

The Issue of Salvation in George Eliot's  
*The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*

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Date of submission: August 2003.

Date of *viva*: October 2003.

## Abstract

This thesis examines George Eliot's novels *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876) within the context of the Victorian era's transformation into an increasingly secularised society, and the consequential concerns regarding social morality and human destiny. Eliot's own intellectual position and influence is of critical concern to this paper, both in her non-fiction writings and in the novels themselves.

The central argument examines Eliot's concerns regarding individual and social development as interrogated in both novels, focusing on the moral struggles of the individual, and the implications for the perceived conflict between the individual and society. In the first two chapters, each examining one novel, the key concern is the perception and experience of moral struggle, and how this effects the individual development of the central characters, particularly in terms of the implications for social concerns regarding the issue of human redemption. The issues raised by close readings of both novels are discussed in the final chapter, in the context of Eliot's engagement with the philosophical, religious, and social debates of the period, particularly regarding the idea of organic human development in the works of Auguste Comte and J. S. Mill.

The contemporary critical focus is on the issue of the moral human development of the central characters of both novels, the complexity and ambiguity which arise from the endings of both texts, and in terms of Eliot's own philosophical position, the Victorian context regarding the ethos of human salvation in a secularised society.

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*for Helen*

*Acknowledgements:*

*Thanks to my Director of Studies, Richard Walker, for his greatly appreciated advice and support, for introducing me to Daniel Deronda, and not least, his enthusiasm for the project. Thanks also to my second Supervisor, Brian Rosebury, for incisive and pertinent suggestions, and support, and thanks to both supervisors for various points and clarifications, too numerous to mention. Thanks also to Anne Wichmann for ever-present support and practical assistance, and to the entire Department of Humanities for all their support.*

*A special thanks to my ever-faithful support team – they know who they are! Thanks also to Stuart Toddington for a useful discussion on metaphysics, and to my fellow researchers for tea, talk, and silence in varying proportions...*

*and deepest thanks always to Chris, Tom and Hattie Brunning for everything.*

## Introduction

I lived in a continual, indefinite, pining Fear; tremulous...  
apprehensive of I knew not what... as if the heavens and the  
Earth were but boundless Jaws of a devouring Monster,  
wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured...  
(Carlyle *Sartor Resartus* 128)

In Victorian Britain, an increasing number of critical literary works were published which destabilised, and indeed began to dismantle, the received framework of Christianity, and contributed to a fervid and anxious social debate. This critical dialogue is born out of the dissemination of European philosophical thinking, the emergence of Biblical criticism, and the Victorian era's own rapidly changing social structures, leading to concerns over social morality and human destiny. This thesis is concerned with exploring George Eliot's own position and influence in this aspect of the debate, within the paradigm of Victorian social thinking.

Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830) and Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) are amongst those works that introduced the notion of evolution to Victorian society, thereby questioning Biblical truth concerning the creation of the world and the origin of humankind. Charles Hennell's *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838), read by George Eliot in 1841<sup>1</sup>, D. F. Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, translated into English by Eliot in 1846, and L. Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by Eliot in 1854, profoundly affected Eliot's own religious faith and contributed enormously to contemporary Victorian thinking about religion, social morality and social form. Eliot also translated B. Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in 1849 and his *Ethics* in 1854, and read other philosophical works such as Auguste Comte's *Positive Philosophy* (1830-42), and J.

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<sup>1</sup> See Eliot *Selected Critical Writings* ed. Rosemary Ashton, p.xxxvii.

W. Goethe's literature, and this vast reading both contributed to, and reflected, Eliot's own philosophical and religious deliberations.

Whilst an in-depth exploration of Eliot's philosophical relationship with these individual thinkers is outside the remit of this project, it is important to recognise that the position Eliot occupies in both her fictional and non-fiction writings reflects significant aspects of her engagement with these works. In 1842, Eliot writes:

I regard... [Biblical] writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to its materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness. (*Letters* 21)

Eliot's non-fiction essay writing began in 1846 with her essays and reviews for prestigious journals, particularly the *Westminster Review*, for which she also acted as Editor in the 1850's. This is significant as, alongside her published translations, it illustrates Eliot's own position in the midst of philosophical, social and literary deliberations, and provides a framework within which to consider her fictional writing. Her fiction becomes the arena in which she explores the human implications of the philosophical, religious and social deliberations with which she and her contemporary society are concerned. The object of this thesis is to explore the relationship between key aspects of Eliot's thinking, and one of her earliest novels *The Mill on the Floss*, and her final novel *Daniel Deronda*. The crucial aspects which relate to this thesis are, following Feuerbach (with whose 'ideas... I everywhere agree' (Eliot *Letters* 132)), Eliot's advocacy of human relations as the object of religion rather than an ethic of eternal Salvation, and consequently, the importance of desiring better human and social values here on earth. Although she rejects Biblical truth for a historical-critical perspective, Eliot retains a strong belief in the relevance and import of Christian moral values.

Whilst the examination of the two novels, and Eliot's philosophical context, will be primarily discussed within the paradigm of contemporary Victorian thinking, it will engage with particular aspects of Eliot criticism. In particular, K. M. Newton's examination of Eliot's retention of a positive Romantic aesthetic in her work will be drawn upon where relevant, and Nina Auerbach's discussions of the Victorian mythology of woman as demon is examined in relation to *The Mill on the Floss*. Patricia Spacks' work on the female literary imagination, and Brian Swann's discussion of imagery pertinent to Gwendolen will be addressed in relation to aspects of *Daniel Deronda*, and Heather Armstrong's valuable examination of Eliot's ethical stance provides a key influence in this second chapter. Rosemary Ashton's work on the influence of German philosophy on Eliot, Gillian Beer's examination of the influence of evolutionary thought, and Suzanne Graver's work on organicism are particularly pertinent in the discussion of Eliot's philosophical position in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1 will examine Eliot's 1860 novel, *The Mill on the Floss*. The central character, Maggie Tulliver, is a yearning individual who desires to attain 'all that was beautiful and glad: thirsty for all knowledge' (MF 320), yet in her journey from childhood into adulthood, she endures emotional and psychological anxiety and struggle with social expectations that her aim in life should be to conform to what it considers to be her duty. Whilst recognising that this bears an explicitly gendered element in the novel, I will argue that the sense of social duty imposed by St.Ogg's is recognised as a force that is incompatible with human aspirations, and that this has devastating consequences for both Maggie and her brother Tom. By concentrating particularly on Maggie's relationship with Tom, I will explore how her need for his love and *acceptance* is representative of her struggle with societal values, but

significantly, encapsulates her need for a full and meaningful human existence. I will analyse how Maggie's journey follows a trajectory through her perpetual struggle between her own desires and the coercive nature of social duty, and centres on the fear of a "fall" from "grace", ascetic self-abnegation, and the struggle for a secularised salvation through human redemption. The chapter will explore how Tom is also coerced by the strictures of societal duty, and experiences his own trials of self-denial. The significance of his relationship with Maggie will be examined in terms of how both Tulliver children struggle to pursue their own desires, against which obligations toward familial and social duty seem to pit themselves, and I will explore how the implications of this inform the final tragedy of *The Mill on the Floss*.

In Eliot's 1876 novel, *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen Harleth begins with a deep sense that 'so exceptional a person as herself could hardly remain in ordinary circumstances or in a social position less than advantageous' (*DD* 23-4), but ends the novel hoping that '*I may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born [although] I do not yet see how that can be*' (810, original emphasis). Chapter 2 will explore how Gwendolen initially denies - but ultimately cannot prevent - the emergence of her own moral conscience, and how this develops through her relationship with Daniel Deronda. Daniel's own journey of self-realisation is a quest for an as yet unknown 'complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship which lay in his own thought like sculptured fragments' (512), and I will examine this in terms of his relationship with Gwendolen and the final ethos of the novel. I will analyse Gwendolen's development of conscience from naïve ignorance, through a "fall" into knowledge through the experience of self-comprehension and a subsequent quasi-religious crisis, and on into a potential

maturity of human redemption. I will explore the significance of Gwendolen's gradual deification of Daniel, and Daniel's ultimate rejection of Gwendolen in relation to the struggles and concerns of them both.

In Chapter 3, the issues raised will be examined alongside a deeper exploration of Eliot's own philosophical thinking, centring on the issue of individual and social salvation. This will be contextualised particularly with the writings of J. S. Mill, and the relationship between Eliot and Mill will be examined in the context of Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, alongside significant aspects of the influence of Feuerbach and Goethe on Eliot's concerns. Gender issues are clearly a crucial factor in both novels, as will be discussed, and some of Eliot's critical essays explicitly examine the position of women in Victorian society, but the scope of this thesis aims to examine Eliot's thinking in terms of human relations in the broadest sense. I will examine the development of Eliot's central characters in both novels, and the implications of their struggles of conscience for both the individual and society.

## Chapter 1

### *The Mill on the Floss*

She rebelled against her lot...and fits even of anger and hatred...  
would flow out over her affections and conscience...  
and frighten her with the sense that it was not difficult  
for her to become a demon. (Eliot *The Mill on the Floss* 380)

In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver yearns to attain 'all that was beautiful and glad: thirsty for all knowledge' (MF 320), yet from her childhood onwards, she has to struggle against her society's dictates of what it considers to be her duty. Whilst this is explicitly linked to gender in the novel, social duty, as affirmed by St. Ogg's, will be examined in terms of its relationship with human aspirations, as both Maggie and her brother Tom suffer devastating consequences.

Maggie has a passionate desire and aptitude for learning, yet she is excluded from pursuing a full formal education in favour of the appropriate behavioural knowledge of feminine decorum (or social duty) she learns at a girl's boarding school. Her intelligence is explicitly defined by her extended family as having only negative connotations, linked as it is to the dictates of gendered social determinism in the novel. Her father's response that 'it's bad, it's bad... a woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble' (66) reflects the social perception that Maggie deviates from gendered expectations, is therefore inherently 'bad' and somehow fatally predestined, the significance of which will be discussed later. Maggie's educational suppression directly compares with her brother Tom's ineptitude for the classical education imposed on him because he *is* a boy, but for which Tom has neither aptitude nor desire, being a boy of practical rather than imaginative applications. Apart from its deficiencies in the hands of his tutor, this type of classical education is irrelevant for Tom's needs, but Mr. Tulliver exhibits

what Eliot recognises in her 1851 review of R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect* as 'irrational faith', born out of ignorance rather than 'guided by those broad principles of reason' whereby belief is recognised as 'inferred from the whole of knowledge' (Eliot "*Progress*" 24). Tulliver's idea of improving Tom's prospects is to provide him with a 'good eddication... as'll be a bread to him... so as he might be up to the tricks o' these fellows as talk fine and write wi' a flourish [as] it 'ud be a help to me wi' these law suits... a sort o' engineer, or a surveyor' (MF 56). Rather than applying a sense of rationality and knowledge to what might entail a practical education for Tom, however, Tulliver applies his 'traditional opinions' and 'unassisted intellect' (63) to his belief that his equally ignorant but self-assured advisor Riley's 'immovability of face and... habit of taking... snuff... [is] truly oracular' (64).

The tutor, Stelling, is equally ignorant of Tom's individual needs, or of what Eliot recognises as the:

...true principle in education, that the reason must be cultivated as well as the imagination and memory, and that it must be cultivated by applying it to the sciences which are of immediate practical value in life. (Eliot "Milton and Education" [1855], *Notebook* 260)

As Brian Spittles recognises, Eliot believes education should be 'concerned with self-understanding as well as comprehension of the external world' (89), have practical value, and 'be appropriate to the interests and abilities of the pupil' (94).

Instead, Stelling delivers a debased and tortuous education, in which it was:

...the practice of our venerable ancestors to apply that ingenious instrument the thumb-screw, and to tighten and tighten it in order to elicit non-existent facts... [i]n like manner, Mr Stelling had a fixed opinion that all boys with any capacity could learn what it was the only regular thing to teach: if they were slow, the thumb-screws must be tightened – the exercises must be insisted on with increased severity, and a page of Virgil awarded as a penalty. (MF 243)

Tom's sensation of powerlessness in his inability to comprehend his studies reduces him to 'something of the girl's susceptibility', and his feelings are relegated to a socially inferior realm where the 'human sensibilities predominated' (210). This gendering of powerlessness, and the idea of human sensibilities as relegated to the feminine division, is central to the novel. Significantly, this also includes Philip Wakem in his feminised state of 'extreme sensitiveness' (235) at public perceptions of his physical "imperfection" (he has a visually obvious curved spine). Philip has a 'melancholy' face and hair 'like a girl's', which Tom, in defensive response to his own sense of inferiority being compounded by Philip's intellectual abilities, thinks 'truly pitiable' (234). Philip's 'peevish susceptibility' (239) often leads him to emotional outbursts that echo Maggie's own in their angry savagery (240). Maggie's empathy for Philip is born out of 'her own keen sensitiveness and experience under family criticism', and her pleasure that someone other than her father could speak 'of her eyes as if they had merit' (260) highlights Maggie's need to be valued, ensuring her lasting affection for Philip. Mutual affection in their relationship is, however, coerced into duty as Maggie learns it is not acceptable to kiss Philip upon meeting after all (263), and feminine decorum is revealed as the public observance of social duty and its exclusion of "inappropriate" sentiments.

Whilst the limiting of her desires and capabilities denies Maggie an outlet for her passions – which bears its own consequences as discussed later – it is also indicative of the social negation of human affections *per se*. These are seen as unnecessary in St.Oggs' version of a civilised society, which enforces a move away from such irrelevances, teaching the younger members which social habits are customarily acceptable so that:

We learn to restrain ourselves as we get older. We keep apart when we have quarrelled, express ourselves in well-bred phrases, and in this way preserve

a dignified alienation, showing much firmness on one side, and swallowing much grief on the other. We... conduct ourselves in every respect like members of a highly civilised society. (91)

When they are still children, however, human sensibilities are very much a part of their nature, social coercion having not yet had time to perpetuate its full effect, as:

Maggie and Tom were still very much like young animals, and so she could rub her cheek against his, and kiss his ear... and there were tender fibres in the lad that had been used to answer... so that he behaved with a weakness quite inconsistent with his resolution to punish her as much as she deserved. (91)

Such “childish” tenderness is gradually suppressed beneath the veneer of social custom as human sensibilities are deemed the preserve of children, girls, and other inferior members of the community, by the empowered members of society who mete out social judgement. The only passion St.Ogg’s appears to accept is the obligation to perform one’s duty in a drive towards a present and a future paradoxically entrenched in the past. The values of societal duty stresses obedience to the dictates of parental and patriarchal authority as the explicit duty of both Maggie and Tom is to know ‘who they’ve to look to... [to] let ‘em know their condition i’ life, and what they’re come down to, and make ‘em feel as they’ve got to suffer for their father’s faults’ (292); a social duty, then, which carries an overt Old Testament message that the sins of the fathers be visited upon the children.

This duty does indeed become a “curse” for both Maggie and Tom, as will be discussed later, despite some members of St.Ogg’s society (albeit self-deprecating or ignored) continuing to perpetuate a haunting undercurrent of the vital significance of human sympathy. Tom and Maggie’s Aunt Moss derides herself on her “uselessness” in being ‘a poor aunt to you, for I’m one o’ them as take all and give nothing’, but she is the only one of the extended family who expresses sympathetic concern for the ‘dear children’ and her ‘poor brother’ (298) rather than apportioning

blame, punishment and the dictates of social duty. That her “taking” refers only to financial support not the human concern that she “gives” emphasises their environment as one that extols the value only of the former. The narrow mentality encapsulated by the majority of the community echoes Eliot’s 1856 discussion of W.H. Riehl’s “Philister” figure in *The Natural History of German Life*, who:

...is indifferent to all social interests, all public life, as distinguished from selfish and private interests; he has no sympathy with political and social events except as they affect his own comfort and prosperity... He has no social or political creed, but is always of the opinion which is most convenient for the moment. He is always in the majority, and is the main element of unreason and stupidity in the judgement of a ‘discerning public’... [For Eliot however, the “Philister” is also] ...the personification of the spirit which judges everything from a lower point of view than the subject demands – which judges the affairs of the parish from the egotistic or purely personal point of view – which judges the affairs of the nation from the parochial point of view, and does not hesitate to measure the merits of the universe from the human point of view. (Eliot “Natural” 292-3)

Spittles recognises that ‘such men [as Mr. Tulliver] are dominated by traditional attitudes, manners and behaviour... [which act] against change’ (33), and that whilst the ‘power of patriarchy passes... [to Tom who] is no less rigid in its application’ (10), he suggests that Tom ‘behaves that way because it is the only course that occurs to him’ (34). In this, Spittles is ignoring how the societal structure coerces Tom into a form of self-abnegation as much as it does Maggie. Pauline Nestor, whilst suggesting that Tom’s ‘self-righteous and unyielding’ tyranny over his sister is ‘born of a narrowness which leaves him unable to respond... to the moral complexity’ (58) of Maggie’s struggles, does recognise that Tom’s very ‘certainty comes at the cost of damage to the self’ (64). K. M. Newton, however, recognises that Tom’s development has been distorted by the suppression of his human sensibilities as ‘[f]eeling and memory are suppressed in favour of the duties of the present... at the cost of an empty inner life’ (105).

In realising he is of no consequence in being 'likely to be held of small account in the world' (*MF* 317), Tom reacts to having 'his interest in life, driven back and crushed on every side' by channelling himself into the 'ambitious resistance to misfortune' (368), and thus embraces social duty, not least because this enables him to attain his own patriarchal authority, thereby escaping the position of powerlessness. Tom attempts to "save" himself from further disappointment by making social and familial duty his aim in life: 'I have conquered [my feelings, and]...found *my* comfort in doing my duty' (original emphasis, 613). Maggie, however, experiences great difficulty in channelling herself into the female dictates of 'unalloyed devotedness', putting forth instead 'large claims for herself where she loved strongly' (284), emphasising that the part of her perceived duty with which she struggles the most is its insistence upon the repression of human emotions. She becomes locked into a perpetual internal struggle between her heartfelt desires and her desire not to be blamed for failing in her duty. Tom has a 'natural inclination to blame' (283) other people whereas Maggie 'hated blame: she had been blamed all her life, and nothing had come of it but evil tempers' (284) and intransigence, emphasising that the marginalisation of human sensibilities leads to the social condemnation of Maggie for her exhibition of these, and that she recognises – and represents - the damage that blame engenders. In feeling a man's duty involves military bearing and the punishing of transgression (239), Tom resolves to always "do just the same again"... [when] viewing his past actions, whereas Maggie is always wishing she had done something different' (107) and had thereby somehow escaped the position of blame. Tom comes to encompass single-minded autocratic determination: his opinion is right and 'he would punish everybody who deserved it... [whilst] he never *did* deserve it', and as 'he was very fond of his sister... [he]

meant always to take care of her... and punish her when she did wrong' (original emphasis, 91-2), Maggie then, remaining eternally a child in the eyes of the patriarch. In becoming judge, jury and executioner, Tom assumes the mantle of St.Oggs' social duty and its gendered determinism, learning to suppress his emotions, yet, significantly, '[i]n his secret heart, he yearned to have Maggie with him' (213).

In her 1855 article "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft", Eliot discusses Fuller's 'calm plea for the removal of unjust laws and artificial restrictions, so that the possibilities of [a woman's] nature may have room for full development' (180). Eliot cites Wollstonecraft in condemning the notion that women 'are supposed to possess more sensibility, and even humanity, than men' (183), arguing that the 'thorough education of women... will make them rational beings in the highest sense of the word' as, crucially, a 'really cultured woman, *like a really cultured man*, will be ready to yield in trifles' (my emphasis, Eliot 183). Mrs. Tulliver and the other Dodson sisters epitomise the ill-educated 'childish passions and selfish vanity [which] will throw a false light over... objects' (Wollstonecraft cited Eliot 182), perpetuating their customary 'practice' and 'particular ways of doing everything... not shrink[ing] from uttering the most disagreeable truths that correct family feeling dictated' (MF 96-7). In *The Mill on the Floss*, the argument for education incorporates schooling and society, women and men, and appeals to the faculties of reason *and* human sensibility rather than St.Oggs' unreasoning ideology that customarily ignores the former and marginalises the latter. Eliot recognises a need for 'the co-operation of the intellect with the impulses' ("Evangelical" [1855] 145) in order to escape the stifling of 'natural good sense and healthy feeling... by dogmatic beliefs', which, 'instead of sharing and aiding our human sympathies...

[are] directly in collision with them' (169). This is emphasised in the novel's recognition of the damage inflicted on both Maggie and Tom as their hopes and aspirations are 'stifled for want of an outlet towards something beautiful, great, and noble' by 'the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts' (*MF* 363).

Tom and Maggie's extended family are social duty incarnate, and represent the whole community. The insistence on familial duty and gratitude "owed" to the dictates of patriarchal authority are stifling the aspirations of both young Tullivers but for Maggie, in his embracing of their values, Tom becomes representative of them all. Her deep need for his approval and love emphasises the emotional and psychological depth of her struggles with her social duty, and recognises the damage it inflicts upon human relationships, for, even as a child Maggie questioned 'the use of anything if Tom didn't love her' (89). Maggie suffers marginalisation on two levels in her inability to conform to social expectations: in terms of her gender itself as excluded from full participation in society, and her inability to embrace the dictates of prescribed "femininity" within this marginalised position.

Mr. Tulliver's perception of Maggie's character and cleverness (and later her own understanding of her passions) reflects her position of social blame. The positing of her traits as evidence of her wayward "wickedness" ultimately signifies a sense of her as both "outside" of her community, and as fatally flawed. This is illustrated by her dark colouring engendering social condemnation for being 'like a gypsy', and that 'it's very bad luck... as the gell should be so brown' (125). Her 'dark heavy locks' of hair frequently act as a focal point of 'her mother's accusation' (61), the import of which will become clear. The full significance of Maggie's

marginalisation lies in her demonisation. She is the tainted gypsy/witch/demon whose unruly hair adds the look of 'a Pythoness' (79), and her passionate anger is described as though 'small demons... had taken possession of Maggie's soul' (161). Her violent treatment of the broken doll, kept as a 'Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes' (78) with beatings and the hammering-in of nails, epitomises the stereotypical "witch-like" perception of her, and also facilitates her slide into self-abnegation as will be discussed later. For Nina Auerbach, Maggie is inherently destructive, 'a woman whose primordially feminine hunger for love is at one with her instinct to kill and to die' ("Power" 171), suggesting Maggie has a 'destructive aura [which] takes shape in the associations of demonism, witchery, and vampirism that surround her' (ibid 157). Newton suggests that Maggie 'clearly has a Romantic sensibility' but that 'this tempts her to give way to strong impulse and to demonic forces in her nature' (110), and Nestor suggests that Maggie's 'vulnerability of good and rational intention to more *anarchic forces* is expressed... through the images of "small demons"' (my emphasis, 61). Maggie's demonisation is, however, a social imposition rather than an inherent demonic nature, and these "demonic/anarchic forces" are Maggie's human sensibilities. That she is described as a "witch" throughout the novel is indicative of Maggie's status as outside of "respectable" Christian society, yet it is this very society which decries (its perception of) her lack of "feminine graces" at the same time as criticising her feminised human sensibilities, and will be shown to reveal its explicitly unchristian behaviour at the end of the novel.

The significance of Maggie's childhood fascination with a picture of a "ducked witch" from *The History of the Devil* by Daniel Defoe cannot be underestimated in terms of the struggles she faces. She explains:

It's a dreadful picture... but I can't help looking at it. That old woman in the water's a witch – they've put her in, to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned... she's innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman. But what good would it do her then... when she was drowned? Only, I suppose she'd go to heaven, and God would make it up to her. (*MF* 66-7)

The initial perception of the old woman as 'a witch' shifts to the anguished questioning of whether she is 'or no', as, whether or not she survives the ducking, social condemnation (and ultimately destruction) is assured. If 'she's innocent' she drowns and if guilty will be condemned by her community. For Auerbach, Maggie exhibits 'a silent murderousness', the ducked witch representing how she 'invokes her demonic self out of her books' ("Power" 160-1). The narrative of the ducked "witch", however, epitomises Maggie's dilemma in the novel as she constantly faces the testing of her "guilt" or "innocence" against social duty, and in always "falling" short, thus reaps condemnation. The significance of her later drowning is clear in the context of this passage, and Maggie's anguish and finally unanswered questions regarding 'what good' her struggles will have done her - including the question of whether the possibility of God 'mak[ing] it up to her' (*MF* 67) is enough – is crucial.

The social marginalisation of Maggie's human sensibilities is emphasised through her depiction as Medusa. Auerbach suggests that Eliot's linking of *Adam Bede*'s Hetty Sorrel with a 'medusa-face' identifies Hetty with 'lower forms of life' (*Woman* 174), and fails to recognise here the Medusa aspect of Maggie Tulliver altogether, aligning Victorian depictions of Medusa with forcing 'us to look into the serpent-woman's face and to feel the mystery of a power, endlessly mutilated and restored, of a woman with a demon's gifts' (ibid 9). In her journal article however, Auerbach recognises the link between Maggie's hair and Medusa, but claims that Maggie's 'turbulent hair that is her bane as a child is an emblem of destructive powers she is only half aware of and unable to control' ("Power" 156). In *The Mill*

on the *Floss*, however, Maggie's Medusa hair is, as discussed earlier, a focal point of her demonisation, and acts to emphasise Maggie's powerlessness:

All the disagreeable recollections of the morning were thick upon her, when Tom, whose displeasure towards her had been considerably refreshed by her... causing him to upset his cowslip wine... [took Lucy] off... as if there were no Maggie in existence. Seeing this Maggie lingered at a distance looking like a small Medusa with her snakes cropped. (*MF* 161)

- a cropping which emphasises her impotence, as she would turn her tormentors to stone thus disempowering them, yet she is unable to do so as she is powerless to redress her marginalisation. The Medusa figure is typically recognised as demonic in Romantic and Victorian literature and criticism, as illustrated by *Bulfinch's Mythology*, a popular text in print in the 1850's:

Medusa was a terrible monster who had laid waste to the country. She was once a beautiful maiden whose hair was her chief glory, but as she dared to vie in beauty with Minerva [Athena], the goddess deprived her of her charms and changed her beautiful ringlets into hissing serpents... Perseus... guided by her image reflected in [his] bright shield... cut off her head and gave it to Minerva. (Bulfinch 152)

Percy Bysshe Shelley, in his poem 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci' (1819), claims Medusa encompasses 'the tempestuous loveliness of terror' (line 33). Whilst this poem emphasises Medusa's beauty, and suggests a powerfully humanised image, it predominantly aestheticises the terror of death. Equally, in Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873) the same Medusa epitomises 'the fascination of corruption' (68). As Isobel Armstrong recognises, Pater pathologises women, who are 'associated with...death, necrophilia, and with transgressive knowledge. They fascinate and repel' (389).

Rather than reflecting a corrupt and corrupting aesthetic born out of a demonic and destructive nature, however, Maggie's incarnation as Medusa recognises the Medusa figure of classical mythology as victimised, demonised, powerless, and above all, *innocent*. In her notebook of 1854-79 in which she recorded her research

for *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot noted a paragraph from Stahr's *Torso* which discusses the 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. "Medusa Rondanini"<sup>1</sup>, probably the earliest known representation of Medusa that emphasises her beauty and humanity. The extract in Eliot's *Notebook* translates as:

[Medusa's] story is a tragic account of the acute jealousy of the ancient gods directed against all splendour and beauty in mankind. The poets of antiquity tell how Medusa... dared to compare herself in beauty to Athena, and the goddess, thereby enraged, changed the girl into a horrible monster. According to... Ovid... Medusa's fate was yet more undeserved. The wild god Poseidon raped the incomparably beautiful princess in Athena's temple, and the goddess... covered her chaste countenance so as not to witness the crime. Athena's punishment, moreover, fell on the innocent victim, because she was powerless to punish the guilty god. (Stahr cited Eliot *Notebook* Entry 40 p.18 & 153)

Athena demonises the innocent Medusa by turning her into a Gorgon, and later assists Perseus in his mission to behead the "demon" she herself created, mounting Medusa's severed head on her shield. This illuminating entry in Eliot's notebook provides an interpretation of the Medusa myth as one of demonised *innocent* victim, punished by the jealousy of the powerful Authority for the splendour and beauty of humankind she exhibits. Significantly, in *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie is emphasised as:

...a creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad: thirsty for all knowledge: with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her: with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life and give her soul a sense of home in it. (*MF* 320)

Maggie Tulliver encompasses the passions and human sensibilities of a yearning human being not a destructive demon, yet is blamed and punished for these very qualities through a social demonisation, which she internalises.

Maggie attempts to escape from this position as one of social blame - and the inner anguish this causes her - by embarking upon ascetic self-abnegation in an

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix

effort to turn her own painfully emotional self to stone. Her intense grief at finding never love but only fault is expressed as the painful 'contrast between the outward and the inward' (320). Her psychological and emotional pain, caused by familial and social condemnation of her natural 'forces' (320) combine with her gendered exclusion from any positive action towards redressing the family's problems, either financially or in preventing the implementation of her father's "curse" against Wakem, which Mr. Tulliver elicits Tom's promise to uphold in writing in the family Bible. Tom has gendered recourse to action in decision, voice and active agency whilst Maggie is disempowered in terms of all three; Tom admonishes Maggie for attempting to express her concerns with '[b]e quiet... I *shall* write it' (original emphasis, 357). For Auerbach, for whom Maggie is purely destructive, 'even a potentially celestial book like Thomas a` Kempis's can be a source of evil in Maggie's hands' ("Power 167). Maggie's ascetic self-denial that she undertakes via a` Kempis is, however, a tactical attempt to prevent a "fall" (like Tom earlier) back into emotional turmoil as her disempowered status enforces a 'slow, changed life', which in turn becomes 'a dreary routine', and 'it is then that despair threatens' (*MF* 367). Emotional and physical self-abnegation is the only avenue of action open to Maggie, as she attempts to transcend the confines of her perpetual condemnation by transforming her passionate yearnings into an elevated sublime self-negation. Maggie is seeking the 'unlearned secret of our existence which shall give to endurance the nature of satisfaction' (367); the sublime meaning of all her struggles and suffering.

Maggie's childhood punishing of the doll as an externalised object of her passionate anger until it is 'entirely defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering' (79) transforms into the first sign of self-effacement when she cut off her hair to

attain 'deliverance from... teasing remarks about it... [wanting] people to think her a clever little girl and not to find fault with her' (121). This attempt to remove her hair as a specific aspect of her victimisation echoes her demonisation as Medusa at the same time as her powerlessness. For Auerbach, Maggie's treatment of "'love-dismembered" dolls' suggests 'a certain murderousness' as, from 'the beginning, Maggie's kisses tend to take life rather than bestow it', exhibiting the 'rapacity' ("Power" 157) of a vampire in all of her relationships. Maggie's abuse of the fetish is a reflection of her pain, rage and powerlessness, however, beginning life as the representative of those who condemn her (like Aunt Glegg), but that rage turns in upon herself, and her passionate yearning, in order to crush it – as the root cause of all her anguish – becoming the abuse of herself in the desire to numb feeling. In a sense, Maggie attempts to become the wooden fetish, and her incarnation as an impotent Medusa echoes in her desire to turn her own emotions to stone. Maggie is the Fetish that her family beat with their sticks of duty, dehumanising her as demon/witch/gypsy in an echo of the dehumanising nature of her whole community, as she will eventually experience.

Philip recognises Maggie's suffering to be born out of her attempt to escape the 'petty family obstacles to her freedom' (*MF* 429), but that her ascetic self-abnegation has only negative connotations as:

...shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism... is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dullness all the highest powers of your nature. Joy and peace are not resignation: resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed... it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance – to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you. (427)

As Suzanne Graver recognises, for Maggie, 'the asceticism of a` Kempis renders his message... remote from this living world' (190). Philip understands the value of Maggie's human sensibilities, and his philosophy, as Joseph Wiesenfarth recognises

(Eliot *Notebook* xxiv), echoes sentiments expressed in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* which Eliot was reading in 1854 and copied a passage from into her notebook:

...the spirit and the senses so easily grow dead to the impressions of the beautiful and perfect... every one should study, by all methods, to nourish in his mind the faculty of feeling these things. For no man can bear to be entirely deprived of such enjoyments... for this reason... one ought, every day at least, to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and... speak a few reasonable words. (Goethe cited Eliot *Notebook* Entry 11, p8 & 144)

Philip says to Maggie that '[t]here are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we *must* hunger after them. How can we ever be satisfied without them until our feelings are deadened?' (original emphasis, *MF* 397-8). In her 1855 essay "The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*", Eliot engages with the crucial recognition that 'the line between the virtuous and vicious, so far from being a necessary safeguard to morality, is... an immoral fiction', as those who experience 'their own falls and their own struggles' (132) recognise. Maggie's 'conflict between the inward impulse and outward fact... is the lot of every imaginative and passionate nature' (*MF* 367), and Philip recognises that in her asceticism, Maggie is denying the impulse to life itself but that her suppressed emotions will re-emerge 'like a savage appetite' (429). As Nestor recognises, 'Eliot understands that the dynamics of repression virtually guarantee the counter-productive element of such determined and relentless efforts at self-regulation' (62).

Once Maggie's self-abnegated feelings are re-awakened to the possibilities of life towards which her yearning and passionate nature strive, 'she felt the half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight' (*MF* 495), a world remote because morally unattainable as she struggles against her feelings for Stephen Guest. He is her cousin's lover and she feels a sense of betraying Philip, but her

greatest anguish concerns her anxiety that she will again precipitate emotional estrangement from Tom, as 'the need of being loved' by her brother is in perpetual struggle with his 'judgement...[against which] she rebelled and was humiliated in the same moment' (503-4). In allowing herself to float away in the boat with Stephen, she attains a blissful moment of respite from the anguish and torment of struggle between her desire for Stephen and her deep need for Tom's love and approval; a moment which anticipates the siblings' final moment of sublime reconciliation in the flood.

For Newton, 'the continuity of self which memory makes possible is a solution to the problem of identity in a world devoid of immanent order or meaning' (100). It is 'Maggie's feeling for the continuity of her life that makes her fear she may commit an impulsive action in contradiction with the past self which she feels is still present in her and which will separate her from her past' (Newton 103). In this, Newton sees memory acting as 'a human means of transcending the amoral, unstructured world... [and acting] as a source of authority for feeling' (102), and in ignoring the past, Maggie and Tom 'become obsessed with the necessities of the present' (104). The world external to human determination is, however, secondary to the struggles Maggie and Tom seek to transcend, as they lose their 'continuity of self' (Newton 100) through societal coercion into the diverging present of struggle and asceticism, or rigid adherence to the demands of social duty. Whilst memory is Maggie's inward access to the realm of human sensibilities tied to her childhood affections, as will be discussed shortly, Newton fails to recognise that the drive to continuity with the past is not an object in itself (which Newton sees embodied in 'the mill itself' (106)); the past is symbolic of the human sensibilities both Maggie and Tom were able to affirm in childhood. In attempting to find 'the unlearned

secret of our existence which shall give to endurance the nature of satisfaction' (*MF* 367) through her ascetic self-abnegation (seeking to transcend her own suffering through what could be termed a long timeless "moment" of passivity), Maggie fails to find an answer to the meaning of her struggles. In the boat with Stephen, Maggie is borne 'along without any act of her own will... memory was excluded', as was all thought 'to the past and the future' (589). In yielding to the passive moment, Maggie's 'personality' (592) is subsumed, along with her ties and affection, without which she would 'feel as if there were nothing firm beneath my feet' (605); the moment then, in which memory, past and future are excluded becomes the transcendent moment in which human struggle is left behind. For Maggie, memory and the moral struggle itself are inextricably aligned with living in the world, with human affirmation and with access to the moral conscience.

In Bob's cottage, when enduring public condemnation for not returning to St.Ogg's a married woman after leaving Stephen, Maggie reaches a crisis of conscience, but again, this is centred on her now seemingly irreconcilable estrangement from Tom, and Maggie agonises over whether 'something [was] being taught her by this experience of great need' (649). In questioning whether she must endure a long life in which she must 'struggle and fall and repent again', Maggie faces 'self-despair' (649). In renouncing Stephen, Maggie rejects what she explicitly recognises as a Fall into Temptation:

...into the sins her nature had most recoiled from - breach of faith and cruel selfishness; she had rent the ties that had given meaning to duty, and had made herself an outlawed soul with no guide but the wayward choice of her own passion. (597)

Crucially, this is not another attempt to follow ascetic self-abnegation but a refusal to relinquish what Maggie recognises as "sacred" human sensibilities. In choosing 'to be true to my calmer affections and live without the joy of love' (603), Maggie

means *sexual* love, as a relationship with Stephen would be, for Maggie, an 'irrevocable wrong... [bringing] sorrow into the lives... that were knit up with hers by trust and love' (597). She is bringing her sense of self-unity to bear on her decision, choosing not ascetic self-denial but the affirmation of human sensibilities. Maggie recognises her deeper duty to be towards the sensibilities tied to her childhood Eden, encompassed in her relationship with Tom, and reflected in her constant search for 'the clue of life...which once in the far off years her young need had clutched so strongly' (597). The childhood relationship between Maggie and Tom is one that Maggie yearns to reclaim, epitomising her ultimate need to experience love, acceptance, and the affirmation of her own affections, and lies in Tom's 'secret heart [in which] he yearned to have Maggie with him' (213). "Falling" in *The Mill on the Floss* forms a dichotomy of two kinds of "fall", constantly struggling against one another. Maggie "falls" in societal terms, but Tom does not, yet Tom falls from Maggie into social duty until they are momentarily returned to the Edenic clasp of childhood innocence and mutual affection. Childhood encompasses a kind of authentic realm of Edenic human sensibility, before the Fall into social duty and its dehumanising values, is accessed through memory and represents, for Maggie, the moral duty which embodies her own sense of salvation. For Auerbach, the 'heavy irony against "the world's wife" does not mean the wife is wrong in seeing that Maggie's wild swerve towards renunciation and her solitary return after the fact are the most destructive choices she can make' ("Power" 167). In the novel, however, Dr. Kenn recognises that St. Oggs' social expectations are at odds with any real sense of morality, and that whilst 'an ultimate marriage between Stephen and Maggie' may be 'the least evil' as far as society is concerned, it would be 'a desecration' to Maggie's 'conscience [which] must not be

tampered with: the principle on which she had acted was a safer guide than any balancing of [social] consequences' (*MF* 627).

Tom also follows a quest for salvation – to “save” himself from the anguish of thwarted aspirations - which he pursues through self-abnegation by suppressing his human affections, subsumed beneath his embracing of social duty. His love for Maggie (and indeed Lucy) is sidelined by his adherence to duty and the patriarchal role he must assume. Tom loses his ability to recognise the value of human sensibilities through social coercion to “evolve” into a socially “mature” member of the community. By pushing these aside and channelling himself into the long hours of employment necessary to try to reclaim the family’s earlier fortunes, and follow the dictates of his father’s ‘curse’ (356) against Wakem, Tom “falls” from his Edenic childhood expectations and associated human sensibilities into the patriarchal responsibility he must shoulder as he is ‘awakened now with a violent shock’ (267). He thenceforth suppresses his inward feelings, which only find expression on his ‘usual saddened evening face’ (355); his daytime face then, literally the façade of social duty. Yet all along, in his drive to claim back the mill, Tom too is trying to reclaim an idyllic past – not as an object in itself – but as an unrecognised need for his human sensibilities to be affirmed.

For Auerbach, Tom is finally ‘possessed’ by Maggie, ‘the witch’s watery cousin, the... mermaid... [who] lures Tom out of... protection... into the dangerous tides’ (“Power” 165) and his doom. When Tom realises that Maggie has rowed through the flood alone to find him, however, he experiences an Epiphanic revelation as he finally comprehends the enormity of what he has lost; the vital importance to himself of Maggie and the values she represents. For Tom:

It was not till... 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 – such an entirely 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... [but] sat pale with a certain awe and humiliation. (*MF* 654)

Nestor argues against this moment as ‘epiphanic’ as it ‘is entirely undermined by the repeated stress on the silent, unacknowledged, and so untested nature of Tom’s realisation’, seeing this as contradicting Eliot’s question: ‘[w]hat is anything worth until it is uttered?... Utterance there must be in word or deed to make life of any worth’ (cited Nestor 72). Tom’s awe and realisation of the significant ‘depths in life’ (*MF* 654) are, however, an internal deed of revelation, deeply resonant of Maggie’s yearning to attain ‘the clue of life’ (597), and a revelation he articulates in his ‘old childish – “Magsie”’ (655), the name he used to call her in love and childhood union. This moment encapsulates a momentary transcendence, like the moments of asceticism and passive elopement as discussed earlier, but is different in one crucial respect. It is an active moment of human affirmation rather than a passive moment which transcends the human altogether. Whilst Maggie attained no answers to her exhausting struggle for the ‘highest and best...her soul’ (597) could attain other than the terrible vision of life-long conflict between her inward aspirations and the external world of social coercion, she attains the answer she seeks in the moment of reconciliation with Tom. This moment encompasses Maggie’s ‘unlearned secret’ (367), her yearning for ‘the clue of life’ (597), and Tom’s ‘revelation... of the depths in life’ (654) and Maggie returned to Tom’s ‘secret heart’ (213) at last.

That the ‘fruit from all her years of striving after the highest and the best’ is ‘her soul’, which ‘could never deliberately consent to a choice of the lower’ (597), posits the fruit of her Temptation as the sublime *potential* of her ‘soul’ in the mortal world. This highlights the dichotomy of “falling” in the novel as, in falling from

social expectations, Maggie is reclaiming her Edenic self, seeking the 'clue of life' (597); her highest human potential. Auerbach claims that, in *The Mill on the Floss*:

...the episode of an actual sexual fall becomes vestigial – Maggie's trespass is an illusion, existing only in its effect on the community and on other lives – for in her melange of demonic and transforming power, Maggie seems a fallen woman by nature, in whom any activity is secondary to the intense ambiguous impact of what she *is*... George Eliot's autobiographical projection is both the witch Defoe imagines... spreading desolation and punished for it, and her community's legendary protector, the Virgin of the flood, who sanctifies the spot she visits. (*Woman* 183)

Philip Fisher recognises, however, that the analogy of Defoe's witch points to Maggie's position of social condemnation, but like Auerbach, he suggests that 'Witch and saint are both *outside humanity*' (my emphasis, 68). Whilst Maggie is clearly innocent of sexual fall, it is far from illusory in terms of the social condemnation she reaps, nor is the impact of her *human* moral struggle anything other than devastatingly experienced by Maggie. She is positioned by society as demonic and fallen by nature, and, as I have already argued, her link with Defoe's witch is clearly related to her demonised human sensibilities and position as one of social blame. In discussing Maggie's incarnation as Medusa earlier, I argued that her demonisation recognises that she encapsulates the splendour and beauty of humankind rather than a demonic nature. Maggie's beauty clearly lies in her human sensibilities: her love, affection, and compassion for others, her desire to seek out beauty and meaning in life, and crucially, that these should *not* be achieved through the misery of others. Even if all her desires came to nothing, for Maggie it could be 'too late for everything, perhaps, but to rush away from the last act of baseness – the tasting of joys that were wrung from crushed hearts' (*MF* 598).

That Maggie reaps social condemnation with no hint of "eternal reward" emphasises that she is adrift in a secular world, which offers the potential for salvation only in human terms, but significantly, it is a world that does not recognise

her values. Social duty in *The Mill on the Floss* imposes a sense of inescapable pessimism as the sins of the father are visited upon Maggie and Tom through the extended family's desire that the younger generation should suffer, be humbled before and obedient to the dictates of the previous generation. In burdening the younger generation with their sense of duty, St.Ogg's society inflicts upon them what is indeed a 'curse' (356), stifling the prospect of progressive human growth rather than trying to incorporate rationality and human sensibilities into the present and the future. In her essay on *The Progress of the Intellect*, Eliot discusses the struggle to free society from ignorant tradition in the pursuit of a social 'system corresponding to the wants and culture of the age, [which] would... strike a firm root in man's [*sic*] moral nature, and... entwine itself with the growth of those new forms of social life to which we are tending' (32). She quotes Mackay, who echoes the situation Maggie faces in remarkably resonant terms:

Nations unanimously subscribed to the pious formula, which satisfied their imaginations, and pleased their vanity... into a belief that they were wise; but which, at the same time, supplanted nature by tradition, the sources of truth by artificial disguises, and at last paralysed the sentiment which gave birth to it... We have long experienced that knowledge is profitable; we are beginning to find out that it is moral, and shall at last discover it to be religious... [In testing] truth... by its fruits, that is, its instrumentality in promoting the right and the useful... while no real knowledge is powerless or fruitless, the fruits differ in refinement and value, the highest being unquestionably those disinterested gratifications which minister to the highest wants of the highest faculties... realizing the mysterious longing of the soul, and promoting the accomplishment of its destiny. (Mackay cited Eliot "*Progress*" 36)

Social "salvation" through marriage to Stephen would have meant, for Maggie, the loss of her 'highest... soul' (*MF* 597), which she sees as her "true" salvation – the only choice her conscience can make - and which the novel validates in the sublime moment of human affirmation. At the same time, Maggie's struggle

for her highest 'soul' is also a struggle with 'self-despair' as the perpetual 'struggle and fall and repent[ance]' (649) will, it seems, only end at death. For Newton, '[t]he highest form of tragedy... is produced by being true to human values or ideals even in the face of a resistant world that must inevitably triumph, causing human destruction or defeat' (106-7). Fisher suggests the social 'exile [Maggie] must go into... is the exact equal to the death the book concludes with' (85), but that this leads to a death which embodies the 'exhaustion' of 'life wasted in an impasse it cannot leap beyond' (98), and Nestor sees Maggie's death as 'fantastic euthanasia' (71). Although the emotional death that exile represents for Maggie does significantly echo her actual death, particularly as both recognise the tragic destruction of human affections, the moment of death in the novel is clearly not recognised as deliberate self-sacrifice to foreshorten life's 'impasse'. In risking her life to save Tom, Maggie's values are life-affirming as Maggie looks at Tom 'with eyes of intense life' (*MF* 654), but that it is the moment of death recognises the impossibility of return or of a future without further struggle. Tom and Maggie attain a form of momentary salvation in their reconciliation, 'clasping' (655) one another; a moment in which the tantalising possibility of a loving, affirming and fulfilling life is framed. The tragedy in the novel is that human values and lives are being crushed, not by an anonymous 'resistant world' (Newton 107) outside of human determination, but by other human beings amongst whom Maggie and Tom live and who dictate the inhuman values of their 'highly civilised' (*MF* 91) society. Maggie and Tom are destroyed through being 'stifled for want of an outlet towards something beautiful, great, and noble' by 'the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts' (363). For Auerbach, Eliot applies 'a Paterian criterion of intensity... the

well-lived life is the vividly felt life that feeds into art', and as such, the flood becomes a 'sudden endorsement of sheer intensity [that] seems to overwhelm the novel's carefully constructed moral antitheses' ("Power" 152-3). The moment of death, however, recognises that the narrow mentality of Maggie's community rejects her values, as the social demonisation of human sensibilities assures the destruction of the "demon", the drowning of the innocent. The guilty inhumanity of St. Ogg's floats to the surface and becomes 'Death rushing on them' in the form of '[h]uge fragments, clinging together in fatal fellowship, ma[king] one wide mass across the stream... [and] hurrying on in hideous triumph' (*MF* 655), clearly echoing the seemingly unstoppable mass of the community and their 'obstinate continuance' of 'evil-speaking...[and] self-exaltation in condemning...the individual men and women who come across...[their] path' (636-7). Maggie and Tom seek – and find – absolution and affirmation with one another, but find no possibility of a positive future within the confines of their intransigent society.

There is posited no future hope in *The Mill on the Floss*, only stagnation and despair, leaving only the clasped moment of human bliss to be briefly savoured, as the 'highest and best' (597) to which the human can strive for but never fully attain as it will be crushed by the dictates of 'uneducated feeling [which] has only the alternative of unquestioning incredulity, or of sacrificing and abrogating itself' (Mackay cited Eliot "*Progress*" 22). The implications recognise the quest for human redemption as a momentarily positive, but finally pessimistic ethic. Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, is equally concerned with the abnegation of human sensibilities, and the idea of redemption as potentially achievable through human faith. The vision of tragic pessimism in *The Mill on the Floss* is transformed into an ethic of survival in *Daniel Deronda*, but one that is inextricably complicated by

struggle and recognises the impossibility of return, positing instead a linear struggle for the “soul”.

## Chapter 2

### *Daniel Deronda*

Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul:  
There, 'mid the throng of hurrying desires  
That trample on the dead to seize their spoil,  
Lurks vengeance, footless, irresistible  
As exhalations laden with slow death,  
And o'er the fairest troop of captured joys  
Breathes pallid pestilence. (Eliot *Daniel Deronda* epigraph, 3)

In Eliot's final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen Harleth begins with a consciousness of profound self-absorption, believing that 'so exceptional a person as herself could hardly remain in ordinary circumstances or in a social position less than advantageous' (*DD* 23-4), but ends the novel hoping that '*I may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born [although] I do not yet see how that can be*' (original emphasis, 810). Gwendolen initially strives to deny her status as an ordinary mortal, and her gradual transformation is tied to the emergence of her moral conscience. Her relationship with Daniel Deronda plays a significant part in her moral development, and Daniel, whose self-conscious search for an as yet unknown destiny in the 'complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship which lay in his own thought like sculptured fragments' (512), undergoes his own transformation.

Gwendolen begins the novel refusing emotional attachment to others, seeking only pleasure for herself through her overtly narcissistic self-absorption. Her desire that others should also perceive her as 'so exceptional a person' (23) goes so far that she has 'visions of being followed by a *cortege* who would worship her as a goddess' (10). Only her pleasure in being adored is of any consequence to her, but this must not include being 'directly made love to' as this would require her to have

an emotional response, whether positive or of 'repulsion' (70), thus destabilising her theatrical pose as the lofty adored Idol. As Brian Swann recognises, Gwendolen turns 'herself into a statue [as] an evasion and an escape from the world of people to the world of a narcissistic cult' (439). When this "god-like" position is undermined by Rex declaring his love, Gwendolen presciently sobs that 'there is nothing worth living for' if 'I can't love people. I hate them' (*DD* 82). Gwendolen's inability to comprehend her spurned lover's pain is directly linked to her lack of 'the slightest visitation of painful love herself' (70), suggesting that only experience can awaken conscience and echoing that even her love for her mother has been subject to Gwendolen's refusal – and dread - of emotional attachment. An 'unpleasant sense of compunction' (96) increasingly forces itself through, however, rupturing the fabric of illusion she wraps around her conscience; it is an eruption *of* Gwendolen's conscience, but inextricably intertwined with her fear of "becoming" a mortal.

From the earliest scenes, mirrors form a framing device for Gwendolen in which she constructs and enacts her theatrical scenarios of self. Early in the novel, Gwendolen happened:

...to be seated sideways before the... mirror... she turned to look at herself... She had a *naïve* delight in her fortunate self, which any but the harshest saintliness will have some indulgence for in a girl who had every day seen a pleasant reflection of that self in her friend's flattery as well as in the looking-glass. And even in this beginning of troubles, while for lack of anything else to do she sat gazing at her image... her face gathered a complacency... Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forward and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm. How could she believe in sorrow? If it attacked her, she felt the force to crush it, to defy it, or run away from it, as she had done already. (18)

The link with Narcissus is clear in the exclusive self-love and kissing of her own reflection and from the unattainable nature of what she desires, which, for Gwendolen, is to attain 'cold' statuesque perfection and a "divine" status, and thus

the avoidance of 'warm' human emotions as these inevitably include 'sorrow'. In his *History of Philosophy* (1871), G. H. Lewes rejects the idea that the mind is a mirror that reflects a truthful reality of the world into the consciousness of the individual:

The radical error of those who believe that we perceive things *as they are*, consists in mistaking a metaphor for a fact, and believing that a mind is a mirror in which external objects are reflected... Consciousness is no mirror of the world; it gives no faithful reflection of things as they are *per se*; it only gives a faithful report of its own modification as excited by external things. (original emphasis, Lewes *History* cited Newton 6-7)

K.M. Newton discusses this philosophical position in relation to Lewes and Eliot's views of contemporary scientific thinking (6-7), their position being one which posits knowledge as interpreted in relation to feelings and experience. This quote from Lewes also reflects the error of the position Gwendolen is attempting to claim in its reversal of the imagery in *Daniel Deronda*. Gwendolen projects her false consciousness and image of what she desires to be into the mirror, using the mirror itself to bolster her misconceptions and project her desire as reality. The quote also reflects Gwendolen's progressive self-realisation, including her tendency to use other people as a 'reflection of... [her] self' (*DD* 18) image, also introduced in the above extract from *Daniel Deronda*, and both of which will be discussed in this chapter.

Gwendolen's egotistic 'ideal was to be daring in speech and reckless in braving dangers, both moral and physical', but when, in practice, life 'fell far behind her ideal, this shortcoming seemed to be due to the pettiness of circumstances, the narrow theatre which life offers to a girl of twenty' (63). Whilst the class and gender driven Victorian society Gwendolen experiences is here explicitly termed a 'theatre' - the structured backdrop to social expectations and possibilities - Gwendolen creates her own theatricality upon the social stage in desiring a role for herself as

omnipotent Idol for others (and herself) to worship. As Newton recognises, acting is 'probably the main symbol in the novel of the ego's desire for power and dominance', allowing 'the egotist by an act of will to create his [sic] own idea of himself and to attempt to impose it on the world' (177). Gwendolen's self-love and growing self-doubt is reflected through a slowly changing perception of mirrors and framing in the novel, and crucially, one which follows a progressively destabilised sense of certainty. When she is returning home from Leubronn with the knowledge of sudden family poverty, Gwendolen recalls the earlier 'self-delight with which she had kissed her image in the glass' but which had now 'faded before the sense of futility in being anything whatever' (DD 229). Her referral back to the mirrored self-image in that more complete stage of naïve self-idolatry shows on what basis her self-assurance has been seriously questioned: how can she be exceptional now if no longer sure of her framework of social standing? After all, this is not only Gwendolen's *chosen* stage, as her society only recognises a sense of 'being anything whatever' (229) through social status. Eliot recognises that this involves the socially 'established formulae about women', of moulding her into 'a doll-Madonna in her shrine', as:

...(let him be a god, provided he be not living), said the Roman magnates of Romulus; and so men say of women, let them be idols, useless absorbents of precious things, provided we are not obliged to admit them to be strictly fellow-beings, to be treated, one and all, with justice and sober reverence. (Eliot, "Margaret" [1855] 185)

In this, then, Gwendolen is directed into the social trajectory set out before her but intends to place herself at the apex of that position, not recognising its dehumanising nature as negative.

Once back home, Gwendolen renews her 'contemplation of the image there' in the glass, reinforcing the image of the objectified self as 'beautiful [which] was after

all the condition on which she most needed external testimony'; *internal* testimony is rather less easily assured of being in a condition of "beauty" despite feeling 'clever enough for anything', as she is attempting to still her oscillation between outward confidence in her theatrical world and inner dread of 'that unmanageable world which was independent of her wishes' (*DD* 251). She is showing a marked separation now between her projected outer image and the glimpsed reality of her inward sensations, as her contemplation is now dispassionate and objective rather than narcissistically intimate; her self-idolatry is beginning to show signs of strain.

Gwendolen's first glimpse of the macabre picture of the dead face and fleeing figure in the hidden panel reveals that her theatricality is an attempt to hide her moral conscience. During one of Gwendolen's early performances, when she has seated herself:

...in an admirable pose... Mrs. Davilow smiled and said, 'A charming picture, my dear!' not indifferent to the display... Gwendolen rose and laughed with delight. All this seemed quite to the purpose on entering a new house which was so excellent a background... [The panel discloses] the picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms... Gwendolen shuddered silently, and Isabel... said – 'You will never stay in this room by yourself, Gwendolen'... [Gwendolen] closed it hastily... 'let nobody open it again.' (27)

The picture in the panel acts like a mirror, but reflecting what exists *behind* Gwendolen's idolised image: her moral conscience, and the fears bound to it. Gwendolen locks the panel and hides the key, determined that nobody shall have access to her conscience, not even herself. For Newton, the panel is hiding 'her own ravaged inner self', born out of 'her repressed guilt' and precipitating 'her self-division and self-alienation' (175). Gwendolen is, however, already dividing and thus alienating herself, and her relationship with the panel and her other reflections are the frames through which her realisation of her 'fuller self' (*DD* 674) is effected. The images from the panel resonate throughout the novel, perpetuating the link with

Gwendolen's conscience. They hint towards what she is now - fleeing from the realisation of her moral conscience which she hides behind an emotionally dead enactment of life - and later, when despair threatens to overwhelm her and she is fleeing from the realisation of her 'worse self' (676). It reflects the face of her terror and the self she is terrified of, tied of course, finally, to Grandcourt's literally dead face and all this represents in terms of Gwendolen's shattered illusions, her death-in-life marriage and the serious masquerade that goes with it, and out of which arise her terrible 'phantoms' of 'Temptation and Dread' from which 'her fuller self... sobbed for deliverance' (674). Gwendolen's terror of the 'ghastly vision' of 'a woman's life' (152) she flees from when she meets Lydia Glasher becomes herself when married to Grandcourt. Lydia's surname itself hints at her status as reflection: "Glas-her", as Swann recognises, seeing Lydia as Gwendolen's 'mirror-image... reflect[ing] what Gwendolen will become, a slave' (440).

After her first vision of the panel, Gwendolen attempts to reassert her desired self-image in her usual framing device of a mirror 'which reflected herself and the room completely', but there is now a disturbance to Gwendolen's certainty as she is reflected 'obliquely with her three-quarter face turned towards the mirror' (*DD* 28). When the panel re-emerges during one of Gwendolen's public performances, she is again confronted by the spectre of her moral conscience, and her horror significantly takes the form of herself looking like a 'statue into which a soul of Fear had entered' (61). This emphasises Gwendolen's theatrical self-idolised image as one from which her conscience has been excluded, leaving her effectively *empty*, devoid of human sentiment and underlining her self-worship as a false idol. It reflects Gwendolen's dread of experiencing what Eliot refers to as 'every aspect of human life', as this brings with it 'the most hideous passions... of love, or endurance, or helplessness'

("Morality" [1855] 131), and Gwendolen negates her human sensibilities in an attempt to be in complete control of herself and her destiny. As her conscience erupts into her constructed void, Gwendolen briefly realises herself as human as she experiences an unwilling recognition of her own liability to 'fits of spiritual dread' (DD 63). In *The Progress of the Intellect*, R. W. Mackay suggests that:

As matter is the soul's necessary instrument, so ignorance, more or less mixed up with all its expressions and forms, may be said to be as it were the eyelid through which it gradually opens itself to the truth, admitting no more than it can for the time support, and, as through a veil, learning to support its lustre. (cited Eliot "*Progress*" [1851] 35-6)

This echoes Gwendolen's inability to escape her gradual self-realisation as the process 'of human development... is perpetually unfolding itself to... widened experience' (Eliot, "*Progress*" 21). That the 'awe within her had not found its way into connection with the religion taught her or with any human relations' (DD 63) emphasises that her conscience is still in a naïve stage in which *self*-reflection has not yet begun to stir. Gwendolen's 'spiritual dread' (63) foreshadows her later spiritual crisis as, crucially, this early fear of the solitude of 'exile' into 'vastness' (64) becomes manifest when she experiences her worst torments alone with Grandcourt on a sea of 'vast silence' in which she nearly despairs of 'rescue' (674), and later feels herself abandoned by Daniel towards the end of the novel.

From their first meeting, Gwendolen is disturbed by Daniel as his 'gaze seemed to have acted as an evil eye', triggering her 'inward defiance' at the 'unpleasantly conscious' sensation 'that he was measuring her... as an inferior' (10). Daniel is drawn to Gwendolen from the first, speculating whether 'the good or the evil genius [is] dominant' in Gwendolen's eyes, and deeming the 'evil genius' to be the likely dominant force as the effect of her glance upon him is of 'unrest rather than... undisturbed charm' (7). In this, Daniel suggests that only a lean towards

'evil' creates unrest, implying that 'good' does not involve a struggle to attain. He also suggests that a woman should effect only 'charm'. As Heather Armstrong recognises, Daniel's initial relationship with Gwendolen is one in which 'he predisposes an answer that is a reduction of Gwendolen's complexity' (146). In implicitly recognising her eyes as the mirrors of the "soul", Daniel's speculation leads into the novel's use of mirrors, reflections and framing to chart the development of Gwendolen's conscience. Whilst Daniel himself comes to play a vital role in Gwendolen's self-realisation, in their relationship 'some education was being prepared for Deronda' (*DD* 430), as will be discussed later.

Meanwhile, faced with having to earn a living as a governess, Gwendolen is determined not to accept such a necessarily deflated status and its subjection to the power of others. She decides to take – for her - the next logical step from her theatrical self-worship to the literal stage and what she perceives as the idolised role of an actress, 'of course... [of] a high position' (252), but is mortified when Klesmer points out the years of hard work for the likely reward of achieving 'hardly... more than mediocrity' (259). Klesmer's truthfulness causes Gwendolen to question her self-certainty so severely that 'the very reflection of herself in the glass – seemed no better than the packed-up shows of a departing fair' (262). Her desire for maximum homage on the stage of Victorian society reasserts itself, however, and, structured as it is upon hierarchical values, she still aims for social advancement. Gwendolen can only achieve social advancement through marriage, deemed 'the only true and satisfactory sphere' (143) for a woman, but a necessity Gwendolen had hoped to avoid in her now thwarted desire to 'achieve substantiality for herself and know gratified ambition without bondage' (252). Gwendolen insists that *if* she marries, she will not be ruled by her husband but means to lead him, for 'such passions dwell

in feminine breasts also' (39). The gendered hierarchy of woman as subject to man's power can also entail an equally false status of elevated morality, as Eliot recognises in denying 'over-zealous' assertions that women have 'moral superiority to men', because this leads to 'a case in which slavery and ignorance nourished virtue, and so far we would have an argument for the continuance of bondage' ("Margaret" 185). In Gwendolen's desire to become the revered Idol, however, she desires to attain the power of authority rather than morality, as her 'ignorance and childish vanity' and lack of acquaintance 'with the importance of life and its purposes' has trained her to 'selfish coquetry and love of petty power', not looking 'beyond the pleasure of making herself felt at the moment' (Fuller, cited Eliot "Margaret" 182). Gwendolen is both cynical and naïve regarding marriage. Whilst recognising that it entails a patriarchal imbalance of power in her determination that if married, she would not 'renounce her freedom, or... do as other women did' (DD 132), she exposes her limited comprehension of the ultimate political powerlessness of a woman in Victorian marriage regarding the exercise of *choice* here. As she will soon realise, in this particular gamble of hers, Grandcourt holds all the cards.

Echoing the figures in the panel as she initially flees Grandcourt and the 'ghastly vision' (152) which Lydia represents for her, Gwendolen:

...had acted with a force of impulse... [which] had come – not only from the shock of another woman's calamity thrust close on her vision, but – from her dread of wrong-doing, which was vague... and aloof from the daily details of her life, but not the less strong... her feeling would have made her place any deliberate injury of another in the region of guilt. (297)

Although the change in her financial circumstances leads her into temptation, right up until the last moment she is determined to reject marriage to Grandcourt, 'wishing him to understand... I may not be ready to take *you*' (original emphasis, 301).

Patricia Spacks suggests that Gwendolen is:

...able to “confront” reality only by making mental pictures of how poverty might affect her appearance. Although such pictures cause her first movement of sympathy toward her mother, whose looks have been affected by hardship, they also underlie her acceptance of Grandcourt... despite her knowledge that such acceptance will wrong others. (49)

Gwendolen’s reflection before her interview with Grandcourt does show that ‘there seemed to be a shadow lifted from the face, leaving all the lines once more in their placid youthfulness’ (*DD* 296). Whilst this could suggest that Gwendolen’s decision is based on her concern for the effects of hardship on her beauty, it actually reflects her outer image of theatrical self-assurance at a time when she is determined to refuse Grandcourt, and deny her own inward uncertainty and the temptation to accept him. Whilst it is clear that Gwendolen’s desire to preserve her mother from financial difficulties is a secondary motive, in accepting Grandcourt in full knowledge of displacing Lydia and her children, Gwendolen chooses to save herself from the social and power-related inferiority of becoming a governess, ‘drawn [by Grandcourt’s words] towards... the suffused sense that in this man’s homage to her lay the rescue from helpless subjection to an oppressive lot... release from the Momperts’ (302-3). Gwendolen’s primary motive is to save herself from an oppressive and powerless situation, and the irony here is clear as her final decision precipitates her into the very circumstances she most wished to avoid. In accepting Grandcourt, Gwendolen believes she is choosing elevation to a social pedestal upon which she will again be idolised, and from which she will wield power, and this desire over-rides her earlier fears of a fall of moral conscience. After her decision, however, Gwendolen spends a sleepless night as ‘here had come a moment when something like a new consciousness was awaked’, and her victory of escape into ‘the imagined freedom she would create for herself in marriage’ had ‘the taint of sacrilege upon it, which she must snatch with terror’ (311-2). That this ‘new

consciousness' is the beginning of her recognition of herself as human is clear in her sense of 'sacrilege' and 'terror' being the fear of what her decision will reap, as this links back to her earlier 'spiritual dread' (63) of the realisation of her own moral conscience, which is, for Eliot, unequivocally 'specifically human' ("Evangelical" [1855] 144).

For J. S. Mill, the natural development of women is 'entirely distorted' and 'forcibly repressed' through social conditioning he likens to 'hot-house' treatment, ensuring 'certain products of the general vital force sprout luxuriantly', while 'other shoots from the same root... [which] are left outside in the wintry air, with ice purposely heaped all round them, have a stunted growth' (*Subjection* [1869] 21). This echoes in Gwendolen's potential goodness waiting for the conditions of growth, and risking having 'the healthy life choked out of it by ...[that] which rears or neighbours it, or by damage brought from foulness afar' (*DD* 68). Gwendolen has been reared basking in self-idolatry, a worship instigated by her mother and which has left her "unhealthily" self-obsessed, and the 'foulness' is exemplified by Grandcourt, who does indeed choke the "healthy" life out of Gwendolen through his tyrannical sadism and the self 'evil' (681) her relationship with him forces her to confront. In both situations, Gwendolen is unable to experience 'the conditions of a healthy and vigorous life' (Eliot "*Progress*" 21). Both Eliot and Mill approach human development in "organic" terms, an issue to be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The relationship between Gwendolen and Grandcourt is one of explicit theatricality from the start as Gwendolen 'played at reigning' (*DD* 316). This is the nearest she will get to the lead she wishes to take as Grandcourt's measured drawls are eventually exposed as a consciously deliberate enactment of his own, behind

which his true character waits to reveal itself to Gwendolen in the secure patriarchal power structure of Victorian marriage. That the stage is associated with prostitution for the Victorians has resounding echoes in Gwendolen's social position of having to sell herself on the marriage market. Gwendolen's gendered powerlessness is recognised in the novel, as her 'complete enjoyment' at receiving maximum homage on the social stage is seen as understandable given that 'it is not quite mythical that a slave has been proud to be bought first' (100). Mill recognises the powerless situation of Victorian women as 'the primitive state of slavery lasting on' (*Subjection* 5), despite progressive improvements in all other social relations. Gwendolen's misreading of Grandcourt before their marriage, despite the revelation concerning Lydia, emphasises her naïve stage of theatricality as self-obsessed obscurantism. Her lack of comprehension is finally unveiled through a fall into the knowledge of conscience, of her own subjection to Grandcourt's *lack* of moral conscience as much as the realisation of her own. As Heather Armstrong recognises, Gwendolen's relationship with Grandcourt teaches her as much as her relationship with Daniel, as 'she does learn something beneficial from her courtship and marriage... the obstinacy of otherness and the exteriority of others' (144), although Armstrong fails to also recognise the important of Gwendolen's realisations about *herself* here.

Gwendolen understands herself to have "fallen" in moral rather than social terms. She experiences remorse after the marriage, accepting the penance of guilt, the 'spikes' (*DD* 328) of punishment but still, as yet, consciously adjusts her self-image in an attempt not to feel them. She attempts to accomplish this by passing the blame onto Lydia as the one who has fallen, thus absolving both herself and Grandcourt from blame, and echoing the hypocrisy of social "morality". The

attempt fails, however, as all self-delusion collapses when she receives Grandcourt's diamond necklace from Lydia along with her curse, and, echoing Mill's analogy of marriage relations involving a 'yoke tightly riveted on the necks' (*Subjection* 11) of women, Gwendolen begins to realise that 'the cord which united her with this lover and which she had hitherto held by the hand, was now... flung over her neck' (*DD* 354).

The imagery of mirrors merges with that of necklaces as Gwendolen reaps the 'terrible *plus*' (598) of her gamble with Grandcourt. On entering Grandcourt's house as his wife, 'Gwendolen... saw herself repeated in glass panels' (358) amidst her luxurious surroundings, but this sense of self-gratification transforms into entrapment as she receives the diamonds with Lydia's letter that the 'willing wrong' Gwendolen has committed 'will be your curse' (359). Gwendolen:

...could not see the reflections of herself then: they were like so many women petrified white... She sat so still for a long while... those written words kept repeating themselves in her. Truly here were poisoned gems, and the poison had entered into this poor young creature. After that long while... Grandcourt entered... and Gwendolen screamed again and again with hysterical violence. (359)

Gwendolen's illusions are finally shattered, as reflected by her multiple images at the moment of self-realisation. The reflections are of petrification: the mirrored image represents the former statuesque but empty shell of her theatrical self, that, in a sinister reversal, is now reflecting Gwendolen's genuine terror. At the same time, it recognises that Gwendolen is trapped in her marriage with Grandcourt, and in this, is frozen into that state of mortal fear, as will become clear.

Grandcourt insists that Gwendolen wear the diamonds and she is powerless against his will, 'frightened', and imagining his 'white hand... capable... of clinging round her neck and threatening to throttle her' (427). Significantly, Grandcourt himself fastens them around her neck, and the lead Gwendolen wishes to take in

marriage becomes a noose. The diamonds become costume jewellery for the serious masquerade of her marriage, enacted both publicly *and* privately with Grandcourt, and represent her choking conscience and choked life, subject to literal, psychological and emotional imprisonment at the hands of her sadistic husband who has no conscience and absolute control over her. The last time she recognises her own reflection in the glass is 'not in admiration, but in a sad kind of companionship' (430). Spacks suggests that here Gwendolen 'realises she is trapped in a tragedy... [and is] beginning to recognize herself as a human being' (49). Whilst Gwendolen now recognises herself as trapped in tragic *reality*, the significance of her recognition of herself as human cannot be underestimated. This moment comes when Gwendolen is dwelling on the 'new consciousness' she has entered following her moral fall, centred on her self-dread and destabilised certainty as 'she trusted neither herself nor her future' (*DD* 430). At the same time, this new self-consciousness has been formed alongside a potential hope that she may realise a 'better' self, a hope she centres in her relationship with Daniel as 'an inward safeguard against possible events which she dreaded [herself capable of performing] as stored-up retribution' (430). This placing of Daniel as her potential saviour has obvious Biblical connotations, not least in her 'feelings' having turned Daniel 'into a priest' (430), but the sense that Gwendolen has projected her need onto Daniel – a reflection of her 'better' self as realisable only through the role of a Christ-like redeemer – has significant relevance to Gwendolen's changing perception of mirrors and framing in the novel, as:

With all the sense of inferiority that had been forced upon her, it was inevitable that she should imagine a larger place for herself in his thoughts than she actually possessed. They must be rather old and wise persons who are not apt to see their own anxiety or elation about themselves reflected in other minds. (547)

Daniel has become, for Gwendolen, the mirror of her moral conscience. The turquoise necklace represents her struggling conscience as she depends more and more on Daniel in her need for a sense of direction now 'her confidence in herself and her destiny had turned into remorse and dread' (430). Joseph Wiesenfarth notes that the diamonds 'continuously appear as a motif of enslavement... the turquoises as a motif of self-mastery, personal responsibility, and moral freedom' (cited Eliot *Notebook* xxxvi). The turquoise represents her potential salvation, of being redeemed from the sin she has committed and that she dreads committing, a path she recognises as attainable *only* through Daniel, whom she consequently deifies. Whilst Gwendolen has now recognised her status as fully human rather than divine for the first time, her development into a sense of self-reflective human maturity is one that requires a further transformation.

Meanwhile, the theatrical self-image, now shattered, becomes a theatrical enactment of marriage, but is a 'Satanic masquerade' (*DD* 762) behind which Gwendolen's newly recognised human sensibilities are stifled beneath claustrophobic images of strangulation, suffocation, poisoning, and drowning. Whilst Daniel has become the mirror of her 'better' self, urging Gwendolen to turn her fear 'into a safeguard' and use her 'sensibility... as if it were a faculty, like vision' (452), Grandcourt has become the mirror of 'the evil within' (681), what Saleel Nurbhai and K. M. Newton recognise as 'the struggle of the good and bad angels – Deronda and Grandcourt respectively – for her soul' (99). This struggle is compounded by Gwendolen's awareness of her own entrapment behind the theatrical image she is forced to adopt in her marriage. As Spacks recognises, Gwendolen's marriage 'demands external modes of self-representation; she plays a part under the "exacting eyes of a husband" (replacing her mirror) who values only appearances'

(49-50). Whilst Spacks also recognises that Grandcourt ‘condemns her to vision as through “a piece of yellow and wavy glass that distorts form and makes colour an affliction”’, she sees this as a progression ‘from contemplation of mirrors to vision through windows, however yellow and wavy, mark[ing] an advance in human possibility’ (50), a view Swann echoes (445). Grandcourt’s yellow glass, however, which ‘Gwendolen had... before her, affecting the distant equally with the near’ is distorting her vision, associated with ‘making... life no better than a promenade through a pantheon of ugly idols’ (*DD* 672) and marks a sinister development that has taken place in Gwendolen’s relationship with the glass. Gwendolen is now framed by Grandcourt’s distorted gaze, significantly ‘not recognising herself in the glass panels... in the painted gilded prison’ (590) any more because she has effectively become imprisoned *behind* the glass. As Swann recognises, the ‘glass panels which had once reflected her multiform now become a glass prison’, as by now ‘she has realized her real situation’ (442-3). Gwendolen is still a divided self, a theatrical image and an imprisoned conscience, but she now recognises the theatrical image as a false idol and both recognises and experiences herself as human. The real Gwendolen is the suffering human being, trapped inside the mirror in enforced ‘Silence’ (*DD* 565) where she ‘schooled [herself] daily to suppression of feeling’ (605). In contrast with her earlier deliberate avoidance of human emotions, Gwendolen is now forced into abnegating her human sensibilities at a point where this is recognised as “soul-destroying”, as her ‘belief... [in good] that seemed so strong and living within her – she saw... suffocated and shrivelled up under her husband’s breath’ (593). She is reduced to the status of ‘an imprisoned dumb creature’ (590), the mirror now only reflecting for Gwendolen an ‘expanded’ (670) view of her luxurious prison in which she has to play her part to perfection.

Grandcourt, however, can see her 'with his narrow, immovable gaze, as if she were part of the complete yacht', having 'an intense satisfaction in leading his wife captive after this fashion' (672). Gwendolen recognises the impossibility of leaving Grandcourt as '[h]er husband would have power to compel her' (603) to return, echoing Mill's discussion of the iniquitous legal powerlessness of a married woman whose husband 'can compel her to return, by law, or by physical force', as she has no legal rights, 'however brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to' (*Subjection* 31). Gwendolen is trapped in the scenery of Grandcourt's own theatrical enactment, a bitterly ironic reversal of the one she intended. The noose of diamonds symbolises her imprisonment as it does indeed enclose her in a circle of glass, behind which 'her fuller self... sob[s] for deliverance' (*DD* 674), not only from her imprisonment but also from the terrible temptation to wreak vengeance upon Grandcourt.

As Gwendolen struggles to keep her belief in her 'better self' (430) - that she currently sees as embodied in Daniel - the associated claustrophobic images merge: outward and inward, false images and real fears, suffocation and drowning, dead faces and self-dread. Imprisoned with Grandcourt in a sea of 'vast silence', Gwendolen dreads her own worst capabilities and 'cling[s] for rescue' - from the 'murdering fingers' of her own wishes and Grandcourt's power - to her only life-raft: her desperate belief in Daniel's 'sympathy' and 'direction' (674). At the moment of Grandcourt's drowning, in seeing her 'wish' for his death 'outside me' (696), she feels her deepest self-dread is finally realised in her momentary hesitation with the rope. Moments later, Gwendolen refuses to be 'wicked... lost' as she 'leap[s] away from myself... from my crime' (696) to save him, echoing the figure in the panel as she flees from her 'worse self' by jumping *towards* 'the dead face' of Grandcourt,

'close to me as I fell' (696). Daniel believes that Gwendolen resisted 'her evil thoughts' with a 'counterbalancing struggle of her better will... *almost* certain' that her hesitation 'had no outward effect' (my emphasis, 696). The ambiguity regarding whether Gwendolen's hesitation renders her guilty of murder recognises the *almost* complete state of human uncertainty Gwendolen has progressively realised: her last remaining certainty is her faith in Daniel. Gwendolen is desperate for his guidance and continued proximity as a refuge from self-despair. As Swann recognises, 'she adopts Deronda as her reflection of true values and interpreter of reality' (444). For Swann, however, Gwendolen's development halts with her transference from 'her own reflection' (443) to Daniel, as this completes her transformation into a 'new religion of humanity [which] centres on Deronda, and her new life is firmly fixed in belief in him' (445). Gwendolen's gamble to attain social advancement and the perpetuation of her self-idolisation, she has long since recognised as the worship of false gods. Following Grandcourt's death, she is no longer imprisoned in his gaze, but she still clings desperately to Daniel as the reflection of her moral conscience with 'supreme need', still caught up in a last '*scene...* which she filled with his relation to her' (my emphasis, *DD* 796). The struggle to realise the full development of her moral conscience is still obscured for Gwendolen by a shift from one idol to another, from a divine sense of self to a deification of Daniel.

Whilst Daniel is positioned as Saviour by Gwendolen, this is a role he occupies throughout the novel. Daniel is concerned with 'lost souls' (365), being drawn to others 'in proportion to the possibility of his defending them, rescuing them, telling upon their lives with some sort of redeeming influence' (324). From saving Han's degree qualification (at the expense of his own) and Mirah from drowning herself in despair, Daniel is deified by all. For Daniel, however, 'such

suppositions' that he 'hardly want[s] anything for himself' other than 'giving himself to the famished tigress to save her and her little ones from starving... like Bouddha [*sic*]', he finds 'rather exasperating' (465-6). Daniel is human rather than divine, having a 'thoroughly terrestrial and manly' physiognomy, '[n]ot seraphic... but still of a kind to raise belief in a human dignity which can afford to acknowledge poor relations' (186). Daniel also faces struggle: his sexual attraction towards Gwendolen, his own unthinking anti-Semitism, and his intense self-consciousness regarding his unknown origin and quest for future. This last is further complicated by his paralysis, caused by his sympathy conflating all courses with equal and therefore nullifying import as 'a pitfall of sympathy' which, 'too diffusive', acts to 'paralyze action and moral force' (Heather Armstrong 170). As discussed earlier, Daniel also begins his relationship with Gwendolen by positing the 'evil genius' as her likely dominant force, as he feels 'unrest' rather than 'charm' (*DD* 7) in contemplating her.

In his moral conscience and wandering energy being undirected, Daniel is (like Gwendolen earlier) somehow removed from human existence as he seeks a cause which would 'make him... an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning disembodied spirit' (365). For Nurbhai and Newton, Daniel is an unformed figure, the biblical golem/Adam, 'into whom [Mordecai] can breathe a soul' (99), echoing my argument earlier which posits Gwendolen as an empty vessel, awaiting the realisation of her moral conscience. Daniel's political stance recognises that his life must be grounded in human experience as "'the ages [should] try the spirits, and see what they are worth'" (*DD* 511), and he becomes the "age" in which Mordecai's visionary 'spirit' can be embodied. Daniel again acts as saviour in rescuing the dying "prophet" from his 'widening spiritual loneliness' (472) by

bringing his own 'wise estimate of consequences which is the only safeguard from fatal error, even to ennobling motive' (513), and echoing his own advice to Gwendolen to use her fear as 'a safeguard' (452). Yet, at the same time, Daniel finds the idea of 'the transmutation of self' (466) an alluring image, and this is one that raises questions at the end of the novel.

Daniel's sexual attraction towards Gwendolen, whom he 'should have loved... if -', is posited by the novel as 'what is but momentary on the permanent chosen treasury of the heart', yet their relationship is clearly more profound than sexual attraction, and is deeply *experienced* by them both in its 'unspeakably touching' (450) intensity, which contrasts with the distanced ideality of Daniel's relationship with the 'freshly-opened flower' (732) Mirah. Newton suggests that Daniel's attraction towards Gwendolen represents a plot-change 'perhaps only reluctantly abandoned... [to] allow[ ] Deronda to recover a sense of tribal identity too easily, without facing some of the most serious difficulties' (191-2) yet recognises that 'the relationship with Gwendolen is also an important stage in the evolution of Deronda', but goes on to posit this as being 'towards his tribal identity' (197). The significance of his relationship with Gwendolen lies, however, in its precipitating Daniel's recognition of *his own* human fallibility, as, not only does he come to recognise his own egoism in his momentary 'falling into an exaggeration of his own importance, and a ridiculous readiness to accept Gwendolen's [deified] view of himself' (*DD* 564), Daniel fears that in her, he will meet his own 'precipitancy in the manifestation of impulsive feeling' and thereby be left with 'a stronger sense of weakness' (621). Daniel recognises a reflection of his own potential failings in Gwendolen (as Newton does recognise, but only in terms of needing 'a larger aim in life' (197)). In his words of advice to her, Daniel is directing his own moral growth, as his 'half-

indignant remonstrance' reflected his 'inward argument with himself' (*DD* 451).

For Daniel, Gwendolen's experience of suffering has, like his own, acted as:

...a painful letting in of light... [giving] conscious[ness] of more beyond the round of your own inclinations – you know more of the way in which your life presses on others, and their life on yours. I don't think you could have escaped the painful process in some form or other. (452)

As Heather Armstrong recognises, through his relationship with Gwendolen, Daniel too comes to recognise 'himself as erring and learning' (155).

When Gwendolen finally realises that Daniel is a separate human – rather than divine - being, with his own 'wide-stretching purposes' outside of her imagined scenes and 'in which she felt herself reduced to a mere speck' (*DD* 803), she undergoes her final conversion. She is precipitated out of her claustrophobic suffocation into an agoraphobic vision of insignificance as her last self-imposed frame of reference is destroyed. The shock of her displacement from a position of 'supremacy in her own world' (804) - and her last remaining certainties - throws Gwendolen into despair, her arms stretched out before her, again echoing the panel, in a helpless gesture of flight from the position of human isolation. In recognising Daniel as finally – and equally – human, Gwendolen's final frame of reference for her moral conscience is realised as her own self, as the 'burthen of that difficult rectitude towards him was a weight *her frame tottered under*' (my emphasis, 806). In battling with her new-found human isolation when Daniel leaves her, Gwendolen struggles with profound despair:

Through the day and half the night she fell continually into fits of shrieking, but cried in the midst of them to her mother, 'Don't be afraid. I shall live. I mean to live.' After all, she slept; and when she waked in the morning light, she looked up fixedly at her mother and said tenderly, 'Ah, poor mamma! You have been sitting up with me. Don't be unhappy. I shall live. I shall be better.' (806-7)

In being equally concerned with her mother's fears for her, Gwendolen's despair is counter-balanced by her newly recognised deep human affections, and she emerges determined 'to live' *and* 'be better'. Eliot recognises that the deepest struggles of human experience necessarily lead to a 'vivid interest in affairs' which:

...must obviously have tended to quicken her intellect, and give it a practical application; and the very sorrows – the heart-pangs and regrets which are inseparable from a life of passion – deepened her nature by the questioning of self and destiny which they occasioned, and by the energy demanded to surmount them and live on. ("France" [1854] 41)

In experiencing her struggles of conscience, Gwendolen has become fully human as she is now 'alive' to the 'sadness' (*DD* 800) in others, and significantly, Daniel has recognised her as such and that the tendency to 'good' involves a great deal of 'unrest' whilst 'evil', as Grandcourt has shown, can effect its own 'charm' (7). In their relationship with one another, Daniel and Gwendolen have each increased their human sympathy, eliciting a 'conversion' into a 'new consciousness', both potentially enabled to be 'something better' (430). Both recognise self and other as fully human, and that this involves self-reliance and mutual relations. The objectification of self or other dehumanises both, leading to *ennui* and oppression and, as Heather Armstrong recognises, 'unhealthy dependence' on one side and superiority on the other, as 'the asymmetry' of Gwendolen and Daniel's earlier relationship 'poses special problems for them both' (158-9). Daniel's rejection of Gwendolen is, therefore, finally necessary to their individual development.

Gwendolen emerges from her struggle with self-despair into calmer self-reflection. In her letter to Daniel, she remembers his words:

*- that I may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born. I do not yet see how that can be, but you know better than I. If it ever comes true, it will be because you helped me...It is better – it shall be better with me because I have known you.* (original emphasis, *DD* 810)

Whilst this echoes the vital role Daniel has occupied in terms of her own development, and even suggests Gwendolen may inherit the mantle of redemptive human fellowship from him, it also posits an equal amount of human uncertainty as 'I may', 'I do not yet see', 'If it ever comes true' (810).

For Newton, *Daniel Deronda* is 'concerned... with demonic forces which are a threat to the ego during an identity crisis or when the will loses control over energies within the self' (169). Lisabeth During suggests that Gwendolen 'remains at the primitive stage of dread, a feminine daemon in a salon, afraid of the power she has and lacking that colder power that goes with moral indifference' (67), and that '[o]utside of a defined religious universe... the feeling of dread just floats. It does not help to bring the dread self to knowledge' (70). I have argued that Gwendolen does indeed progress into self-realisation through her own sense of dread. Further to this, in *Daniel Deronda* the demonic self is again realised as human, but rather than encompassing the social demonisation of human sensibilities as Chapter 1 argued regarding *The Mill on the Floss*, here the demonic self is the *self-aware* human potential for perpetrating immoral acts, the 'fear' of which operates as 'a safeguard' (*DD* 452) in the moral conscience: 'Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul' (epigraph, 3). Eliot recognises 'morality' as 'specifically human... [and it] is dependent on the regulation of feeling by intellect' ("Evangelical" 144). That the demonic self is human, and relates to the awareness and regulation of such impulses by the moral conscience, is emphasised by the contrast between Gwendolen's self-dread regarding her demonic potential and Grandcourt, coldly reptilian rather than demonic and devoid of any moral conscience or human sensibilities. Unlike Maggie's social condemnation in *The Mill on the Floss*, Grandcourt's drowning can

be seen as not just Gwendolen's pivotal crisis (and convenience) but symbolic of his status as inhuman and thereby morally irredeemable. Gwendolen's rejection of the theatrical image, the 'contempt of appearance' (*DD* 608), is a rejection of the inhumanity of false relations in favour of painful – and uncertain - living.

In Daniel's marriage to the body and soul of his visionary future (Mirah and Mordecai respectively) and leaving for a semi-mythical utopian quest (leaving aside actual historical events), there is a sense in which Daniel is transcending human society altogether and embracing a higher form of existence. Alan Mintz suggests that '[t]o remain in [a] society of necessity involves becoming a Gwendolen; and to become a Daniel, society – at least English society – had to be left behind' (151). During suggests that, 'in the conflicting resolutions... the possibility of being ethical, at one moment given the most deterministic if not sociobiological justification [through Daniel's Jewish heritage/quest], is at the next moment assigned to the uncanny' (82). At the same time as asking if the only alternative offered to the cultural exclusivity of Grandcourt's 'English solipsist as psycho' is Daniel's 'voluntary embrace of cultural determinism' (83), During suggests that Daniel's transcendence sums the novel, as:

[Daniel's] sympathy fails to sow the seeds of impartial sympathy that would develop [Gwendolen's] faculty of seeing and understanding a world outside herself. From start to finish she finds it impossible to imagine how other people radically different from herself can even exist... [in the novel's] failure of sympathy to perform... moral regeneration on Gwendolen. (78)

- not recognising Gwendolen's realisation of self and other at all. Whilst the juxtaposed ending of the novel does trouble critics, who usually posit either a positive or negative reading of either Gwendolen's or Daniel's "end", my reading focuses on the very uncertainty "the end" effects. If the transcendent project represents the importance of a human vision as an avoidance of *ennui*, it embodies

the search for 'those disinterested gratifications which minister to the highest wants... realizing the mysterious longing of the soul, and promoting the accomplishment of its destiny' (Mackay cited Eliot "*Progress*" 36). In offering the hope of human potential at the same time as apparently transcending the finally uncertain Gwendolen and her society, however, it also recognises the human uncertainty that thinking about the present and future entails.

Whilst her deification of Daniel is finally revealed to Gwendolen as another false reflection, her reliance upon his guidance was a necessary step to enable her to survive those desperate months with Grandcourt, her projected worse self that Gwendolen finally realises is an equally false image. Eliot recognises a process of development that shows how 'each age and each race has had a faith and a symbolism suited to its need and... stage of development' ("*Progress*" 19). Through her relationship with Daniel, Gwendolen finally realises her moral conscience and recognises that her choices lie solely within herself, and that she has – and must – instigate her own human redemption and survival. Her development of conscience is analogous to a deeper symbolic trajectory of historical human development, however, as Gwendolen progresses from a pagan worship of the empty idol into a quasi-Christian discovery of and *dependence on* God in the form of the Christ-like teachings of Daniel and the possibility of redemption (juxtaposed with the Old Testament God of Grandcourt, offering only purgatory and damnation). This is not to suggest that the novel is neatly parcelled into an allegorical myth, however, as Mintz recognises, seeing Moses as the predominant theme but also 'echoes of other heroes: the prophets of the Bible, Christ, the messiah of Jewish lore, and the figures of medieval romance' (163). Mintz argues, however, that the novel finally evinces 'absence', avoiding 'rationality... and a concentration of present complexity' by

positing 'potential or future *certainty*' (my emphasis, 165). The novel does indeed posit 'present complexity', and engages in a gradual removal of certainties which relate to iniquitous and immoral societal structures as much as a religious moral framework, as this chapter has made clear. Gwendolen's gradual realisation of her human vulnerability, and the potential despair of individual isolation coupled with the moral responsibility involved in relations with others, resonates with the progressively destabilised sense of certainty that this spiritual crisis has precipitated her culture into. Her final metamorphosis is into a spiritual abyss of uncertainty, left by the absence of the certainties of belief in God or social structure, and leaving her struggling with self-despair.

Pauline Nestor suggests that the ethos of the novel 'offers an affirmation of sameness... fantastically supplemented by the absorption of difference', and is 'shadowed by the sad and diminished figure of Gwendolen' (154-5), a reading Philip Fisher echoes (209). For Nurbhai and Newton, the *denouement* posits 'a complete humanity... [as] the ultimate aim and necessary for the completion of the individual' (107), seeing this as 'the advent of a utopian era' (180) in which 'individual and universal [are]... inextricably linked, the form of one only being complete in the completion of the other' (188). Gwendolen here 'represents... the potential of Britain' (189) to regenerate itself through completion 'by gaining a soul' (190) and ridding itself of the dehumanising nature of 'empty tradition' (189) represented by Grandcourt. *Daniel Deronda* does recognise the vital importance of individual wholeness - the 'fuller self' (*DD* 674) both Gwendolen and Daniel attain - enabling them both to realise the equal human status, potential and responsibility of self and other, but individual self-realisation should not be conflated into an homogenous mass of 'universal' humanity. The analogy between individual and social/national

self-realisation does not lead them to collapse into one another. As Heather Armstrong argues, to:

...establish identity by either opposition or similitude is to participate in a totality encompassing the same and the other. The truly other has an alterity that is not *relative* to the I, but is *revealed* to the I... not a relation that erases difference, but one which preserves the distance and remoteness of the other. (original emphasis, 24-5)

- but, I emphasise, not at the expense of the self. The novel posits the vital importance of recognising and respecting both mutuality and difference, of 'separateness with communication' (*DD* 725), as it is the mutual (fully human not objectifying) relations between individual people through which the realisation of the 'fuller self' (674) is effected. As implied in the analogy between Gwendolen's and Daniel's development and final quest, this is echoed in the potential formation of society and in international relations. In her relationship with Daniel, Gwendolen eventually realises both self and other as human at the same time as 'their separateness from each other' (803), and, as already argued, this leads to the recognition of uncertainty rather than the now discredited impositions of certainty. Nurbhai and Newton do recognise that 'the completion of the individual also depend[s] on the relation to... other individuals' (188). D. R. Carroll recognises that the novel's 'idea of the balance of "separateness with communication" is transcribed into terms of personal relationships' (379), but also suggests a projected 'complete unity' of the novel, positing this to simply be the 'cure' for 'Deronda's disease of sympathy' (380), imposing a sense of closure on the novel it clearly rejects. Heather Armstrong recognises that, in some of her letters, Eliot engages with a 'sense of *uncertainty*, as opposed to *certainty*' (original emphasis, 38), and, crucially, that Eliot's novels 'never pretend[ ] that the way of true relation is easy... portray[ing] it as changeable, demanding, messy' (179).

In her determination to 'live' (*DD* 807), Gwendolen attempts to forge a positive future of human fellowship, but it is a future complicated by uncertainty. The final ethos of *Daniel Deronda* is – contra the pessimistic certainties of *The Mill on the Floss* - fraught with questions. At the same time as recognising the importance of a vision of hope for the future, the juxtaposition of Gwendolen's uncertain and vulnerable situation at the end of the novel *recognises* the uncertainty and vulnerability that living in the present *and* thinking about the future entails.

## Chapter 3

### The Issue of Salvation

...while no real knowledge is powerless or fruitless, the fruits differ in refinement and value, the highest being unquestionably those disinterested gratifications which minister to the highest wants of the highest faculties, and which earn for philosophy the title of a divine love, realizing the mysterious longing of the soul, and promoting the accomplishment of its destiny. (R. W. Mackay cited Eliot *Progress* 36)

This chapter will explore the relationship between Eliot's non-fiction essays and reviews, which tend to posit a sense of optimism, contemporary Victorian thinking including Eliot's own letters, and the complexity and ambiguity which arise from *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*. In both novels, George Eliot explores the struggles of her central characters to realise something better, to realise the full potential of their "souls" in the secularised mortal world. This chapter will explore how Eliot's non-fiction engages with the issue of salvation, as raised in the previous two chapters. I will examine how other Victorian thinkers engage with the issue of social salvation in order to contextualise Eliot's thinking and contribution to the debate, bearing in mind that her non-fiction is already directly engaging with the thinking of her contemporaries, and is informed by her own philosophical reading.

As outlined in my Introduction, Eliot's translations of L. Feuerbach and other European philosophy and Biblical criticism, alongside her vast reading of critical thinkers such as Auguste Comte, J. S. Mill and J. W. Goethe either contributed to, or reflected, Eliot's own philosophical, religious and social deliberations. Feuerbach advocates human relations as themselves encompassing the "divine", that the 'relations... of man to man [*sic*]... all the moral relations are *per se* religious [and] Life as a whole is, in its essential, substantial relations, throughout of a divine nature' (*Essence* [1841] 271). Eliot wrote in 1854 that '[w]ith the ideas of

Feuerbach I everywhere agree' (*Letters* 132), and 20 years later, echoes Feuerbach, albeit with a more corporeal emphasis:

...the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man: and... the idea of god, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (i.e. an exaltation of the human). (*Letters* [1874] 453)

Like Feuerbach, Eliot values the spiritual equally with the corporeal, and herself exalts the human in urging the desire for 'a higher strain of duty to... [an] ideal... [of] human love and moral action' wherein human relations have 'sacredness' (453-4). Further, Eliot argues that 'morality' itself 'is specifically human' ("Evangelical" [1855] 144), and recognises the vital importance of desiring better human and social moral values here on earth. In this, her retention of the relevance and import of Christian moral values (as opposed to dogma) as a necessary element to social salvation is central. As raised in Chapter 2, Eliot recognises a process of organic human development, and Comte's *Positive Philosophy* (1830-42) is highly relevant here as it underlies key aspects of Eliot's and Mill's thinking.

In his *Introduction to Positive Philosophy* (1830), Comte posits an understanding of the human (and the wider universe) in organic terms: of an inexorable process of historical development (1), both individual and societal development (4-6), and of the organic interdependent nature of all sciences (14-15). It is worth elaborating here that for Comte, human intellectual development has progressed through three philosophical stages in all its deliberations, apart from social science. This last is still subject to the earlier unreasoning theological and metaphysical stages of philosophy rather than the final positive stage of contemporary intellectual development (12) that is currently applied to all other

sciences. The first theological stage involves searching for 'absolute knowledge' through positing 'supernatural agents, whose arbitrary intervention explains... the universe' (2). This is *necessarily* followed by the intermediate metaphysical stage of personified abstractions whereby 'the supernatural agents are replaced by abstract forces', and 'each phenomenon...[is] explained by assigning it to its corresponding entity' (2). The final desired positive stage is then reached, wherein the mind recognises 'the impossibility of obtaining absolute truth' and 'endeavours now only to discover, by... reasoning and observation' the 'invariable relations' (2) between phenomena by considering 'only the facts themselves' (8). It is immediately clear that Gwendolen's three-stage development emphasised in Chapter 2 aligns with Comte's theory of positive philosophy, which for Comte as for Eliot, is related to the development of the individual, and to society as a whole. This is not to suggest a simplification of the complexity of individual and social developmental relations, but to emphasise the interrelated nature of development itself. As G. H. Lewes recognises, for Comte:

The phenomena relating to mankind are obviously more complex than those relating to the individual... and depend upon them... and we see also something peculiar, not physiological, which modifies the effects of these laws, and which results from the action of *individuals on each other*, curiously complicated by the action of each generation on its successor. (original emphasis, Lewes *History* [1871] 653-4)

Comte recognises the desirability and necessity of a comprehensive education for all (*Positive* 24), and advocates the need for an intellectually enlightened society, also views that Eliot clearly shares. The significance of social science being left behind in this progressive organic process is that, for Comte, the road to social salvation is to be found by applying positive philosophy to 'the study of social phenomena', thereby leading to 'a single body of homogeneous doctrine', at which point the 'final triumph of the positive philosophy will take place spontaneously, and

will reestablish [*sic*] order in society' (29-30). For Comte, society needs to escape from 'the existing evil', which 'consists above all in the absence of any true organization' (29) caused by the simultaneous application of all three philosophical stages in social thinking. Social order is the desired objective, and is 'the return of modern society to a truly normal state' (64-5). Once this has been widely recognised as both necessary and inevitable, 'every sensible man should next endeavour to work for the triumph of that philosophy' (29). Social salvation then, is attained through a *return* to "normality", escaping the evils of confusion and revolutionary crisis (28) in the culmination of an inexorable organic progression through three stages that somehow lead society *back* to a state of peaceful normality. For Comte, then, thinking in unison is all.

Whilst this echoes Chapter 1's discussion of Maggie and Tom's search to reclaim the childhood Eden of human affirmation, the ultimate failure of which is due to a conflict born out of different forms of thinking, Eliot clearly recognises the unified social dogma of St. Ogg's as immoral, repressive and dehumanising, as is Maggie's potential alternative of ascetic self-abnegation. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot affirms a positivist evolutionary organic growth of the individual members of successive generations, but not of *inexorable* social change, thus also posits the need for society's forms to evolve as well, rather than the repression of individual aspirations into a peaceful or "normal" state of social obfuscation. She does, however, clearly posit the moral need for unified thinking in terms of engendering a social education that is both broad and reasoning, but one that also affirms human sensibilities and individual aspirations. Gillian Beer recognises that Eliot is specifically troubled by Comte's assertion that "Humanity is composed essentially of the dead... If the living are admitted it is, except in rare instances, only

provisionally””, Eliot following this citation in her notebook with her concern that if ‘our duties are towards “Humanity” how are the living and those who are to come to be excluded?’ (Comte and Eliot cited Beer 185). Whilst positing an ‘undeniabl[e] truth’ in the view that ‘the only hope of extending man’s sources of knowledge and happiness is to be found in positive science, and in the universal application of its principles’, (Eliot “*Progress*” [1851] 18), Eliot recognises that the living (and future) members of society should be the focus of any philosophical thinking, and at the same time, recognises the ambiguity and complexities of attempting to fit ‘living, generous humanity – mixed and erring, and self-deluding’ (“*Morality*” [1855] 131) into a philosophical system. Gordon Haight notes that, in her ‘adherence to Positivism... GE “never accepted the details of the system, never went beyond the central idea”’ (editorial note, Eliot *Letters* 318), and, whilst for Eliot ‘[m]y gratitude increases continually for the illumination Comte has contributed to my life’ (*Letters* [1867] 325), her work increasingly argues against Comte’s sense of certainty.

Harriet Martineau, who published her translation of Comte’s *Positive Philosophy* in 1853, criticises Lewes for ““introducing *Psychology* as a science in his Comte papers”” (original emphasis, cited Eliot *Letters* [1852] 108), a criticism Eliot clearly rejects as she follows this report by exerting that ‘Comte himself holds *Psychology* to be a necessary link in the chain of science – Lewes only suggests a change in its relations’ (108). Beer recognises that the question of whether there is ‘a morphology of the unconscious... as insistent and inescapable as that of physical organic life’ (184) is a crucial one to Eliot and her contemporaries. For Lewes – and for Eliot – the importance of psychology as a whole, conscious and unconscious, is vital as it underpins human understanding of the complex organic development of both individual and society, of self-realisation and social relations, of theory as

'necessary to observation', and of the developmental workings of the mind itself as it 'commences with the unknowable... learn[s] its impotence... [and] the limits of its range before it can content itself with the knowable' (Lewes *History* 648). The importance of psychology to Eliot is crucial to her thinking as examined here.

Eliot's criticism of the immoral "morality" of Victorian social forms and opinions, and her advocacy of change, is clear from her reviews and essays. In her early review of J. A. Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith* in 1849, whilst Eliot criticises the 'questionable character' of some of the novel, at the same time, she praises:

...its trenchant remarks on some of our English conventions, its striking sketches of the dubious aspect which many charactered respectabilities are beginning to wear under the light of this nineteenth century, its suggestive hints as to the necessity of recasting the currency of our religion and virtue, that it may carry fresh and bright the stamp of the age's highest and best idea – these have a practical bearing. (15)

All of the issues she highlights here are those she continually engages with throughout her writing career, and the short but crucial last point of having 'a practical bearing' needs to be born in mind throughout. In the review of Froude, Eliot highlights the self-seeking hypocrisy evident in the ranks of the clergy, a criticism that focuses on the neglect of the spiritual nourishment of humankind. For Froude, 'the Clergy... who through all their waking hours ought to have for their one thought, the deepest and most absorbing interests of humanity' instead aim for their own social advantage and ambitious pursuit of, 'not cures of souls', but their own '*livings*: something which will keep their wretched bodies living in the comforts they have found indispensable' (original emphasis, cited Eliot "*Nemesis*" 16); the nourishment of the human "spirit" then, is seen as neglected but vital. Six years later, Eliot criticises the immoral "morality", motives and practices of Christian dogmatism in her blistering attack on the 'bigoted narrowness' ("Evangelical" 138) of Dr. Cumming, a 'preacher of immense popularity' (140).

In this essay, Eliot criticises the preacher for operating an elitist system of heavenly salvation by exclusion, in his exposition of what Eliot terms ‘the love of the *clan*, which is the correlative of antagonism to the rest of mankind’ (original emphasis, 159). At the same time as espousing the service of God, Cumming denounces ‘his fellow-men’, who are not recognised as ‘fellow-sinners and fellow-sufferers’ but are dehumanised as ‘automata’ of ‘Satan’, and therefore, as ‘agents of hell’ (160). The “othering” and dehumanising of fellow human beings Eliot recognises as pernicious to moral social values and damaging to both parties, engendering not love but ‘hatred’ (160), as discussed in both previous chapters. She denounces such ‘perversion’ as ‘obstructive of true moral development’, this last evident in the ‘*idea* of God’ which is only ‘really moral in its influence’ when ‘contemplated as sympathizing with the pure elements of human feeling... which we recognize to be moral in humanity’ (my emphasis, 168). For Eliot then, the *idea* of Christian morality she clearly values highly, and is keen to retain these values even whilst rejecting the existence of God outside of human contemplation. Eliot also retains the necessity of spiritual salvation, a salvation she perceives as effected through the experience of self-realisation and moral human fellowship. As morality itself is seen as an essence or element of human nature, it is, therefore, a vitally necessary (and natural) objective. J. S. Mill echoes Eliot’s views on self-realisation as the experiential basis for effecting moral human relations, as morality ‘consists of two parts’, these being ‘self-education; the training, by the human being himself [*sic*], of his affections and will’, and the second is ‘the regulation of his outward actions’ (“Bentham” [1838] 71). Crucially, this last is ‘halting and imperfect without the first’ because it is our own self-reflection that provides the:

...qualifications for regulating the nicer shades of human behaviour, or for laying down even the greater moralities as to those facts in human life which

tend to influence the depths of the character quite independently of any influence on worldly circumstances – such... as the sexual relations, or those of family in general, or any other social and sympathetic connexions of an intimate kind. (71)

From this self-realisation comes altruism. Rosemary Ashton suggests that Spinoza and Feuerbach offer ‘an ethic and a psychology applicable to men in their unheroic everyday’ (159), and that, for Spinoza, ‘self-interest is necessarily man’s motive force, but by reflecting on it and... that if I am of supreme interest to myself, so also is my fellow man of supreme interest to himself, I can and must act altruistically’ (158). Ashton fails to draw these points together to discuss Eliot’s idea of altruism, the human divine, or the relationship between this and the ordinary individual, however, issues which this chapter is concerned to explore.

In her essay on Cumming, Eliot’s emphasis is again on the vital importance of the spiritual well being of humanity here on earth, positing Christian morality as valuable only when seen in the light of human relations (which are for her, the true object of morality and imbued with ‘sacredness’ (*Letters* [1874] 454)), and therefore only if working ‘on the same principle that human sympathy is found a source of strength’ (“Evangelical” 168). To pervert these values by the distancing of sympathy for one’s fellow human beings is to posit a God ‘who instead of sharing and aiding our human sympathies, is directly in collision with them’ (169), and is therefore acting against what Eliot recognises as “genuine” human morality. Eliot does, however, optimistically posit a ‘tendency towards good in human nature [which] has a force... no creed can utterly counteract, and which ensures the ultimate triumph of that tendency over all dogmatic perversions’ (170). In this, Eliot specifically posits an uncontainable element in human nature, which is clearly an element for “good” that she sees as engaged in an inexorable and organic ‘growth’ which will inevitably break through these dogmatic attempts to contain it as, ‘build

walls round the living tree as you will, the bricks and mortar have by and by to give way before the slow and sure operation of the sap' (167-8). As Suzanne Graver recognises, Eliot regards 'human nature not as constant but as continuously developing, moving slowly but comprehensively toward the improvement of mankind' (16). In her review of *The Progress of the Intellect*, Eliot also equates the 'good' as 'synonymous' with the 'true', and that everyone who believes this, 'bears in his soul the essential element of religion' (32-3). Eliot is positing an optimistic belief in the inherent good in human nature (the "divine" element) that will inevitably overcome the repressive and negative operations of social and Clerical dogmatic forms; a *certainty* of human value. Eliot, then, appears to retain an element of metaphysical thinking in her positing the human as having the exalted religious aspect of a "divine", moral *essence* of goodness and truth. This is not a transcendent metaphysics, against which Eliot clearly argues in her advocacy of theory as necessarily having a 'practical bearing' ("*Nemesis*" 15), but a rejection of the Benthamite empiricism that excludes the equal value (or even existence) of those non-factual, unseen human sensibilities. As Mill recognises:

In many of the most natural and strongest feelings of human nature [Bentham] had no sympathy; from many of its graver experiences he was altogether cut off; and the faculty by which one mind understands a mind different from itself... was denied him by his deficiency of Imagination... accordingly, Bentham's knowledge of human nature is bounded... [by] the empiricism of one who has had little experience... neither internal... nor external... [neither] prosperity... adversity, passion nor satiety... [nor] Self-consciousness... to which this age owes so much of its cheerful and its mournful wisdom... He had never been made alive to the unseen influences which were acting on himself, nor consequently on his fellow-creatures. ("Bentham" 65-6)

Clearly these are the consciously reasoned elements Eliot considers vital to self-realisation and her ethos of moral individual and social salvation, and the role of human imagination and sympathy are vital to both. Significantly, Mill criticises

Bentham's inability to recognise humankind 'as a being capable of pursuing spiritual perfection as an end... without hope of good or fear of evil from other source than his own inward consciousness' (68), strongly echoing Eliot's own position as discussed in the previous two chapters. Here, then, Mill is arguing against Bentham's position at the final logical end of Comte's third positivist stage, where 'man... accustom[s] himself to consider only the facts themselves' and disregards *all* forms of 'abstract forces' which may be considered 'inherent in the different beings of the world' (Comte *Positive* 8). Mill is not advocating a retention of Comte's pre-positive metaphysical stage, in which all objects 'do all that they do because it is their Essence to do so, or by reason of an inherent Virtue' (Mill "Comte" [1865] 268) as he criticises the continuation of 'the empty mode of explanation by scholastic entities, such as [of] a plastic force, a vital principle' (289). Yet Mill advocates as 'an instructive and profitable object of contemplation' (332) the raising of social thinking to the region of a religion. Whilst this is only in so far as it becomes a 'power which may be acquired over the mind by the idea of the general interest of the human race, both as a source of emotion and as a motive for conduct', for Mill it 'appeals to that feeling of the Infinite, *which is deeply rooted in human nature*' (my emphasis, 333-4), and as such, Mill echoes Eliot's own retention of an anti-Benthamite metaphysical but *organically human* element in a refusal to forego the necessary importance of the unseen but *existing* human imagination, emotions and aspirations. Whilst it is clear that Mill's emphasis is on the corporeal human as he avoids Eliot's position of belief in a "divine" element, whether human or otherwise, Eliot and Mill both refuse to progress as far as Bentham's reasoning of all "non-factual" human qualities out of existence, considering these to be vital elements in both individual and social terms.

K. M. Newton suggests that, for Eliot, 'Christian morality and values... must be preserved, but they must be based on non-metaphysical principles' (26). Whilst:

The Enlightenment tended to think that morality could be justified in purely rational terms... for George Eliot, morality was rather a natural product of the social life of man; its basis was in human feelings which had become transformed into moral ideas through the interaction of men and society. (26)

Whilst this is clearly evident in Eliot's thinking, not least that both morality and values must be grounded in human experience, she does also lay particular emphasis on the exalted 'sacredness' (*Letters* 454) of human relations, and the moral value of their experience. Ashton recognises that Eliot foregoes 'the inadmissible ground of Reason' as a means of "'saving"... God and immortality', as both Strauss and Kant had done after seeming 'to prove them impossible' (152), yet does not explore the relationship between Eliot's "'conversion to disbelief"' (156) and her quasi-metaphysical slant in positing the human as divine and in idealising human relations, other than to point out Eliot's 'much more enthusiastic remarks while translating Feuerbach' (152), whom Ashton cites. Later, Ashton does acknowledge that Feuerbach's 'emphasis on the use of the senses and the faculty of the imagination as central to religious myth and the exercise of moral duty alike', is a 'telling' influence 'on [Eliot's] thought and art' (166), and that Goethe 'joins Comte and Feuerbach as examples... of thinkers who secularise religious feeling, channelling it into human feelings towards fellow humans' (170). Feuerbach's positing of there being 'no other essence which man can think, dream of, imagine, feel, believe in, wish for, love and adore as the *absolute*, than the essence of human nature itself' (*Essence* 270) echoes Eliot's own position of human relations as bearing a 'sacredness' (*Letters* 454) in which:

...the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is

not man: and... the idea of god, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (i.e. *an exaltation of the human*). (my emphasis, Eliot *Letters* [1874] 453)

For Eliot then, as for Mill, the organic human contains an “essential” spiritual element which must be catered for in both theory and practice, and crucially, provides the authentication for their advocating the vital importance of the individual who must not be sacrificed to society.

In her review of *The Progress of the Intellect*, Eliot alludes to a ‘more enlarged idea of providential evolution’ which sees the morality of Christianity as a fortuitous progression in its suitability regarding the *destination* of human spiritual needs, as ‘the peculiar religious and political history of the Hebrews’ becomes ‘a preparation for ushering into the world a religion which anticipates and fulfils the yearnings of man’s spiritual nature’ (31). Human spiritual salvation is not only desirable but an organically necessary evolutionary objective. Further to this, removing Christian religious sentiment from its narrow dogmatic forms and mythical origins would enable an organic ‘development of the Christian system corresponding to the wants and culture of the age... strik[ing] a firm root in man’s moral nature, and... entwin[ing] itself with the growth of those new forms of social life to which we are tending’ (32), consequently leading to social salvation. Mill too recognises that ‘the sayings of Christ are... irreconcilable with nothing which a comprehensive morality requires; that everything which is excellent in ethics may be brought within them’, but explicitly recognises that ‘other ethics... must exist side by side with Christian ethics to produce the moral regeneration of mankind’, as ‘the interests of truth require a diversity of opinions’ (*On Liberty* [1859] 126-7). Mill clearly posits an ethic of moral ‘regeneration’ as the desired project through which the ‘truth’ of

perpetual human improvement (he avoids the religious term “salvation”) will be attained, but one that recognises both multiplicity and individuality to be of critical value to society, *and* necessary to its arrival at a position of ‘truth’. Whilst Eliot is, however, at a recognisable distance from Mill here as she does not advocate the necessity of multiple viewpoints in order to arrive at a sense of social ‘truth’, she clearly posits respect for difference *and* connection, as argued in Chapter 2. As Beer recognises, Eliot’s exploration of ‘British insularity’ illustrates how it leads to a ‘meagreness of national culture’, whilst ‘the multiple past, both genetic and cultural’ (187-8) leads to enrichment. Graver recognises that for Eliot and her like-minded contemporaries, ‘[t]olerance, which remains a value, is joined by brotherhood, [which is] now given predominance over the concrete ties of kinship’ (57). For Eliot and Mill, the Comtean process of organic human development clearly focuses on the vital importance of moral development, which Eliot sees as effected through a natural progression into Christian moral values (minus the dogma), and both recognise as of value when divested of the theological but retaining a vital aspect of quasi-metaphysical form in pertaining to the moral, spiritual and social regeneration of humankind.

In the positivist advocacy of the need for a broad social education, ‘even among the mass of the people’ (Comte *Positive* 25), Eliot’s view that ‘aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity’ and is a medium through which she works ‘to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate’ (*Letters* [1866] 318), emphasises that her novels are indeed intended to educate her readership with her own philosophical views, including the necessary pursuit of human salvation in the corporeal world. Eliot is also very aware of the dangers of preaching, however, as ‘no sooner do you begin to betray

symptoms of an intention to moralize... than the interest of your hearer will slacken' ("Morality" 130), as Ashton recognises (171). Rather than trying to moralise or provide pat answers through a binary characterisation of "good" and "bad" individuals attaining their "just" rewards, Eliot consistently engages her central characters in a personal moral struggle in which they wrestle with both their own impulses and external forces, and the positive and negative implications of their own decisions. Grandcourt's characterisation is the exception here, as he is the dehumanising face of those outmoded social forms, represented by St. Ogg's in *The Mill on the Floss*, which need to change to enable the salvation of all concerned. Eliot's central characters persistently exhibit her posited uncontainable force, which tries to attain the higher moral "good", and she - like Goethe whom she admires - depicts 'every aspect of human life where there is some twist of love, or endurance, or helplessness to call forth our best sympathies' ("Morality" 131), thus encouraging her audience to ask themselves deeply searching questions regarding their own moral choices, human relations, and the wider society. As Graver recognises, for Eliot, the role of writer is a vital part of the organic whole as '[l]iterature is not only an index but also an agent of social evolution' (186), and further, that Eliot 'attempted to capture... the forms of belief that characterized past and present communities, but also... wanted to create through her fiction new forms of belief' (260). Comte recognises the 'interdependence between the progress of the sciences and that of the arts, owing to their innumerable reciprocal influences, and... that they have all been closely connected with the general development of human society' (*Positive* 48-9), and therefore, the vital role of art itself as forming both reflection and education in an organic view of society is clear. In Mill's critique of Bentham's narrow Utilitarian view of 'treating the *moral* view of actions and characters, which is

unquestionably the first and most important mode of looking at them, as if it were the sole one', Mill advocates the interrelated importance of the '*aesthetic* aspect, or... *beauty*', and the '*sympathetic* aspect, or... its *loveableness*' (italics original, "Bentham" 84). For Mill, in these three interrelated aspects of actions and characters, the '*moral* aspect, or that of its *right* and *wrong*... addresses itself to our reason and conscience; the second [aesthetic] to our imagination; the third to our human fellow-feeling', and as such, the 'morality of an action depends on its foreseeable consequences [we approve or disapprove]; its beauty [we admire or despise], and its loveableness [we love, pity, or dislike]' (84). This echoes the serious intent Eliot places on her writing as a source of social education, and is clearly related to the organic nature of individual and social development of the corporeal, emotional, intellectual and spiritual human that she and Mill adopt. Mill recognises the 'high moral value' Comte places on 'the creations of poets and artists in all departments' as their 'mixed appeal to the sentiments and the understanding' fits them to 'educate the feelings of abstract thinkers, and enlarge the intellectual horizons of people of the world' ("Comte" 324).

In Eliot's desire to 'make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate' (*Letters* 318), the Utopian potential Daniel encompasses at the end of *Daniel Deronda* – and the momentary vision of salvation through human affirmation afforded to Maggie and Tom at the end of *The Mill on the Floss* – can be validated, and be seen to have 'a practical bearing' (Eliot "*Nemesis*" 15). For Graver, whilst Eliot strives 'to reconcile antitheses, to balance opposing forces, to discover integral truths concerning not only matters of gender but also of fact and value, sympathy and criticism, ideality and the hard, unaccommodating actual' (309), her fiction ultimately fails to uphold what Graver perceives as 'the organic concepts she elsewhere attempts regularly to

affirm... testify[ing] for the most part not to biological and sociological entities but rather to a myth or vision of organic unity' (308). Graver criticises both Eliot and her contemporary theorists, including Mill, for 'transferring their own needs to their idea of what community might be' (310), as this 'ideal of perfection [is] one that... embraced a secularised ideal of brotherhood – at the price... of compromising empiricism in philosophy and realism in art' (310). Graver fails to recognise the vital role that the Utopian vision plays for Eliot, despite recognising that sympathy *and* imagination are essential factors for Eliot in enabling her society to 'extend the scope of sympathy to include... [those] "who most differ from them in customs and belief"' (Eliot cited Graver 264), and that Eliot's use of these in her 'rhetorical strategies... effect extraordinary acts of balance: to satisfy her readers and challenge them, to arouse their intense sympathy yet allow for dissent, all the while averting their ultimate estrangement' (279). Graver recognises that Eliot's comments on sympathy and imagination:

...suggest three matters central to the aesthetic of sympathy: the affective function of literature; *the importance of imagination in transforming belief into socially binding action*; and the need to engage the reader in a community of feeling... with the human community at large. [But] These principles speak, however, only to the purpose of the work of art – to enlarge the reader's sensibility to foster social unity – and not to the means of achieving that purpose. (my emphasis, 265)

Graver fails to recognise that an informed imagination is intended to effect that very means. For Eliot, if 'aesthetic teaching... lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram', it 'ceases to be purely aesthetic', and as such, 'becomes the most offensive of all teaching' (*Letters* [1866] 318), opening itself to the danger of transcending the human reality she is clearly so concerned to engage with. Yet, crucially for Eliot:

Avowed Utopias are not offensive, because they are understood to have a scientific and expository character: they do not pretend to work on the emotions, or couldn't do it if they did pretend... consider the sort of agonizing labour to an English-fed imagination to make art a sufficiently

real back-ground, for the desired picture, to get breathing, individual forms, and group them in the needful relations, so that the presentation will lay hold on the emotions as human experience – will... “flash” conviction on the world by means of aroused sympathy. (318)

By positing a momentary vision of human affirmation in *The Mill on the Floss* and a vision of individual and social potential in *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot is providing hypotheses of mortal salvation, a necessary focus and human objective of hope to avoid the '[f]inality' of 'bewilderment or defeat' (Mackay cited Eliot "*Progress*" 35), and thus averting the dangers of *ennui*, despair, or defeatism. For Comte, the abstract is essential to positive philosophy as 'the study of the generalities of abstract physics is [needed] to furnish the rational basis of a truly systematic concrete physics' (*Positive* 45). In positive philosophy, from the study and understanding of 'science comes prevision; from prevision comes action' (38), for the 'concrete... sciences... function consists in applying these [abstract] laws to the actual' (43). Eliot's vision is intended to be allied with and potentially realisable by 'breathing, individual' human beings through their being experienced by characters with whom her audience has attained 'sympathy' (*Letters* [1866] 318), and crucially, in both novels, take place within an affirmation of human fellowship (Maggie with Tom, Gwendolen with her mother, and Daniel with Mirah/Mordecai). That these novels also both engage with human tragedy (in the deaths of Maggie and Tom, and Gwendolen's terrible torments and potential despair), the need for social morality to change is emphasised through Eliot's echoing of Mill's interrelated moral, aesthetic and sympathetic depiction of the actions and characters. Between the publication of *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot expresses the high value she places on the use of tragedy 'to urge the human sanctities' (*Letters* [1866] 319). She also clearly renounces the ideal of a metaphysical salvation that transcends human lives through those attempts 'to climb to heaven by the rainbow bridge of "the high *priori*

road””, as she posits instead the value of being ‘content humbly to use [her] muscles in treading the uphill *a posteriori* path which will lead... to an eminence whence we may see very bright and blessed things on earth’ (Eliot “Future” [1855] 137). Eliot is keen to place her Utopian vision of human salvation in the mortal world and propose a realisable present and future, but recognises in her fiction that the phenomena of living human individuals prevent an imposition of certain answers. For Comte, whilst ‘precision and certainty are two qualities of very different nature’, each science can offer certain results, provided:

...that its conclusions are not pushed beyond the degree of precision of which the corresponding phenomena admit, a condition that may not be always very easy to fulfil. In any science whatever, everything that is simply conjectural is only more or less probable, and it is not that which constitutes its essential domain; everything that is positive – that is to say, founded on well established facts – is certain. (*Positive* 61)

Comte, as discussed earlier, is confident that the positive philosophy is both inevitable and desirable (29), and its application to social science engenders certainty in leading to ‘the final triumph... [that] will reestablish [*sic*] order in society’ (30). Echoing Comte’s view that ‘no idea can be properly understood apart from its history’ (*Positive* 1) in her review of *The Progress of the Intellect*, Eliot advocates an appreciation of the forms and processes of the past as a vital tool to understanding present society. In recognising how society is ‘in bondage to terms and conceptions which, having their root in conditions of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality’ (19), social change can be effected, although this does not provide certain answers for the form of the future. As Beer recognises, by the end of her career, Eliot’s earlier ‘dependence of the future on the past is brought into question’ (169). Gwendolen ends *Daniel Deronda* with her ‘story... like that of the Zionist state... still to come, a matrix of fictions not yet fixed and diminished by the retrospect of history’, which Beer links to Comte and Darwin, amongst others, who

she sees as emphasising 'the unstayable and ever-extending movement of all phenomena' (180). As this thesis has argued, whilst the final stasis of *The Mill on the Floss* encloses Maggie and Tom in an immovable social state, the focus of the final novel is on the unknowable future. Eliot advocates a sense of certainty in the organic 'invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience' ("*Progress*" 21), yet at the same time, she recognises that this progressive individual and social human education necessarily includes the uncertain element of the individual human and the struggle between the individual and society, which thereby belies a predictable future. Comte's certain results, then, Eliot recognises as confounded by the 'corresponding phenomena' (Comte *Positive* 61) of the individual and unique human, and the complexity of their relations with others.

For Eliot, the desire and *necessity* of 'spread[ing] enlightened ideas is perpetually counteracted by... *idola theatri* [entrenched habits of mind]' ("*Progress*" 19). These are encompassed within a broad recognition of the ignorant attitudes towards education in all of its forms including its formal sense, the marginalisation of the "other" in the gendered suppression of women both inside and outside marriage, and the class and race-based obsession with social hierarchy and respectability. In particular, the social marginalisation of human sensibilities is recognised as intensely damaging, both individually and socially, Eliot positing the vital need for the affirmation of human affections and the recognition of individual aspirations, refusing to see people as a means to an end. Graver recognises that for Eliot:

...the conscious decisions she... associates with living in complex and advanced (as opposed to simple and primitive [Gemeinschaft]) societies are essential to her delineation of characters who purposefully choose to repudiate the *Gesellschaft* [contemporary industrial society] of the marketplace and to devote their lives to a good they must themselves define. (115)

In these terms, Eliot attempts to merge the positive ideals of *Gemeinschaft* community feeling with the progressive ideals of *Gesellschaft*, rejecting the stasis of small-town mentality and the isolationist potential of contemporary society. In both earlier chapters, the issue of the demonic self is recognised as, respectively, the social marginalisation (through a demonisation) of human sensibilities in *The Mill on the Floss*, and in *Daniel Deronda*, the recognition of the potential evil the human self is capable of performing; this conscious recognition itself acting as a moral safeguard against the deliberate choice of an immoral act. In recognising that the demonic self *is* the human self, Eliot is refusing both theological and metaphysical representations of good and evil by grounding these forces in human emotions and actions, a process itself emphasised in the psychological development Gwendolen undergoes in the last novel where she projects her own impulses toward good and evil onto Daniel and Grandcourt. Eliot refuses the distinction of class, gender or race as a dividing-line between good and bad morals, as her central characters, struggling to attain the salvation of “higher” morality, attest. Maggie, Gwendolen and Daniel are all positioned as the marginalised “other” through their conflicts with the social dictates of gender, race, and social hierarchy, yet clearly all aspire to attain the highest morality. For Eliot, the ‘line between the virtuous and the vicious, so far from being a necessary safeguard to morality, is itself an immoral fiction’, as those who experience ‘their own falls and their own struggles’ (“Morality” 132) recognise, and as such, belie a totality of vision. The recognition *and* experiencing of the individual moral struggle itself leads to education in the broadest sense as the human self is realised as equal to fellow human beings, and human salvation is perceived in modest and attainable human terms. Eliot’s retention of an aspect of the metaphysical “divine” in the spiritual human and her recognition of the uncertainty

of the future, do not affirm Comte's proposition that unified thinking is needed as a means of "normalising" social relations into 'a fixed social order' (*Positive* 29), as she is refusing the idea of social salvation *as or through* an homogeneous fixity.

Eliot recognises the value of the ordinary individual, and her praise of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* echoes her own vision of attainable salvation:

Everywhere he brings us into the presence of living, generous humanity – mixed and erring, and self-deluding, but saved from utter corruption by the salt of some noble impulse, some disinterested effort, some beam of good nature, even though grotesque or homely. ("Morality" 131)

To return to Comte, for whom the positive philosophy is evolutionarily inevitable, '[w]hether... a good or a bad thing matters little' (*Positive* 29), Eliot posits the need for a salvation that is engendered from and for the 'good' of the individual and society, and is born out of the individual's own moral struggle. For Eliot, the road to salvation also reflects and respects difference between individuals rather than a totalising social order. Mill explicitly refutes what he sees as Comte's 'systemizing' of humankind into a single channel of pure altruistic motive, asking:

Why is it necessary that all human life should point but to one object, and be cultivated into a system of means to a single end? May it not be the fact that mankind, who after all are made up of single human beings, obtain a greater sum of happiness when each pursues his own, under the rules and conditions required by the good of the rest, than when each makes the good of the rest his only object, and allows himself no personal pleasures not indispensable to the preservation of his own faculties? ("Comte" 337)

Mill advocates the 'sufficient gratification' of personal enjoyments as 'favourable to the benevolent affections', denying both severe asceticism and 'the love of domination, or superiority', as one makes 'everything else painful' and the other 'implies... the equivalent depression of other people' (338-9). Mill clearly has an object of secularised individual *and* social regeneration in mind, and his emphasis is on an individual self-realisation which does not oppress others. It is important to recognise that, whilst Mill advocates a 'utilitarian doctrine' formed on the basis that

'happiness is... the only thing desirable as an end', he regards both 'the end [objective] of morality' and that of 'rational conduct' as including 'not solely the pursuit of happiness, but the prevention or mitigation of unhappiness' (*Utilitarianism* [1863] 190). Mill recognising then, that the former aim of happiness as desirable but equally, that it may be 'chimerical', in which case 'there will be all the greater scope and... imperative need' for the mitigation of unhappiness, 'so long at least as mankind *think fit to live*' (my emphasis, 190). Here Mill strongly echoes the final position Gwendolen occupies in *Daniel Deronda*, as discussed in Chapter 2, emphasising the crucial importance of Gwendolen's decision to 'live' (*DD* 807) and follow her newly realised moral conscience in the pursuit of altruistic human fellowship, alongside her profound uncertainty regarding the future, in terms of happiness or anything else. Chapter 1 also discusses Eliot's recognition of the dangers of self-despair and that Maggie's final actions are life-affirming rather than deliberate self-sacrifice, positing the vital importance of choosing to live, and of seeking to balance one's own individual aspirations alongside those of others. For Beer, *Daniel Deronda* posits an image of freedom as, instead of drowning like Maggie, Gwendolen 'is taken to the edge of the plot, out of the marriage market... [and] the ordering of inheritance... [which] is as far as her freedom can go... [yet] for a George Eliot novel, it is a long way' (218). She suggests that '[n]o single future can be inferred from the present, yet we all live by prediction', but claims that *Daniel Deronda* is 'a novel *about that which does not occur*', because Gwendolen 'does not kill Grandcourt nor... marry Deronda. Neither Deronda nor Mirah reach... reunion of affection with their mothers. Grandcourt does not conceive an heir by Gwendolen' (my emphasis, 219). Whilst the predetermined closure of *The Mill on the Floss* becomes the potential freedom of an indeterminate future in *Daniel*

*Deronda*, the latter is a novel that also explores the ramifications of freedom, recognising that freedom operates within the constraints of social coercion *and* social responsibility. It is clearly a novel about individual and social realisation, born out of moral struggle, which are indeed major occurrences, and affirms the necessity of human vision to enable the recognition that a future is possible.

In 1879, W. H. Mallock, political philosopher and satirist, reviewed Eliot's work for the *Edinburgh Review*. He suggests that Eliot's 'entire philosophy is an impassioned protest against pessimism... present[ing] the human life and the human lot to us as worthy of all our piety... love and reverence', through 'beings who are not isolated, but linked together by countless ties of duty and affection; and... the moral *raison d'être* of existence' (457). Yet Mallock also recognises the tension between this position and an evident potential pessimism in the novels, seeing Eliot's ultimate ethos as life posited 'as nothing better than a "penal settlement"', as, for Mallock, there is 'no happy and rejoicing brotherhood... but a sad and labouring race of chained convicts, whose highest glory it is not to attempt escaping' (457). Graver recognises that, in Eliot's fiction, 'there is a continual tension... between actual separateness or fragmentariness, on the one hand, and a vision of unity on the other' (124). For Eliot, there is a perpetual conflict between the individual and society, but her emphasis is on 'the struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully *being brought into harmony with his inward needs*', (my emphasis, "*Antigone*" [1856] 245) rather than human inner life 'brought into harmony' with social form. Like Eliot, Mill is keen on the Comtean 'direct cultivation of altruism, and the subordination of egoism to it' (Mill "Comte" 339), and both he and Eliot recognise that this does not involve self-sacrifice but must be balanced by the realisation of

individual desires, objectives, and crucially, the individual search for a vision of spiritual salvation. Mill's ethos of self-determination does, however, posit more individual optimism than Eliot's fiction, as he prizes individual self-realisation through the qualified pursuit of happiness as the objective. For Eliot, however, the ties of affection to others are the predominant element, as every man and woman, 'in considering his or her past history, is... aware that it has been cruelly affected by the ignorant or selfish action of some fellow being in a more or less close relation of life', and as such, this self-conscious experience provides a strong 'motive... to an energetic effort that the lives nearest us shall not suffer in like manner from *us*' (*Letters* [1874] 454). As Ashton recognises however, Eliot's view of renunciation is, like Goethe's, 'a noble but not unmixedly heroic action, rather one that is prepared for and carried out in the context of the mutual relationships of a larger social group' (172).

Mallock recognises that Eliot 'does not underestimate the causes for despair' but asks if 'she over-estimate[s] the causes for hope?' (458). Beer recognises that for Lewes, the process of evolution 'makes the implicit explicit' (cited Beer 172) and as such, 'revealed the manifold potentialities of the world, not all of which could be realised' at the same time as bringing 'a sense of being responsible for the shaping of the future' (Beer 172). Eliot brings this ethos of uncertainty *and* responsibility to her affirmation of vision. In her positing of pessimistic certainty in *The Mill on the Floss* and a *potentially* positive uncertainty in *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot recognises the difference between theory and practice at the same time as the need *for* a reasoned theory to effect practice. Whilst Eliot does argue against pessimism, and her emphasis on the importance of human vision attempts to avoid the clearly recognised position of despair, her work does contemplate a much darker road.

In a letter written less than two weeks before her death in 1880, Eliot advises her friend Elma Stuart over the latter's concern regarding a close friend's conversion to Catholicism. Eliot herself 'would not venture to thrust my mind on [the friend's] as a sort of omniscient dictatress, when in fact I am very ignorant of the inward springs which determine her action' (*Letters* 551). Throughout her career, *contra* Comte's vision of a certain social order, Eliot engages with what she recognises as an inevitable ongoing conflict between the desires of the individual and the constraints of society in both her fiction and non-fictional writings:

Wherever the strength of a man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection, brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, *there* is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon [the individual and society]; such a man must not only dare to be right, he must also dare to be wrong – to shake faith, to wound friendship, perhaps, to hem in his own powers...

...our protest for the right should be seasoned with moderation and reverence... [as] lofty words... are not becoming to mortals. (original emphasis, "*Antigone*" 246)

In the letter to Stuart 34 years later, Eliot goes on to urge her friend to remember that 'the reason why societies change slowly is, because individual men and women cannot have their natures changed by doctrine and can only be wrought on by little and little', and that she should refrain from dictation or remonstrance 'out of reverence for that sanctuary of inmost feeling which the closest union must leave free from intrusion' (*Letters* [1880] 552). To the last then, Eliot retains a firm belief in an organic and *sacred* sense of human nature, the sanctity of the individual and the need for a progressive evolutionary and organic society (at the same time as rejecting a *totality* of society), and of the need for human fellowship which respects others and affirms the individual road to spiritual salvation. At the same time, she

also recognises the conflict between the individual and society to be an ongoing one, and clearly recognises the potential for both hope and despair.

In a letter to the positivist Frederic Harrison in 1866, six years after publication of *The Mill on the Floss* and ten years prior to *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot replies to his urging her to write a positivist epic by remarking that she has 'a consciousness tending more and more to consist in memories of error and imperfection rather than in a strengthening sense of achievement' (*Letters* 318). This sense of uncertainty is significant as it recognises the inability to encompass individual and social salvation into a system, whether through literature or otherwise, but does not – as her last letter to Elma Stuart attests in its urging respect for another's decisions – refuse the possibility of any certainties at all. Eliot posits *certain* elements needful in the drive for human salvation, in both her novels and non-fiction. The pessimistic certainty of *The Mill on the Floss* encompasses the resultant destruction to reason and human sensibilities – and individual lives – engendered by the failure of immoral social values to reform, at the same time as positing the necessity of positive human values to individual and social salvation, framed at the moment of destruction. This certainty of what constitutes both individual and social moral value, and the necessary elements to effect human redemption is clearly central to *Daniel Deronda*, but the final uncertainty Gwendolen faces recognises the presence of both optimism and pessimism as equal possibilities, placing human destiny explicitly in human hands. That individual salvation is an intensely private and sacred affair, and that each is responsible for one's own redemption, also recognises that the individual is equally at risk of isolation and self-despair. In her advocating a practical and attainable ideal of salvation, necessary for individual realisation and social form, Eliot posits an

uncertainty of outcome but not of the elements needed. That a future is possible at all does, however, attempt to reject the final pessimism. Eliot recognises the necessity of spiritual aspiration and a vision of human *hope* for the present and the future, to avoid *ennui*, despair, or defeat.

## Conclusion

The Everlasting No had said: 'Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil's);' to which my whole Me now made answer: 'I am not thine, but Free, and for ever hate thee!' (Carlyle *Sartor Resartus* 129)

For Eliot, the object of religious feeling is humankind, placing salvation as clearly a corporeal rather than a transcendent ethic, and, therefore, working towards better human and social moral values is a profoundly desirable goal in the mortal world, both in the present and the future. Eliot posits salvation as spiritual, moral, and attainable, and as desirable in both individual and social terms; indeed, the one is organically necessary to the other. At the same time, the individual should not be sacrificed to the social whole, as realised in Eliot's positing a certainty of human value. She recognises the need for social change through the recognition and removal of those outmoded traditions which effect issues of race, gender, education, religious and social form, and prevent both individual and social growth. For Eliot, education in its widest sense is the means through which change is effected, and must include the elements of reason, sympathy and imagination to engage effectively in the human struggle in both theoretical and practical terms. She actively engages in the contemporary Victorian debate regarding social ethics, particularly in her non-fiction essays, but clearly recognises her fiction as a deliberate and *accessible* arena in which she interrogates the human implications of contemporary Victorian philosophical, religious and social thinking.

Whilst being morally desirable, human salvation is clearly an individual matter, and also a modest one, needing only to include relations of respectful equality with other human beings to be both moral and effective. This relationship is itself born out of the individual's own reflective experience of moral struggle, which,

alongside the elements of reason, sympathy and imagination, act to make such relations effective. Eliot recognises the oppression of the self through ascetic self-abnegation, or of the “other” through dehumanising and oppressive social practices, to be damaging to the human sensibilities of both. This leads to stagnation, preventing the progressive growth of either the individual or society. For Eliot, *contra* Comte’s certainty of social order or positing of a mythical “return” to normality, Eliot sees no end to history but an ongoing organic human growth on both individual and social levels. It is, however, necessary that social form is actively transformed to enable the organic growth of the individual. At the same time, she recognises that any progress is slow and often painful. Eliot’s engagement with the oppositions and tensions within the ethics of individual and social development is not one in which she attempts to impose a certain answer, of either homogenous unity, or the victory of the individual over society, or vice versa. Whilst Eliot does propose certain elements that must be in place to effect individual and social salvation, both in the present and the future, she profoundly respects the individuality of the mixed and erring human, and appreciates the complexity of their relations with others and with social form, and the element of uncertainty that this necessarily entails. For Eliot, the dichotomy between good and evil is clearly grounded in the human, and she recognises that moral freedom operates within the constraints of social coercion and social responsibility. She does, however, attempt to refuse the position of despair by positing the necessity of moral human vision as an affirmation of both the present and the future.

Whilst this thesis has been primarily concerned to explore the implications of the optimistic positivism of Eliot’s work, the spectre of pessimism has been clearly visible, not least in the ambiguity and complexity Eliot refuses to ignore in both *The*

*Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*. Eliot's desire to explore the ramifications of human existence in a secularised society, which faces the dismantling of both religious and social forms of certainty, is an engagement in a prolific and anxious debate, and the tension between optimism and pessimism is evident in her novels. During the period in which Eliot experiences her "conversion into disbelief" (Ashton 156), Alfred Tennyson is struggling from deep despair to restored hope in 'That God, which ever lives and loves, /... / And one far-off divine event, / To which the whole creation moves' (1833-50, Epilogue, lines 141-4) in his *In Memoriam A.H.H.* Six years after the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, George Gissing writes in his essay *The Hope of Pessimism* that the 'prospect of happiness on earth is a chimera', and anticipates a time when '[t]he grave will become a symbol of joy' (1882, 96-7). Eliot's relationship with pessimism, and with those other nineteenth century writers whose literatures also engage in the struggle between hope and despair in human destiny, is a provoking one. Whilst Eliot posits a vision of human hope for the future as necessary to avoid despair, it is one which often proves elusive as the relationship between optimism and pessimism is frequently a blurred one. For Eliot, 'to be a failure of Nature and to know it is not a comfortable lot. It is the last lesson one learns, to be contented with one's inferiority – but it must be learned' (*Letters* [1854] 134), a position that suggests the individual's only hope is to eventually be content with a pessimistic view of a present which appears to negate a more optimistic future.

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## Appendix



Medusa Rondanini

4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE.

Copy of an original 440 (?) BCE, Height 0.39 m  
Munich, Glyptotek 252

[http://www.goddess-athena.org/Museum/Sculptures/Alone/Medusa\\_Rondanini\\_m.htm](http://www.goddess-athena.org/Museum/Sculptures/Alone/Medusa_Rondanini_m.htm)  
07/03/03