, and that having failed to find fulfilment in emulating the sacrifices of Milton's daughters, she will not find it in this direction either, but in a way more independent, positive and challenging.

Another character relating very closely to one of the main themes is Caleb Garth. Garth's interest in public service takes a very different form from either Dorothea's or Lydgate's - and he is candidly critical of Bulstrode's. This interest is practical rather than theoretic, expressing itself as a respect for useful work of all kinds, and as a personal zest for a job well done. His recognition that he does not manage money well frees him to enjoy his work as an end rather than a means, and leaves him content to be relatively poor. In this respect he is a contrast to Bulstrode, as he is in his easy-going tolerance of others; he is described as 'one of those rare men who are rigid to themselves and indulgent to others'. (Vol. I, Ch. 23, p. 203.) He also embodies the combination of integrity and hard work, which is the ideal towards which Fred turns after relinquishing his hopes of a fortune and his flirtation with the Church.

Brooke is the other figure whose aspirations and motives throw into relief the virtues of the main characters. Political reform might reasonably be expected to remedy some of the causes of the ills which concern Dorothea and Ladislav; Brooke's opportunities are there, and he is not hampered by poverty. But his motivation is a kind of parody of Dorothea's search for a vocation and of Lydgate's ambition. He wishes to redeem his dilatory past by making a name for himself, by 'becoming something'. 'I was too indolent, you know: else I might have been anywhere at one time.' (Vol. I, Ch. 9, p. 67.)

He claims broad experience and tolerance, having 'gone into' almost everything at some time; but his mind is so shallow and unselective that he sees no relationships and grasps no principles. In this he seems to be the antithesis of the bigoted Bulstrode, but he is no more admirable, for his opinions, like Bulstrode's principles, are no more than prejudices, and his attempts at 'broad-mindedness' simply result in contradictions. He is quite capable of supporting Reform and wishing at the same time that someone would bestow a pocket-borough on Ladislav. His inconsistencies usually appear in a humorous light; their serious effect is to show up by contrast the intelligent grasp of Ladislav.

The relationship of the four stories in Middlemarch.



The relationship of the four stories.

The hierarchical structure of Middlemarch can be simply represented in diagrammatic form. (See p. 128.) This diagram cannot do justice to the vitality and complexity of the novel, since it reduces and simplifies. It does, however, clarify the thematic relationship of the four stories, and show that the principle on which they are unified is the transference of a theme from a subordinate position in one story to a central position in another. Once this principle is understood, it is possible to see how the book can be a treasure-house of details without being an indifferent whole.

Each separate mythos is a process, in the sense that some kind of important change takes place for the protagonist of each story. Each mythos also evokes a process in the reader, who becomes involved in a dynamic pattern of sympathetic emotion in response to the movement of the story. Yet there are relationships between one such pattern of response and another. If we ask what we care most about in relation to each of the four protagonists, what we hope or fear for them, we find that it is different in each case, but recognizably like something that has been raised as a secondary concern in at least one of the other stories. That Dorothea should learn to know herself in order to come into her full maturity as a woman is the hope to which the reader is moved in the first story; but when we come to Lydgate, and follow sympathetically the consequences of his errors, we find that we have already experienced a similar dread in following that part of Dorothea's story which involves her marriage to Casaubon. In the same way, Fred's development in response to Mary is additionally interesting because we are peripherally aware of a similar process taking place in Will, and of Lydgate's frequently expressed need for the same kind of support from Rosamond. And in the undermining of Bulstrode's public morality by his private dishonesty there are connections with all the other three stories, which help to put into an ordered perspective Dorothea's renunciation of her fortune,

Lydgate's financial success at the price of his moral failure, and Fred's relinquishment of his gentlemanly ambitions and clerical intentions.

This impression of an ordered perspective is perhaps the most important effect of the unusually complex organization of material in Middlemarch. It is the dimension that the separate stories do not have, though with skilful editing they could be abstracted from the whole and told for their own sake. The total effect of Middlemarch is entirely in keeping with the author's intention, evident in all her work, that the reader should see general truth in particular situations, but that he should be aware of the limited usefulness of such generalizations, 'unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot'.¹

The world of Middlemarch is both recognizable in its resemblance to the real world, and internally consistent with itself. Two of its recognizable and consistent features are the multiplicity of possible responses in any given situation, and the close connection of the actual response to personal character. The resemblance between one situation and another is always modified by the unique factor, the nature of the person facing the situation. The issue of such a situation is predictable only in so far as that nature is known - which, within the world of Middlemarch, as in life, is always incompletely. Its significance is determined by the point of view of the person involved; and this, too, must be at least partly hidden from the onlooker. Where the reader knows more than the onlooker, where he is given such insight into the mind of a protagonist that he is able both to predict response and to judge significance, he is at the same time aware both of the arbitrary appearance, to the onlooker, of the response he is witnessing, and of the shifting nature of significance. While any narrative that makes use of more than one point of view creates the same kind of multiple vision, Middlemarch, with its concentration on four protagonists and its many glimpses into other minds, achieves the effect particularly markedly, giving us, over

1. The Mill on the Floss, Book 7, Ch. 2, p. 530.

and above and through the particular stories, the author's interpretation of her world.

It is a world of separate centres of consciousness, of individual points of view from which the events and people which comprise human experience take on a unique order and significance. Some of the imagery points to this relativity:

Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection.

Vol. I, Ch. 27, p. 232.

Several of the narrator's comments tend in the same direction:

In spite of the blinking eyes and white moles objectionable to Celia, and the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James, Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungred like the rest of us.

Vol. I, Ch. 29, p. 245.

The inevitable egocentricity of the vision makes the world potentially a selfish one, since if people are seen only as factors significant to one's own situation it is natural that they should be accepted and even deliberately used as such. Casaubon, Rosamond, and Bulstrode all use people in this way; and all, as we have seen, rationalize their attitude by reference to the notion of a providence especially benevolent towards themselves. To accept the centrality of one's own position in the universe is both easy and natural.

Yet this world of unique points of view and interlocking experience is shown in Middlemarch to be, though not entirely knowable, essentially sharable. To recognize the existence of an equivalent centre of self is to transcend one's natural egocentricity or 'moral stupidity'. It requires a courageous honesty involving both the imagination and the will; it is therefore often painful, and yet it is necessary for moral growth and spiritual health. It is the vital capacity in the spiritual lives of Dorothea and Mary Garth and Farebrother, and its absence makes Rosamond and Casaubon and Bulstrode spiritually dead. In Middlemarch the recognition of the half-apprehended mystery of the other person is not only possible; it is essential for spiritual survival.

The world of Middlemarch corresponds very closely to the world in which George Eliot believed, and for which she wrote. It is a world in which lover and teacher and artist all serve the same end, that of

'amplifying and extending our contact
with our fellow-men beyond the bounds
of our personal lot'.¹

1. George Eliot. 'The Natural History of German Life: Riehl',
Westminster Review, 66 (July 1856), 54.

CHAPTER 9

DANIEL DERONDA (i)

Gwendolen Harleth : A mythos of character change.

I have had some very interesting letters both from Jews and from Christians about *Deronda*. Part of the scene at the club is translated into Hebrew in a German-Jewish newspaper. On the other hand a Christian (highly accomplished) thanks me for embodying the principles by which Christ wrought and will conquer. This is better than the laudation of readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there.

George Eliot, in a letter to Mme Eugène Bodichon.

Haight, The George Eliot Letters, VI, p. 290.

Theme and Structure.

Since Leavis's suggestion, (happily later retracted) that Gwendolen Harleth's story might profitably be separated from the rest of the novel, it has been usual to think of Daniel Deronda as consisting of a 'good half' and a 'bad half'. While there are perhaps grounds for evaluating the two parts differently, the habit of thinking of them as separate or separable can only be misleading. It obscures the significant differences between the two stories by implying that the author tried to do the same thing in both, with different degrees of success; and it obscures the significant connections which exist between them, and which add considerably to the interest of the whole.

In conception, the novel shows a return to the two-part structure of Adam Bede and Silas Marner, in which two protagonists work out opposing or complementary problems. In these two works, as in all the rest of the novels, one story clearly predominates, the other being placed in a subordinate relation to it. In Daniel Deronda, however, attention seems to be equally divided, and the book might be said to have, in the strict sense of the term, a double mythos. Gwendolen and Deronda call forth different kinds of interest, because there is a fundamental difference in the kind of thing that happens to each, but the amount of attention and sympathy required of the reader is much the same in each case. The first problem confronting the formal critic is to discover by what structural principle the two stories are united.

That the mythos of Gwendolen's story is one of moral change hardly needs demonstrating: the development of her conscience is clearly central to her part of the novel, and all the details conspire to sustain the reader's interest in this process. In relation to this process, Deronda himself is a detail, though an important one. Like Felix Holt in relation to Esther Lyon, he

1. The Great Tradition, pp. 93-139.

In his 'Introduction' to the Harper Colophon edition of Daniel Deronda, p. xiv, Leavis admits, 'in the re-reading that preceded the present note, my already growing sense that the surgery of disjunction would be a less simple and effective one than I had

plays a double role, representing in Gwendolen's eyes the new way of life towards which she strives, and becoming the chief agent through whom the change is effected. Unlike the case of Felix and Esther, however, there is no real correspondence between Deronda's needs and Gwendolen's, and the conventional ending of a marriage between the two main characters would be no satisfactory resolution for either. Gwendolen's story moves towards her attainment of moral independence, and Deronda's painful leave-taking of her, so like a cruel abandonment, is his last active contribution to her education. To learn to work out her new life of moral responsibility without reference to him is the necessary completion of the process of her growth.

Deronda's story is more problematical, partly because it does not lend itself to realism in the same way as Gwendolen's does. Yet its pattern is a familiar one. The mythos is one of self-discovery, involving for Deronda a discovery of his identity, for which his Jewishness is a symbol; and this discovery effects in him a readjustment of his relationships and a reassessment of his duties. The process is something like Dorothea's awakening in Middlemarch, except that Deronda has the educational advantages which Dorothea is conscious of lacking, and instead of having to grow out of a system of self-imposed principles into a more flexible and responsive attitude, he has difficulty in finding any principle by which to direct his responses both to the needs which he sees around him, and to the claims which his receptivity tends to encourage. His problem, partly caused (as well as symbolised) by his bewilderment about his early history, is the absence of any central intention in his life. While he is uncertain of his identity, he is uncertain of his proper attitude to the world around him, and he tends to assume a role which is not quite genuine, and which involves a certain straining of himself to fit a pattern. The danger of this role is that he will dissipate his energies by spreading them too widely, and break the continuity of his own life by his constant involvement in the lives of others without recognition of his own

needs. While he retains such a role he cannot be fully himself, and he is not able to affirm his connections with common humanity. It is my intention to show in chapter 12 that part at least of Deronda's 'woodenness' and 'unreality' belong to this role, and that far from being an indication that George Eliot has idealized him uncritically, this element in him is often a feature of the self-idealization from which he needs to be redeemed. He needs, as he himself comes to see, 'to escape standing as a critic outside the activities of men, stiffened into the ridiculous attitude of self-assigned superiority'. (Ch. 37, p. 353.)

The antithetical problems of Gwendolen and Deronda predispose them towards each other in a way that is both interesting and complicated. The complications arise from the fact that it both includes and transcends a sexual attraction, and that not a simple one, but one which is sublimated and transformed by the attitudes of each towards the opposite sex. Deronda, because of his confused feelings towards his unknown mother, tends to see women in a romantic light, and to feel that they require his protection and chivalry. Gwendolen, in need of some kind of priest figure to strengthen her wavering resolve (and knowing neither father nor God), is only too willing to claim the help that Deronda seems to offer, and to put him in the role for which he has cast himself. As her other relationships make apparent, she has a strong repugnance towards physical contact with men, and this seems to put her at a safe distance from Deronda, as his chivalry appears to remove him from danger to her: each senses a safeness in the other. The possibility of this becoming an 'ordinary flirtation' is equally out of the question for both, and the possibility that the claims of a spiritual dependence may be even more complex and demanding than those of any sexual relationship, has not yet fallen within the experience of either. While it is a kind of love relationship that develops between them, it is one in which each fits into a role determined by the needs of the other. This element of distortion causes a painful discrepancy between the significance of the relationship

for Gwendolen and its significance for Deronda in the light of his self-discovery.

The importance of the relationship is emphasised in the opening chapters. Beginning 'in medias res', we see Deronda watching Gwendolen gamble at Leubronn:

Deronda's first thought when his eyes fell on this scene of dull, gas-poisoned absorption was that the gambling of Spanish shepherd-boys had seemed to him more enviable: - so far Rousseau might be justified in maintaining that art and science had done a poor service to mankind. But suddenly he felt the moment become dramatic. His attention was arrested by a young lady who, standing at an angle not far from him, was the last to whom his eyes travelled. She was bending and speaking English to a middle-aged lady seated at play beside her; but the next instant she returned to her play, and showed the full height of a graceful figure, with a face which might possibly be looked at without admiration, but could hardly be passed with indifference.

The inward debate which she raised in Deronda gave to his eyes a growing expression of scrutiny, tending farther and farther away from the glow of mingled undefined sensibilities forming admiration. At one moment they followed the movements of the figure, of the arms and hands, as this problematic sylph bent forward to deposit her stake with an air of firm choice; and the next they returned to the face which, at present unaffected by beholders, was directed steadily towards the game. The sylph was a winner; and as her taper fingers, delicately gloved in pale-grey, were adjusting the coins which had been pushed towards her in order to pass them back again to the winning point, she looked round her 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.

p. 3

Seeing Gwendolen through Deronda's mind, we are aware both of her proud recklessness, and of his critical interest. Then there is a sudden shift in point of view:

But in the course of that survey her eyes met Deronda's, and instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested - how long? 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. It did not bring the blood to her cheeks, but sent it away from her lips. She controlled herself by the help of an inward defiance, and without other sign of emotion than this lip-paleness turned to her play.

pp. 3 - 4.

Already she is responding to his interest, and is uncomfortable and defiant under his scrutiny. In Chapter 2 Deronda redeems and returns her pawned necklace, and the relationship is established, both psychologically and symbolically: he has assumed the role of protector, and she is thinking of him, at this stage resentfully, as a disapproving critic.

As in Silas Marner, the order of narration is significant. After this account of their first encounter, Chapters 3 - 14 take us back in time to Gwendolen's background and circumstances, while Chapters 16 - 20 outline Deronda's early years. While there is sufficient personal history to establish the complex situations of both protagonists, the main emphasis is on their respective attitudes to themselves and to life. We learn that Gwendolen's gambling expresses an habitual attitude of confidence and recklessness that affects even her most serious choices, while Deronda's redemption of the necklace is another characteristic action in a life that is crowded with similar acts of chivalry. The order of narration draws attention to the convergence of these two very different attitudes.

Gwendolen Harleth: Character and background.

After the suggestive opening chapters, the rest of Book I is devoted to Gwendolen's early history, and what we have already

glimpsed in her as an attitude to life is accounted for, and developed more fully. To begin with, we learn that her affections are still bound up exclusively with her indulgent mother, and that no one has so far shaken the complacent sense of superiority which belongs in infancy to the favourite child of such a mother. She has a natural but excessive pleasure in admiration, and an immature need to be the centre of attention:

She meant to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner; or rather, whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living, seemed pleasant to her fancy.

'Gwendolen will not rest without having the world at her feet,' said Miss Merry, the meek governess: - hyperbolical words which have long come to carry the most moderate meanings; for who has not heard of private persons having the world at their feet in the shape of some half-dozen items of flattering regard generally known in a genteel suburb? And words could hardly be too wide or vague to indicate the prospect that made a hazy largeness about poor Gwendolen on the heights of her young self-exultation. Other people allowed themselves to be made slaves of, and to have their lives blown hither and thither like empty ships in which no will was present: it was not to be so with her, she would no longer be sacrificed to creatures worth less than herself, but would make the very best of the chances that life offered her, and conquer circumstance by her exceptional cleverness. Certainly, to be settled at Offendene, with the notice of Lady Brackenshaw, the archery club, and invitations to dine with the Arrowpoints, as the highest lights in her scenery, was not a position that seemed to offer remarkable chances; but Gwendolen's confidence lay chiefly in herself. She felt well equipped for the mastery of life. With regard to much in her lot hitherto, she held herself rather hardly dealt with, but as to her "education" she would have admitted that it had left her under no disadvantages. In the schoolroom, her quick mind had taken readily that strong starch of unexplained rules and disconnected facts which saves ignorance from any painful sense of liness; and what remained of all things knowable,

she was conscious of being sufficiently acquainted with through novels, plays, and poems. About her French and music, the two justifying accomplishments of a young lady, she felt no ground for uneasiness; and when to all these qualifications, negative and positive, we add the spontaneous sense of capability some happy persons are born with, so that any subject they turn attention to impresses them with their own power of forming a correct judgment on it, who can wonder if Gwendolen felt ready to manage her own destiny?

Ch. 4, pp. 26 - 27.

With all the irony implicit in her sense of being 'well equipped for the mastery of life', there is a degree of amused sympathy for Gwendolen here. That the ironic humour is directed at least as much against her naivety as against her complacency appears from the specification of the details of the life to be mastered - 'the notice of Lady Brackenshaw, the archery club, and invitations to dine with the Arrowpoints' - and of the elements of the equipment, 'her French and music'. Gwendolen's obliviousness of the possible complexities of life, while it makes her careless of other people's sufferings, gives her in social situations an attractive energy and confidence. One can see why Rex Gascoigne falls in love with her, why Grandcourt wants her as a wife, and why Deronda is interested in her. Our perception of her attractiveness and the fact of Rex's love contribute to the important recognition that though she cannot at this stage love, she can be loved, and is not likely to want for suitors, even after Deronda's departure. She clearly has sufficient personal resources to make a new beginning possible.

Not everything about Gwendolen is attractive, however. There is a selfishness that can be carried to cruel extremes, such as the killing of her sister's canary because of its interruption of her singing. Her memory of this episode makes her wince, and in her calculated restraint of this potential violence there is an element of self-preservation:

Gwendolen's nature was not remorseless, but she liked to make her penances easy, and now that she was twenty and more, some of her native force had turned into a self-control by which she guarded herself from potential humiliation.

Ch. 3, p. 15.

Related to this potential cruelty, but not consciously associated with it until much later, are her fits of spiritual dread. They begin as purely emotional experiences, and are associated with the dark unformulated terrors of childhood; they are remedied, even in her adult years, by her being taken into her mother's bed, or by a conscious return to 'her usual world in which her will was of some avail' and in which she 'felt the possibility of winning empire'. (Ch. 6, p. 45.) They become associated, after her engagement to Grandcourt, with the wrong that she feels she is doing Lydia Glasher and her children; but their pre-existence explains the force with which her newly developing conscience plagues her, and the desperate tenacity with which, conscious of guilt and feeling herself inexplicably judged, she fixes on Deronda as the embodiment of this judging force.

Another important aspect of Gwendolen's character, carefully accounted for by the author without any self-analysis on Gwendolen's part, is her sexual unresponsiveness. It seems to be related to her having remained the centre of her mother's attention so long past infancy, and to her feeling much happier when her 'unlovable stepfather' was not at home.

'Why did you marry again, mamma? It would have been nicer if you had not.'

Ch. 3, p. 14.

As well as instinctively shrinking from the touch of a man, as she does with both Rex and Grandcourt, she is extraordinarily blank about the emotional complexities of love. Her treatment of Rex is an expression, not of deliberate cruelty, but of a vast gap in her experience:

She put her chestnut to a canter, and Rex had no choice but to follow her. Still he felt encouraged. Gwendolen was perfectly aware that her cousin was in love with her; but she had no idea that the matter was of any consequence, having never had the slightest visitation of painful love herself. She wished the small romance of Rex's devotion to fill up the time of his stay at Pennicote, and to avoid explanations which would bring it to an untimely end. Besides, she objected, with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to. With all her imaginative delight in being adored, there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her.

Ch. 7, pp. 49 - 50.

In Gwendolen's dealings with Rex (as in her dealings with everyone else at this time) she shows a great failure of sensibility. Not only does she not know how he feels, but she is unable to imagine how he might feel. Though she obviously has some imaginative capacity, she has not been accustomed to employ it in surmise about other people's feelings; except in what relates to herself, it remains largely undeveloped. It is in this imaginative failure that George Eliot sees the source of Gwendolen's moral failure; and it is through the growth of a sympathetic imagination that her moral development is to begin.

The imaginative failure, in turn, has its source at least partly in the unsettled conditions of Gwendolen's childhood. She has not learned to love even places and objects and animals, and so the process of the widening of her sympathies which George Eliot sees as the natural form of moral education has not yet begun. The connection is made explicit at the beginning of Chapter 3:

Pity that Offendene was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories! A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early

home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood. At five years old, mortals are not prepared to be citizens of the world, to be stimulated by abstract nouns, to soar above preference into impartiality; and that prejudice in favour of milk with which we blindly begin, is a type of the way body and soul must get nourished at least for a time. The best introduction to astronomy is to think of the nightly heavens as a little lot of stars belonging to one's own homestead.

But this blessed persistence in which affection can take root had been wanting in Gwendolen's life.

pp. 12 - 13.

In her conception of the details of Gwendolen's character, as in Silas Marner, George Eliot shows very clearly her perception that moral education is primarily an emotional process, rather than an intellectual or a voluntary one. It requires the intelligence and the will, certainly, and it extends to include difficult and sometimes unrewarding duties, but it begins with the emotions. Gwendolen's state, on her arrival at Offendene, consists in an infantile amorality rather than any positive immorality. That she should learn to love someone - and it is Daniel Deronda who happens to attract her - is more necessary to her moral development than any guidance he can give her about where her duty lies. It is of course this that Deronda does not realize until it is too late to retreat, because her need to love is disguised both by her repression of sexuality and by the formidable moral problems which are the immediate cause of her unhappiness. The first book, 'The Spoiled Child', prepares very thoroughly both for Gwendolen's subsequent development and for the complications which ensue for Deronda.

Events and complexities.

The event that begins a chain of alterations in the significance of life for Gwendolen is her meeting with Grandcourt. At their first meeting, before there is any serious question of a proposal of marriage from him, she weighs up his advantages, showing a response like her first response to Offendene, which was that it would be 'a good background for anything', and that no one need be ashamed of living there. (p. 15) Like the house, Grandcourt is assessed negatively, and as a background: as perhaps 'less disagreeable as a husband than other men, and not likely to interfere with his wife's preferences'. (Ch. 11, p. 80.) She sees him only in terms of his usefulness to her: there is an entire failure to recognize him as an independent personality - a failure which is later to be repeated in her relations with Deronda.

There are two stages in Gwendolen's conflict over Grandcourt; or perhaps they are better regarded as two separate conflicts. The first is between her conscious social ambition and her instinctive distaste for marriage; it expresses itself in apparently trivial coquetry, and makes her feel that her decision, when she makes it, will have the arbitrariness of the outcome of a game of chance. The second and more serious conflict begins after her return from Leubronn, when she has discovered in herself a conscientious scruple against marrying Grandcourt, and when at the same time her family's financial and social destitution suddenly makes it very desirable that she should do so. Superimposed upon the first conflict is this second one, between conscience and expedience. From both points of view, marriage with Grandcourt threatens her integrity, and for the first time her desire for a situation proper to her imagined role comes into conflict with a little-understood principle in herself. Both are moral conflicts, although it is only the second which she recognizes as such. In dividing Gwendolen's uncertainty in this way, George Eliot implies that it is not simply the existence of Lydia Glasher and her children

that makes the marriage a moral disaster: it is also the violence done to Gwendolen's own nature.

The indecision in her mind during the first conflict shows itself clearly in the contradiction between her reasoning and her behaviour; she finds herself evading Grandcourt even when she has decided rationally that she will accept him.

'It is all coquetting,' thought Grandcourt; 'the next time I beckon she will come down.'

It seemed to him likely that this final beckoning might happen the very next day, when there was to be a picnic archery meeting in Cardell Chase, according to the plan projected on the evening of the ball.

Even in Gwendolen's mind that result was one of two likelihoods that presented themselves alternately, one of two decisions towards which she was being precipitated, as if they were two sides of a boundary-line, and she did not know on which she should fall. This subjection to a possible self, a self not to be absolutely predicted about, caused her some astonishment and terror: her favourite key of life - doing as she liked - seemed to fail her, and she could not foresee what at a given moment she might like to do. The prospect of marrying Grandcourt really seemed more attractive to her than she had believed beforehand that any marriage could be: the dignities, the luxuries, the power of doing a great deal of what she liked to do, which had now come close to her, and within her choice to secure or to lose, took hold of her nature as if it had been the strong odour of what she had only imagined and longed for before. And Grandcourt himself? He seemed as little of a flaw in his fortunes as a lover and husband could possibly be. 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. Certainly, with all her perspicacity, and all the reading which seemed to her mamma dangerously instructive, her judgment was consciously a little at fault before Grandcourt. He was adorably quiet and free from absurdities - he would be a husband to suit with the best appearance a woman could make. But what else was he? He had been everywhere, and seen everything. That was desirable, and especially gratifying as a preamble to his supreme preference

for Gwendolen Harleth. He did not appear to enjoy anything much. That was not necessary: and the less he had of particular tastes or desires, the more freedom his wife was likely to have in following hers. Gwendolen conceived that after marriage she would most probably be able to manage him thoroughly... And on the whole she wished to marry him; he suited her purpose; her prevailing, deliberate intention was, to accept him.

But was she going to fulfil her deliberate intention? She began to be afraid of herself, and to find out a certain difficulty in doing as she liked. Already her assertion of independence in evading his advances had been carried farther than was necessary, and she was thinking with some anxiety what she might do on the next occasion.

Ch. 13, pp. 99-100.

Gwendolen's reasoning here is interesting in its revelation of her ignorance both of the demands generally likely to be made by marriage and of those belonging particularly to marriage with Grandcourt. She sees marriage as offering 'the dignities, the luxuries, the power of doing a great deal of what she liked to do'; and herself playing a major role with a husband who would 'fold his arms and give her his countenance without looking ridiculous'. She fails not only to recognize the particular person that Grandcourt is, but even to recognize him as a person at all. He appears simply as an object on the periphery of her life: decorative, useful, and perhaps even necessary, but able to be managed as she manages her horses. For all Gwendolen's dislike of her step-father, it is plain that she is unaware, at least on a conscious level, of the possible pressures of one personality upon another, and of the adjustments required in marriage. She sees marriage as her mother and uncle have encouraged her to see it: as an institution providing a social structure within which she can pursue her life as before, but with more freedom, more scope, and a wider audience. Her assessment of Grandcourt as 'adorably quiet' and her assignment of him to a suitably passive role gain much in irony because we have already seen his petulance towards

Lush and his delight in making his dog jealous; and because we know that he is contra-suggestive, making up his mind to marry Gwendolen because Lush suggests his marrying Catherine Arrowpoint, pursuing her when she begins to resist him, and losing interest when she seems to be yielding. To the reader it is perfectly clear that Grandcourt will be neither adorable nor quiet.

Most important of all, however, is the distaste for men and marriage that, running counter to Gwendolen's conscious views, is revealed in her asides. 'The prospect of marrying Grandcourt really seemed more attractive to her than she had believed beforehand that any marriage could be'; and 'He seemed as little of a flaw in his fortunes, as a lover and husband could possibly be'. (My underlining.) This is the standard by which Grandcourt is measured: marriage to any man must necessarily be disagreeable, but marriage to Grandcourt seems likely to be less disagreeable than other marriages. It gradually emerges that what distinguishes him thus from other men is his absence of demonstrativeness: he is not 'ridiculous' in the sense in which Gwendolen finds both Mr Middleton and Rex Gascoigne ridiculous. Since Grandcourt's coolness of manner expresses pride and absence of love rather than any lack of sexuality, such attraction as Gwendolen does feel for him at this stage contains in double measure the seeds of her later aversion.

In all her calculations over this marriage, Gwendolen displays not only an ignorance, common for her age and time, of the complexities of her own sexuality, but a blankness, already shown in her treatment of Rex, about the dimension of love in human relationships. Knowing nothing either of the misery probably to be suffered or of the joy certain to be missed in a marriage without love, she sees her future in terms of the ordinary world she knows. Fulfilment seems to her to lie entirely in admiration, and the success of a marriage in its capacity for providing sufficient and proper occasions for that admiration. That we do not on this account begin to feel sorry for Grandcourt is due to George Eliot's skill in withholding all sympathy from her

presentation of him, and in suggesting that among his complicated motives in choosing Gwendolen as a wife, the desire for her love does not feature.

Up to the point of her hasty return from Leubronn, not much sympathy is required of the reader for Gwendolen herself, although she is for a large part of these chapters the centre of interest. We are by this time intensely aware of her weaknesses, but they are such that hitherto it has been mainly other people who have suffered from them. Even her meeting with Lydia Glasher at the Whispering Stones serves more to confirm her instinctive physical antipathy to Grandcourt, and more to give rational ground to her prejudice against marriage, than it does to destroy any source of real happiness to her. Her disillusionment, unlike Dorothea's, comes before her marriage; and since it destroys a belief in Grandcourt's relative harmlessness rather than in any positive virtues, it is not, in itself, nearly as painful as Dorothea's. It is the process of disillusionment in herself that really evokes our sympathy, even though all that we have learned of Gwendolen so far has pointed to the necessity of some such change in her.

The process begins with her gloomy arrival at Offendene and her gradual discovery that the situation is very much worse than her limited imagination has represented. She finds that instead of 'living abroad', which she has taken to be the economical alternative to living at Offendene, her family is to move into Sawyer's Cottage, while she herself has the choice of teaching in a girls' boarding school or becoming a governess. There is real hardship involved in both these positions, quite apart from their being unfitting backgrounds for a 'princess in exile'; and having awakened to the fact that her material circumstances will not necessarily arrange themselves for her convenience, Gwendolen turns to her belief in her talents, and sends for Herr Klesmer to advise her.

Her appeal to Klesmer both prefigures and contrasts with her subsequent appeal to Deronda. Klesmer's handling of Gwendolen's

problem is admirably firm and kind; she does not easily relinquish her belief in her own talent, and he has to persevere to make her see her prospects clearly. Though she is hurt by his truthfulness, it is perceptibly a necessary truthfulness. Partly because of the specific nature of the questions she asks him, but partly also because of his own temperament and sensitivity, Klesmer can answer firmly and with particularity, whereas Deronda, responding to less specific and more obscurely framed questions, can only answer in generalities. Like Deronda, Klesmer comes to Gwendolen's aid when he is very preoccupied with his own affairs; but unlike Deronda, he is able to preserve his detachment, and is quick to clarify his own position. At the same time he offers very clearly defined practical help, in contrast to the limitless moral support that Deronda seems to promise, and from which he cannot easily extricate himself. The problems which Gwendolen poses in each of these two appeals are admittedly very different, and, as I shall show later, Deronda's injury of Gwendolen (in so far as it is an injury) arises as much from the nature of her needs as it does from his inadequacy. There is, however, enough similarity between the two situations to draw attention to their contrasts, and both men play an important part in Gwendolen's moral growth.

For the reader, the interview with Klesmer initiates a response of serious sympathy with Gwendolen which deepens as she faces not only the painfulness of her predicament, but her own helplessness.

For the first time since her consciousness began, she was having a vision of herself on the common level, and had lost the innate sense that there were reasons why she should not be slighted, elbowed, jostled - treated like a passenger with a third-class ticket, in spite of private objections on her own part. She did not move about; the prospects begotten by disappointment were too oppressively preoccupying; she threw herself into the shadiest corner of a settee, and pressed her fingers over her burning eyelids. Every word that Klesmer had said seemed to have been branded into her memory, as most words are which bring with them a new set of impressions and make an epoch for us. Only a few hours before, the dawning smile of self-contentment rested on her lips as she vaguely imagined a future suited to her wishes: it seemed but the affair of a year

or so for her to become the most approved Juliet of the time; or, if Klesmer encouraged her idea of being a singer, to proceed by more gradual steps to her place in the opera, while she won money and applause by occasional performances. Why not? At home, at school, among acquaintances, she had been used to have her conscious superiority admitted; and she had moved in a society where everything, from low arithmetic to high art, is of the amateur kind politely supposed to fall short of perfection only because gentlemen and ladies are not obliged to do more than they like - otherwise they would probably give forth abler writings and show themselves more commanding artists than any the world is at present obliged to put up with. The self-confident visions that had beguiled her were not of a highly exceptional kind; and she had at least shown some rationality in consulting the person who knew the most and had flattered her the least. In asking Klesmer's advice, however, she had rather been borne up by a belief in his latent admiration than bent on knowing anything more unfavourable that might have lain behind his slight objections to her singing; and the truth she had asked for with an expectation that it would be agreeable, had come like a lacerating thong.

Ch. 23, pp. 195-6.

Gwendolen's humiliation on this occasion is intense, and our sympathy is increased by the prospect of further humiliation that her future seems to offer. A career as an artist she now sees to be too costly in either money or personal pride, and likely to end in failure, while the two teaching situations offered her are so contrary to her inclinations that there is small likelihood of her succeeding in either of them even sufficiently to escape humiliation, quite apart from the severe limitation of her freedom that would be involved. In its way, the Mompert situation, now to be accepted as the least of the evils, promises to be as much a violation of one part of Gwendolen's nature as her marriage to Grandcourt is of the other part. It is when she is weeping over her recognition of this that her mother brings her a letter from Grandcourt that reopens her conflict on different ground.

The new complex of forces at work in this second conflict is seen almost in its entirety after her engagement, in her reflections over what she has done.

'And what a position for the wife, Gwendolen!' said Mrs. Gascoigne, 'a great responsibility indeed. But you must lose no time in writing to Mrs. Mompert, Henry. It is a good thing that you have an engagement of marriage to offer as an excuse, else she might feel offended. She is rather a high woman.'

'I am rid of that horror,' thought Gwendolen, to whom the name of Mompert had become a sort of Mumbo-jumbo. She was very silent through the evening, and that night could hardly sleep at all in her little white bed. It was a rarity in her strong youth to be wakeful; and perhaps a still greater rarity for her to be careful that her mother should not know of her restlessness. But her state of mind was altogether new: she who had been used to feel sure of herself, and ready to manage others, had just taken a decisive step which she had beforehand thought that she would not take - nay, perhaps, was bound not to take. She could not go backward now; she liked a great deal of what lay before her; and there was nothing for her to like if she went back. But her resolution was dogged by the shadow of that previous resolve which had at first come as the undoubting movement of her whole being. While she lay on her pillow with wide-open eyes, 'looking on darkness which the blind do see,' 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 - calamity which had ceased to be a mere name for her; and all the infiltrated influences of disregarded religious teaching, as well as the

deeper impressions of something awful and inexorable enveloping her, seemed to concentrate themselves in the vague conception of avenging power. The brilliant position she had longed for, the imagined freedom she would create for herself in marriage, the deliverance from the dull insignificance of her girlhood - all were immediately before her; and yet they had come to her hunger like food with the taint of sacrilege upon it, which she must snatch with terror. In the darkness and loneliness of her little bed, her more resistant self could not act against the first onslaught of dread after her irrevocable decision. That unhappy-faced woman and her children - Grandcourt and his relations with her - kept repeating themselves in her imagination like the clinging memory of a disgrace, and gradually obliterated all other thought, leaving only the consciousness that she had taken those scenes into her life. Her long wakefulness seemed a delirium; a faint, faint light penetrated beside the window-curtain; the chillness increased. She could bear it no longer, and cried, 'Mamma!'

'Yes, dear,' said Mrs. Davilow, immediately, in a wakeful voice.

'Let me come to you.'

Ch. 28, pp. 229-231.

The pressure of the Gascoignes, unavailing in persuading Gwendolen to accept Grandcourt when his intentions were first revealed, now seems to have operated indirectly in their insistence on her acceptance of the Mompert situation. Relief at escaping this is her initial reaction, and the threat of its materializing if she were not to marry Grandcourt is part of what is included in there being 'nothing for her to like if she went back'. So too, we know, are Sawyer's cottage and the sufferings of her mother, towards whom she has already begun to behave with more consideration. Her care not to disturb her mother during her wakeful night is consistent with the new exercise of her sympathy.

'She liked a good deal of what lay before her.' What she does not like, the idea of marriage itself, has receded into insignificance beside the urgency of her other needs. Suddenly the

hardships and indignities of her future years seem to have given way to 'the brilliant position she had longed for, the imagined freedom she would create for herself in marriage, the deliverance from the dull insignificance of her girlhood'. That side of Gwendolen's nature which would have been repressed in her subjection to the Mompert household is after all promised fulfilment, which is all the more desirable to her since her disillusionment by Klesmer.

These are the factors which have inclined her to accept Grandcourt; and in conflict with them are those which are to continue to disturb her peace, even after Grandcourt's death. Her aversion to 'being made love to' does not appear from this passage, but there are reminders of it earlier in her approval of Grandcourt's 'delicate homage' when he proposes to her, and in her having 'no alarm lest he meant to kiss her'. (Ch. 27, p. 226.) This anxiety is for the moment in abeyance, having given way to the complex of fears described in the above passage. This includes alarm at her own unpredictability, and at the lawlessness, the lack of a consistent principle determining her behaviour: 'she was appalled by the idea that she was going to do what once she had started away from with repugnance'. As in her first conflict, she finds that she has been unable to fulfil her deliberate intention, although this time her deliberate intention and her actual response are different. Allied to this fear of something unaccountable in herself, there is a less clearly articulated but more terrifying fear of the consequences of deliberately choosing what she believes to be wrong: she sees her action as having 'the shadowy array of possible calamity behind it - calamity which had ceased to be a mere name for her'.

These fears are vaguely but powerfully related to her recurrent and terrifyingly irrational fits of dread, so that her anticipation of the longed-for brilliance of her marriage is mingled with the preconscious terrors of her childhood nightmares, and seems to have 'come to her hunger like food with the taint of sacrilege upon it, which she must snatch with terror'. Finally,

the haunting vision of Mrs Glasher and her children now gathers to itself this complex of disturbing fears. Already Gwendolen has shown a tendency to invest Mrs Glasher with a generalized significance, having seen her during the encounter at the Whispering Stones as 'some ghastly vision... come to her in a dream, saying "I am a woman's life." ' (Ch. 14, p. 112.) Already, therefore, Mrs Glasher epitomises the yoke of marriage, with its violation of personal freedom and the bitterness of jealous passion; and this is the violation that Gwendolen subconsciously fears she must submit to, perhaps in any marriage. Now, in addition, Mrs Glasher is associated with an injury consciously to be committed by Gwendolen, and therefore with her horror of evil within herself and vengeance without. George Eliot does not specifically make the connection between Gwendolen's fear of sexuality and her attacks of dread, but they are consistent with one another, and together they account for the force which the symbol of Mrs Glasher comes to have for her. At this stage in Gwendolen's emotional life, and at this moment of cold terror, the only appropriate comfort is one that would be offered to a small child:

She could bear it no longer, and cried,
'Mamma!'... 'Let me come to you.'

Daniel Deronda's role in Gwendolen's moral education.

The process by which Mrs Glasher becomes an emotionally charged symbol for Gwendolen is a step in the process by which Daniel Deronda becomes an authority-figure in her life. As we have already seen, his own conduct in the redemption of her necklace has helped to cast him for this role. Now, after her second meeting with Deronda, she learns of his supposed illegitimacy, and believes that, but for this disability, he would be heir to the property which Grandcourt is to inherit after Sir Hugo's death. Thus he, too, becomes associated in her mind with the victims of an injustice with which, by her marriage to Grandcourt, she is about to align herself.

What was he going to be? What sort of life had he before him - he being nothing of any consequence? And with only a little difference in events he might have been as important as Grandcourt, nay - her imagination inevitably went in that direction - might have held the very estates which Grandcourt was to have. But now, Deronda would probably some day see her mistress of the Abbey at Topping, see her bearing the title which would have been his own wife's. 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 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. Perhaps Deronda himself was thinking of these things. Could he know of Mrs. Glasher? If he knew that she knew, he would despise her; but he could have no such knowledge. Would he, without that, despise her for marrying Grandcourt? His possible judgment of her actions was telling on her as importunately as Klesmer's judgment of her powers...

Ch. 29, pp. 248-9.

After this, all Gwendolen's contemplation of her conduct turns on Deronda's supposed judgment of her. What he must think of her, or what he would think if he knew all her circumstances, becomes crucial to what she thinks of herself. He becomes an embodiment of her conscience; or rather, of that world of moral values outside herself to which her conscience is beginning to aspire. Like Mrs Glasher, he is a symbol in Gwendolen's life; but the emotions which surround him are mainly pleasant ones. His kindness and sympathy and his obvious interest in her give her a pleasure as near as anything she has yet experienced to the pleasure of being in love.

'I wish he could know everything about me without my telling him,' was one of her thoughts, as she sat leaning over the end of a couch, supporting her head with her hand, and looking at herself in a

mirror - not in admiration, but in a sad kind of companionship. '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.' Without the aid of sacred ceremony or costume, her feelings had turned this man, only a few years older than herself, into a priest; a sort of trust less rare than the fidelity that guards it. Young reverence for one who is also young is the most coercive of all: there is the same level of temptation, and the higher motive is believed in as a fuller force - not suspected to be a mere residue from weary experience.

But the coercion is often stronger on the one who takes the reverence. Those who trust us educate us. And perhaps in that ideal consecration of Gwendolen's, some education was being prepared for Deronda.

Ch. 35, p. 323.

CHAPTER 10

DANIEL DERONDA (ii)

Daniel Deronda : A mythos of self-discovery.

A mythos of self-discovery.

The education being prepared for Deronda by Gwendolen's exalted trust in him is an important part, but only a part, of a much larger process of reorientation and adjustment that is very different from Gwendolen's moral conversion. There is a tendency among critics to regard Deronda as an embodiment of George Eliot's idea of virtue, speaking in her voice and carrying her approval of all that he does.¹ This view reduces his role in the novel to that of a mere standard of virtue, against which Gwendolen's selfishness is to be judged and her improvement recorded. Such, of course, is the role to which Gwendolen herself assigns him; but it is of the essence of the denouement that she is wrong in doing so, and must recognize that he has a life of his own that is largely outside her experience. He insists on having his own story, as interesting, at least in its conception, as Gwendolen's is.

Chapter 16, with which the review of Deronda's early history begins, describes vividly the moment 'burnt into his life as its chief epoch'; the moment when, questioning his tutor about the number of nephews of popes and cardinals recorded in his history book, he suddenly applies his knowledge of illegitimacy to his own situation.

A new idea had entered his mind, and was beginning to change the aspect of his habitual feelings as happy careless voyagers are changed when the sky suddenly threatens and the thought of danger arises. ... Daniel felt the presence of a new guest who seemed to come with an enigmatic veiled face, and to carry dimly-conjectured, dreaded revelations. The ardour which he had given to the imaginary world in his books suddenly rushed towards his own history and spent its pictorial energy there, explaining what he knew, representing the unknown. The uncle whom

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1. A. V. Dicey, Unsigned review in Nation, October 1876, xxiii, reprinted in Carroll, The Critical Heritage. p. 403.
Henry James's Constantius in 'Daniel Deronda : A Conversation', reprinted in The Critical Heritage. p. 424.
F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, pp. 96-99.
Barbara Hardy, The Novels of George Eliot, pp. 109-110.

he loved very dearly took the aspect of a father who held secrets about him - who had done him a wrong - yes, a wrong: and what had become of his mother, from whom he must have been taken away? - Secrets about which he, Daniel, could never inquire; for to speak or be spoken to about these new thoughts seemed like falling flakes of fire to his imagination. Those who have known an impassioned childhood will understand this dread of utterance about any shame connected with their parents. The impetuous advent of new images took possession of him with the force of fact for the first time told, and left him no immediate power for the reflection that he might be trembling at a fiction of his own. The terrible sense of collision between a strong rush of feeling and the dread of its betrayal, found relief at length in big slow tears, which fell without restraint until the voice of Mr. Fraser was heard saying - 'Daniel, do you see that you are sitting on the bent pages of your book?'

Ch. 16, pp. 123-124.

George Eliot places this psychological shock in Daniel's fourteenth year: it marks the end of his unquestioning trust in Sir Hugo, and therefore the end of his carefree childhood. His imaginative energy is transferred from 'the imaginary world in his books' to his own history, and his adolescence is coloured by a mistaken idea of the circumstances of his birth. The 'collision between a strong rush of feeling and the dread of its betrayal' turns his response to intense inward suffering, which he is at pains to conceal.

There is a good deal of psychological realism in this part of Deronda's story, as there is in the tracing of its subsequent effect on his personality. Convinced that his father has wronged both his mother and him, and inhibited from expressing that conviction by his love for Sir Hugo, Deronda takes the suffering upon himself. Instead of expressing his sense of injury and confronting Sir Hugo with his suspicions, he identifies himself with the innocent victim of what he believes to be his father's misconduct, adopting a sort of Suffering Servant¹ role that is to

1. Isaiah, Ch. 52-53.

distort his responses until he finds out who he is, both literally and psychologically. This is the origin of his altruism, his 'passion for people who are pelted', as Sir Hugo describes it. (Ch. 59, p. 451.) The altruism is not thereby discredited; but it is by no means given the full authorial approval that is often attributed to it. Its origin is shown to lie in a misconception by Deronda himself, and in an emotional conflict to which that misconception has given rise. All that he does, therefore, in the way of sacrificing himself in the interests of others, must be regarded in this qualifying light, that it is not the free expression of his own nature, but the expression of a role assumed under a mistaken impression of his identity and his birth.

Deronda's susceptibility to the sufferings of others shows itself during his adolescence in a tendency to seek friendships in which he gives more than he receives. This is not presented as entirely laudable; there is an implicit criticism in the account of his friendship with Hans Meyrick, who 'seemed to take Deronda as an Olympian who needed nothing'. (Ch. 16, p. 134.)

Deronda was content, and gave Meyrick all the interest he claimed, getting at last a brotherly anxiety about him, looking after him in his erratic moments, and contriving by adroitly delicate devices not only to make up for his friend's lack of pence, but to save him from threatening chances. Such friendship easily becomes tender: the one spreads strong sheltering wings that delight in spreading, the other gets the warm protection which is also a delight. Meyrick was going in for a classical scholarship, and his success, in various ways momentous, was the more probable from the steadying influence of Deronda's friendship.

Ch. 16, pp. 134-135.

Deronda's satisfaction, indeed his pleasure, in being taken advantage of by his charming but thoughtless friend evokes a response of impatience from the reader, and the description of the relationship in terms of 'strong sheltering wings that delight in spreading' is surely meant to suggest a protective-

ness that is not quite appropriate to the situation. Sir Hugo's rebuke after Deronda has missed his scholarship through helping Hans is a transposition into Sir Hugo's tones of a criticism that the reader also feels:

'...And, my dear boy, it is good to be unselfish and generous; but don't carry that too far. It will not do to give yourself to be melted down for the benefit of the tallow-trade; you must know where to find yourself.'

Ch. 16, p. 136.

To know where to find himself is Deronda's problem.

Deronda's attitude to women.

He shows a tendency to assume the role of protector whenever he can. The connection between this tendency and his attitude to suffering in general, and to suffering women in particular, becomes much clearer when the identity of his unknown mother is about to be disclosed, and when he becomes conscious of the shaping force which this mystery has had on his emotional life.

... the words of his mother's letter implied that his filial relation was not to be freed from painful conditions; indeed, singularly enough that letter which had brought his mother nearer as a living reality had thrown her into more remoteness for his affections. The tender yearning after a being whose life might have been the worse for not having his care and love, the image of a mother who had not had all her dues whether of reverence or compassion, had long been secretly present with him in his observation of all the women he had come near. But it seemed now that this picturing of his mother might fit the facts no better than his former conceptions about Sir Hugo. He wondered to find that when this mother's very handwriting had come to him with words holding her actual feeling, his affections had suddenly shrunk into a state of comparative neutrality towards her. A veiled figure with enigmatic speech had thrust away that image which, in spite of uncertainty, his clinging thought had gradually modelled and made the possessor of his tenderness and duteous longing. When he set off to Genoa, the interest really unnermost in his mind had been

much relation to his mother as to Mordecai and Mirah.

Ch. 50, pp. 464-5.

It is now clear to Deronda himself that in his romantic picturing of his mother he has imaginatively taken upon himself the role of her protector, bearing vicariously what he has believed to be his father's guilt, and longing to expiate it by showing her the care and duty that he supposes her to have lacked. This attitude of compunction towards an absent mother has, as he now realizes, 'been secretly present with him in his observation of all the women he had come near', and has imposed a pattern on his relationships. In spite of his awareness of the attraction that women have for him, he does not allow himself to fall in love until after his momentous meeting with his mother. His friends, moreover, seem to conspire to treat him as being above such human feelings, as if his self-imposed role breathed an 'indefinable prohibition' as powerful as that communicated by Gwendolen's frigidity. This is part of the inhumanity of which critics from Henry James onwards complain of in *Deronda*;¹ but it must be the author's intention that the reader should feel this as a weakness in his character rather than as evidence of an unsuccessful attempt 'to make a faultless human being'.² It is an effect of the erroneous sense of himself that is changed by his discovery of the truth of his history.

His rescue of Mirah is, to begin with, a dramatization of his characteristic role. He is unusually stirred by the experience, and the disturbance is explicitly related to his feelings about his mother:

1. Henry James's *Pulcheria*, in *Daniel Deronda : A Conversation*. George Saintsbury, Review in *Academy*, 9 Sept 1876, x, 253-4, reprinted in Carroll, *The Critical Heritage*.

F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*.

Many other critics make the same objection, even among those who are more sympathetic to *Deronda*'s part of the novel.

2. Constantius in *Daniel Deronda : A Conversation*.

'Great God!' the words escaped Deronda in a tone so low and solemn that they seemed like a prayer become unconsciously vocal. The agitating impression this forsaken girl was making on him stirred a fibre that lay close to his deepest interest in the fates of women - 'perhaps my mother was like this one.'

Ch. 17, p. 141.

In relation to Mirah, Deronda becomes quite literally the rescuer and protector that he has imaginatively longed to be. The nature of the relationship is confirmed by her gratitude, and by her religious interpretation of the rescue as an act of God, in which Deronda himself has played the part of an angel or messenger. The light-hearted but extravagant romanticism of the Meyrick girls does not help to reduce Mirah's view to realism:

'Kate burns a pastille before his portrait every day,' said Mab. 'And I carry his signature in a little black-silk bag round my neck to keep off the cramp. And Amy says the multiplication-table in his name. We must all do something extra in honour of him, now he has brought you to us.'

'I suppose he is too great a person to want anything,' said Mirah, smiling at Mab, and appealing to the graver Amy. 'He is perhaps very high in the world?'

'He is very much above us in rank,' said Amy. 'He is related to grand people. I daresay he leans on some of the satin cushions we prick our fingers over.'

Ch. 20, p. 166.

As a man, Deronda is at the beginning placed entirely out of Mirah's reach, as much by his assumed role as by his supposed race.

His own interest, however, soon begins to transcend the romantic relations that he has been responsible for establishing. First he is angered by Hans's outpourings about his love for Mirah:

But now he noted with some indignation, all the stronger because it must not be betrayed, Hans's evident assumption that for any danger of rivalry or jealousy in relation to Mirah, Deronda was as much out of the question as the angel Gabriel. It is one thing to be resolute in placing one's self out of the question, and another to endure that others should perform that exclusion for us. He had expected that Hans would give him trouble: what he had not expected was that the trouble would have a strong element of personal feeling. And he was rather ashamed that Hans's hopes caused him uneasiness in spite of his well-warranted conviction that they would never be fulfilled. They had raised an image of Mirah changing; and however he might protest that the change would not happen, the protest kept up the unpleasant image. Altogether, poor Hans seemed to be entering into Deronda's experience in a disproportionate manner - going beyond his part of rescued prodigal, and rousing a feeling quite distinct from compassionate affection.

Ch. 37, p. 349.

Next, he expresses some of his exasperation in his discussion with Mirah and the Meyrick girls over his resemblance to the self-sacrificing Bouddha:

'But Mr. Hans said yesterday that you thought so much of others you hardly wanted anything for yourself. He told us a wonderful story of Bouddha giving himself to the famished tigress to save her and her little ones from starving. And he said you were like Bouddha. That is what we all imagine of you.'

'Pray don't imagine that,' said Deronda, who had lately been finding such suppositions rather exasperating. 'Even if it were true that I thought so much of others, it would not follow that I had no wants for myself. When Bouddha let the tigress eat him he might have been very hungry himself.'

p. 350.

Already, therefore, Deronda is becoming aware of an element in himself that he has not taken account of. He is surprised by his feelings of possessiveness towards Mirah, and by his impatience with the assumption of everyone around him, including Mirah, that he is beyond such feelings. For the reader, these

stirrings of humanity in Deronda are a welcome relief: it is time for the appearance of a flaw in his unselfishness, and our sympathy increases in proportion to his growing awareness of his own needs. That we should respond in this way seems to indicate that all his earlier acts of self-sacrifice have operated so as to convince us, not that he has no weaknesses, but that his habit of always sacrificing his own interests is his weakness. He is now beginning to resist consciously the habitual view that he has encouraged others to take of him. But as we have seen, its origins are unconscious, and his problem cannot be put right by thinking about it, or even by acting differently. Its solution depends on the readjustment of his feelings towards his mother, and must await her revelation of herself and her real feelings towards him.

Soon after this discovery of a resistance in himself to his present role, Deronda recognizes a need for a friend with whom he can reciprocate confidences. This recognition is precipitated by his turmoil over Hans and Mirah, and immediately precedes his meeting with Mordecai at Blackfriars Bridge.

Mordecai.

Mordecai is one of the weakest parts of the novel, not because his fanaticism and rhetoric lack credibility, but because he does not demonstrate the greatness attributed to him by Deronda and Mirah. The impression is a happier one when it is mediated through Mirah, but when Mordecai himself speaks, he seems to forget the special circumstances and needs of his hearers. Hence, he frightens little Jacob with his ranting, and in his eagerness to use Deronda according to his vision, he fails to consider Deronda's position, or to show any interest in his personal life. He seems, indeed, to lack a listening power essential to the greatness that is claimed for him. We are clearly meant to suspect him at first, and then to come round to approval and admiration, as Deronda does; but first impressions are too strong for this.

It is difficult to forgive Mordecai for making little Jacob recite prophetic poetry (which he does not understand), and for regarding this triumphantly as 'a way of printing'. (Ch. 38, p. 358.) Even more disturbing is his attempt to fit Deronda to a preconceived pattern, and to see in him the fulfilment of his own dreams. It is true that in relation to Deronda's readjustment Mordecai has a symbolic function, representing the new Jewish identity towards which he is moving, and which is not, after all, alien to his inclinations. However, it is also true that Mordecai is not merely an allegorical figure; he is a person in relation to the other people in the novel, and should be acceptable on the same plane of reality as they are. In the absence of any real knowledge that Deronda is already beginning to alter, Mordecai's refusal to accord him the freedom to be himself cannot be defended as an acceptable attitude in a human relationship, and our first aversion to this is never satisfactorily dispelled by anything that he says or does.

Mordecai enters Deronda's life when Deronda is beginning to fall in love with Mirah, and when Gwendolen has begun to claim some of his attention. With his certitude that Deronda is the friend he has been waiting for, and with his insistence that Deronda should share his vision and accept his ideas, Mordecai is a formidable figure. There is an ambiguity about him, at first, and we are evidently meant to share Deronda's fears that this is yet another claim, and an unreasonable one, at a time when he is already overburdened with conflicting obligations. To begin with, Deronda responds to him because 'it accorded with his habitual disposition that he should meet rather than resist any claim on him in the shape of another's need' (Ch. 40, p. 372); and Mordecai's claims seem enormous. At this stage they threaten Deronda's cultural foundations and his whole way of life, and they are made urgent and insistent by Mordecai's advanced ill-health. They seem much less unreasonable later, when Deronda's Jewishness is disclosed, and when Mordecai's relationship to Mirah is established; in accepting the spiritual mission pressed upon him by Mordecai, Deronda will after all be doing

what his friendship, his love for Mirah, and his newly found national consciousness are already prompting him to do. To start with, however, Mordecai's fanaticism is alarming.

Deronda's state of mind in relation to the conflicting demands upon him is expressed in his anxious imaginings at his next meeting with Gwendolen, when she again shows an inclination to make him feel responsible for her actions:

There was a foreshadowing of some painful collision: on the one side the grasp of Mordecai's dying hand on him, with all the ideals and prospects it aroused; on the other this fair creature in silk and gems, with her hidden wound and her self-dread, making a trustful effort to lean and find herself sustained. It was as if he had a vision of himself besought with outstretched arms and cries, while he was caught by the waves and compelled to mount the vessel bound for a far-off coast.

Ch. 45, p. 424.

This situation is the result of Deronda's generalized sense of duty and his readiness to respond to the claims that are made on him, and even, unconsciously, to invite such claims. The conflict cannot be resolved, even at the conscious level, until he has some direction, some reason for preferring one duty to others. Yet, as we have seen, this openness of sympathy is related to an emotional problem which Deronda cannot solve alone: it requires the revelation by his mother of his origins and his history.

When this revelation comes, the changes in Deronda's feelings are made very explicit. He begins with an affirmation of the attitude that he has fostered since childhood:

'I used to think that you might be suffering,' said Deronda, anxious above all not to wound her. 'I used to wish that I could be a comfort to you.'

She rebuffs him, and in defending herself, admits her coldness:

'I don't mean to speak ill of myself,' said the Princess, with proud impetuosity, 'but I had not much affection to give you. I did not want affection. I had been stifled with it. I wanted to live out the life that was in me, and not to be hampered with other lives...'

'... I did not want a child.'

Ch. 51, p. 470.

This revelation is followed by another, that Deronda is Jewish. Together, these discoveries provoke his indignation, not on her behalf as he has always imagined it would be, but on his own.

'I am glad of it,' said Deronda, impetuously, in the veiled voice of passion. He could not have imagined beforehand how he would come to say that which he had never hitherto admitted. He could not have dreamed that it would be in impulsive opposition to his mother. He was shaken by a mixed anger which no reflection could come soon enough to check, against this mother who it seemed had borne him unwillingly, had willingly made herself a stranger to him, and - perhaps - was now making herself known unwillingly. This last suspicion seemed to flash some explanation over her speech.

Ch. 51, p. 471.

The substitution of the hard reality of his mother's rejection for the imaginative yearnings of his adolescence is a painful shock for Deronda, and necessitates a radical readjustment. It is also liberating, since it frees him to admit feelings that he has hitherto checked. Now he can be glad to be a Jew, he can admit that he loves Mirah, and he can discover a principle which will give direction to his impulses of service and duty. The discovery of his identity provides him with a definite point of view; it also gives him a new firmness and energy:

His mother had compelled him to a decisive acknowledgment of his love, as Joseph Kalonymos had compelled him to a definite expression of his resolve. This new state of decision wrought on Deronda with a force which surprised even himself. There was a release of all the energy which had long

been spent in self-checking and suppression because of doubtful conditions; and he was ready to laugh at his own impetuosity when, as he neared England on his way from Mainz, he felt the remaining distance more and more of an obstruction. It was as if he had found an added soul in finding his ancestry - his judgment no longer wandering in the mazes of impartial sympathy, but choosing, with that noble partiality which is man's best strength, the closer fellowship that makes sympathy practical - exchanging that bird's-eye reasonableness which soars to avoid preference and loses all sense of quality, for the generous reasonableness of drawing shoulder to shoulder with men of like inheritance.

Ch. 63, p. 561.

This is the state of emotional integration at which Deronda arrives, and towards which the mythos of his story moves.

Deronda's Jewish heritage.

It remains to consider the effectiveness of Judaism as a symbol for Deronda's self-discovery, and as the medium in which his social integration is to take place. Perhaps its greatest advantage is that it was sufficiently remote from the lives of most of George Eliot's readers to make possible the degree of idealization necessary to her purpose. Any actual community, whether religious or secular in its origins, is likely to reveal serious flaws when it is scrutinised closely. A more familiar Christian or English community would have invited, from those who knew it well, objections more damaging than the objections that were in fact made by prejudiced and ignorant readers. The sense of a significant discrepancy between the ideal and the actual would have distracted attention from the function of the symbol, and could not well have been integrated into the pattern of responses proper to the rest of the novel. As it was, it was possible to the author to present Jewish nationalism through the visions of Mordecai, the intentions of Deronda, and the piety of Mirah and the Cohens; and to leave the reader with the sense that this was an ideal to be striven

for in the future, and only fragmentarily expressed in the present.¹

There are other obvious advantages in the choice of Judaism as a symbol. It is, in its ideal form, a culture rooted in family piety, in which the recognition of bonds of affection shapes the moral life, and from which the bonds of duty extend outwards to the nation. It therefore contains the possibility of direction which Deronda has sought; a direction neither imposed nor arbitrarily chosen, but arising from his particular position in place and time, and according with his already existing affection for Mirah and Mordecai. While it includes such personal bonds, however, it relates them to a long historical tradition, and promises a future which gives purpose to the present. That there should be such a visible objective as the political reunification of a divided people, and the resettlement of an actual tract of land, promises scope as well as direction for Deronda's largeness of sympathy, and adds greatly to the significance of the symbol.

In addition, the religious principles of Judaism seem usually to be bound up with Jewish political life, and expressed in moral action. It is not made clear how much of Mordecai's theological belief is acceptable to Deronda, or whether he is free to combine his humanistic outlook with an appreciation of the poetry and symbolism of the Jewish tradition. It is clear,

1. I have reluctantly omitted, as lying outside the scope of a formal analysis, two very interesting questions. One is George Eliot's sympathetic and largely accurate presentation of Jewish life and aspiration, and the social and educational purpose of this, which she explains in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe. (Haight, The George Eliot Letters, VI, p. 301.) The second is the prophetic nature of her conception of Zionism, twenty years before Theodor Herzl convened the first Zionist congress at Basle in 1897.

however, that his impulse of service and duty is to come into its own in a culture that has a long tradition of such service and duty, and a theology that gives meaning to sacrifice and suffering.

In conception, then, the symbolism of Deronda's Jewish heritage is completely fitting for its purpose, and it gains an added interest when that purpose is understood. Nevertheless, in its rendering it is less interesting than the other parts of the novel, and its weaknesses seem to be directly related to its virtues. In the first place, there is too much explanation of Jewish customs, related no doubt to the same remoteness from the ordinary English reader which makes the Jewish world suitable for idealization. The reader is put too much in the position of an uninitiated observer who will not understand without a full explanation; and while there may be justification for this in the real ignorance of real readers, the relationship does not encourage the same involvement as does a tacit assumption of common ground between author and reader.

In the second place, when the idealization is extended to the characters themselves, there is sometimes a discrepancy between our actual response, as readers, and the response that the author seems to expect. I have already indicated my dissatisfaction with Mordecai; but Mirah too suffers in the process of idealization. What is doubtless intended as a charming simplicity is communicated sometimes as dullness, and sometimes as sentimentality. I find traces of both in her words to Mrs Meyrick about her childhood:

'Oh yes, it was the earliest. I think my life began with waking up and loving my mother's face: it was so near to me, and her arms were round me, and she sang to me. One hymn she sang so often, so often: and then she taught me to sing it with her: it was the first I ever sang. They were always Hebrew hymns she sang; and because I never knew the meaning of the words they seemed full of nothing but our love and happiness. When I lay in my little bed and it was all white above me, she used to bend over me between me and the white,

and sing in a sweet low voice. I can dream myself back into that time when I am awake, and often it comes back to me in my sleep - my hand is very little, I put it up to her face and she kisses it. Sometimes in my dream I begin to tremble and think that we are both dead; but then I wake up and my hand lies like this, and for a moment I hardly know myself. But if I could see my mother again, I should know her.'

Ch. 20, p. 155.

Even more serious, perhaps, are the lapses into sentimentality in the narrator's comments on Mirah.

When he entered, Mirah rose with the same look of grateful reverence that she had lifted to him the evening before: impossible to see a creature freer at once from embarrassment and boldness. Her theatrical training had left no recognisable trace; probably her manners had not much changed since she played the forsaken child at nine years of age; and she had grown up in her simplicity and truthfulness like a little flower-seed that absorbs the chance confusion of its surroundings into its own definite mould of beauty. Deronda felt that he was making acquaintance with something quite new to him in the form of womanhood. For Mirah was not childlike from ignorance: her experience of evil and trouble was deeper and stranger than his own. He felt inclined to watch her and listen to her as if she had come from a far-off shore inhabited by a race different from our own.

Ch. 20, p. 167.

It is easier to see Mirah's place in relation to Deronda and his Jewish heritage than it is to respond to her as seems to be required. There is, I think, an imperfect control over this part of the novel which is perhaps related to the mixture of realism and romanticism in the work, and fails to elicit the sort of response the author seems to intend. Fuller discussion of this problem will be found in the critique at the end of this section. It is sufficient for the moment to recognize that Mirah, who is a contrast to Gwendolen in many ways, and is recognizably more appreciative of Deronda's love, is much less interesting to the reader.

CHAPTER 11

DANIEL DERONDA (iii)

The linking of the two stories.

The growth of the relationship.

The really interesting part of Deronda's story is the development of his relationship with Gwendolen. We have traced the process by which, because of his supposed illegitimacy, she comes to associate him with the illegitimate children she has wronged, and to think of him as an embodiment of her conscience and a potential agent in her moral education. This is matched by a corresponding process of inference and surmise on his part, so that without any detailed explanation from either, each comes very near to understanding the other's position.

The process of Deronda's inference is to be seen in Ch. 36, just after he has learned of the existence of Mrs Glasher:

Since the early days when he tried to construct the hidden story of his own birth, his mind had perhaps never been so active in weaving probabilities about any private affair as it had now begun to be about Gwendolen's marriage. This unavowed relation of Grandcourt's, - could she have gained some knowledge of it, which caused her to shrink from the match - a shrinking finally overcome by the urgency of poverty? He could recall almost every word she had said to him, and in certain of these words he seemed to discern that she was conscious of having done some wrong - inflicted some injury. His own acute experience made him alive to the form of injury which might affect the unavowed children and their mother. Was Mrs. Grandcourt, under all her determined show of satisfaction, gnawed by a double, a treble-headed grief - self-reproach, disappointment, jealousy? He dwelt especially on all the slight signs of self-reproach: he was inclined to judge her tenderly, to excuse, to pity. He thought he had found a key now by which to interpret her more clearly: what magnifying of her misery might not a young creature get into who had wedded her fresh hopes to old secrets! He thought he saw clearly enough now why Sir Hugo had never dropped any hint of this affair to him; and immediately the image of this Mrs Glasher became painfully associated with his own hidden birth. Gwendolen knowing of that woman and her children, marrying Grandcourt, and showing herself contented, would have been among the most

repulsive of beings to him; but Gwendolen tasting the bitterness of remorse for having contributed to their injury was brought very near to his fellow-feeling. If it were so, she had got to a common plane of understanding with him on some difficulties of life which a woman is rarely able to judge of with any justice or generosity; for, according to precedent, Gwendolen's view of her position might easily have been no other than that her husband's marriage with her was his entrance on the path of virtue, while Mrs Glasher represented his forsaken sin. And Deronda had naturally some resentment on behalf of the Hagars and Ishmaels.

pp. 325-6

One effect of this tacit understanding between them is that the preliminary social formalities are dispensed with, and Deronda is able to dismiss 'any caution against her being a coquette setting snares to involve him in a vulgar flirtation' (p. 326). Gwendolen has never felt any such caution necessary, and they are able, in their brief meetings, to go straight to the serious business, she claiming the help that she needs, and he expressing the sympathy that he feels.

Another effect of the nature of the understanding between them is a certain awkwardness for Deronda, who knows too much and is told too little. Though he is able to guess at the import of her vague self-accusations, he is inhibited in his replies by the fact that she has not confided in him fully and in detail. 'I wish he could know everything about me without my telling him,' Gwendolen thinks at one stage. (Ch. 35, p. 323.) This is what she wants, but to begin with, her confessions are confined to generalities and hypotheses:

'You admire Miss Lapidoth because you think her blameless, perfect. And you know you would despise a woman who had done something you thought very wrong.'

'That would depend entirely on her own view of what she had done,' said Deronda.

'You would be satisfied if she were very wretched, I suppose?' said Gwendolen, impetuously.

'No, not satisfied - full of sorrow for her. It was not a mere way of speaking. I did not mean to say that the finer nature is not more adorable; I meant that those who would be comparatively uninteresting beforehand may become worthier of sympathy when they do something that awakens in them a keen remorse. Lives are enlarged in different ways. I daresay some would never get their eyes opened if it were not for a violent shock from the consequences of their own actions. And when they are suffering in that way one must care for them more than for the comfortably self-satisfied.' Deronda forgot everything but his vision of what Gwendolen's experience had probably been, and urged by compassion let his eyes and voice express as much interest as they would.

Ch. 36, p. 330.

The terms of Deronda's reply are necessarily limited by what Gwendolen has said. Since she has not directly admitted that she is speaking of her own wretchedness and her own wrongdoing, he must answer in the same general and hypothetical form. It is this limitation that makes some of his dealings with her seem piously didactic, and inadequate for the situation. He seems to be offering general advice, when it is clear that behind her appeal for guidance lies a deeper need for thorough understanding and acceptance. Nevertheless there is evidence in the above passage, as well as in a number of others, that Deronda himself is aware of the inadequacy of his words, and that though he tries to answer her questions in the form which they impose, his answers are less important for their moral precepts than for the sympathy which accompanies them. In spite of her lack of response to his ideas, the sympathy is communicated, and sustains her.¹

1. This view contrasts with Jerome Thale's criticism in The Novels of George Eliot, pp. 135-6: 'Deronda is not, as has often been said, her confessor; he is a lay analyst, and a poor one; he conducts her through the dark night of the super-ego, urging her to self-reproach, to fear of self and of consequences.'

The development and complication of the relationship occurs when the Grandcourts are staying with the Mallingers at Diplow. In the course of three brief interviews, Gwendolen moves to a position of emotional and moral dependence on Deronda, while he is divided between his growing sympathy for her and a growing alarm at her 'precipitancy of confidence towards him'. (Ch. 36, p. 334.) By the time they meet again, at Lady Mallinger's musical party in London, the intensity of the relationship has increased, and it increases still more as they become aware of each other's inclinations.

'But one may feel things and not be able to do anything better for all that,' said Gwendolen, not smiling in return - the distance to which Deronda's words seemed to throw her chilling her too much. 'I begin to think we can only get better by having people about us who raise good feelings. You must not be surprised at anything in me. I think it is too late for me to alter. I don't know how to set about being wise, as you told me to be.'

'I seldom find I do any good by my preaching. I might as well have kept from meddling,' said Deronda, thinking rather sadly that his interference about that unfortunate necklace might end in nothing but an added pain to him in seeing her after all hardened to another sort of gambling than roulette.

'Don't say that,' said Gwendolen, hurriedly, feeling that this might be her only chance of getting the words uttered, and dreading the increase of her own agitation. 'If you despair of me, I shall despair. Your saying that I should not go on being selfish and ignorant has been some strength to me. If you say you wish you had not meddled - that means, you despair of me and forsake me. And then you will decide for me that I shall not be good. It is you who will decide; because you might have made me different by keeping as near to me as you could, and believing in me.'

Ch. 45, pp. 423-4.

Gwendolen responds quickly to the threat of withdrawal which she senses in Deronda's words, and her response takes the form

of an even stronger claim. She puts on him the whole responsibility for her moral life:

'... that means, you despair of me and forsake me. And then you will decide for me that I shall not be good.'

This pressure intensifies both his anxiety and his desire to help her:

In Deronda's ear the strain (of Mirah's song) was for the moment a continuance of Gwendolen's pleading - a painful urging of something vague and difficult, irreconcilable with pressing conditions, and yet cruel to resist. However strange the mixture in her of a resolute pride and a precocious air of knowing the world, with a precipitate, guileless indiscretion, he was quite sure now that the mixture existed. Sir Hugo's hints had made him alive to dangers that his own disposition might have neglected; but that Gwendolen's reliance on him was unvisited by any dream of his being a man who could misinterpret her was as manifest as morning, and made an appeal which wrestled with his sense of present dangers, and with his foreboding of a growing incompatible claim on him in her mind.

p. 424

Deronda's conflicting responsibilities.

Gwendolen's renewed plea comes at a time when Deronda is very preoccupied. His interest in Mirah has grown, and although he has not yet allowed himself to fall in love with her, he is very protective towards her. He has already discovered that Mordecai is the lost Ezra, but has not yet told Mirah this. He is attracted by Mordecai's visions, and stirred by his growing sense of spiritual kinship with him. In his own thinking about himself there is, as we have seen,¹ a new resistance to the role in which he has previously cast himself, and which others have confirmed for him. Practically, his failure to decide on a career has revealed his psychological

1. See above, pp. 162-166.

uncertainty, and he is in a state of suspense and anxiety. In his own life, therefore, there are signs of changes as fundamental as Gwendolen's, and more various. While she sees him as essential to her future development, and permanently so, he necessarily sees her as representing one of several claims that will not always be compatible, and between which he will have to choose.

Our sense of the impending conflict between Deronda's needs and Gwendolen's is heightened by the shifting point of view in the narration. We see from Gwendolen's point of view the stifling horror of her marriage to Grandcourt, the nature of his hold over her, and the importance that Deronda is coming to have in her life. We see the process by which he becomes 'a terrible-browed angel from whom she could not think of concealing any deed so as to win an ignorant regard from him'. (Ch. 54, p. 507.) He becomes, in her mind, a priest, at the very time when, as we know from the insight we are given into his mind, he is altering his vision of himself and everything that relates to him, and being impelled to recognize his own emotional and social needs.

The full irony of the incompatibility between Deronda's needs and Gwendolen's is apparent in their chance meeting at Genoa. He appears when she most needs him, and she simply accepts his presence, without surprise or question. His reception of her on the quay after Grandcourt's drowning, and his subsequent responsibility for her, come just at the moment when he has the greatest reason to refuse them. They come as a direct result of the attitude of chivalry which earlier caused him to redeem the pawned necklace; but they come, ironically, too late. He is no longer impelled by a vague yearning for an unknown mother towards an atonement to women in general; instead, his emotions have assumed a definite direction and his mind is set on his newly-found duties. The resistance which has gathered force in his earlier meetings with Gwendolen is now at its greatest.

'He was not a priest,' is his response, as she tries to utter her confession (Ch. 56, p. 519); and yet, because of all that has gone before, and because in her helplessness she has no one else to turn to, he cannot now forsake her. Her appeal is direct, as before:

'... But now, if you cannot bear with me when I tell you everything - if you turn away from me and forsake me, what shall I do? Am I worse than I was when you found me and wanted to make me better? All the wrong I have done was in me then - and more - and more - if you had not come and been patient with me. And now - will you forsake me?'

Her hands which had been so tightly clenched some minutes before, were now helplessly relaxed and trembling on the arm of her chair. Her quivering lips remained parted as she ceased speaking. Deronda could not answer; he was obliged to look away. He took one of her hands, and clasped it as if they were going to walk together like two children: it was the only way in which he could answer, 'I will not forsake you.' And all the while he felt as if he were putting his name to a blank paper which might be filled up terribly. Their attitude, his averted face with its expression of a suffering which he was solemnly resolved to undergo, might have told half the truth of the situation to a beholder who had suddenly entered.

That grasp was an entirely new experience to Gwendolen: she had never before had from any man a sign of tenderness which her own being had needed, and she interpreted its powerful effect on her into a promise of inexhaustible patience and constancy.

Ch. 56, p. 520.

This movement of committal on Deronda's part makes possible the detailed confession which Gwendolen so badly needs to make, of her murderous impulses before the yachting trip, and of her failure to throw the rope. Her distress stirs him to passionate pity, which in turn provokes in her a regret that she has made him unhappy, and takes her mind momentarily away from herself. His support of sympathy and affection is so

clearly what she needs at this moment that it is difficult for the reader to wish it withheld; yet in the light of what has by now taken place in Deronda's life, his impulses towards Gwendolen are so clearly at variance with the rest of his intentions that it is impossible not to dread the impending conflict, and to see, as he does, that they cannot both escape pain. At this stage the reader's sympathy is almost evenly balanced between Gwendolen and Deronda.

The irony of Deronda's situation is further stressed by the contrast between his interviews with Gwendolen and those with his mother. Both are imperious women; both keep him waiting, and then send for him when they are ready to see him. On the day of Grandcourt's death, Deronda has been finally rejected by his mother, who has confessed that she never loved him, never wanted him, and is 'not a loving woman'. (Ch. 53, p. 501.) He has made a great effort to break through the barrier between them, and has failed. The next day he is sent for by Gwendolen: she too confesses her failure to love, but her confession is made with a very different intention. She is obviously beginning to learn to love, and she needs him as he once longed to be needed by his mother. She makes the claim that his mother failed to make, but too late: he is no longer free to respond.

Gwendolen's increasing dependence on Deronda after her return to London, and her continuing need to talk to him of her own affairs, make it impossible for him to speak of his.

He said nothing, and she asked nothing, of what chiefly occupied himself. Her mind was fixed on his coming to Diplo before the autumn was over; and she no more thought of the Lapidoths - the little Jewess and her brother - as likely to make a difference in her destiny, than of the fermenting political and social leaven which was making a difference in the history of the world. In fact, poor Gwendolen's memory had been stunned, and all outside the lava-lit track of her troubled conscience, and her effort to get deliverance from it, lay for her in dim forgetfulness.

Ch. 65, p. 582.

Gwendolen's immaturity.

There are at this stage two disturbing features of the relationship which make the reader feel it as an increased threat to Deronda. One is that in spite of Gwendolen's greater self-knowledge and her new courage in facing the existence of evil within herself, there remains a profound egocentricity in her attitude to Deronda. She does not think about the rest of his life, outside his meetings with her; she does not even wonder how he came to be at Genoa. There is simply a failure, consistent with her earlier failures of imagination, to recognize his existence as an independent being. The other disturbing feature is the complete absence from her mind of any ideas of love or marriage in relation to him:

Her imagination had not been turned to a future union with Deronda by any other than the spiritual tie which had been continually strengthening; but also it had not been turned towards a future separation from him. Love-making and marriage - how could they now be the imagery in which poor Gwendolen's deepest attachment could spontaneously clothe itself? Mighty Love had laid his hand upon her; but what had he demanded of her? Acceptance of rebuke - the hard task of self-change - confession - endurance. If she cried towards him, what then? She cried as the child cries whose little feet have fallen backward - cried to be taken by the hand, lest she should lose herself.

Ch. 65, p. 582.

While it is clear that Gwendolen is learning to love, and that her feeling for Deronda is a great advance on any of her earlier feelings, it is also apparent that she retains a significant dissociation of love from sex. Her failure to recognize the sexual possibilities of her present feeling is the counterpart of her earlier failure to recognize the desirability of love in marriage, and she still has a long way to go towards achieving emotional integration before she is

capable of a mature love-relationship. Her love for Deronda is like the love of a child for its father: it is genuine, in its way, and it is a stage beyond the infantile dependence upon her mother which has characterized her until now; but it is nevertheless immature, a stage in her growth and not a resting point.

The necessary resolution.

The recognition of these inadequacies in Gwendolen's loving affects our hopes and fears not only for Deronda, but for Gwendolen herself. We begin to see that it is necessary for her further development (emotional as well as moral) that she should somehow relinquish her hold on him, not only for his sake, but also for her own. The parting is not a punishment for Gwendolen's past selfishness, as she herself seems to suggest, but a necessary step in her development. The pity lies in its painful suddenness: it is cruel, and Deronda feels it as such, but everything points to its necessity. Gwendolen's hysterical insistence at the end of Ch. 69, when she hears of Deronda's approaching marriage and intended departure, looks like a melodramatic exaggeration:

'Don't be afraid. I shall live. I mean to live.'

It is, however, a serious indication that the crisis she is going through is necessary and regenerative, and that even her suffering is accompanied by an awareness of the new life that is to follow. 'I shall live. I shall be better,' she repeats to her mother, and any lingering doubts that she might be speaking only of her physical recovery are dispelled by her letter to Deronda: 'It is better - it shall be better with me because I have known you.'

Barbara Hardy has called Gwendolen's story open-ended,¹ and in one sense it is, and so is Deronda's. Both are left on the threshold of a new life, the details of which are largely unknown.

1. The Novels of George Eliot, p. 153.

We have seen the process by which they arrive at that threshold, but we have only hints and promises of the direction to be taken by their newly-discovered selves. In another sense, however, both stories reach satisfactory closure. The book is about the process of change: in Gwendolen, as she changes emotionally and morally, and in Deronda as he discovers himself and his place in the world. Both processes are satisfactorily completed, and each gains interest from its juxtaposition with the other.

CHAPTER 12

DANIEL DERONDA (iv)

Some critical observations.

Though Daniel Deronda is less successful in its entirety than Middlemarch, it is certainly even more ambitious in both theme and technique. Both parts of the book are novel in conception: the growth of moral sensibility in Gwendolen from the merest hint of a possible beginning is a more radical transformation than any of the conversions treated in the earlier works, while Deronda's search for identity points forward to one of the chief themes of the twentieth century that had been little touched on in the nineteenth. Furthermore, the interdependence of the two stories is a technical achievement different in kind from the technical achievement of Middlemarch. The relationship between the four stories of Middlemarch is, as we have seen, a thematic one; and though there are also causal connections interlocking the stories, each one is conceivable in isolation from the rest. Each can be (and at least one has been)¹ abstracted, and is perfectly intelligible on its own. In Daniel Deronda, on the other hand, such separation is impossible: we cannot understand what is happening to Gwendolen unless we also understand what is happening to Deronda, and the most interesting part of Deronda's conflict is lost if we do not understand the nature and force of his involvement with Gwendolen. The two stories are related with a degree of interdependence that is new in George Eliot's work.

It is hardly surprising that in a work of such novelty there should be some flaws, and probably there has been more critical dissatisfaction with Daniel Deronda than with any of George Eliot's other novels. For our purposes, such criticism needs to be linked to the integrated pattern of responses which the book evokes from the reader, and I intend therefore to consider those parts of the novel which do not seem successful in evoking the particular responses which would integrate harmoniously with the rest of the pattern. For there are some areas of

1. Mary Garth: A Romance from Middlemarch. Adapted by Frederick Page. OUP, 1953.

uncertainty in which the reader is not sure that his actual response is that intended by the author, and others in which he is sure that it cannot be the intended one, because it obviously does not fit in with the rest of the pattern. This kind of assessment can only be made when enough of the pattern has been successfully established; but I think that with Daniel Deronda this is the case, and that it is possible to see its structural weaknesses with some degree of clarity.

The Romantic Convention.

Since these weaknesses are all to be found in the Jewish part of Deronda's story, and since they concern the romantic elements in it, I wish first to reassert my belief that it is not in the romanticism itself that the fault lies. In one of the most perceptive early reviews of the book, R. E. Francillon defends Daniel Deronda as a romance, arguing that it is different in kind from the realistic fictions which preceded it, and suggesting that it ought not to be subject to the same kind of critical judgment.¹

Daniel Deronda is essentially both in conception and in form, a Romance: and George Eliot has not only never written a romance before, but is herself, by the uncompromising realism of her former works, a main cause for the disesteem into which romantic fiction has fallen - a disesteem that has even turned the tea-cup into a heroine and the tea-spoon into a hero. George Eliot should be the last to complain that the inimitable realism of Middlemarch has thrown a cold shade over the truth and wisdom that borrow the form of less probable fiction in Daniel Deronda. She is in the position of every great artist who having achieved glory in one field sets out to conquer another. The world is not prone to believe in many-sided genius: one supremacy is enough for one man.²

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1. 'George Eliot's First Romance', Gentleman's Magazine, Oct. 1876, xvii, 411-27. Reprinted in George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, ed. David Carroll.
 2. Carroll, op. cit., p. 383.

Francillon goes on to discuss 'the transformation of Gwendolen' as the central action of the novel, and to suggest that such an improbable possibility as a change of this nature requires the improbable machinery of romantic fiction to bring it about; including the extremes of vice and virtue represented by Grandcourt and Deronda. The whole review is an excellent defence of romantic fiction, and a fine study of Gwendolen's story. It seems to me to fall short only in its treatment of Deronda as merely an agent in Gwendolen's conversion, without any significant story of his own. Francillon notices, but dismisses as irrelevant, the tension I have already discussed between Deronda's knightly role and the stirrings of his ordinary impulses:

I must own to a feeling of relief when Deronda was conscious of a wish to horsewhip Grandcourt; it was a touch of good warm-blooded sympathetic humanity. However, the sneer is a very cheap and not very effective form of criticism. Nobody dreams of sneering at the Red Cross Knight, in another romance, or at Bayard, sans peur et sans reproche, in romantic history.

Carroll, op. cit., p. 391.

This pleasure in seeing Deronda show 'a touch of good warm-blooded humanity' does not require the apology offered; it is, as we have seen, perfectly compatible with the larger pattern of responses. Only if interest is concentrated entirely on Gwendolen does it seem out of place.

Perhaps it is indicative of the difference between nineteenth and twentieth century thinking that the part of the novel which Francillon defends as requiring a framework of romantic convention is the part which I regard as realistic. Granted that such a radical change of attitude as Gwendolen undergoes is unusual (but by no means impossible), it seems to be accounted for with careful psychological realism (see above, Ch. 9). Such romantic imagery as there is in Gwendolen's story is almost always ironic; either humorously so, as in the

references to her as 'a princess in exile', or tragically so, as when she is brought ashore at Genoa to be received by the waiting Deronda, who by this time is no longer a knight-errant, but a knight with a task from which she is necessarily excluded.

It is the mythos of Deronda's story that seems to me the romantic part of the novel. Here the romantic details which feature ironically in Gwendolen's story reappear and ask to be taken seriously. There is a literal rescue from drowning, a real artistic success such as Gwendolen has only dreamed of, and even a real princess. There are children who are actually lost, and identities that are literally unknown. The story has a credibility of a different order from that of Gwendolen's, like the credibility of romances and fairy-tales; that is, the central spiritual experience is recognizable, though the elements that make it up are extraordinary. Deronda's self-discovery, and the change in outlook that accompanies it, seem to be communicable only either in general technical terms ('adjustment of the personality', 'emergence of a new role', 'clarification of identity'), or in symbol and metaphor ('discovery', 'quest', 'heritage'). Within this context, Mordecai and Mirah have their proper places; so do Joseph Kalonymos and the Princess Halm-Eberstein, and Deronda's inheritance from his grandfather, preserved physically and tangibly in a wooden chest. Deronda himself makes very clear connections between these outward persons and things and the inward process of readjustment that takes place in his thinking and feeling. The symbols are not ambiguous; we are seldom in doubt as to their significance, and never in doubt that the inner action in Deronda's consciousness is more important than the external events which partly account for it, and partly express it. It is difficult to see that objections to these symbols should have any more valid ground than objections to Miranda in The Tempest or to Pearl in The Scarlet Letter.

The Two Sets of Conventions.

There does appear to be, however, a degree of critical uncertainty about these romantic elements, and its source can perhaps be located in an ambiguity about the system of conventions operating in this part of the novel. Conventions do not normally worry the reader, provided that they are clearly established so that he knows what to expect. The establishment of conventions is one function of the structure of a work; and it does not much matter whether the work is called a novel or a romance, provided that it is approached in a spirit of willingness to enter into whatever agreement the author invites, and provided that the nature of that agreement is clear. Broadly speaking, a set of realistic conventions operates in Gwendolen's story, and a set of romantic ones in Deronda's. Since the two stories are inter-dependent and complementary, and since they therefore converge at critical points, it would not be surprising if we were sometimes confused into applying the wrong set of conventions. Having been accustomed to look for a certain kind of realism in Deronda's encounters with Gwendolen, we might understandably look for the same kind of realism in his conversations with Mordecai, and be disappointed.

Nevertheless, the co-existence of two different sets of conventions need not in itself be confusing, and in parts of the book George Eliot shows herself able to use the tension between them to achieve a heightened effect. A particularly successful chapter is the one treating of Catherine Arrowpoint's engagement to Klesmer (Ch. 22, p. 175). Here there is a deliberate interplay between the romantic elements of a stereotyped situation and the realism with which they are treated. An heiress throws away her fortune to marry for love: Catherine and Klesmer are both aware of the stereotype, and this awareness constitutes a difficulty that makes for a realistic awkwardness between them. It is an unromantic

difficulty, yet its existence depends on the recognized discrepancy between the romantic situation and social convention. In defying her parents, Catherine asserts her superiority to the commonplace values which they accept; and she shows up by contrast the pressures which influence Gwendolen's decision to marry, and the absence, in Gwendolen's case, of the determining force of love.

Yet Catherine is not a romantic; she emerges as level-headed and sensible, and knows much more precisely than Gwendolen does the implications of the choice she is making, and her reasons for making it. It is she who reminds her parents of the origin, in trade, of the fortune which they are so concerned to place 'in the right hands'. She sees through their grand rationalizations about duty and responsibility to their commonplace anxieties about class and position. The whole episode is given an additional humorous irony by its relationship to the romantic fiction of Mrs Arrowpoint, and by her indignation that her own plots should dare to invade domestic reality: 'Those times were not these, nor is Klesmer Tasso.' (Ch. 22, p. 183.) So skilfully is the realism of this incident played off against the romanticism which it takes for granted that we know exactly how much of each is to be taken seriously, and how we are expected to respond. There is a sureness of tone about this chapter which indicates that the mere juxtaposition of different conventions need not in itself be confusing. Here their coexistence is enriching and amusing.

I think the real difficulty lies in the transference of certain elements from one story to the other, so that we tend to transfer also responses from an appropriate context to an inappropriate one. The unsatisfactoriness of Mordecai and Mirah has already been discussed: they both evoke from many readers a response which falls recognizably short of the inferred intention of the author. It is possible to understand their symbolic function and to see why they have been idealized,

and yet to feel distaste for Mirah's sentimentality and suspicion of Mordecai's enthusiasm. This felt discrepancy between intention and achievement is a sign of some structural weakness, related, I think, to the control of the reader's expectations. As the interest moves from Deronda's involvement with Gwendolen to his involvement with the Jewish world, there is a narrowing of the narrative distance. From a point of view of critical detachment, from which we are invited to see limitations and difficulties, we are moved, sometimes rather suddenly, to a position of close identification with Deronda, and from here we seem to be expected to take seriously at least some of the romantic elements of which we have elsewhere been critical.

The awkwardness of the transition is felt most strongly when we come to Deronda himself. In relation to Gwendolen he is a redeeming agent, a Good Angel,¹ a priest,² a monitor;³ an ideal figure representing and in part helping her to achieve the better life that she longs for. For her transformation to be intelligible to herself, it is necessary that she should, for a time, think of him in this way. Yet, as we have seen, it is also necessary for both of them that this role should be abandoned; that Deronda should find some specific duty to replace his attitude of generalized knight-errantry, and that Gwendolen should cease to see him only as an agent in her moral life, and should recognize him as an individual with a life of his own. Our response to the encounters between them has been one of growing criticism for Gwendolen's tendency to perpetuate an idealized conception of Deronda as some super-human being existing only to solve other

1. Francillon, op. cit., p. 391.

2. Daniel Deronda, Ch. 35, p. 323.

3. Daniel Deronda, Ch. 36, p. 337.

people's problems; a conception for which Deronda himself is partly responsible, and which he increasingly resists as 'a ridiculous attitude of self-assigned superiority'. Thus far the response is appropriate, and prepares us for the necessary resolution of both problems.

When we come to Deronda's own adjustment, however, we find that he necessarily describes this in romantic terms, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he has relinquished one romantic role in favour of another. Here is part of the account he gives Mordecai of his sense of mission:

'It is through your inspiration that I have discerned what may be my life's task. It is you who have given shape to what, I believe, was an inherited yearning - the effect of brooding, passionate thoughts in many ancestors - thoughts that seem to have been intensely present in my grandfather. Suppose the stolen offspring of some mountain tribe brought up in a city of the plain, or one with an inherited genius for painting, and born blind - the ancestral life would lie within them as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations, and the spell-bound habit of their inherited frames would be like a cunningly-wrought musical instrument, never played on, but quivering throughout in uneasy mysterious moanings of its intricate structure that, under the right touch, gives music. Something like that, I think, has been my experience. Since I began to read and know, I have always longed for 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. You have raised the image of such a task for me - to bind our race together in spite of heresy. You have said to me - 'Our religion united us before it divided us - it made us a people before it made Rabbanites and Karaites. I mean to try what can be done with that union - I mean to work in your spirit. Failure will not be ignoble, but it would be ignoble for me not to try.'

Deronda's experience is already intelligible to the reader through the careful account of the crucial interviews with his mother, Sir Hugo, and Joseph Kalonymos, and through the clarification of his feelings towards Mirah and Mordecai. But here, to render it intelligible to himself and communicable to Mordecai, he is made to use a series of emotionally charged metaphors which are likely to make many readers wary. Here we need to make distinction between the implied reader and actual readers.¹ We are aware that the reader to whom the work is addressed is meant to take Deronda's words seriously, and to approve, as Mordecai does; if we respond with suspicion to the sentiments expressed, we are nevertheless aware that this is not the response intended by the author, since it does not fit coherently into the total pattern of our responses. There is some uncertainty of control here. Some of Deronda's phrases are clichés, it is true, and likely to fail to command respect under any circumstances: 'my life's task', 'an inherited yearning' and 'a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations' simply do not communicate adequately. But this is only half the trouble. The other half is that, our responses having been conditioned and ordered by that part of Deronda's story which overlaps Gwendolen's, we have come to this part with the wrong expectations. We are liable to find his conception of his new role as 'the heart and brain of a multitude' not less romantic than the role he has just relinquished; and since we have been taught to be critical of his romanticism about women, it is difficult to suspend criticism of this new romanticism, although it is clear that we are meant

1. See Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 137-8. Booth does not actually use the term 'implied reader', but he discusses the concept in these pages. The implied reader is the reader created by the author, whose beliefs are in complete agreement with those of the implied author. I have borrowed the term 'implied reader' from Austin M. Wright, of the University of Cincinnati.

to do so. And it does seem to be romanticism, for Deronda's ambition for 'some social captainship' is at once too vague and too specific: too vague because it seems to ignore the obvious difficulties¹ in the task of reuniting a divided people, and too specific in its vision of a self-imposed leadership by a young man whose abilities have not yet been tried.

These are perhaps unfair criticisms to make of a story as clearly romantic as Daniel Deronda's; they represent a recourse to an expectation of realism when this expectation is inappropriate. Yet that they should arise at all, and that they should persist when we have consciously determined to look at this part of the novel as a romance points, I think, to an uncertainty of control on the author's part. It may be that the uncertainty necessarily follows the linking of the two stories; in which case our relatively minor dissatisfactions are a small price to pay for the considerable gain in interest that results from this linking. I think it is more likely, though, that the problem belongs to the experimental nature of the material and of the form, and that it would have been solved in a subsequent work.

1. The difficulties seemed impossibilities to some contemporary critics. See James Picciotto's review, Carroll, p. 416.

CONCLUSION.

At the beginning of this thesis we defined 'structure' as the counterpart in the text of the total pattern of responses which the novel evokes from the reader. In each of the four novels analysed we have looked very closely at this pattern, and have for the most part found it to be coherent and significant. It has usually been possible to see not only how our responses have been evoked at any given stage, but why they should be as they are. A particular response of, for instance, sympathy or anxiety is part of a coherent pattern if it follows naturally from our response to what has gone before, and prepares for our response to what follows. Where the pattern seems to falter, and a response cannot be accounted for by reference to the coherence of the whole, we would expect it, in terms of our definition, to relate to some fault of structure (unless it is due to some prejudice or inattention on the part of the reader).¹

In the four novels we have studied, we have found surprisingly few such faults. Most of them relate to overdevelopment of detail rather than anything else: the Featherstone chapters of Middlemarch and some of the Jewish parts of Daniel Deronda seem to go on too long in proportion to the contribution they make to the mythos of each book; and I think similar objections can be made to parts of Felix Holt and Romola. In addition, we have found in Daniel Deronda lapses into sentimentality and romanticism in passages where we have been led, by most of what has gone before, to expect realism.

It is, of course, possible to make these criticisms in these terms only because in each case the rest of the pattern is coherent. If it were not, we might still find Mirah sentimental or some of the Featherstone conversations dull, but these would be isolated responses, made without reference to the structure, and therefore made simply as assertions of personal taste.

1. See Ch. 1, p. 9.

It is always difficult to say what an author should have done or must have intended to do, where this is thought to be different from what he actually has done. It becomes possible only when so much of the structure is discernible that the function of those parts which are not completely successful can be deduced from the nature of the rest; and this is certainly the case with all George Eliot's novels.

An interesting feature of her work is that it does not reveal a steady development towards formal perfection; the development is rather towards structural complexity. She does not master a technique and then repeat it: when she has mastered it, she attempts something different, and usually more difficult. The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner, and Middlemarch all represent high points of achievement. The novels in between, and Daniel Deronda, are not as good structurally, but each is more ambitious than those that precede it. It is when George Eliot is experimenting with new forms or new combinations of forms that the faults which we have noted tend to appear.

If structure is really as closely linked to the reader's responses as we have assumed in this thesis, we should expect to find a connection between complexity of structure and complexity of response. I think that this link is there, and that George Eliot's experiments with increasingly complex structures can be seen as an attempt to evoke increasingly complex responses from the reader. Her reason for doing this is perhaps related to her sense of the moral or educational purpose of fiction, which we considered in Ch. 1 (7-8). It is worth recalling at this point a claim made in one of her early essays, and referred to earlier in this thesis:¹

Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.

'The Natural History of German Life: Riehl.'²

1. p. 132.

2. Westminster Review, 66 (July 1956), p. 54. Also Essays and Leaves from a Notebook, p. 193.

While she was undoubtedly also aware of the simplifying aspect of art, it was its amplifying function that she repeatedly emphasised. She seems to have dreaded over-simplification: on at least one occasion she resisted a suggestion by Frederic Harrison that she should write a novel embodying the Positivist ideal, saying explicitly that she found 'aesthetic teaching' offensive if it lapsed 'from the picture to the diagram'.¹ She obviously knew how to select and shape and control her material, or her novels would not be what they are. She therefore knew how to simplify, yet the simplification of the reader's responses was the reverse of what she wished to achieve. I think that the complex novel enabled her to achieve a significant shaping and yet to avoid the over-simplification which she saw as a danger.

It is easy enough to understand how the reader's experience is amplified by complexity of detail, selected and structured in subordination to a controlling mythos. We have seen in the analyses of The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner how the details serve to increase our involvement and control our response. Complexity of structure works rather differently. In most of George Eliot's novels we have whole stories set side by side; or rather, interwoven. We become involved in two, three, or four processes, nearly simultaneously, so that we are constantly required to bear in mind the variability and the many-sidedness of the situations in which the characters are involved. While we follow one story, we are made aware that there are also others, in which similar sets of circumstances may be met in different ways by different people. The separate stories of Middlemarch may each impress us with a general truthfulness; but read together, as they must be, they discourage any facile generalization. Built into the structure is the check, the reminder that other people have different opportunities, and that they see and experience and respond in different ways. We are constantly required to qualify judgments

1. The George Eliot Letters, IV, p. 300.

and to consider other possibilities, because the other possibilities are there, actualized in the other stories.

There is a special difficulty attendant upon the kind of mind that sees a multiplicity of factors in any given situation. It is liable to make so many qualifications to any statement that the final result may carry no conviction; fullness of understanding may be achieved at the cost of a diminution of emotional commitment. George Eliot had that kind of mind; the complex novel is her way of avoiding the attendant weakness. She permits the total involvement of our sympathies in the story she is telling; and instead of weakening our response by suggesting reservations, or dissipating it by taking our sympathy in another direction, she tells, at more or less the same time, other stories which evoke other feelings and other judgments. The reservations and corrections and amplifications then emerge from the co-existence of all the stories.

Writing in reply to a friendly critic of Middlemarch, George Eliot said,

That you should have picked out those exquisite words of Vinet's - 'où l'élégance la plus exquise semble n'être qu'une partie de la vérité' - as representing your judgment about what I have written, is a peculiar comfort to me. It is precisely my ideal - to make matter and form an inseparable truthfulness.

Letter to Charles Ritter, 11 February 1873.¹

For George Eliot, structure in a novel is not merely a way of arranging a picture of life; it creates the relationships that are essential to that picture, and it cannot finally be separated from the picture itself.

1. The George Eliot Letters, V, p. 374.

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