

## *Daniel Deronda*: New Elements and Long Familiar Types\*

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My title, "new elements and long familiar types," comes from a letter from George Eliot to her publisher John Blackwood. It is part of a passage in which, almost for the first time, she acknowledges her doubts as to how the Jewish scenes in *Daniel Deronda* would go down with the public. The acknowledgment was prompted by a mere hint of misgiving from Blackwood. He had delayed expressing any opinion of Book 5 of the novel — of which the revise had just been sent to George Eliot — because he had felt it would be "presumptuous" to speak of Mordecai until he had seen more of him, but also because he had been "puzzling and thinking over that phase of the Tale." Eliot's reply makes it clear that his puzzlement didn't surprise her:

I thought it likely that your impressions about Mordecai would be doubtful. Perhaps when the work is finished you will see its bearings better. The effect that one strives after is an outline as strong as that of Balfour of Burley for a much more complex character and a higher strain of ideas. But such an effect is just the most difficult thing in art — to give new elements — i.e. elements not already used up — in forms as vivid as those of long familiar types. Doubtless the wider public of novel-readers must feel more interest in Sidonia than in Mordecai. But then, I was not born to paint Sidonia.<sup>1</sup>

Blackwood's previous correspondence with Eliot, and with Lewes, had not prepared him for Mordecai: he had publicized *Daniel Deronda*, with their approval, as simply "a story of English life," set in the present and dealing with the upper classes.<sup>2</sup> Eliot's fear that the public would share Blackwood's surprise and uneasiness about the Jewish characters was quickly confirmed. Only a month after the last part of the novel was published (it appeared in eight parts, at monthly intervals) she was wringing her hands over "the laudation of readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen."<sup>3</sup> And the habit of dismembering the novel in this way has persisted ever since, James and Leavis being the most defiant — and most persuasive — of many offenders. Even critics who can appreciate how subtly and piquantly the themes, images, and narrative structures of the Jewish parts are interwoven with those of the English almost invariably judge the Jewish parts artistically inferior.

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1 *The George Eliot Letters* [*GEL*], ed. Gordon S. Haight (Yale University Press, 1954-55), vi. 221-3.

2 *GEL*, vi. 193n.

3 *GEL*, vi. 290.

It is not my object now to assess the many attempts that have been made to justify this preference for the English parts on aesthetic grounds, but I believe nearly all such attempts rest ultimately on one or more of three ways of explaining what is "wrong" with the Jewish scenes: that their characters "have no existence outside the author's study," appear to be based upon "invention" rather than "observation" (this was how James put it)<sup>4</sup>; that the art of the Jewish scenes leans too far towards the "ideal and eclectic" to harmonize with the "real and concrete" presentation of English life (here I am adopting terms that Eliot herself used in another context)<sup>5</sup>; and that we are given a much fuller vision of what Eliot would call the "medium" in which the English characters move than of that in which the Jewish characters move.<sup>6</sup>

Eliot's pronouncement that "the most difficult thing in art" is "to give new elements...in forms as vivid as those of long familiar types" seems to me to show that, to some extent at least, she anticipated these lines of attack. But it also, I suggest, hints at one important means by which she apparently hoped to circumvent the "difficulty" as she describes it. This was to narrow the imaginative gap between the seemingly "new" and the seemingly "long familiar" by suffusing the long familiar — and I am thinking of course mainly of the Gwendolen-Grandcourt story — with an unexpected flavour of remoteness, of strangeness. In this respect I believe it is significant that in the sentences before and after her reference to the problem of new elements and long familiar types, she seizes upon two *literary* types, Scott's Burley and Disraeli's Sidonia, as a contrast to, a measure of, the newness of her own Mordecai. (Within the novel Mordecai is similarly measured against another of Scott's Covenanters, Habakkuk Mucklewraith, while Mirah is implicitly compared to Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*.<sup>7</sup>) On other occasions in her letters and diaries, George Eliot is inclined to blame the public's hostility or indifference to Mordecai on racial prejudice or cultural insularity — phenomena which the novel itself stingingly satirizes; here, however, she recognizes that the expectations and preconceptions the reader will bring to his encounter with Mordecai will have been formed as much by other novels as by first-hand experience. One may suspect, indeed, that Mordecai and much of the religiosity that surrounds him in the novel owe more to Disraeli than George Eliot liked to think — and

4 "Daniel Deronda; a Conversation," repr. in Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *A Century of George Eliot Criticism* (Methuen, 1966), p. 100.

5 *GEL*, ii, 362.

6 See her letter to R. H. Hutton defending her selection of historical detail for *Romola*: *GEL*, iv, 97.

7 Penguin English Library edition, ed. Barbara Hardy, 1967, pp. 627, 629, 235. All subsequent page references are to this edition.

one distinguished contemporary critic, R.H. Hutton, was almost irreverent enough to say so.<sup>8</sup> But the general point I'm driving at is that Eliot's instinctive recourse to literary types for a measure of, perhaps a point of departure for, a new and puzzling character like Mordecai exemplifies a habit that appears constantly in the novel itself — in the English parts at least as much as in the Jewish. Characters and situations in literature, in painting, in mythology, and in opera are invoked again and again in order to suggest a perspective — a cultural and historical perspective — under which a more or less familiar version of upper-class English life becomes partly assimilated to the rootless, struggling, poetic world of the past, a world of which the Jews are a survival.

Most accounts of the artistic disparity between the English and Jewish sections seem to me to overlook, or understate, this aspect of the novel: its extreme literariness and artiness, the meticulous distancing and framing of its "thorough picture of English life." When I say "extreme" I mean extreme even by George Eliot's own standards, in her English novels at least. And my tone will make it clear that I use the words "literariness" and "artiness" descriptively rather than disparagingly. George Eliot's bookishness, her parade of her learning and good taste, can often strike us as pedantic and pedagogic, but the artiness of *Daniel Deronda* for the most part is lively, functional and artfully muted: so artfully, I suggest, that its strange, highly stylized, poetic vision of English life is often mistaken for, and chiefly admired as, a piece of social and psychological realism.<sup>9</sup> I don't for a moment deny, of course, that much of the characterization, many of the scenes, do impress us by their truth to life and their social typicality; but in the total conception — the *donnée*, the selection of characters, and the devising of plot — I feel there is ample evidence that Eliot was less concerned about surface realism, mere *vraisemblance*, than in any of her other novels.

One aspect of *Daniel Deronda* that I believe hasn't attracted the

<sup>8</sup> See Hutton's review of *Daniel Deronda* in the *Spectator*, xlix (9 September 1876), 1133.

<sup>9</sup> Two previous critics who do stress the stylized, poetic quality of the novel as a whole are Edward Dowden ("Middlemarch and *Daniel Deronda*," *Contemporary Review*, xxix [February 1877], 348-69) and John Bayley ("The Pastoral of Intellect," *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, ed. Barbara Hardy, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, pp. 199-213). Dowden considers that "in *Daniel Deronda*, for the first time, the poetical side of George Eliot's genius obtains adequate expression, through the medium which is proper to her — that of prose — and in complete association with the non-poetical elements of nature" (*op.cit.*, p. 350). Bayley treats *Daniel Deronda* as a "pastoral" in which the "personal case...[becomes] one with the cultural." In this light, "the accepted view that the novel divides in two, and that the Gwendolen part is good, the Deronda part bad, seems...to ignore the homogeneity of the themes here, and their successful harmonization...The coming to awareness of Gwendolen — the universe pressing in upon her — parallels Deronda's discovery of his historic fate and duty: both are equally cut off from any perspective of individuality; both exemplify their author's preoccupation with the development of social and cultural consciousness. The process is set off by the absolute unreality, in ordinary fictional terms, of Grandcourt" (*op.cit.*, p. 210).

attention it deserves is its emphasis on the immanence of, and need for, poetry and romance in everyday life. True, this theme is almost a matter of course in a George Eliot novel, but the kind of poetry that enters into *Daniel Deronda* (into the English parts as well as the Jewish), and the degree to which it enters, are hardly paralleled in any of her earlier novels. The characters must rediscover in themselves what E.M. Forster calls the "keen heroic edge;" they must learn the Forsterian truth that though death destroys us, the idea of death saves us; they must not only attain a "vision" in which (as Barbara Hardy points out<sup>10</sup>) thought and sensibility unite, but they must also "connect" the "passion" — the heroic and tragic opportunities of life — with the "prose"<sup>11</sup>; and they must not merely imagine but actually experience the passion, and experience it at its grimmest.

Predictably, the exalted longing for poetry and romance marks the Jewish characters (including of course Daniel) rather than the English; but within the novel — within its "present" — it is chiefly Gwendolen, Grandcourt, and to some extent Mrs Glasher who actually endure tragedy. That Gwendolen will have to endure it is foreshadowed unmistakably in the heavily symbolic (not at all "realistic") scene where the terrifying picture of the dead face, normally concealed behind a hinged panel of wainscot, suddenly confronts her while she is acting the part of the statue of Hermione. Just as she is about to mime a dead statue coming to life, an image of death — of irreversible death — shatters her moral and artistic complacency. She still looks, we are told, "like a statue," but a statue "into which a soul of Fear has entered" (p. 91). Other critics have noted how the upturned dead face in the picture prefigures the face of the drowning Grandcourt in the tragic climax of Gwendolen's story, and how the role she chooses for her Leontes in the tableau ("instead of embracing her, [he] was to kneel and kiss the hem of her garment") anticipates the one she later expects to make Grandcourt play — skipping in effect the first three acts of Hermione's and Leontes' drama. However my particular interest in the statue scene at present lies in the example it provides — the first major one in the novel — of life imitating art, or, one can almost say, of art determining life. When the dead face in the painting comes to life, as it does for Gwendolen, it is simply forestalling the "dead" statue of Hermione, upstaging poor Gwendolen. Herr Klesmer's polite pretence that its appearance was a coup de théâtre designed by Gwendolen herself is interpreted, and meant to be interpreted, by her as a tribute to her artistry. But in reality of course Klesmer is ironically contrasting (as he so often does

10 *The Novels of George Eliot* (Athlone Press, paperback edn. 1963), pp. 66-7.

11 See E.M. Forster, "The Point of It," *Collected Short Stories* (Penguin edn, 1954), p. 162, and *Howard's End*, chaps. 22 and 27 (Edward Arnold, Pocket edn, 1947, pp. 253 and 197).

later in the novel) the power of true Art, in this case of the painter of the dead face, with the feebleness of imitation art: for as George Eliot has sarcastically observed just before the scene, acting in a tableau is within the bounds of genteel propriety because, unlike "private theatricals in the full sense of the word," it is only "an imitation of acting." True art expresses the poetry, the tragic passion, of life; Gwendolen's imitation art is designed to suppress it, to tame and trivialize it.

Much of this has been pointed out before, but I don't think the extent to which not only life but art as well takes its revenge on Gwendolen has been fully registered. The statue scene establishes one of the patterns for her whole subsequent career, a pattern that consists essentially, in her being made to enact, to play *out*, each of the typical roles that she at first chooses to play *at*, to merely mimic. Gwendolen, it might be said, frames herself. She can protect herself from the vast impersonal terrors of life and death only by reducing herself to a fixed image in a frame, the frame of a picture, of a stage, or (most often) of her own mirror. From this point of view her play-acting is compulsive. She is in many ways a more tragic version of Trollope's Lizzie Eustace (from whom, and also for the minor heroine of *The Eustace Diamonds*, Lucinda Roanoke, I suspect Eliot gleaned a number of helpful ideas). Gwendolen shares Lizzie Eustace's obsessive need to "make the thing acted more real than the thing itself"<sup>12</sup>, a need that derives from her inability to face the reality, or unreality, of her own nature; like Lizzie, she can achieve an "ardent sense of living" (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 69) only in the contemplation of reflected images of herself — her own and other people's. But the nemesis that overtakes her, far from shattering all her protective frames, in a very real sense confirms them and locks her into them. The parts she is made to act out are those of the tragedy queens, the historic femmes fatales, the heroines of sensational romance upon whom she has pretended (in both senses of the word) to model herself.

Before going on to further examples, I want to look briefly, and for the moment generally, at some of the ways in which the assimilation of Gwendolen's story to tragedies long familiar to us in the poetry and romance of literature and the other arts relates it to the story of Daniel, Mirah and Mordecai. The most striking illustration is offered, I think, by the first important event in the Jewish story,

12 *The Eustace Diamonds* (World's Classics, 1953), p. 192. Lucinda Roanoke in *The Eustace Diamonds* engages herself, out of sheer financial necessity, to a man she despises; unlike Grandcourt, he openly displays his sadistic desire for mastery over her and she is unable to go through with the proposed marriage. Like Gwendolen, Lucinda finds a sense of liberation and power, an outlet for her thwarted natural instincts, in horse-riding.

Daniel's rescue of Mirah. This rescue, as has often been noted, contrasts tellingly with Gwendolen's failure to rescue Grandcourt when he, like Mirah, is on the point of drowning: obliquely, the "upturned dead face" behind the wainscot in the statue scene thus prefigures Mirah's on the bank of the Thames as well as Grandcourt's in the Bay of Spezzia. But the rescue of Mirah also parallels the statue scene in another respect: the manner in which it shows art anticipating life. When Daniel first sees Mirah on the river bank he has no premonition of an "adventure" (the novel's own word). He is absent-mindedly ("unconsciously") singing the gondolier's song from Rossini's opera *Otello* (p. 227).<sup>13</sup> This song is a setting of Dante's famous lines, "Nessun maggior dolore / Che ricordasi del tempo felice / Nella miseria," of which Tennyson's translation (in "Locksley Hall") is used as epigraph to the chapter: "a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." In the opera, the gondolier's song chimes in so perfectly with Desdemona's mood that it plunges her into the willow song, her emotional preparation for her death. In the novel Daniel and Mirah first see each other exactly at "the pianissimo fall of the melodic wail 'nella miseria.'" To Daniel, Mirah seems a living incarnation of the misery described by Dante. In Mirah, the words of the song, chiming in with her desperate mood, reinforce the desire for death just as they had reinforced Desdemona's overpowering presentiment of it. The moment of art becomes the moment of life, as it had in the statue scene.

One difference of course is that Daniel *wants* life to imitate art, believes that it ought to and that it does. There was, we are informed, "a fervour which made him easily find poetry and romance among the events of everyday life." And the narrator adds:

And perhaps poetry and romance are as plentiful as ever in the world except for those phlegmatic natures who I suspect would in any age have regarded them as a dull form of erroneous thinking. They exist very easily in the same room with the microscope and even in railway carriages: what banishes them is the vacuum in gentlemen and lady passengers. (p. 245)

To fill this vacuum, to show how nature abhors it, is clearly one of George Eliot's main aims in the picture of English ladies and gentlemen she gives in the novel. Indeed the whole novel can be viewed as a confirmation of Daniel's vision of life, all life, as ardent, poetic, and strange — a vision that is endorsed by Mirah when she asks, rhetorically, "Is this world and all the life upon it only like a farce or a vaudeville, where you find no great meanings? Why then are there tragedies and grand operas, where men do difficult things and choose

<sup>13</sup> Eliot and Lewes heard a performance of *Otello* at Paris in 1860: see Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot; a Biography* (Oxford, 1968), p. 322.

to suffer?" (p. 257). The same vision is implicit in the Meyricks' disbelief in the "coarse selfishness, petty quarrelling, and slang [of fashionable ladies] as they are represented to be in what are called photographs" (p. 237). Superficially Gwendolen's and Grandcourt's world is that of the literary photographs and contains plenty of farce and vaudeville, much of it highly diverting. But in essence it is shown to be a world in which possibilities of poetry and romance, of the tragic, the sensational, the grandly operatic, are scarcely less real than in the Jewish world.

This is shown, as I have said, not only by the tragic denouement of Gwendolen's story but also, more subtly and pervasively, by the constant suggestion of foreshadowings or paradigms of her tragedy in literature and other arts. In part the foreshadowing, the preparation for tragedy, occurs in her own imagination, as expressed in her choice of grand and tragic roles for play-acting. But these feigned, ideal images of herself are also reflected, with varying degrees of distortion, in other people's images of her: as a princess or queen-in-exile (pp. 56, 71), a Diana (p. 367), a subject for a Reynolds portrait (p. 151), a Vandyke duchess (p. 619), and so on. And even when the other eyes cast her in roles more sinister, more destructive than any she would consciously choose — for example a Lamia (p. 41)<sup>14</sup>, a serpent with "traces of demon ancestry" (p. 99), perhaps even a Medea (p. 487) — they can be seen to be building on aspects of her self-image which she is largely unconscious of but which we infer very early in the novel.

The chief early clues to this demonic aspect of Gwendolen's ideal self, the chief foreshadowings of that instant of quasi-homicidal inclination which marks the tragic climax of her story, can be found in two dialogues with her mother. In the first she is explaining why she feels she could be a great tragic actress like Rachel:

'You have better arms than Rachel,' said Mrs Davilow; 'your arms would do for anything, Gwen. But your voice is not so tragic as hers: it is not so deep.' 'I can make it deeper, if I like,' said Gwendolen, provisionally; then she added, with decision, 'I think a higher voice is more tragic: it is more feminine; and the more feminine a woman is, the more tragic it seems when she does desperate actions.'

'There may be something in that,' said Mrs Davilow, languidly. 'But I don't know what good there is in making one's blood creep. And if there is

14 Barbara Hardy's note on the allusion to Gwendolen's "Lamia beauty" (*Daniel Deronda*, Penguin edn, p. 886) seems to me to miss the main point by failing to connect the allusion with the frequent references in the novel to Gwendolen's serpentine and demonic qualities — the qualities, implanted in man at the Fall, which make her capable of murder (or murder-by-default). Sexually, Gwendolen is of course more aptly pictured as a Diana (cf. p. 367) than as a Lamia. Her strangling of her sister's pet canary, however, provides a foretaste of her serpentine propensities (p. 53).

anything horrible to be done, I should like it to be left to the men.'

'Oh mamma, you are so dreadfully prosaic! As if all the great poetic criminals were not women! I think the men are poor cautious creatures.'

'Well, dear, and you — who are afraid to be alone in the night — I don't think you would be very bold in crime, thank God.'

'I am not talking about reality, Mamma,' said Gwendolen impatiently.

(p. 85)

Gwendolen's comfortable certainty that what happens in Art — what the "great poetic criminals" do, for example — has no relevance to reality, at any rate to the reality of her own life, is a characteristic underestimation of the predictive power of art (as the novel reveals it); so too is her next remark, that men are poor cautious creatures in comparison with women: it is clear that she hasn't learnt the lesson of her aborted performance of Hermione. Indirectly though, her remarks do attest the *formative* power of art; for her belief that the tragic actress relies chiefly on the frisson of shock resulting from the contrast between her femininity and her capacity for desperate action ("the more feminine a woman is, the more tragic it seems when she does desperate actions") smacks strongly of a particular literary source, and the suggestion seems to be borne out in a further dialogue between her and her mother soon after. Gwendolen, poking fun at her mother's fantasies about the "delightful young man" who will choose Gwendolen as his bride, says that she knows he will have "hunters and racers, and a London house and two country-houses, — one with battlements and another with a veranda. And I feel sure that with a little murdering he might get a title." Her mother, doubtless with memories of the pet canary that Gwendolen had strangled as a child, hastily breaks in: "Don't talk in that way, child, for heaven's sake! you do read such books — they give you such ideas of everything" (pp. 128-9). The books Mrs Davilow has in mind are obviously sensation novels, which specialize in homicidal heroines with seraphically innocent faces, and which were at the height of their notoriety during the 1860s, the period in which the novel is set.<sup>15</sup> They are just the sort of imitation art — imitations of imitations of tragic passion — which, as we have already seen, makes the strongest appeal to Gwendolen. But the demonism of their heroines, and their frantic fear of it when they become conscious of it, certainly anticipate Gwendolen's — even though in them the demonism is usually tracked back, evasively, to some obscure hereditary illness, whereas in her it is recognized, more honestly, as a form of atavism, an assertion of the brute power of nature that persists in all of us.

15 On the sensation novel, see my pamphlet *Some Mid-Victorian Thrillers; the Sensation Novel, Its Friends and Its Foes* (University of Queensland Press, 1971).



The delicacy with which this dark, primitive side of Gwendolen's nature is adumbrated (and it is of course glimpsed also in other people's ideas of her as a Lamia, a wood-nymph, or more prophetically a Nereid, a sea-nymph) makes an effective contrast to the much bolder, more lurid presentation of her "rival," Lydia Glasher. Beyond Gwendolen's strangling of the canary, there is nothing crudely sensational about anything she actually says or does, as distinct from what she imagines herself doing or pretending to do. Gwendolen's West Indian grandmother — Mrs Davilow's mother — apparently didn't pick up the steamy tropical virus that induced raging, homicidal frenzy in Bertha Mason. Most of the sensational trappings are bestowed instead on Lydia Glasher, the woman who in certain respects plays Bertha's role in relation to Gwendolen's Jane Eyre, but who for all her smouldering fires and flair for melodrama would never dream of killing or being killed. The "adventure" of Gwendolen's meeting with Mrs Glasher among the Whispering Stones, unlike the "adventure" of Daniel's first meeting with Mirah (the word is applied to both episodes), proves rather an anticlimax — to Gwendolen and to the reader. Gwendolen approaches the rendezvous with something of the excited expectation of Rosalind entering the Forest of Arden (p. 188). But despite Mrs Glasher's chequered past (befitting her Christian name — traditionally associated with eloping ladies), the green world that she discloses to Gwendolen, initially at least, is neither romantic nor comic but harshly real — as cold, hard, and haunting as the Whispering Stones themselves or as the glacier which her surname suggests. To Gwendolen she is like "some ghastly vision" saying "I am woman's life" (p. 190). And although, as the narrator goes on to point out, she belongs in essentials to a type long familiar to novel-readers and patrons of "*opéra bouffe*"; although Gwendolen had been agog for romance, for literary adventure, she is again taken completely by surprise by this further instance of life imitating art: "Gwendolen's uncontrolled reading, though consisting chiefly in what are called pictures of life, had somehow not prepared her for this encounter with reality" (p. 193).

Some of Mrs Glasher's subsequent behaviour may appear to indicate a kinship between her literary tastes and Gwendolen's. Up to now, however, Gwendolen's inward rebellion against "the restraints of family conditions," and against social "obligations" generally, has not gone beyond "the genteel romance where the heroine's soul poured out in her journal is full of vague power, originality, and general rebellion, while her life moves strictly in the sphere of fashion"; Mrs Glasher, on the other hand, has already encountered

the stimulus to active and irrevocable rebellion — a sadistic husband — which Gwendolen must have read about in books but certainly doesn't expect to meet with in life. The operatic curse that Mrs Glasher places on her — later — may smack more of art than of real life, but it is at least rooted in genuine passion, actual experience. Assuming that the example of *Jane Eyre* is somewhere at the back of her mind, her threat to interrupt the wedding, or as Grandcourt puts it to “play the mad woman” (p. 397), reflects both her own literary leanings and George Eliot's highly “literary” conception of her. But the delivery of the diamonds and the curse to Gwendolen on her wedding night is an altogether more original and morally perceptive means of revenge. Just before receiving them Gwendolen is surrounded and protected by framed images of her own formal perfection, as reflected in glass wall-panels; after receiving them she is for the first time oblivious of her own mirror-image. “She could not see the reflections of herself then” (p. 408). The frame is still there, but the picture within it is shattered: the curse is come upon her.<sup>16</sup>

The fulfilment of Mrs Glasher's curse, the nemesis visited upon Gwendolen by the “Furies” that are ushered over her threshold on her wedding night, is treated not only as a story of modern English life, but also, implicitly, as a grim parody of a tale of Italian Renaissance villainy. This of course helps to link it imaginatively to the Jewish story, since Daniel is Italian and is likened repeatedly to Italian Renaissance types, especially to those in some of Titian's paintings,<sup>17</sup> but also to (for example) Dante's *spiriti magni con occhi tardi e gravi* (p. 500), and, as we have seen, to a Venetian gondolier. His mother, too, is an Italian opera-singer whose life has included more than its share of operatic ingredients (notably its version of the “stolen child” theme). And all the songs that Mirah sings are in Italian and convey an implied comment on her own past life (pp. 422, 617, 796, etc.). Among the English characters it is above all Grandcourt who is projected in an Italianate light. His “impenetrable gaze and air of distinction” are compared to those of a portrait by Moroni, a sixteenth-century painter of the Venetian school (p. 362). And though we can see him as true, with fairly gross exaggerations, to English type (both in real life and in literature)<sup>18</sup>, it isn't difficult to

16 The parallel between Gwendolen, contained as in a “picture frame,” and Tennyson's Lady of Shalott is suggested by Jennifer Gribble in her paper, “The Lady of Shalott and the Victorian Novel:” see *Papers delivered at the A.V.S.A. Conference held at the University of Sydney, August 1975*, Australasian Victorian Studies Association (Wellington, 1977), p. 12.

17 See pp. 226, 552. Eliot and Lewes saw Titian's “Tribute Money,” which is alluded to on p. 552, at the Dresden gallery in 1858 (Haight, *George Eliot; a Biography*, p. 264); when C.E. Norton visited them at the Priory in 1869 he noticed the “common lithograph” of it hanging on one of the walls (*GEL*, v. 8). Lewes remarked also on the “Rembrandtish” flavour of the Jewish scenes in the novel (*GEL*, vi. 196).

18 His closest literary relative is perhaps Sir Hugh Clavering (in Trollope's *The Claverings*).

see why Hans Meyrick pictures him as a sixteenth-century Italian duke, with Gwendolen as his only-slightly-anachronistic “Van Dyke duchess.” Certainly his parasite Lush — despite the assurances George Eliot received from one knowledgeable source that he was true to life<sup>19</sup> — hardly strikes us as a likely denizen of Victorian England: he has, perhaps, faint affinities with Meredith’s Adrian Harley, but his surprising given names, “Thomas Cranmer,” offer a clue to his real historical period and also suggest a historical model for him in his role of intermediary between Grandcourt and his women. This is not to say, however, that Grandcourt is a robust English bluebeard of Henry VIII’s type, though their situations have common elements that the novel presumably wishes us to register: Grandcourt’s true prototype, as Hans Meyrick perceives, is Duke Alfonso, “the jealous baritone, with freezing glances, always singing asides” (p. 794).

The Duke Alfonso that Hans has in mind, as an earlier reference makes clear (p. 626), is Duke Alfonso I of Ferrara, in Donizetti’s opera *Lucrezia Borgia*. Like Grandcourt this duke suspects his wife, Lucrezia, of having an affair with another man. His response is not to throttle her (as Gwendolen fears Grandcourt might do to her), but to command Lucrezia to poison her lover. She obeys, but then administers an antidote as soon as Alfonso’s back is turned. What Alfonso doesn’t know is that the young man is not Lucrezia’s lover but her illegitimate son. Later, Lucrezia again poisons him, this time unintentionally. She again offers him the antidote, but she also reveals for the first time that she is his mother: the discovery that he is a Borgia so disgusts him that he refuses the antidote. Heartbroken, Lucrezia immediately dies. I outline the part of the plot in which Lucrezia and her son rather than Alfonso hold the centre of the stage not because there is anything remotely parallel to it in *Daniel Deronda* but because Lucrezia presumably falls in the category of “great poetic criminals” who appeal so strongly to Gwendolen’s imagination. Indeed one observer within the novel — a very minor, “choric” character named Vandernoordt — seems to detect, or suspect, a touch of the Medea-like ferocity that distinguished Lucrezia in Gwendolen herself: he pictures her and Lydia Glasher as playing the roles of Creusa and Medea opposite Grandcourt’s Jason, but suggests that Gwendolen could in fact play Medea (p. 487).<sup>20</sup> But more immediately to the point, we notice that as well as Rachel, Gwendolen

<sup>19</sup> See *GEL*, vi, 240-41.

<sup>20</sup> Vandernoordt, it is interesting to note, is recalling an actual performance of *Medea* in which the title role was played by Ristori, the Italian actress who inherited the mantle of Rachel. Eliot and Lewes saw her in the role in London in August 1857 and Lewes compared her interpretation of it favourably with that of Rachel. See Haight, *George Eliot; a Biography*, p. 241.

len dreams of emulating the great singer Giulia Grisi, who was a famous interpreter of the role of Lucrezia: George Eliot heard her in it in 1857,<sup>21</sup> and it was the part she chose for her comeback in London in 1866. Lucrezia, then, may well be one of the “desperate” roles Gwendolen plays in her imagination and later acts out, to a degree, in real life: perhaps the “poisoned diamonds” that poison her mind against her husband are intended to remind us, obliquely, of the most notorious of all husband-poisoners. The surmise is strengthened, a little, by the hinted comparison of Grandcourt to another Borgia, Cesare, in the epigraph to chapter 48,<sup>22</sup> and by Gwendolen’s view of Mrs Glasher — who is Medea in relation to her Creusa — as a “woman who had the poisoning skill of a sorceress” (p. 616). It is at any rate incontrovertible that her fear of both Grandcourt and Mrs Glasher — reflected in the roles which she at first allots to them but which she later, in a sense, enacts herself — owes something to her (and George Eliot’s) visits to the opera as well as to their acquaintance with sensational fiction.<sup>23</sup>

Another Duke Alfonso who I suspect may have sat as a model for Grandcourt was the grandson of the one who figures in Donizetti’s opera. This duke, Alfonso II, last member of the ancient and arrogant house of Este, is now generally recognized as the main historical model for the duke in Browning’s “My Last Duchess,”<sup>24</sup> whose character clearly anticipates Grandcourt’s in a number of its most distinctive traits: the cold jealousy, the obsessive pride of rank and respect for aristocratic decorum, the complete suppression of the moral sense by the aesthetic. Grandcourt’s sole avowed concern is with the picture that he and Gwendolen make together. He wishes (or believes he wishes) to regard Gwendolen as merely a decorative item in his collection. He insists upon her wearing the hated diamonds as emblems both of his ownership of her and her aesthetic fitness for the role of his wife. He has, we are told, “no idea of a moral repulsion, and could not have believed...that there may be a resentment and disgust which will gradually make beauty more detestable than ugliness” (pp. 734-35). He would be content, so long as Gwendolen

21 See *GEL*, ii. 370 and Haight, *George Eliot; a Biography*, p. 241.

22 “Tis a hard and ill-paid task to order all things beforehand by the rule of our own security, as is well hinted by Machiavelli concerning Caesar Borgia, who, saith he, had thought of all that might occur on his father’s death, and had provided against every evil chance save only one: it had never come into his mind that when his father died, his own death would quickly follow” (p. 644). At the beginning of the chapter Grandcourt makes his will; at the end he announces the voyage to the Mediterranean which leads to his death.

23 The few references to sensation novels in Eliot’s and Lewes’s correspondence and journals tend to be slighting. But they read (or began reading) Wilkie Collins’s *No Name* aloud (*GEL*, iv. 32), and Lewes made sympathetic comments on the sensation novel, and on M.E. Braddon in particular, in his article “Criticism in Relation to Novels,” *Fortnightly Review*, iii (15 December 1865), 352-61.

24 For a summary of arguments about historical models for the Duke, see W.C. De Vane, *A Browning Handbook*, 2nd edn (N.Y., 1955), pp. 107-9.

were his alone, for her to be no more than the perfect work of art that she worshipped in her mirror — and in this respect he is of course a condign punishment for her. He doesn't give commands, not final ones at any rate, but then he doesn't need to, because Gwendolen soon recognizes and submits to the role he expects of her, submits to it partly from sheer terror. And again the terror is shown to be not entirely a figment of her imagination, overheated by opera and sensation novels, but a further sign of her awakening to the fact that no life is immune to the destructive passions that she would confine to books and the stage.

Whether or not George Eliot had Browning's duke consciously in mind as an analogue to Grandcourt, she identifies his literary type clearly enough by not only relating him to Leontes (who, it may be worth noting, has also been proposed as a possible model for Browning's duke<sup>25</sup>), but also reminding us of another example of the type: the husband of Madonna Pia in Dante's *Purgatorio*, who, "feeling himself injured by her, took her to his castle amid the swampy flats of the Maremma and got rid of her" (p. 731). In another place it is recalled how "Husbands in the old time are known to have suffered from a threatening devoutness in their wives, presenting itself first indistinctly as oddity, and ending in that mild form of lunatic asylum, a nunnery" (p. 656). (And this could in fact have been the fate of the wife in "My Last Duchess," as Browning himself affirmed.<sup>26</sup>) Grandcourt, the narrator goes on, "had a vague perception of threatening moods in Gwendolen which the unity between them in his views of marriage required him peremptorily to check."

The strong traces of Browning I find in the novel bring me to what seems an appropriate note on which to conclude. For among English authors of George Eliot's own day Browning can be seen as the most obvious inspiration for both of the aspects of the novel which this brief discussion has attempted — however tentatively and incompletely — to explore: the Italian Renaissance "frame" that is sketched round much of the action, and the explicit and implicit insistence on the need for art to embody life — passionate life — and for life to be lived with the intensity and vision of art.

25 See Lionel Stevenson, "The Pertinacious Victorian Poets," *UTQ*, xxi (1952), 241-2.

26 See *Ibid.*, p. 241 and Louis S. Friedland, "Ferrara and *My Last Duchess*," *SP*, xxxiii (1936), 675-7.