PATTERNS OF DISILLUSIONMENT AND INSIGHT IN
THE MILL ON THE FLOSS, MIDDLEMARCH, AND DANIEL DERONDA

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
English
by
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May, 1983
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DEDICATION

to my father--with love.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am especially grateful for the support and guidance of the chairperson of my thesis committee, Dr. Robert Chianese.
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ABSTRACT

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by
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This essay will study George Eliot's three major heroines, Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss, Dorothea Brooke in Middlemarch, and Gwendolen Harleth in Daniel Deronda. All three women undergo dramatic disillusionments, brought about by their failure to appraise accurately the nature of their own feelings and desires, those of others, and the limitations placed by society on their role as women. In studying the source, nature and outcome of these heroine's disillusionments, my thesis will provide some criteria for evaluating their motivation and provide insight into what George Eliot intended their struggles to represent. I will also comment on how echoing patterns of disillusionment in other characters within these novels reflect on the larger
actions of the heroines. Do they all have the same misconceptions and expectations? Are they all disillusioned in the same way and to what purpose? Finally, I will study the extent to which characters are able to act on their insights and whether they are able to make the necessary adjustments to their life goals and roles within their society.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary, is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. The element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. (Middlemarch, 144)

The novels of George Eliot seek to portray the ordinary struggles of human life, the necessary and inevitable disillusionments that come to most people with maturity and the passage of time. Most of the novels center around the story of some noble human being, with a loving and unselfish character, but flawed in such a way that his or her life is fraught with significant obstacles, obstacles that cannot be removed until such time that the individual comes to realistic terms with the nature of the impediment. Thus, most of the main characters in George Eliot's novels follow a pattern of disillusionment and insight. And, our final judgment on the worth of these characters depends on whether they act on the insight they discover or whether they accept disillusionment and remain fettered by it for the remainder of their lives.
This essay will study George Eliot's three major heroines, Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, and Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* within this framework. These three women undergo dramatic disillusionments, brought about by their failure to appraise accurately the nature of their own feelings and desires, those of others, and the limitations placed by society on their role as women. Furthermore, I will study the disillusionments and insights of several minor characters to understand how their roles and actions influence and reflect the problems facing their heroines. What do Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver, Tom, Philip and Stephen realize about their goals and expectations for their lives? Do any of them receive any insight about the reasons for their disillusionments and what effect does their success or failure in understanding their disillusionments have on Maggie? I will also examine the role and action of Casaubon, Lydgate and Rosamund in *Middlemarch*. How do their disillusionments strengthen or weaken our final conclusions about the fate of Dorothea and her attempts to find a larger purpose for her life? Finally, I will examine *Daniel Deronda* in a slightly different manner. In light of the novel's split theme and the resultant shallow development of most of its minor characters, I shall concentrate on Gwendolen Harleth, whose vanity and selfishness place her alone in her struggles. Her priest-confessor, Daniel Deronda, does
undergo a process of discovery, but his character is too strong and well-developed to undergo disillusionment. His role in the novel necessitates that he be beyond the stage of disillusionment. His search for a noble purpose and direction for his energies emphasizes the shallowness of Gwendolen's search for a purpose because hers is motivated by selfish desires. I will thus study his role in the novel only in how it reflects on Gwendolen's process of development.

George Eliot was concerned with showing her main characters' difficult search for a supreme love. All the characters in this study are united by their common misconceptions about love and marriage and about their place and role in their society. None of the three heroines is satisfied with what or who they are; each attempts in some way to advance herself within her society. Their motivations differentiate the three characters: while Maggie and Dorothea act to better not only themselves, but their society, Gwendolen seeks only to provide for her own wants and desires.

In studying the source, nature and outcome of these heroines' disillusionments, my thesis will provide some criteria for evaluating their motivation and provide insight into what George Eliot intended their struggles to represent. I will also examine how echoing patterns of disillusionment in other characters comment on the larger actions of the heroines. Do they all have the same
misconceptions and expectations? Are they all disillusioned in the same way and to what purpose? Finally, to what extent are characters within a given environment able to act on their insights and what adjustments do they make to their life goals and their roles within society? An examination of these heroines' final outcomes will assist in determining what George Eliot's conclusions were about our ability to act and react to the pressures and restrictions of our society.

I have chosen to study these heroines because I believe each is similar to the others, but more importantly, because these three women are the most substantial women in George Eliot's fiction. Perhaps it is the strongly autobiographical nature of Maggie and Dorothea that makes them seem such accurate portrayals, and it could be that Gwendolen Harleth's flaw of selfishness is so common in our century that we are especially sympathetic to her. Whatever the reason, these women have generated the bulk of the criticism on George Eliot, although there is no single study concentrating on these three. Henry James rated Maggie Tulliver as one of the "most successful of the author's young women," found Dorothea to be flawed, but exquisite in her "undefinable moral elevation," and ultimately concluded that Gwendolen Harleth was a "masterpiece."²

As feminist critics repeatedly view George Eliot as one of the great women of the last century, they attempt
to place all her heroines on the level of women fighting against stereotypical roles that do not allow them breadth and scope. But it is important to remember that George Eliot never allows her heroines to become the kind of woman she was. They were never larger than life and remained confined and confronted with the modest and everyday problems that women were likely to face. I believe that much of George Eliot's success and longevity as a novelist depends on the fact that women are still facing the same problems that Maggie, Dorothea and Gwendolen encounter. Some critics view Maggie Tulliver's death as the only option available to a woman of her character and actions, and see Maggie as the liberated woman whose actions ostracize her from society. As much of the criticism of George Eliot has centered on the epic Middlemarch as the definitive work of her career, the character of Dorothea has come under extensive scrutiny. Critics such as Leslie Stephen have concluded that what Dorothea really needs is a good husband to settle her down into her natural role as wife and mother. But the central question concerning Dorothea is whether or not her second marriage and her subsequent unheralded role in life is a justifiable or noble end for a woman of her goodness and potential for greatness. For Gwendolen Harleth, the critical reaction seems to be a reluctance to place blame on Gwendolen for her actions, a reluctance that stems from the confining rules of society that many believe cause her
to act as she does. However, I believe she must be held directly responsible for her actions, and not be judged a mere victim of society's restrictions.

The novels were published over a span of sixteen years, beginning with *The Mill on the Floss* in 1860, followed by *Middlemarch* in 1871-72, and concluding with *Daniel Deronda* in 1876, the final novel of George Eliot's career. By the time of the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot was cognizant that the role of women was changing and that women, as a result, were confused about their own roles and their place in society. This confusion is reflected in many of the problems facing Gwendolen Harleth. What was her role and place in her society and how could she go about discovering and fulfilling it? In *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot makes some definite statements about the values that women needed to approach and fulfill their purpose in their society.

The struggles of these characters are not worldly or momentous issues, but they are made poignant and significant by George Eliot's keen perception of their universal nature. They are simply the struggles of ordinary human beings, whose flaws and failings prohibit them from becoming what they want to be, or initially believe they want to be. In some instances, they discover that what they wanted for themselves was unrealistic and selfish. At other times, their own failings forever close some avenues of choice to them. Maggie will never have
the kind of platonic or romantic relationship with any of the men she loves because she cannot adjust her personality and desires to the limitations society has placed on her. George Eliot depicts Maggie as a girl whose high spirits place her at odds with her society, but whose own personality is also at fault. Her nature as a problem child, her total demands on those she loves, when compounded by the failure of the Mill and the resultant hardships, combine to make her life and future dramatically different from what she expects. As Maggie struggles to deal with this disillusionment, she encounters challenges that she ultimately cannot meet or act on.

Like Maggie, Dorothea struggles to find meaning and purpose in her life, but she herself is concerned with her inexperience and her lack of knowledge that she believes limits her ability to make correct decisions. This concern and desire for knowledge leads her to marry Casaubon, an act which does teach her more about her own abilities, not through the guiding light of her scholar husband, but as she is forced to rely on her own opinion and feelings about what is right and wrong. Although Dorothea undergoes many disillusionments, she emerges as the most successful of all George Eliot's heroines in her ability to adapt to her disillusionments. But this adaptation does necessitate the abandonment of her search for a role beyond that of wife and mother, and she
seemingly accepts the restrictions society placed on women at that time.

Gwendolen Harleth undergoes the strongest disillusionment and receives the harshest judgment from George Eliot. Gwendolen's struggle to overcome her vanity and selfishness extracts the highest payment of any of George Eliot's heroines. Despite Gwendolen's final statement that she will survive, her outcome remains unclear. However, even if it is only to become like Dorothea, a woman who never attains any fame or widespread recognition for her gentleness and nobility, Gwendolen certainly seems to be able to progress from the point where we leave her at the novel's close. The reader and critic themselves must decide whether her disillusionments have generated insight and motivation enough to act and change her existence to become an unheralded, but noble and worthwhile woman.

The purpose of this study is to examine George Eliot's beliefs about the individual's ability to adapt to the limitations of her own personality and society's. Each heroine encounters hardships because of their inability to adequately gauge the reality around them. What ultimately allows these heroines to react and be effective within their societies is their ability to gain insight from their struggles and to act accordingly.
They were very bitter tears; everybody in the world seemed so hard and unkind to Maggie; there was no indulgence, no fondness, such as she imagined when she fashioned the world afresh in her own thoughts. In books there were people who were always agreeable or tender, and delighted to do things that made one happy and who did not show their kindness by finding fault. The world outside the books was not a happy one, Maggie felt; it seemed to be a world where people behaved the best to those they did not pretend to love and that did not belong to them. And if life had not love in it, what else was there for Maggie? Nothing but poverty and the companionship of her mother's narrow griefs—perhaps of her father's heart cutting childish dependence. There is no hopelessness so sad as that of early youth, when the soul is made up of wants and has no long memories, no superadded life in that of others, though we who look on think lightly of such premature despair as if our vision of the future lightened the blind sufferer's present.

Maggie Tulliver, the heroine of *The Mill on the Floss*, cannot adapt or modify her passionate ideals, desires and expectations to fit the limitations of her society. Her inability to adjust to the necessary and typical restrictions of her society is magnified by her circumstances. Her father's financial failure and the resulting hardships—the loss of joy, ease, and social standing—present Maggie with obstacles that she cannot master. She appraises her present and future situation in a pessimistic and often hopeless light. Through a series
of events, chiefly conditioned by her failure to receive the full measure of love and indulgence from her brother Tom, Maggie never grows from her disillusionments to form insights, instead she dies after a frustratingly bitter search to find a life that meets her unrealistic expectations.

Finally, Maggie Tulliver is not the only character in The Mill on the Floss disillusioned by the turn of events centered on the fall of the Tulliver Family. In this essay, I will study the blighted expectations of Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver, of Tom, and of Stephen Guest, whose self-confident beliefs about love undergo a rapid and painful reversal. There is little doubt that these characters' trials are secondary to Maggie's, yet such characters should be studied in order to discern how their attempts to act and readjust their beliefs about their society reflect on Maggie's plight.

Discussions of this novel are traditionally marked by disagreement about its conclusion, and by the belief that Stephen Guest is not presented as an adequate temptation to someone of Maggie's character. I believe an analysis of her illusions will help show the consistency of both the novel's conclusion and Maggie's choice of Stephen as a lover. Maggie's passion for Stephen becomes understandable when one considers the nature of her expectations about love, and the failure of Tom to fulfill them. Furthermore, Maggie's lack of insight and action
make the conclusion of the novel clearer, although still appearing harsh. It seems that the reader's strong reaction against Maggie's destruction stems from the strong sympathy created for the hopelessness of Maggie's lot in life and her noble nature. But Maggie does not reach any insight after all her trials, as is demonstrated in this passage toward the novel's denouement:

Life stretched before her as one act of penitence, and all she craved, as she dwelt on her future lot, was something to guarantee her from more falling; her own weakness haunted her like a vision of hideous possibilities that made no peace conceivable except such as lay in the sense of sure refuge. (505)

For Maggie, the only "sure refuge" from her weakness and falling is death. Even during these final moments, she still clings to her belief that penitence will somehow ease and erase her regrettable acts. Throughout the novel, she returns to the idea of penitence, self-denial and renunciation but they are never enough to keep her from doing wrong. Still, she turns once more toward them, as though they could still sustain her.

The unusual nature of Maggie's childhood shapes her path to disillusionment. She loves with intense passion and depth and suffers from being something of a changeling as a child. Her hair won't curl, her skin is much too brown, and her temper too quick. Maggie's awareness that her looks and behavior are somehow not what they should be generates her impulsive longing to be rid of all the
things that create this difference. Perhaps no scene better demonstrates this desire and her tendency to act in an all-or-nothing fashion than the incident when she cuts her hair and sits as "helpless and despairing as Ajax among the slaughtered sheep" (63):

He [Tom] hurried downstairs and left poor Maggie to that bitter sense of the irrevocable which was almost an everyday experience of her small soul. She could see clearly now that the thing was done, that it was very foolish and that she should have to hear and think about her hair more than ever, for Maggie rushed to her deeds with passionate impulse and then saw not only their consequences, but what would have happened if they had not been done with all the detail and exaggerated circumstances of an active imagination. (62)

Maggie's tendency to do and want everything in extremes stands out as her most significant fault, a fault that in a child is perhaps not unexpected or unusual, but Maggie's failure to grow out of this tendency certainly contributes to her downfall. This fault directly shapes her need to be loved, which must be filled in this same all-consuming fashion. Tom's failure to love her completely, indeed, everyone's failure to love Maggie wholeheartedly and unreservedly, conditions all her searches for love. From the very early moments of her life, the effect and influence of this desire for love influences Maggie's actions:

It was Tom's step then that Maggie heard on the stairs when her need of love had triumphed over her pride and she was going down with her
swollen eyes and dishevelled hair to beg for pity. At least her father would stroke her hair and say, 'Never mind, my wench.' It is a wonderful subduer, this need for love--this hunger by which nature forces us to submit to the yoke and change the face of the world. (35)

Critics have noted that Maggie's submission to Tom seems contradictory to her intensely passionate nature. Leslie Stephen argues that "The young woman, with her high-wrought enthusiasm, submits too 'passively' not to say tamely to his imperious interference."³ But all her life Maggie acts in the belief that submitting to Tom will secure his love. Unfortunately, this belief is founded on an illusory premise about the nature of love, a premise by which Tom could never be influenced.

Maggie's ability to feel and desire things deeply and completely stems partially from her difficult childhood, but her father's failure and subsequent misfortunes hasten what, in light of her unrealistic expectations, would be inevitable disillusionments about the nature of her future. All her impulsive longings and imaginary indulgences are exaggerated by the hardness of her conditions. Maggie reacts against these conditions, but with a blindness that results in a false self-denial and submission that do nothing to alleviate the harshness of her trials. In fact, Maggie's renunciation is perverse, and stems from an egotistic pride in suffering, and a belief that such a hard path would be ennobling, and eventually guarantee her the pleasures she once believed
would be hers. Much of the harshness of Maggie's life comes from the failure of those she loves to comfort her, but also from the lack of any viable vocation or duty that she can devote herself to and thereby forget some of her trials. But there can be no love or vocation that will ever completely satisfy Maggie's consuming desires; therefore, she is destined to fail unless she can adjust her expectations of others to a more realistic level of involvement.

As a child, Maggie's visions of her world depend on a knowledge of books and fairytales. She imagines the gypsy camp will be the perfect home for her and constantly expects the perfect life described in books she has read to become available to her. Her gradual disillusionment increases in bitterness and effect, until at last Maggie abandons any hope for the world she once imagined. But she abandons hope because her circumstances seem cruelly to prohibit any chance of such a world opening up to her, not because she has the insight that the kind of world she expects cannot materialize, because it is unrealistic. In her disillusionment, Maggie turns to a search for a duty or vocation that might somehow give her a place in life. Her father's downfall necessitates Tom's earning his bread and Maggie envies him this option; he is able to shut himself off from the pain and solitude of their home and find some minor solace in the working world, while she cannot:
... she was as lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl in the civilized world of that day who had come out of her school-life with a soul untrained for inevitable struggles; with no other part of her inherited share in the hardworn treasures of thought, which generations of painful toil have laid up for the race of men, than shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history; with much futile information about Saxon and other kings of doubtful example ... (293)

George Eliot indicates in this passage that Maggie's unfortunate circumstances are not singular to her own life, that others were suffering identically, but for Maggie, the pain and disillusionment are never lightened by the acknowledgement that she is not alone in her troubles. She seeks to remedy her loneliness by finding a duty. Eventually, she believes that Philip Wakem will finally provide her with a better purpose to fill her life, by easing the burden of his. But this too is an illusion, as Maggie discovers that such a duty cannot stop her from loving Stephen, and thus harming Philip.

Barbara Hardy notes George Eliot's care not to place her heroines in typical situations when faced with the need or choice of a vocation:

When George Eliot's heroines are faced with the problem of a career none of them become authoresses and although some of them become governesses, George Eliot carefully refrains from showing us a Jane Eyre ... Maggie Tulliver has a 'dreary situation in a school,' but we do not see her there, and when she becomes daily governess to Dr. Kenn's younger children we see nothing of the schoolroom.
George Eliot's point in providing only the smallest details of Maggie's role as teacher and governess indicates the failure of these roles to fulfill Maggie's desire for a larger duty and vocation. They are not enough, especially in light of Maggie's need for an all-consuming vocation, one that will occupy every aspect of her being. After all, only through her own determination does she work at all. When Tom pays off his father's debts and buys the Mill, everyone expects Maggie will settle down into the life that the single female of her day would have followed. But Maggie makes it clear that this is not what she desires. Such inactivity is repulsive to her, although much of the repulsion comes from her fear of her own actions if she stays in the vicinity of Stephen Guest. She is unable to trust her own powers of self-denial and fears she might eventually give way to his entreaties. Even after her return from their failed elopement, she seeks some position in society. But this is a course of action that Maggie's escapade with Stephen has permanently closed to her. Finally, when Dr. Kenn has no choice but to relieve Maggie of her role as governess, she remains without any choices or hopes of finding any duty through which she might make amends for her actions. This frustrating of her desire to occupy her life in some better vocation is confused once more with her notions of penitence. She feels that committing
herself to any role, however small or tedious, will somehow redeem her in the eyes of those she loves.

But what possible role or duty has Maggie been prepared for? To her falls the typical lot of women of her time. She and Lucy knit and sew for charity, visit relatives, daydream and take long walks; life is an endless series of meaningless tasks created to absorb time and effort until one day passes to the next. No wonder a sensitive woman like Maggie has time to reflect and worry about the lack of meaning and purpose in her life. Furthermore, all the possibilities for beauty and culture are removed because of her father's misfortunes. Maggie decides through a twisted interpretation of Thomas a Kempis that self-denial, a continual penitence and renunciation of the pleasures and beauties of life, will provide the only key to survival within the cruel and unjust restrictions she feels life has unfairly imposed on her. Once again, the need for love, "the wonderful subduer," causes Maggie to follow this false road, believing that such self-denial and penitence will eventually be repaid with the fulfillment of her wishes. Laurence Lerner has pointed out that Maggie's reliance on renunciation never serves the purpose she believes it will: "Renunciation itself has been one of her strongest impulses, and it has neither followed reason nor led her to act for others." 5
It is not until Philip Wakem wisely points out that her renunciation will serve only to magnify her desires and that "every rational satisfaction of your nature that you now deny will assault you like a savage appetite" (336) that Maggie begins to abandon her course of penitence:

Here suddenly was an opening in the rocky wall which shut in the narrow valley of humiliation where all her prospect was the remote unfathomable sky; and some of the memory haunting earthly delights were no longer out of her reach. (332)

Indeed, one of the only insights Maggie does receive concerns the false nature of this self-inflicted punishment. She later discovers the true meaning of renunciation in her relationship with Stephen. She conveys this realization to her aunt, "'Oh, aunt Gritty, I'm very wretched. I wish I could have died when I was fifteen. It seemed so easy to give up things then, it is so hard now.'" (462). The only purpose that Maggie's penitence and self-denial serves is to prepare her for her final "suicide" when she sacrifices her life as a sign of her remorse for her actions.

Reva Stump argues that the constrictions of the society of St. Oggs are responsible for Maggie's tragic existence. 6 Susan Shahzade believes that Maggie dies because, as a woman, she has no alternatives left to her in an environment designed by men for men. 7 George Eliot
certainly criticizes society by portraying its narrowness in judging and condemning Maggie, and in the lack of any alternative roles besides those of dutiful daughter or sacrificing wife. Yet Maggie also judges herself as having failed, and her failure results from her inability to receive any insight from her disillusionments, and in her unrealistic expectations of love as a force of salvation. Maggie goes to her death unenlightened about the failure of her father, Tom, Philip, and Stephen to meet her demands for love. She never understands that such demands can never be met.

Maggie's love for her brother is central to every issue in The Mill on the Floss. All her actions and desires stem from her need to be loved intensely and completely, a need which Tom, as her brother, can never meet. Her brother is embedded in her earliest memories, as she tells Philip when he wistfully notes that Maggie will never love him the way she loves Tom:

'Perhaps not,' said Maggie simply; 'but then, you know, the first thing I ever remember in my life is standing with Tom by the side of the Floss while he held my hand; everything before that is dark to me.' (313)

This memory is prophetic about the sad nature of what Tom and Maggie's last memories will be, and their intertwined, deadly fate.

Maggie's love for Tom is always undercut by the knowledge that he does not love her in the same way as she
loves him. Furthermore, his love always includes a judgment of her actions, while hers remains all-embracing. Maggie and Tom have a typical love/hate relationship as children, but that this relationship continues when they are adults is certainly an example of both characters' failure to grow from their experiences. Jerome Thale has pointed out the failure of either Maggie or Tom to "temper their attitudes:"

He [Tom] does make good, but he never really grows up: his reaction to Philip Wakem remains adolescent, and, more important, his attitude toward himself and toward Maggie does not develop beyond that of the self-righteous schoolboy. Tom's ferocious and one-sided coming to terms with reality is a growing up only in a superficial sense . . . Though it does in the end amount to failure to grow up, Maggie's difficulty is not to be described so simply . . . Though Maggie's world does not offer her much, her real problem is internal and lies in the way she deals with her world.8

The way in which Maggie deals with her world is too often childish, as Richard Colby has also noticed: "Maggie--when confronted with moral choices in adult life--clings to the perennial companions of her existence, the Floss, Dorlcote Mill, her brother and her parents."9

One of Maggie's few insights emerges in her appraisal of Tom's faults after his "self-righteous schoolboy" reaction after discovering Maggie and Philip's relationship:

'I don't want to defend myself,' said Maggie, still with vehemence; 'I know I've been
wrong, --often, continually, but yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would have been better for, if you had them. If you were in fault, if you had done anything very wrong, I should be sorry for the pain it brought you; I should not want punishment heaped on you. But you have always been hard and cruel to me; even when I was a little girl and always loved you better than anyone else in the world, you would let me go to bed without forgiving me. You have no pity; you have no sense of your own imperfection and your own sins. It is a sin to be hard, it is not fitting for mortal, for a Christian. You are nothing but a Pharisee. You thank God for nothing but your own virtues; you think they are great enough to win you everything else. You have not even a vision of feelings by the side of which your shining virtues are mere darkness.' (354)

There is no better appraisal of Tom's character in the novel, his failing, limitations and refusal ever to bend standards that are completely unrealistic. But Maggie cannot take this insight into Tom's character and grow from it. Instead, she continually seeks his approval, and shapes and conditions her life toward meeting his requirements. When she returns in disgrace, in spite of her knowledge of Tom's unbending nature, she still seeks him out:

Her brother was the human being of whom she had been most afraid from her childhood upwards--afraid with that fear which springs in us when we love one who is inexorable, unbending, unmodifiable, with a mind that we can never mold ourselves upon, and yet that we cannot endure to alienate from us. (495)

Much of Maggie's fear of Tom comes from the knowledge that her brother, despite his stubbornness and failure to be
aware of his own imperfections, is certainly aware of hers:

'I never feel certain about anything with you. At one time you take pleasure in sort of perverse self-denial, and at another you have not resolution to resist a thing you know to be wrong.' (402)

Maggie writhes under her brother's judgment; she fears it because of its accuracy. Their reunion after her disastrous actions with Stephen fulfills Maggie's worst fears about her brother's character. Tom ostracizes her, refusing to understand or accept any reasons for her conduct, which he inevitably judges against what he considers to be the irreproachable nature of his own. Tom's failure to have any insight into his sister's possible motivations and struggle undoubtedly hastens her final self-destruction. Tom's insights into her noble nature come too late to save either of them:

It was not until 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 question, he guessed a story of almost miraculous, divinely protected effort. (533)
Thus Tom finally realizes that Maggie's spirit is noble and courageous, that she does not exist for capricious pleasure nor to inflict pain on others for her own satisfaction. But it is probable that Tom's character is such that he could only receive such insight in the moments before death. And for Maggie, only in death can she experience the kind of love and worship from Tom she has always craved. The language of the passage, the "awe and humiliation" with which Tom looks at Maggie, her "miraculous, divinely protected effort," also signals the arrival of the almost religious worship that Maggie has always desired from Tom, the unquestioning, all-embracing love that usually accompanies the worship of some larger than life image.

Although Maggie's unrequited love for Tom dominates her life, the love she feels for her father and its subsequent inability to comfort him also contributes to her disillusionment about the nature of love. After her father loses the Mill, she does not blame him, but clings to him still, in love and gratitude for all that he has done for her. Tom's criticism of her father instantly arouses her sympathy and love for him:

Her heart went out to him with a stronger movement than ever at the thought that people would blame him. Maggie hated blame; she had been blamed all her life and nothing had come of it but evil tempers. Her father had always defended and excused her, and her loving remembrance of his tenderness was a force within
her that would enable her to do anything for his sake. (207)

To Maggie, her father remains one of the only lights of her childhood; his approval of her, contrasted to her mother's constant remonstrances about her looks and behavior, becomes a valuable pearl that Maggie clings to as a hope for life in the future—a sign that all is not bleak in her life. But this hope dies as Maggie's love and attention to her father do not suffice to relieve him of the weight of his failures:

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 mixed with bitterness, like everything else. (284)

The "grim melancholy" felt by Mr. Tulliver is further exemplified in the attitudes of his wife, whose inability to comprehend or act after the family's misfortunes also compounds Maggie's hardships. Mrs. Tulliver can provide Maggie with none of a mother's comforts and presents a sad picture of a feeble mind trying to understand why all her expectations have suddenly been shattered:

Why that should have happened to her which had not happened to other women remained an insoluble question by which she expressed her perpetual ruminating comparison of the past with the present. (281)
Even Mrs. Tulliver's generous compassionate gesture of staying with Maggie after she returns in disgrace arises out of a confused notion of maternal devotion, unenlightened by an insight into her daughter's sacrifice or the true nature of her troubles:

'I must put up wi' my children; I shall never have no more; and if they bring me bad luck, I must be fond on it; there's nothing much else to be fond on, for my furnitur' went long ago. And you'd got to be very good once; I can't think of how it's turned out the wrong way so!' (503)

Mrs. Tulliver represents the childishly materialistic woman of her age. Deprived of her furniture, her silver and her linens, and her place in society, she lives out her life wondering where she went wrong since all her possessions were taken from her, even ultimately, her children.

For Maggie, neither her father nor her mother can provide her with the loves she craves. When Tom repeatedly rejects attempts by Maggie to share their mutual disillusionments about their lives, Maggie begins her search for a love that will meet her requirements. Their different temperaments make Maggie's need for love much stronger than Tom's, as Richard Colby observes: "Of a more sensitive and aesthetic temperament than Tom, Maggie responds to beauty and things of the intellect and the imagination."¹⁰ This is part of the reason Maggie is attracted to Philip but any discussion of the love that
Maggie feels for Philip, or Stephen must be preceded by an understanding that the love she feels for both these men is subordinated to her love for Tom and shaped by his response. Her initial affection for Philip stems from his kindness to Tom at school; furthermore, Philip possesses all the qualifications necessary to receive love from Maggie. He is an outcast through no fault of his own; his physical deformity makes him an object of Maggie's all-embracing compassion. But he is also a sensitive, artistic man who finally worships Maggie in the way she wishes her brother would. Philip represents the brother Tom never has been or ever will be, one who loves Maggie without judging her, and who will promise to remain with her forever:

'What a dear, good brother you would have been, Philip,' said Maggie, smiling through the haze of her tears. 'I think you would have made as much fuss about me and been as pleased for me to love you as would have satisfied even me. You would have loved me well enough to bear with me and forgive me everything. That was what I always longed that Tom should do. I was never satisfied with a little of anything.' (335)

Philip's deformity also increases the strength of his surrogate brother role since it hinders Maggie from having sexual desires for him.

Philip initially fulfills Maggie's illusions about love in several ways. He reopens a world from which she has shut herself off because it seems to taunt her with its inaccessibility. In agreeing to meet Philip, she
gives up her life of self-imposed renunciation. Maggie begins to see the beauty around her once more. Philip also seems to provide her with the ultimate goal of a larger duty, and Maggie expresses the belief that her ability to soften Philip's harsh life will be the greatest duty she could have. But Maggie is once again disillusioned about the power and nature of this devoted love when she meets Stephen Guest. She then discovers that her sympathetic love for Philip, the desire to relieve his burden, is not strong enough to overcome the passion she feels for Stephen.

George Eliot makes it clear that Maggie's love for Stephen is sexual and her love for Philip one of sisterly affection and devotion. Maggie never looks on Philip as a lover. The physical, sexual love that attracts Maggie to Stephen involves a passion that she has never felt. The power of this love defies all her resolutions and ideals about her love for Philip and for Lucy, and she cannot overcome it until she partially succumbs to it.

Maggie's relationship with Stephen Guest provides the final hardship of her brief and sorrowful existence. Critics have found Stephen Guest a character who cannot match Maggie in depth or spirit, a man who is therefore unworthy to be the cause of her ultimate downfall. F.R. Leavis criticizes Stephen, explaining that George Eliot's failure with him results from her autobiographical illusions as an unattractive writer fantasizing about the
perfect lover. Leslie Stephen reacted so strongly against Stephen that he called him a "mere hairdresser's block," and goes on to accuse George Eliot of being unable to portray male characters. Joan Bennett acquits George Eliot of this charge, but remarks that:

The question at issue for the modern reader is not whether so 'noble' a character as Maggie could be mastered by passion, even if it is, in part, but whether Stephen Guest is presented as an adequate temptation.

To base a criticism on the belief that Stephen cannot be a suitable lover for Maggie seems almost absurd. It would not be possible to argue that every two people that love and experience passion are suited to each other or "well-matched." In presenting Stephen as the cause of Maggie's downfall, George Eliot further comments on the irony of love. Neither Stephen nor Maggie has a clear vision of what love entails. Each believes the other is everything he or she dislikes, yet they are almost instantly aware of their attraction for each other. Stephen has selected Lucy as just the right wife for him, the kind of girl who is "accomplished, gentle, affectionate and not stupid." Maggie believes that her affectionate, sisterly devotion to Philip will be enough to fulfill her needs for love. But both Maggie and Stephen discover that their conceptions of love can only be fulfilled through each other, and that the passion they
feel, despite its harm to others, is the true love they search for.

Laurence Lerner explains Maggie's attraction to Stephen in this way:

What we share is the yearning that takes her to Stephen, the need that causes her to see so much of him. George Eliot understood this: she meant us to share the yearning, whatever our reservations about Stephen. . .

George Eliot accepted criticism about the conclusion of her novel, but was adamant about her characterization of Stephen:

The other point of criticism--Maggie's position towards Stephen--is too vital a part of my whole conception for me to be converted to the condemnation of it. If I am wrong there--if I did not really know what my heroine would do under the circumstances in which I deliberately placed her--I ought not to have written this book at all, but quite a different book, if any. If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble, but liable to great error--error that is anguish to its own nobleness--then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology.

George Eliot's reasoning for Maggie's succumbing to the temptation of Stephen appears to be the pointing out of the futility of following a life of self-denial and renunciation that serves only to provide a perverse pride in sacrifice. The strict discipline that Maggie inflicts on herself proves her undoing. Had she not led such a severe life, devoid of all pleasure and self-indulgence,
Stephen's worship of her might not have seemed quite so attractive; his culture, voice, and refinements might not have aroused in Maggie all her suppressed longings. Richard Colby feels that for Maggie, Stephen represents "the temporary displacement of morality by aesthetics." Here is a physically strong, attractive, cultured man who singles her out as the "single passion of his life." The fault of their relationship lies, therefore, not only in the expected pain it causes others, but in Maggie's pathetic self-love and long suppressed pride that Stephen's worship of her encourages, starved as she is for any romantic attention from anyone:

Maggie has smiled at herself then, and for the moment had forgotten everything in the sense of her own beauty, crowned by the night of her massy hair. If that state of mind could have lasted, her choice would have been to have Stephen Guest at her feet, with daily incense of adoration near and distant, and with all possibilities of culture at her command. But there were things stronger in her than vanity--passion, and affection and long deep memories of early discipline and effort, of early claims of her love and pity; and the stream of vanity was soon swept along and mingled imperceptibly with that wider current that was at its highest force today, under the double urgency of the events and inward impulses brought by the last week. (447)

As Maggie struggles to overcome her passion for Stephen, she fights against the harshness of her lot and tries to gain some insight into the nature and purpose of her sufferings:
There were moments in which a cruel selfishness seemed to be getting possession of her; why should not Lucy—why should not Philip suffer? She had had to suffer through many years of her life, and who had ever renounced anything for her? And when something like that fullness of existence—love, wealth, ease, refinement, all that her nature had craved, was brought within her reach, why was she to forego it that another might have it, another who perhaps needed it less? (470)

Maggie's long-held belief that her earlier suffering and denial would somehow be rewarded is a major part of her failure to understand why she should not yield to Stephen. Since all her suffering was motivated by the wrong reasons, it once again stirs her to act in a manner that she incorrectly believes she has "earned."

But amidst all this new passionate tumult there were the old voices making themselves heard with rising power until from time to time the tumult seemed quelled. Was that existence which tempted her the full existence she dreamed? Where, then, would all the memories of early striving, all the deep pity for another's pain which had been nurtured in her through years of affection and hardship, all the divine presentiment of something higher than mere personal enjoyment, which had made the sacredness of life? (470)

That the "tumult" is only quelled from "time to time" shows how unsuccessful Maggie is in believing that the course of action she wants to follow is the right course. Again, had Maggie not committed herself to following a self-inflicted path of denial and penitence that served no real purpose other than to make this kind of temptation
impossible to resist, she would not have been faced with the dilemma of wondering why she had suffered at all.

She might just as well hope to enjoy walking by maiming her feet as hope to enjoy an existence in which she set out by maiming the faith and sympathy that were the best organs in her soul. And then, if pain were so hard to her, what was it to others? (470)

But all Maggie's fighting and questioning are in vain. She cannot bring herself to resist Stephen and in committing the single, regrettable action of her life, she brings suffering to all those she loved and had hoped to protect.

After her return to St. Oggs, when her attempts to be reintegrated into society and to be forgiven by Tom have failed, it becomes even more difficult for her to resist Stephen's entreaties: "All that day before she had been filled with the vision of a lonely future through which she must carry the burden of regret, upheld only by clinging faith." (527) She recalls her feelings for Philip and Lucy with an effort and seems once more on her former path of life-long renunciation. But she has told Stephen that she would rather have died than fallen into temptation, and it cannot be coincidence that her wavering once more toward him is followed by the flood:

'I will bear it, and bear it till death... But how long it will be before death comes! I am so young, so healthy. How shall I have the patience and strength? Am I to struggle and
fall and repent again? Has life other trials as hard for me still?'

... Surely there was something being taught to her by this experience of great need; and she must be learning a secret of human tenderness and long suffering that the less erring could hardly know? 'Oh God, if my life is to be long, let me live to bless and comfort-'

At that moment Maggie felt a startling sensation of sudden cold about her knees and feet; it was water flowing under her. (528)

Maggie does die rather than yield again to temptation. Although her death in the flood reunites her with her brother, Maggie's refuge in death appears to provide little evidence of her final insight into her sufferings. She dies knowing that she resisted the ultimate temptation of marrying Stephen, but she also knows that she was not strong enough to prevent hurting those she loves and thus considers herself a failure. Furthermore, she seems to learn nothing from her denial of Stephen if her only act in life after that denial is to await a quick death. She learns nothing from her struggle but the fear that she might fall again. Rather than learning from her disillusionments and applying some of her insights from her struggles into a better future for herself, she turns to death, the only option she considers available to her to provide her with the kind of security she seeks in preventing her from ever hurting another again.

Ultimately, no character in the novel can build upon disillusionment as a foundation for action. Both Maggie and Tom are victims of their diametrically opposed,
equally unyielding natures. We are told that with Maggie is buried both Philip and Stephen's "keenest joy and sorrow" (535); although Stephen eventually marries Lucy, it is an act that is probably an afterthought, born out of guilt and sorrow at the loss of Maggie. And poor, imbecilic Mrs. Tulliver must live to see all her "possessions" taken from her and her strongest premonitions about the river fulfilled. Therefore, The Mill on the Floss seems to offer little promise that human beings can adapt and adjust to changes and setbacks in their lives and expectations. Maggie, Tom, Stephen, the major characters and minor ones, cannot take advantage of their experiences and insights in shaping actions that could realistically fulfill their goal of happiness or purposeful existence.
CHAPTER III

MIDDLEMARCH

Although Middlemarch is the second novel of this study, its heroine, Dorothea Brooke, must be ranked as George Eliot's most positive female character. In this massive "study of provincial life," George Eliot presents her reader with an exhaustive, complex depiction of the difficulties and contradictions of human life in rural nineteenth-century England. In Dorothea Brooke, the would-be Saint Theresa, she portrays the difficulties faced by a woman whose existence depends on both love and vocation, but whose illusions about how and what these desires entail cause her painful disillusionment, although she is not without some final insight.

Jerome Thale notes the increase in scope of Middlemarch as compared to The Mill on the Floss. "She is presenting the world not as hostile but as real, necessary, that is, as the tough and sometimes intractable material in which the individual character becomes and is demonstrated."¹

All the leading characters in the novel have a dangerous illusion created by the failure of their own aspirations to conform to the realistic expectations and limitations of society. Dorothea believes that she can do
good through learning, and that the way to learning can only be found through marrying someone with the "guiding light" of knowledge. Casaubon believes that marriage to a young and vibrant girl will bring him peace and repose. Lydgate initially believes that the demands of science and new medical concepts will be welcomed and met by Middlemarch, while Rosamund looks to marriage to provide her with a long sought egotistical self-enhancement. Even Bulstrode, according to Quentin Anderson, is deluded in believing his inward moral restitution can somehow atone for his appropriation of his original fortune. In this chapter, I intend to examine the nature of Dorothea's illusions, their gradual disintegration, and her subsequent insights and actions. I will also study Casaubon's disillusionment with marriage and his intellectual pursuits. Lydgate and Rosamund's mutual disillusionment with love and marriage, and Lydgate's resulting failure to complete the career he once sought, will be examined in an effort to understand how all these characters exemplify George Eliot's conclusions about Dorothea's final role in life, and to ascertain whether Dorothea is able to act from the insights she receives during her life.

Dorothea's desire to do good and improve her society leads her into a disastrous marriage. Her initial flaw is an inability to see the true character of those who surround her, as well as the limitations of her
environment. This inability to see clearly sometimes stands her in good stead and she is led past people's more obvious and damning flaws: "her blindness to whatever did not lie in her own pure purpose carried her safely by the side of precipices where vision would have been perilous with fear." (273) However, her blindness ultimately proves more harmful than beneficial. In choosing to marry Casaubon, she takes the first step in learning that her problems in finding some larger purpose in her life are not solved as easily as she imagined. Laura Emery points out what Dorothea's choice of Casaubon represents:

Her desire to submit herself to a great teacher, like her other self-mortifying practices, is meant to be recognized as idealism well mixed with ambitious pride and illusion. . . . The author makes us aware that Dorothea's choice is made in accordance with an ideal image of herself rather than in accordance with her actual nature.  

Like Maggie, Dorothea is drawn to self-mortification and penitence as a means of purifying her soul and perhaps ensuring some greater role in later life. Dorothea's air of self-denial also influences her desire to marry, as she seeks larger and nobler issues from her marriage than love and companionship. Her thoughts on her marriage at once make apparent this mixture of pride and illusion:

The union that attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path. 'I should learn everything then,' she said to herself. 'It
would be my duty to study that I might help him better in his great works. There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Everyday things with us would mean the greatest things. It would be like marrying Pascal. I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by. (21)

For Dorothea, the disillusionment after her marriage is twofold: marriage does not provide her with a vocation; nor does her husband prove to be the "guide who would take her along the grandest path."

Through other character's insights on Casaubon, and even by his own words, George Eliot makes it clear that he is not going to be the answer to Dorothea's search. In the early stages of the courtship between Dorothea and Casaubon, Celia presents the reader with an accurate picture of both Casaubon and Dorothea. Celia's awareness of her sister's blindness to anything not in keeping with her own wishes is very keen:

I thought it right to tell you because you went on as you always do, never looking just where you are, and treading in the wrong place. You always see what nobody else sees; it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you never see what is quite plain. (27)

Despite this general warning, Dorothea mistakenly marries Casaubon believing that his knowledge will be imparted to her and she will then be able to be guided appropriately by that knowledge:

... to Dorothea, after that toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies which had made
the chief part of her education, Mr. Casaubon's talk about his great book was full of new vistas. . . That more complete teaching would come--Mr. Casaubon would tell her all that: she was looking forward to a higher initiation in ideas, as she was looking forward to marriage, and blending dim conceptions of both. . . She did not want to deck herself with knowledge--wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action; and if she had written a book she must have done it as Saint Theresa did, under the command of an authority that constrained her conscience. But something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent; and since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more learned than Mr. Casaubon? (63-64)

Dorothea makes the mistake of looking to others for what she will only be able to find in herself. Her marriage to Casaubon is a mixture of desire for knowledge and a search for vocation. She believes that as Casaubon will be able to provide a light to see the world better, so too will she be able to provide assistance to a great scholar. However, Dorothea's learning is not advanced enough for her to be anything more than a copyist, and her desire to help him is further frustrated by Casaubon, who fears that any close examination of his work might reveal its inadequacy.

Dorothea's disillusionment with her marriage and her husband does not occur in a blinding, radiating moment, but over a gradual period of time. Barbara Hardy places Dorothea's moment of disenchantment with her marriage upon
her return to Lowick, but I believe she becomes disenchanted with her existence while in Rome, but cannot immediately identify the cause of her unhappiness. Her husband's many absences during their honeymoon allow her time to finally realize that she has approached her marriage with lofty expectations that Mr. Casaubon will never be able to meet:

How was it that in the weeks since her marriage, Dorothea had not distinctly observed but felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither? . . . What was fresh in her mind was worn out to his; and such capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by the general life of mankind had long shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalmment of knowledge. (145-146)

Dorothea is only just beginning to understand the true nature of marriage; she has yet to be disillusioned about the futility of her husband's search for the "Key to all Mythologies." From the moment that Will reappears, Dorothea's disillusionment with her husband gains force. Not only does Ladislaw plant the first seeds of doubt about her husband's research, Casaubon's own shoddy treatment of Ladislaw causes Dorothea to question her husband's goodness and integrity. Despite her apparent failure to think of Will as a lover, she finds herself anticipating his visits and his conversations as they are directly opposite to everything she has begun to find most
oppressive about Casaubon. His failure to make the "right" decisions about Will makes it apparent to Dorothea that, despite all his knowledge, her husband is less capable of deciding appropriately and justly than she is. Furthermore, Casaubon does not allow Dorothea any voice in decisions, arguing that her lack of worldly experience blurs and affects her judgment. This lack of experience is the very failing that Dorothea looked to Casaubon to remedy, and his criticism is especially hard to bear:

'Dorothea, my love, this is not the first occasion, but it were well that it should be the last, on which you have assumed a judgment on subjects beyond your scope. Into the question how far conduct, especially in the matter of alliances, constitutes a forfeiture of family claims, I do not now enter. Suffice it, that you are not here qualified to discriminate.' (275)

These are harsh words for Dorothea, all the more hurtful because they allude to an inadequacy which she has long feared in herself, and one which she looked to marriage to alleviate.

George Eliot's treatment of the sexual aspect of Casaubon's and Dorothea's marriage leaves much to be surmised, but clearly, another one of Dorothea's disillusionments stems from her husband's rather confused and worried attempts to avoid passionate demonstrations of any kind. He seems to fear any expression of emotion, sentiment or intelligence that is not obscurely tepid, qualified, drawn out and vague. The failure to provide
any physical comfort or relief to his wife oppresses Dorothea, whose passion and ardor are strong:

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 shoe-latchet, if he would have made any sign of acceptance other 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. (147)

Her husband's duplicity in inserting the codicil to his will restricting any marriage between Ladislaw and her provides Dorothea with the final realizations about her marriage:

But now her judgment, instead of being controlled by duteous devotion, was made active by the embittering discovery that in her past union there had lurked the hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion. The living, suffering man was no longer before her to awaken her pity, there remained only the retrospect of painful subjection to a husband whose thoughts had been lower than she believed, whose exorbitant claims for himself had even blinded his scrupulous care for his own character, and made him defeat his own pride by shocking men of ordinary honour. (362)

Thus her knowledge of her husband's deceit at last releases Dorothea from her heavy yoke. Casaubon's last act frees her from what would undoubtedly have been a life consuming, fruitless devotion to organizing his useless research. She disposes of her obligations to him in one incident, an incident which also shows her growth in
insight about marriage and the true purpose that should lie behind it:

The pity which had been the restraining compelling motive in her life with him still clung about his image even while she remonstrated with him in indignant thought and told him he was unjust. One little act of hers may perhaps be smiled at as superstitious. The Synoptical Tabulation for the use of Mrs. Casaubon, she carefully enclosed and sealed, writing within the envelope, 'I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no believe in--Dorothea.' Then she deposited the paper in her own desk. (393)

The lessons that Dorothea learns from her marriage are painful ones, bringing harsh realizations and unexpected adjustments. She also learns that, regardless of its nature or importance, she cannot work for or support what she has no belief in.

But if these lessons are harsh for Dorothea, so too, do they bring pain to Casaubon, who also does not receive what he expects from marriage. He imagines that marriage to a girl as young, beautiful, and ardent as Dorothea will bring a repose and contentment to the waning years of his life:

Poor Mr. Casaubon had imagined that his long studious bachelorhood had stored up for him a compound interest of enjoyment, and that large drafts on his affections would not fail to be honoured. . . . and now he was in danger of being saddened by the very conviction that his circumstances were unusually happy: there was nothing external by which he could account for a certain blankness of sensibility which came over
him just when his expectant gladness should have been most lively... (63)

Casaubon's sadness must increase. He discovers that Dorothea is too ardent, and her very youth and strength seems to turn in judgment against him. Just as Dorothea suffers during their honeymoon, so too does Casaubon, but as Reva Stump points out, Casaubon's disillusions are "woven out of passions which are in themselves ignoble."\(^5\)

After their first argument, Dorothea searches her soul and bears the burden of guilt, while Casaubon's egotistic nature reacts against this seemingly unjust slight on his character:

.. .to Mr. Casaubon, it was a new pain. .. since this charming young bride not only obliged him to much consideration on her behalf (which he had sedulously given), but turned out to be capable of agitating him most cruelly just where he most needed soothing. Instead of getting a soft, fence against the cold, shadowy, unapplausible audience of life, had he only given it a more substantial presence? (150)

After the development of Will and Dorothea's friendship, Casaubon's uncertain fears about his wife's lack of total adoration take shape and form. His life long fear of being discovered a pedant, convinces him that his wife judges him and brings his "power of suspicious construction into exasperated activity." (307) Life for Casaubon has not proved at all what he expected. Ever fearful to write a sentence lest it should betray his
ignorance and make him a laughing stock, Casaubon's life is an:

...uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught, and yet not to enjoy: to be present at the great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self--never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dimsighted. (207)

Casaubon's death frees both himself and Dorothea from an experience that never turns out to be what either envisioned. Casaubon dies with no insight, but with a selfish conviction that by adding the codicil to his will, he has prevented other happiness where he could find none.

But what effect does marriage have on Dorothea? I believe that by discovering that Casaubon's knowledge was not the guiding light to great decision-making, she somehow obtains an implicit faith in her own ability to judge right from wrong. She can now act as she sees best, using only her own feelings and belief to guide her, although she does accept advice from others. She readjusts her vision after realizing that life exists in more subtle nuances than she previously imagined. She tells Ladislaw of her adjustments to life:

'Sorrow comes in so many ways. Two years ago I had no notion of that--I mean of the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands, and makes us silent when we long to speak. I
used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up,' she added playfully. (397)

Yet although Dorothea does not realize it at once, she is now able to do what she chooses, with a security in her decisions brought about through her struggles. I shall discuss Dorothea's final outcome with Will below, but I would like to point out that regardless of her marriage to him, Dorothea does manage to take some positive action after Casaubon's death. She appoints Farebrother as curate, against the advice of others who could be considered more knowledgeable, and arrives at the decision by judging whether Farebrother's or Tyke's sermons have more meaning for Middlemarch society. She champions Lydgate, both in his personal battle and in his quest for support for his hospital. Although others have argued that it is naivete on Dorothea's part to accept Lydgate's story, she does a noble and sensitive act in supporting him and interceding on his behalf with Rosamund. And finally, Dorothea chooses to marry Ladislaw--Mrs. Cadawallader's "Italian with white mice." The only knowledge that guides Dorothea in these decisions is her perceptions and beliefs about human nature and her constant endeavor to relieve others' burdens.

The question of whether or not Dorothea is able to act upon the insights she receives after her marriage to Casaubon is tied to her actions after his death. The
entire question of the role of women in Victorian society, Dorothea's search for a higher duty and her ultimate fate as heroine, are all bound to her final decision to marry Will Ladislaw. The critical reaction about Will is mixed. Just as critics reacted against Maggie's choice of Stephen Guest, they also argue that Will Ladislaw and Dorothea are not well matched. Henry James wrote that:

The author, who is evidently very fond of him, has found for him here and there some charming and eloquent touches; but in spite of these he remains vague and impalpable to the end. . . . He is . . . a woman's man. ⁵

F. R. Leavis finds that Will is like Stephen; since both Maggie and Dorothea are self-indulgent fantasies of George Eliot, Guest and Ladislaw are accessories required by the fantasy. ⁷ Quentin Anderson feels that Ladislaw is "rather like a character in an ordinary novel," ⁸ while Leslie Stephen finds Will to be "conspicuously unworthy of the affections of a Saint Theresa." ⁹ Jerome Thale argues that the "failure of Will comes not from author identification with Dorothea and undigested wish-fulfillment, but from a failure to draw Ladislaw fully enough." ¹⁰ U.C. Knoepflmacher's argument supports this belief, stating that "if Ladislaw's unsatisfactoriness persists, this is so not because of his unsuitability as Dorothea's husband, but because, as a character, he serves too many different roles in the novel's ideological scheme." ¹¹
My own views rest more with the statements of Laura Emery and Reva Stump. Emery argues that:

A successful refutation of Leavis's charge that Dorothea gives us "Maggie's case again," will have to show that Dorothea develops a degree of self-knowledge greater than any implied in her disillusionment with Casaubon or mothering (rescuing) ideal. If we look closely at the stages of her relationship to Will Ladislaw, we see that her self-knowledge does grow, even if so slowly that a twentieth-century reader would like to shake her, and that she moves away from her ideal self-image toward self-acceptance. 12

Emery concludes that "Will Ladislaw may have too much potential and not enough actual form, even in the end, but he is right for Dorothea because he needs her and values her." This is an important point. In Casaubon's failure to provide her with the tenderness and sympathy Dorothea expects from a husband, Will's attentiveness, his worship of her, makes it apparent why Dorothea should be attracted to him. Just as Maggie enjoys and treasures the praise and attention that Stephen pays her, so too does Dorothea recognize and appreciate that Ladislaw believes her worthy of attention. Neither character is free from vanity. Although Dorothea depends more on a response to her thoughts and feelings about life and art, she is not completely immune to compliments on her appearance. Ladislaw is so enraptured with her, that even she can sense some part of his devotion. Will responds to her in a way that perhaps Dorothea, in her very earliest dreamy
visions about marriage, once anticipated a husband should. Will tells her:

'You are a poem—and that is to be the best part of a poet—what makes up the poet's consciousness in his best moods,' said Will, showing such originality as we all share with the morning and the springtime and other endless renewals. 'I am glad to hear it,' said Dorothea, laughing out her words in a birdlike modulation, and looking at Will with playful gratitude in her eyes. 'What kind things you say to me!' (166)

Ladislaw is alive to Dorothea's every feeling and wish. However, it is typical of George Eliot that she does not allow Dorothea to consider Will as anything but a "semi-relation" until after her husband's death.

Laurence Lerner expresses the belief that Ladislaw is not a total success:

Dorothea's second marriage, like that of Adam and Dinah's, is merely a happy ending. And just as Adam had to grow shadowy with romance when he took on his final role as a lover, so Ladislaw, splendidly as he is elsewhere seen, blurs slightly as he becomes Dorothea's husband.13

Ladislaw is, at times, splendidly drawn. I believe it is important to point out that Will is not a static character, waiting around for the appropriate moment to capture Dorothea. As Reva Stump observes, Will changes and develops his conception of love throughout the novel.14 Again, as she does in her portrayal of Maggie and Stephen's expectations about appropriate love and lovers, George Eliot adds a touch of irony in Will's
initial appraisal of Dorothea, whom he judges in light of Casaubon's personality:

Ladislaw had made up his mind that she must be an unpleasant girl since she was going to marry Casaubon, and what she said of her stupidity about pictures, would have confirmed that opinion even if he had believed her. . .There could be no sort of passion in a girl who would marry Casaubon. (59)

Obviously, the differences between Dorothea's first and second husbands are extreme. However, she begins her marriage to Casaubon sincerely convinced that he is everything she would want in a husband. It seems likely that had she met Will prior to Casaubon, she would not have been attracted to him. After all, he knows less than Casaubon, and therefore would have very little to recommend him to the early Dorothea.

Furthermore, Ladislaw's attitude and approach to love undergo changes throughout the novel. Initially, he is content to worship and idolize Dorothea. He wants to "fall at the Saint's feet and kiss her robe," (160) and believes that "She was not a woman to be spoken of as other women were." (161) But as their relationship progresses, Ladislaw's idolatry changes to desire and he becomes impatient with their roles. He still holds her higher than any other human, but this worship can no longer sustain him. He refuses to accept her belief that their lives need not be maimed by their separation. His "chivalrous attitude no longer holds any charm," as Stump
points out. Will tells Dorothea, "You may see beyond
the misery of it, but I don't." (594) He cannot be
content with vague possibilities or the remembrance of
having been loved. Reva Stump accurately judges the
nature of Will's progress:

But as a child in becoming a man becomes both
something less and something more, so Ladislav
has become something more in the very process of
taking on form. Dorothea has been for him a
shaping influence. And she accepts him now, not
as one who can take her 'along the grandest
path,' but simply as a man she can love. 16

But regardless of her final opinion of Will, Dorothea does
not accomplish great things, but accepts her role as wife
and mother, a life of "beneficent activity." I agree with
Reva Stump, who concludes that Dorothea's insights lead
her to accept a limited notion of her possible range of
action:

Dorothea has learned that the channels for doing
good are narrow and indirect, that Utopian plans
are ineffective, that human life is limited and
that waste of potential good is in the scheme of
things. 17

It does not seem possible to argue for any more positive
view than this, especially when one considers George
Eliot's concluding remarks on Dorothea's fate:

Many who knew her, thought it was a pity that so
substantive and rare a creature should have been
absorbed into the life of another and only be
known in a certain circle as a wife and mother.
But no one stated exactly what else 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 Ladislaw. (611)

Perhaps it is only when one considers the sadder fate of Dorothea's counterpart, Lydgate, does it become possible to consider Dorothea's fate with some optimism.

Lydgate has just as many dreams and ideals as Dorothea and that he is unable to fulfill them is perhaps sadder than Dorothea's fate, because as a man, Lydgate has the choice of many more vocations. His dream, to discover the "primitive tissue" that is the source of life, is certainly a noble one. But his illusions about women, love and marriage cause him to choose a woman whose egotistical narrowness strangles any chance of discovering that source of life. What he discovers instead is that his own goals and desires are unrealizable, not only because of the narrowness of Middlemarch society that fails to accept all the latest medical advances, but because he fails to make the right decisions since they are often the hardest. He believes his previous experience with the murderess Laure will provide ample proof against falling fatally in love again, when in fact Rosamund turns out to be just as deadly as Laure:

But he had more reason than ever for trusting his judgment, now that it was so experienced; and henceforth he would take a strictly scientific view of women, entertaining no expectations but such as were justified beforehand. (114)
His unrealistic belief is his downfall; he marries Rosamund and their resulting financial problems forever harness Lydagate to a life void of achievement. Hazel Mews presents one of the most telling interpretations of Lydgate's and Rosamund's marriage:

The marriage of Rosamund to Lydgate is definitely one which receives contemporary social approval [as opposed to both marriages of Dorothea]. Rosamund's attitude to his work, to his fervent wish to add something to fundamental medical knowledge, a wish parallel to Dorothea's, idea of doing some active good, which 'haunted her like a passion,' is confined to a certain pride in a husband who 'could make discoveries.' In Lydgate's case he is completely frustrated by his wife's narrowness and selfishness and obstinacy. 18

Leslie Stephen presents the best summation of Rosamund's character:

Rosamund Vincy is a model of one of the forms of stupidity against which the gods fight in vain. Being utterly incapable of even understanding her husband's aspirations, fixing her mind on the vulgar kind of success, and having the strength of will which comes from the absolute limitation of one aim, she is a most effective torpedo, and paralyses all Lydgate's energies. 19

Even for a creature as egotistical and self-centered as Rosamund, disillusionment comes, although there was "always but one person in Rosamund's world which she did not regard as blameworthy." But in her daydreaming romance built around Ladislaw, she at last discovers that the world does not revolve around her. When Ladislaw tells her that he would "rather touch her [Dorothea's]
hand if it were dead, than I would touch any woman's living," (571) Rosamund is temporarily stunned:

The terrible collapse of the illusion towards which all her hope had been strained was a stroke which had too thoroughly shaken her; her little world was in ruins. . .and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness. (572)

But Rosamund's disillusionment gives her no positive insight, as the conclusion of Middlemarch tells us, "she simply continued to be mild in her temper, inflexible in her judgment, disposed to admonish her husband and able to frustrate him by stratagem." (618)

But for Lydgate the disillusionment about his marriage, his money problems and compromising relationship with Bulstrode prove crushing. Jerome Thale observes that "Because Lydgate's work is so important, because so much of his character is committed to and defined by professional ambition, the collapse of his career means total wreck for him." 20 Lydgate is ultimately affected by a "slackening resolution," his feared "creeping paralysis." He dies at the young age of 50, his "skill relied on by many paying patients, but he always regarded himself as a failure; he had not done what he once meant to do." (610)

Yet Dorothea "had no dreams of being praised above other women, feeling that there was something better which she might have done. . .never repented that she had given
up position and fortune to marry Will Ladislaw." (610) "Dreams" are something that Dorothea finally learns to give up, that she can do that shows that she is better able to adapt to her society. Furthermore, she does not want praise or fame, and feels that the role she has accepted is something less than what she had once wanted, but is now wise enough to accept that smaller role and not react against or repent it.

Thus we have two people who want to do some "good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world." (110) When compared to Lydgate's failure, brought on by his dreams and illusions and his inability to support the weight of his own actions, Dorothea's end, though ambiguous, is more successful, even though "it spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth."
CHAPTER IV

DANIEL DERONDA

And poor Gwendolen had never dissociated happiness from personal pre-eminence and eclat... Surely a young creature is pitiable who has the labyrinth of life before her and no clue--to whom distrust in herself and her good fortune has come as a sudden shock, like a rent across the path that she was treading carelessly.¹

In Gwendolen Harleth, George Eliot creates a pathetic masterpiece, a woman whose selfish actions and needs combine to make her life miserable and pointless until, in disillusionment, she realizes she must turn her goals and desires outward for the betterment of others. Gwendolen's illusions about her world, her "ambitions and desire for luxury" (40), her "practical ignorance" and girlish ideals that consist of "being daring in speech and reckless in braving dangers, both moral and physical" (94), predestine her to fail in her search for personal happiness, tied as it is to her strong "determination to have what is pleasant." (71)

Perhaps the sharpest difference in this final novel is that between Gwendolen's character and other George Eliot heroines, especially those considered in this study. Maggie and Dorothea are heroines whose goodness transcends the petty and small limits of their environments and their
social counterparts. Certainly there are few characters better than these two within their worlds; Lucy is not Maggie's superior, nor is anyone held up as a model for Dorothea; on the contrary, she is the most revered. Yet Gwendolen must see herself bettered in temperament, intelligence, and talent by her cousin Anna, Miss Arrowpoint and Mirah. Gwendolen makes no pretense of self-sacrifice or penitence; she is a "princess in exile," "always bored," and has no interest in improving her world or making anyone's burden easier. Furthermore, Gwendolen's inability to love and her fear of physical contact, revealed early when her cousin Rex tries to become tender with her, make her "curl up and harden like sea-anenome at the touch of a finger" (121). Her illusions about her self-perfection foster her lack of desire to better herself in any spiritual or intellectual way--"she has no permanent conscious of . . . spiritual restraints" or the "sweetness of labor and fulfilled claims." (94,317). All this sets her markedly apart from Maggie and Dorothea. Gwendolen angrily rejects her cousin Rex's offer of marriage saying, "'Pray, don't make love to me! I hate it.'" (71) After Rex leaves, she tells her mother, "'I shall never love anybody. I can't love people. I hate them.'" (72) This is quite a reversal from Maggie and Dorothea, both of whom cannot seem to find enough people to love, particularly attractive, marriageable males.
Although Maggie, Dorothea and Gwendolen are all women whose illusions about themselves and their society cause them to suffer disillusionment and hardships, Gwendolen's suffering is the harshest. Jerome Thale calls Gwendolen "a new type, the bitch taken seriously," and undoubtedly George Eliot meant that a woman with serious illusions and flaws must suffer serious consequences. Gwendolen's childhood contributes to the development of these flaws. Her self-centered character is molded and shaped from an early age, as Hazel Mews points out:

The girl has led a rootless existence as the beautiful eldest daughter of a widowed mother, living amidst a bevy of plain younger sisters and being taught by an 'elderly, neutral governess.' It will be noted that this is an all female household... It is tantalizing to speculate how different Gwendolen's story might have been had she had a brother.3

Although the latter point is certainly speculation, it does provide some reasons for Gwendolen's unreserved belief that she is and should be the center of her world. She has been raised to believe that her beauty and charm will be enough to guarantee her an introduction to the world of luxury and self-satisfaction she seeks; and furthermore, that she is justified in seeking such luxuries because her personal attributes place her above people less attractive in looks and manner. There is nothing but encouragement toward her outlook from the all female household.
F. B. Pinion observes that Gwendolen's "egotistic desire and habitual command lead her to assume she can 'manage her own destiny.'" Her belief that her nature will always be strong enough to dominate others, and that this strength will always ensure that she gets what she wants, helps her commit her folly of marrying Grandcourt. Although marriage does not represent the "fulfillment of ambition" for her, and at times seems to guarantee a life "irrevocably immersed in humdrum" (32), she does realize that it presents a social promotion and conditions herself to its inevitability on the grounds that she will be able to master the husband of her choice. Her confidence in herself and the nature of her future is expressed early in the novel:

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 chances that life offered her, and conquer circumstances by her exceptional cleverness. (33)

Even if Gwendolen was not so concerned with her own comfort and personal ease, her belief that her cleverness will conquer circumstances exhibits such naivete about life—and about aristocratic men—that it is inevitable that she will be disillusioned.

A woman of Gwendolen's era and background has only one course to follow in her lifetime. Gwendolen accepts
marriage on the grounds that she can control every element involved in it. Although she temporarily rejects marriage to Grandcourt after her meeting with Lydia Glasher, the promise of life as a governess or companion seems so unsuitable to Gwendolen's conceptions of her superiority, that she concludes there can be little point in living:

The family troubles, she thought, were easier for everyone than for her--even for poor mamma, because she had always used herself to not enjoying . . . She had a world-nausea upon her, and saw no reason all through her life why she should wish to live. No religious view of her trouble helped her; her troubles had in her opinion all been caused by other people's disagreeable or wicked conduct: and there was really nothing pleasant to be counted on in the world . . . As to the sweetness of labor and fulfilled claims; the interest of inward and outward activity; the impersonal delights of life as a perpetual discovery, the dues of courage, fortitude, industry, which it is mere baseness not to pay towards the common burden; the supreme worth of the teacher's vocation;--these, even if they had been eloquently preached to her, could have been no more than faintly apprehended doctrines: the fact that for a lady to become a governess--to "take a situation"--was to descend in life and to be treated at best with a compassionate patronage. (203)

No passage better exemplifies all the insights Gwendolen must have before she can make any progress as a human being. In her failure to accept any of the above qualities or vocations that George Eliot undoubtedly considered meaningful and significant, Gwendolen condemns herself to a life that is filled with disillusionments about her conceptions of pleasure and luxury:
The prospect of marrying Grandcourt really seemed more attractive to her than she 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 lose, took hold of her nature as if it had been the strong odor of what she had only imagined and longed for before . . . And Grandcourt himself? He did not appear to enjoy anything much. That was necessary: and the less he had of particular tastes and 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. (121)

Given the nature of her expectations, it is fitting that Gwendolen's marriage proves to be such a brutal experience for her. She tries to convince herself that she marries Grandcourt out of desperation, for the sake of her mother and sisters. She clings to this belief in order to assuage her conscience, which though passive, does exist:

'\textit{My dear child, I trust you are not going to marry only for my sake,' said Mrs. Davilow, deprecatingly.}\\Gwendolen tossed her head on the pillow away from her mother, and let the ring lie. She was irritated at this attempt to take away a motive. Perhaps the deeper cause of her irritation was the consciousness that she was not going to marry for her mamma's sake--that she was drawn towards the marriage in ways against which stronger reasons than her mother's renunciation were yet not strong enough to hinder her. (281)

She chooses her husband and certainly receives all the money, prestige and luxury she imagined marriage could
She compounds her folly of marrying Grandcourt since she has clear knowledge of Mrs. Glasher and her children's prior claims on him.

Hazel Mews notes the ominous difference between Gwendolen's conceptions about her future husband and the kind of man he really is:

Grandcourt is a dark enigma with a 'withered heart' and this young girl, pitifully ignorant of the characters of men, sets out to use him for her own ends. Her exploitation of him for the sake of her own pride and later of her position is, in its ways, as reprehensible as his entering into relationship with her as a different kind of object. 5

Gwendolen enters marriage with her "head erect and elastic footstep," "walking amidst illusions" (319), an image that later provides a sharp contrast to the Gwendolen Deronda comforts after her husband's death, who "with the peculiar expression of one accused and helpless, . . . looked like the unhappy ghost of Gwendolen Harleth whom Deronda had seen turn away from the gaming tables after her losses." (628)

Throughout most of the novel Gwendolen feels love for no one but herself. Her attachment to her mother is really one of reinforcement that does not develop into love until the full horror of her marriage comes upon her. Gwendolen never turns to others for comfort and support until she needs them for survival. It never occurs to her to comfort her mother, and even her desire for a
relationship with Deronda stems from her own needs and desires for advice, without any concern for his. She feels little affection for her half-sisters and has no real place to call home. She remains a pampered woman with nothing to do. That she envisions marriage as filling this void in her life only makes her situation that much sadder. She most desires the freedom to do as she pleases, without the shackles of responsibilities. But by marrying Grandcourt, Gwendolen only locks the shackles of a relationship and loses any freedom she might have had. Her marriage forces her to submit to another person and this submission is particularly galling because it is the exact opposite of what Gwendolen expected from her marriage: "Already in seven short weeks, which seemed half her life, her husband had gained a mastery which she could no more resist than she could have resisted the benumbing effects of a torpedo." (385) In the months that follow, Gwendolen comes to realize how false her illusions about marriage were and in her desperation to find something good to cling to in the disaster that is her life, she turns to Deronda.

Gwendolen's need for Deronda at this point does not prove that she has had any positive insights as yet. She turns to Deronda for guidance because she cannot believe that she is not going to get everything she feels she deserves. She still seeks pleasure and luxury; only when she cannot find it in Grandcourt, she initially expects
Deronda to provide it, although what she seeks the most from him is approval. She is still without the insight that it is her own flawed, self-centered personality that has created the awful trap her marriage becomes for her. She seeks Deronda's approval that her marriage was not wrong initially, and is anxious to prove to him that she will atone for the harm she has done to Mrs. Glasher and her children by marrying Grandcourt. But her anxiety stems from her need for Deronda's approval, not because she feels overwhelming guilt and remorse for her actions.

An understanding of the role Daniel Deronda must play in Gwendolen's life will perhaps provide some justification for what critics consider to be the most damaging flaw in the novel. The split theme of the novel, what Harold Fisch calls "all the Mordecai-Mirah-Daniel business," aroused criticism from the moment the novel was published. Central to the criticism of the Deronda story is its lack of unity, its vapid and underdeveloped characters, and its lack of interaction with Gwendolen's story. The list of critics who have argued that the novel would have been much better had George Eliot jettisoned the "Jewish theme" is certainly impressive. Henry James, F. R. Leavis, Joan Bennett and Leslie Stephen all argue that the masterpiece of Gwendolen is marred by the failure of Deronda, Mirah and the other characters in that part of the novel to match the depth of Gwendolen.
Almost immediately after the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot decried the tendency of critics to "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."⁸ Joan Bennett acknowledges that the themes were meant to be intertwined, but that it is a contrived juxtaposition, rather than a natural development between the two characters:

And, as regards the two central themes, the development of Gwendolen's character and Deronda's discovery of his mission, some connection is also achieved. The reader cannot fully discover Gwendolen's character or Deronda's without taking into account the relationship that develops between them... It is therefore impossible to 'cut the book up into scraps' without describing it falsely, since the author has arranged that the two main themes shall be intertwined. But this is a deliberate contrivance of her craftsmanship rather than a necessary consequence of her response to her subject.⁹

Bennett feels that George Eliot was mistaken in trying to unite her concern for the Jewish race exemplified by the Deronda story and her concern over a beautiful woman she had glimpsed gambling feverishly, a glimpse which later provided the material for the character of Gwendolen Harleth. What Bennett seems to miss, and what James and Leavis also ignore, is that Gwendolen's character was such that it would not develop without Deronda. And in order for Deronda to have the effect he has on Gwendolen, he must be almost larger than life. Only a man like Deronda,
someone religious in overtones and stern in his approach and relationship with Gwendolen, would attract someone of her character. Although Deronda is obviously the exact opposite of Grandcourt, both men share attributes that Gwendolen insists on in men she admires. Both men are dominating, strong and "free from absurdities." Furthermore, Gwendolen is so absorbed in her own world she has missed the goodness in many of the smaller, more insignificant people around her. If Deronda does not seem real to readers, neither did he seem real to Gwendolen, who certainly accorded him a God-like reverence.

George Eliot begins to set up the contrast between Gwendolen's narrow personal life and Deronda's far reaching sensibilities quite early in the novel:

Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way she could make her life pleasant— in a time, too, when ideas were with fresh vigor making armies of themselves, and the universal kinship was declaring itself fiercely: when women on the other side of the world would not mourn for the husbands and sons who died bravely in a common cause, and men stinted of bread on our side of the world heard of that willing loss and were patient: a time when the soul of man was waking to pulses which had long been beating in him unheard, until their full sum made a new life of terror or of joy. (109)

This passage provides several indications of the theme and intent of the novel. "The soul of the man waking to the pulses . . ." on a larger scale evokes the American Civil War; "the soul" can also be Deronda, although the Jewish
theme has not been introduced at this point. The passage also makes the relative insignificance of Gwendolen's thoughts and plans quite clear.

Harold Fisch argues that the difference in timbre and effect between the two halves of the novel is actually the central theme. How else can Gwendolen gain the insight that her concerns and goals are petty and insignificant unless she is provided with an example of someone whose goals make hers seem minor in comparison? Deronda's problems and concerns are far reaching and philosophical, the kind of concerns that any George Eliot character would be a better person for having.

Although I do believe the character of Deronda and the Jewish theme plays an important part in Gwendolen's disillusionment, I do not finally believe the novel is balanced. Perhaps the blame can be placed with George Eliot's incredibly insightful characterization of Gwendolen, besides whom characters like Mirah are, as Henry James said, "hardly more than shadows." However, I do not think it serves any purpose to decide, as James and Leavis do, that we should just cut away the Jewish theme and deal with Gwendolen. Gwendolen's illusions are centered on the belief that she is the center of her world, that there is no issue or concern more important than her pleasure and ease in her life. Although her marriage proves to contradict any belief she had in her ability to dominate at will, she still suffers from a lack
of knowledge about the world at large, the world enlarged and brought to exaggerated life by Deronda. She must also learn that another way to bear her problems is to realize that they are insignificant in the scheme of things. That she does not realize this throughout most of the novel is quite clear, particularly in this brutally revealing comment by the narrator:

"She was thinking of Deronda much more than he was thinking of her--often wondering what were his ideas 'about things' and how his life was occupied. But a lap-dog would be necessarily at a loss in framing to itself the motives and adventures of doghood at large; and it was as far from Gwendolen's conception that Deronda's life could be determined by the historical destiny of the Jews, as that he could rise into the air on a brazen horse, and so vanish from the horizon in the form of a twinkling star."

(497)

If Gwendolen is struggling here to gain insight about what motivates Deronda, I believe she struggles only to ascertain how to better involve Deronda in her own world by familiarizing herself with what constituted Deronda's. She cannot specify her concerns. What does she mean about his "ideas about things?" His ideas about love, duty, the existence of man? To someone of her limited perception, questions about the nature of other people's ideas are never defined beyond the vague and nebulous "things." Her mental boundaries are too defined and limited by her own small world to give her questions about Deronda concrete shape and depth.
The question remains whether Gwendolen really makes any progress during the novel and whether or not she really has become a better person for knowing Deronda. Hazel Mews points out the vagueness of Deronda's advice to Gwendolen, "although it may be taken to approximate to George Eliot's own view of the best course for unhappy women to pursue and the worthwhile things for which frustrated women might live." \(^{12}\) The advice comes before the death of Grandcourt, when Gwendolen feels hopelessly trapped by her situation:

'Look on other lives before your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world beside the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action--something that is good apart from the actions of your own lot.' (405)

Although Gwendolen attempts to expand her horizons, she seems to have little success. Even at the conclusion of the novel, she suffers from a lack of clarity about the nature of her world. Jerome Thale argues that the ending leaves Gwendolen "with the poorest remnant of her egoism--remorse." \(^{13}\) Barbara Hardy calls the conclusion of \textit{Daniel Deronda} an "experiment in realism" and concludes that:

For Gwendolen, the final loneliness is not only an extension of suffering when she feels she has already suffered and recovered, but a suggestion that her tragic nurture is still incomplete. The ending gives us the imaginative equivalent
of the shock of space confronting a narrow and protected vision for the first time.14

The novel ends in Gwendolen's final and complete disillusionment. She no longer believes herself or her desires are the center of the universe. She manages to gain insight from her trials and hardships and does not resent the greater forces that separate her from Deronda. Rather than a selfish reaction of anger, she finally feels humiliation. But the process has been a long and difficult one, and the central question that emerges out of the novel's conclusion must be whether or not Gwendolen can expand her humiliation, her insight from her trials, and take some action that Deronda would approve of and champion as worthy of mankind's energies.

Her reactions to Deronda's confession of his parentage and race are almost ludicrous: "'I hope there is nothing to make you mind. You are just the same as if you were not a Jew.'" (733) When Deronda informs her of his decision to go East, we see that apparently Gwendolen still has not realized the relative insignificance of her troubles:

That was the sort of crisis which was at this moment beginning in Gwendolen's small life: she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving. All the troubles of her wifehood and widowhood had still left her with the implicit impression which had accompanied
her from childhood, that whatever surrounded her was somehow specially for her, and it was because of this that no personal jealousy had been roused in her in relation to Deronda: she could not spontaneously think of him as rightfully belonging to others more than to her. But here had come a shock which went deeper than personal jealousy—something spiritual and vaguely tremendous that thrust her away, and yet quelled all her anger into self-humiliation. (735)

Gwendolen's reliance on an outside source for all her insight and guidance proves the most problematic aspect of Daniel Deronda. What is also disturbing is that Gwendolen's gradual change for the better is not motivated by a self-perception instigated by individual appraisal, but by her desire to be worthy of Deronda's approval. Even her compulsive gesture of jumping into the sea after her husband is brought about by the thought of Deronda. That his influence is so strong generates one of the crucial questions of the novel. How strong will his effect be after he leaves? Previously every effort by Gwendolen to change and improve her nature and her actions with others has been motivated by a desire to live as Deronda suggested she should live. After the death of Grandcourt, her every move has been made with the constant question of what Deronda would think of her actions. Although the novel concludes with Gwendolen expressing her desire to live, in light of her extreme dependence on Deronda, her ability to mold her insights into any
positive actions without him to motivate and guide her is difficult to imagine.

The passage above also illustrates George Eliot's juxtaposition of the more worldly theme of Deronda's search for a heritage and a homeland, over Gwendolen's search for a place in society. And it emphasizes the necessity of having Deronda and Gwendolen remain apart; she must struggle and survive on her own. If Deronda were to remain by her side for the remainder of their lives, it would merely reinforce Gwendolen's assumption that the world exists for her own convenience and needs. In what are her admittedly enormous emotional problems, Gwendolen has only just begun to consider that Deronda has a life outside his relationship to her. She sees his revelation about his parentage only in so far as it would affect their relationship. The dim perception of the trek her mind and soul will have to make to reach Deronda's is only slightly felt, although she does perceive the chasm in the depth of their minds and concerns. Deronda attempts to lessen the shock of his departure with the platitude, "'I'll write,'" but inevitably, the gulf between them will widen. As a man with a vocation, Deronda can seek out this nation for his race, becoming a wandering prophet, and not the Disraeli Sir Hugo Mallinger envisioned him to be. As a woman with no hope of finding the type of larger role open to Deronda, Gwendolen certainly does not have the option to merge love with this type of higher
political duty; she cannot easily dedicate herself to some similar mission.

If she can sustain and expand the insights she has at the novel's conclusion, it remains for Gwendolen to react as Dorothea does, to become one of those women whose "full nature, like that of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth." Gwendolen must accept that the role open to her to become the kind of woman Deronda has encouraged her to become involves no larger duty, but rather a small sharing of goodness and support for others in her world. Whether she has the strength after her pathetic and harsh ordeal of disillusionment and insight to go beyond her trials and help others can only be surmised.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

If art does not enlarge our sympathies, it does nothing morally; I have heart-cutting experiences that opinions are a poor cement between human souls: and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writing is, that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures.¹

From reading The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda, certainly most readers would agree that George Eliot has accomplished her task, that the struggles of Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke and Gwendolen Harleth do enlarge our sympathies, however different they may be from anything that the reader has experienced. These three women struggle to awaken from their dreams about life and finally attempt to face the hard, unanticipated and unprepared for pressures of life as it is.

Ultimately, our judgment of the effectiveness of these heroines' abilities to face the discovered restrictions of their lives depends on the conclusion of each novel. Jerome Thale believes that George Eliot inevitably encountered problems when it came to concluding her novels:

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The ending of a novel—the concrete circumstances which allow for fulfillment—was for George Eliot, as for so many Victorian novelists, a stumbling block. We are inclined to feel the most satisfactory endings are those of Lydgate and Gwendolen, which are unhappy and inconclusive. When George Eliot decides to give her characters fulfillment as well as self-knowledge, she does not do so well.²

The conclusions of all three novels have presented "stumbling blocks" to critics as well as readers. George Eliot admitted the tragic conclusion of *The Mill on the Floss* was not well prepared for because she had allowed too much space to the development of the childhood scenes; however, the ending is finally appropriate for Maggie. Maggie Tulliver does not gain any lasting insights from her life. She never modifies her expectations about love so that they meet with the realistic limitations of society and those around her. Her own actions succeed in ostracizing her from those she loves the most. In death she at last receives Tom's total and wholehearted respect and love, but both her moral stance as saviour to Tom and Tom's final insight into his sister's worth are conditioned by their rapidly approaching death. Maggie at last earns what she has always wanted from Tom, but that it can only come with their death together underlines the futility of her expectations about their lives.

There is little argument that, of all George Eliot novels, the conclusion of *Daniel Deronda* remains the most unclear, certainly as far as Gwendolen's fate is
concerned. Barbara Hardy believes that "the novel expands through its open ending, an ending rare in its century, though common enough in ours, where the openness is sometimes organic or sometimes an inconclusive playing at the slice of life realism." The ending is open because nothing is decided; Deronda goes off somewhere towards the East, while Gwendolen's fate remains undecided, in her own hands, waiting for her to make something with it. However, I believe the ending reflects the nature of the character of Gwendolen. As the most flawed and self-centered of any of George Eliot's heroines, Gwendolen finds her path to becoming a better human being a long and difficult one. The ending's inconclusiveness also underlies our uncertainty about Gwendolen's ultimate success in expanding her insight that she is not the center of the universe into some positive activity, one not motivated by selfish desires and ambitions. Thus, George Eliot herself did not seem to be sure that a woman with Gwendolen's character and flaws would be capable of such growth, and I believe she purposely leaves the reader speculating about Gwendolen's growth.

F. B. Pinion concluded about Daniel Deronda that the conclusion is "open-ended but decidedly more true to life (and more modern) than that of The Mill on the Floss: it is more hopeful that that of Middlemarch." While I would agree with his opinions about the first two novels, I
cannot agree that Daniel Deronda can be considered more hopeful than Middlemarch. I believe that Middlemarch represents George Eliot's greatest statement about her heroines' successes. Not only does the novel provide the reader with an example of a woman who does manage to do some good within her society, it also points to a positive outcome for those who struggle for some basic goodness and nobility in their lives and in those around them. Hazel Mews has concluded that "Happiest were the gentle, sweet, loving, simple women who sweetened the lives of others and found in that their own quiet joy." Dorothea's struggles lead her to this role, this "sweetening the lives of others;" and, if it is something less than she had once envisioned for herself, then such are the limitations of life.

It remains to be said that George Eliot did not offer to any one of these heroines the role that she played, that of authoress. Perhaps this was because George Eliot was most concerned with depicting the "ordinary struggles of human life" and she was not by any means "ordinary." If she does not present to women of our century a clear path to follow, perhaps it is because George Eliot could not see a single path that could fulfill a woman's desire for a higher vocation and yet stay within the limitations placed on the female sex by her society.
However, Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke and Gwendolen Harleth are not women controlled and conditioned solely by their society. They are three women whose illusions, faults and lack of vision lead them into hardships of their own making. Just as they are mainly responsible for these hardships, only they can be responsible for any success they might have in growing from these hardships and developing a more accurate vision of their world.
NOTES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1 George Eliot, Middlemarch, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956). All quotations will be from this edition followed by the page number in the text.


4 Susan Shahzade, "Women as Hero in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction," MLA Convention, Los Angeles, 29 Dec. 1982.


Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (London: The Athlone Press, 1964). Hardy is the most significant critic who, mistakenly, gives too much emphasis to Gwendolen's outside restrictions, and not enough to the critical flaws within her own character that limit her.

CHAPTER II

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS


3 Stephen, p. 96.

4 Hardy, p. 51.


7 Shahzade, p. 6.


10 Colby, p. 239.

11 Leavis, p. 41.

12 Stephen, p. 104.

13 Bennett, p. 116.

14 Lerner, p. 273.
CHAPTER III
MIDDLEMARCH

1 Thale, p. 117.
2 Anderson, p. 319.
4 Hardy, p. 99.
5 Stump, p. 151.
7 Leavis, p. 75.
8 Anderson, p. 292.
9 Stephen, p. 179.
10 Thale, p. 119.
12 Emery, p. 169.
13 Lerner, p. 266.
14 Stump, p. 209.
17 Stump, p. 212.
CHAPTER IV

DANIEL DERONDA

1 George Eliot, Daniel Deronda (New York: Signet Classics, The New American Library, 1979), p. 245. All quotations will be from this edition followed by the page number in the text.

2 Thale, p. 124.

3 Mews, p. 120.


5 Mews, p. 120.


7 Henry James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," p. 686; Leavis, p. 80; Bennett, p. 183; and Stephen, p. 191.

8 Cross, III, 290.

9 Bennett, p. 183.

10 Fisch, p. 349.

11 James, p. 687.

12 Mews, p. 158.

13 Thale, p. 121.

14 Hardy, p. 152.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION


2 Thale, p. 146.

3 Hardy, p. 153.

4 Pinion, p. 217.

5 Mews, p. 197.
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