Transformation of Rage

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The Pattern of the Myth of Narcissus in *Daniel Deronda*

Shortly after the completion of *Middlemarch*, George Eliot, visiting in Homburg, Germany, observed a young woman among a group of gamblers, "completely in the grasp of this mean, money-raking demon." As she wrote in a letter to her editor John Blackwood, "It made me cry to see her young fresh face among the hags and brutally stupid men around her" (*Letters* 5:314). The image of the young woman was destined to become the germ of her next novel, *Daniel Deronda*, which opens with her character Gwendolen, a young Englishwoman, in a similar scene. As in her earlier novels, Eliot tells the story of her individual character in the larger context of her place in society and history. In this last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, she relates her young Englishwoman's sense of alienation to the larger social theme of the alienation experienced by Jews in England and other Western European societies, by developing a set of Jewish characters whose lives intersect with Gwendolen's. According to Gordon Haight, the "lively concern with the idea of Jewish nationalism" that is evident in the novel had grown out of a friendship with Emanuel Deutsch, a cataloguer in the British Museum, whose own "enthusiasm for a Jewish national home" had developed out of visits to the Middle East in 1868 and 1869. His death in 1873 occurred just as Eliot was planning her new novel, and in Haight's view, influenced her portrayal of Mordecai, the dying scholar who inspires Deronda's decision to settle in Palestine (*Biography* 470–71).

Eliot added to her already substantial knowledge of Judaism her study of Hebrew history, language, and literature in preparation for writing the novel (472). For details for the English setting of "her only novel of contemporary life" (458), she and Lewes traveled to Wiltshire, including Salisbury, Stonehenge, Devizes, and Marlborough, where she gained "a
rich store of material to draw from for the background of *Daniel Deronda*” (475). For legal details, she consulted the lawyer Frederic Harrison, as she had done while she was writing *Felix Holt* (476). She made her first “Sketches towards *Daniel Deronda*” in early 1874; the writing was completed by June 1876. *Daniel Deronda* was published in eight parts during February-September of 1876. Throughout the writing of the novel, Eliot had characteristically experienced recurring depressions and ill health. At the same time, Lewes, in a more positive frame of mind, was working energetically on his *Problems of Life and Mind*, volume 2 of which was published early in 1875.

Blackwood’s response to *Daniel Deronda* was enthusiastic from the outset, and continued to be so as he received each part of the manuscript (*Letters 6*:143, 144, 182, 221, 227, 239, 261, 262, 271, 295, 305). Among many other positive comments, he observed a new technique in Eliot’s fiction writing that reflects her gift for psychological analysis; of her characterization of Gwendolen he wrote, “[Gwendolen’s] running mental reflections after each few words she has said to Grandcourt are like what passes through the mind after each move at a game, and as far as I know a new device in reporting a conversation” (182). Upon receiving the last section of the book, he wrote Lewes: “Grand, glorious, and touching are too mild words for this last book. In fact criticism and eulogism are out of place. I feel more than ever what I have often said to critics: ‘Bow and accept with gratitude whatever George Eliot writes’” (262). The successful sales of the book suggest that most readers agreed with him. As Haight notes, “The publication of this last of her novels marked the zenith of George Eliot’s fame. She was regarded as the greatest living English novelist” (*Biography* 491).

Blackwood had also written at one point that he was “puzzling and thinking over [the Mordecai] phase of the Tale” (*Letters 6*:222). Indeed, some of Eliot’s contemporaries were not only puzzled by but critical of what Barbara Hardy calls the “conspicuously ideological and symbolic” presentation of “the Jewish problem” (“Introduction” 10). Eliot was gratified, however, by letters from many prominent Jews, who appreciated the extent of her knowledge of Judaism and her positive portrayal of Jewish people. Among them were Dr. Hermann Adler, Rabbi of the Bayswater Synagogue; Haim Guedalla, one of the leaders of the Jewish community in London; Abram Samuel Isaacs, an American Jew at the Theological Seminary in Breslau; and Abraham Benisch, editor of the
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*Jewish Chronicle* (Haight, *Biography* 486). It is worth noting also that Sigmund Freud held in high regard Eliot’s portrayal of Jews in *Daniel Deronda*; he was amazed “by its knowledge of Jewish intimate ways that ‘we speak of only among ourselves’” (Jones 116).

Although Eliot clearly intended “everything in the book to be related to everything else there” (*Letters* 6:290), the unity of the novel has been an issue among modern critics, many of whom, including F. R. Leavis and Ruby Redinger, have seen the novel as having two plots: the Gwendolen story and the Jewish story. Among the critics who have defended the novel’s unity, however, are Nancy Pell, who has identified “the themes of patriarchal power and the daughters’ resistance to it . . . in both parts of the novel” (432), and H. M. Daleski, who points to the motif of the forsaken child which ties together the stories of several of the characters. Daleski also makes the distinction, however, between the unity of the novel and “the striking discrepancy in the quality of the two parts into which the novel falls.” He sees the Gwendolen part “as among the best things George Eliot ever did,” and the Jewish part as “among the worst” (67). Defending the Jewish section of the novel as “the part that gives the entire work its unity and significance,” however, Joan M. Chard notes that both Gwendolen and Deronda are “uncertain of their identities.” She argues that “the personal quest for identity and vocation is linked in this novel with the historic and national consciousness of the Jewish people, whose journey out of exile through the wilderness to the promised land has become a paradigm of the human pilgrimage” (38).

My purpose in this chapter is to show how psychoanalytic insights illuminate the novel, particularly the characterization of Gwendolen, and contribute to the discussions of the novel’s unity. I also want to show how the portrayal of Gwendolen’s resolution of her psychological dilemma may reflect Eliot’s own resolution of conflict, as evidenced in the self-described loss of her “personal melancholy” (*Letters* 6:310) following the completion of her last novel.

Underlying the story of Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* is the pattern of the myth of Narcissus. At the beginning of the novel Gwendolen is a female Narcissus, self-centered and cold in her relationships with other men and women. Unlike the mythological Narcissus, however, who finally dies pining away for his own image, Gwendolen is cured of her narcissistic disorder and begins to grow into a mature adult with a
capacity to care for herself and others. A consideration of both the myth and the psychoanalytic theories about narcissism can help readers appreciate the depth of insight into human motivation that informs Eliot's prepsychoanalytic creation of her most fully developed character, Gwendolen. The writings of Heinz Kohut and Otto F. Kernberg, in particular, whose theories represent the two contemporary schools of thought on the subject, support the idea that Eliot has portrayed in Gwendolen what a modern psychologist would call a narcissistic personality.

According to Ovid's version of the myth, Narcissus is an attractive sixteen-year-old, much admired, but unloving in return. One of many rejected youths prays that Narcissus might fall in love and "not win over/The creature whom he loves!" Nemesis, the Goddess of Vengeance, answers the prayer: Narcissus looks into a pool of water, falls in love with his own reflection, pines away, and dies, because he cannot separate himself from "that image/Vain and illusive" (68-73).

Gwendolen, like Narcissus, is much sought after. Her "glance" has a "dynamic quality" that attracts people to her (35). Yet however much she delights in being admired, she does not reciprocate. She does not like girls or women, because she finds them uninteresting. She attracts men to her, only to reject them; she does not want them to touch her. When Rex Arrowpoint attempts to tell her that he loves her and tries to "take her hand," she says, "Pray don't make love to me! I hate it!" (114). After she rejects Rex, she breaks down and sobs to her mother, "[W]hat can become of my life? There is nothing worth living for! . . . I can't love people. I hate them. . . . I can't bear anyone to be very near me but you" (115). She realizes, at least momentarily, that her contempt for others is a sign of a deficiency in herself.

The relatively recent (1980) introduction of the diagnostic category, "narcissistic personality disorder," in the Diagnostic Manual of the American Psychiatric Association "finally gave formal psychiatric recognition to the importance of the concept of narcissism in mental disorders" (Russell 138). The manual lists five interrelated diagnostic criteria (DMS-III 317), and Gwendolen displays all five. The first is her exaggerated sense of her own importance, which in Eliot's portrayal is one result of the way she is treated in her family. She is her mother's first and most favored child, the "pet and pride of the household." She thinks of her
four younger sisters, the children of her mother’s second marriage, as “superfluous.” She is in the habit of having her own way, and she is determined not to let anyone else interfere with her happiness (chapter 4).

Second are Gwendolen’s fantasies of unlimited success, power, and beauty. In the opening scene at the gambling table, Gwendolen has “visions of being followed by a cortege who would worship her as a goddess of luck and watch her play as a directing augury” (39). She is accustomed to taking for granted “that she knew what was admirable and that she herself was admired” (40). Wherever she goes, she delights in the “homage” she receives from men, as “an indispensable and agreeable guarantee of womanly power” (68).

Third is her need for constant attention and admiration—a need reflected by her manner of participation in the charades at the neighborhood party in her family’s new home at Offendene. When the group is trying to think of what show to put on, Gwendolen’s only thought is to choose a scene that “suited her purpose of getting a statuesque pose in this favorite costume” (89). She insists on being the center of attention: there is to be “just enough acting of the scene to introduce the . . . music as a signal for her to step down and advance”; and the scene is to end with Leontes kneeling and kissing “the hem of her garment” (90).

Fourth are Gwendolen’s feelings of rage, inferiority, humiliation, or emptiness in response to criticism or defeat. Many examples of this kind of reaction occur in the early sections of the novel. She resents Deronda in the opening scene because she thinks he is “measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior” (38). She feels “anger,” “resistance,” and “bitter vexation” when she learns she must come home because of the loss of the family fortune (45). She reacts with “the vexation of wounded pride” when Deronda buys back and returns to her the necklace she has sold (49). She feels humiliated when Herr Klesmer, an accomplished musician, tells her she doesn’t have enough talent to be a successful actress. Without her former grandiose image of herself, she is left feeling empty and bored. “All memories, all objects” and even her own reflection in the glass “seemed no better than the packed-up shows of a departing fair” (306).

Finally, there is her sense of entitlement and lack of empathy. Instead of feeling sympathy for her mother when the family suffers the financial loss, Gwendolen feels sorry for herself, as “rightfully the chief object of
Eliot’s rich portrayal of Gwendolen in the context of her family and society includes several injurious events and circumstances which could be said to contribute to the sense of abandonment and low self-esteem that underlie the haughty exterior of her narcissistic personality. Evidence in the text suggests, for example, that the death of Gwendolen’s father has assumed an importance in her mind (as portrayed by Eliot) that is integral to her disorder, which so mysteriously combines cold-
ness, fear, and rage. Her father had died when she was still in "long clothes" (52), and she has no memory of him. Knowledge of the effects of a missing parent on a child's development is not new to psychoanalysis. Fenichel describes three consequences: (1) an increased attachment to the remaining parent, usually ambivalent in nature; (2) a "frequent and intense unconscious connection between the ideas of sexuality and death," which "may create an intense sexual fear," or "even a masochistic trend in which dying (reunion with a dead parent) may become a sexual goal"; (3) the regression to the oral phase which accompanies mourning and which may imply (if it occurs at an early age) "permanent effects in the structure of the Oedipus complex and character." He gives an example of a woman patient "whose father had died when she was a baby [and who] had a tendency to hate everybody": men because none were like her idealized father, and women "because her mother had taken the father for herself, letting him die before the daughter had had any opportunity to enjoy him" (94).

Fenichel's remarks are appropriate to Gwendolen's situation. There are few references in the novel to her father, but they are significant. We learn that when Gwendolen was twelve years old, her mother had shown her a picture of her father, and recalled "with a fervour which seemed to count on a peculiar filial sympathy," the fact that "dear papa" had died when Gwendolen was a baby. Gwendolen, only able to think of the stepfather she had known throughout her childhood, changed the subject and asked her mother why she married again. "It would have been nicer if you had not," she said. Astonished, her mother said, "You have no feeling, child!" After this incident, Gwendolen, "hurt and ashamed," never again dared to ask a question about her father (52-53). Years later, after the stepfather's death and the family's subsequent move to Offendene, Gwendolen goes hunting by horseback one day without permission. When she and her mother discuss the incident afterward with Mr. Gascoigne, her mother asks her not to "do it again," and then turning to Mr. Gascoigne adds, "Her father died by an accident, you know." Gwendolen, "kissing her merrily, and passing over the question of the fears which Mrs. Davilow had meant to account for," says, "Children don't take after their parents in broken legs" (107-8). Once again, by avoiding the subject of her father's death, Gwendolen denies the importance of her loss. At Leubronn, when Gwendolen learns of the loss of the family fortune, she decides to sell a necklace made of
turquoises “that had belonged to a chain once her father’s. But she had never known her father; and the necklace was in all respects the ornament she could most conveniently part with” (48). Gwendolen’s lack of feeling about her one tangible reminder of her father betrays her lack of awareness of any feelings of grief or loss over her father’s death. Her willingness to sell the necklace constitutes a denial of his importance to her. Just before she goes out to sell the necklace, she has made her preparations to return home from Leubronn, and happens to look at herself in the mirror. Narcissus-like, she “sat gazing at her image . . . till at last she . . . leaned forward, and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm. How could she believe in sorrow?” (47). The loss of the fortune is associated with and reactivates her sense of loss of her father, because in her life it is fathers who provide fortunes. She defends herself against this sense of loss by gazing at her image in the mirror.

The importance of the loss of her father is evident in many ways. Fenichel emphasizes the child’s increased, yet ambivalent, attachment to the remaining parent. Gwendolen has not wanted to share her mother either with a new father or her “superfluous” sisters. Mrs. Davilow’s “apologetic state of mind for the evils brought on her by a step-father” (71) reinforces Gwendolen’s sense of entitlement. Yet her feelings about her mother are ambivalent. She frequently refers to her mother’s “unhappiness,” for example, upon their arrival at Offendene, when she says, “Can nobody be happy after they are quite young? You have made me feel sometimes as if nothing were of any use” (57). Gwendolen is attached to her mother, but she is also disappointed in her.

Fenichel also emphasizes the connection in the child’s mind between the ideas of sexuality and death. Gwendolen’s fear of death is surprising in its intensity, given her customary self-assurance. She is terrified by the “picture of an upturned dead face from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms,” which is discovered behind a panel of the wainscot when the family is exploring the drawing room in their new home at Offendene (56). When she first sees the picture, Gwendolen “shudders silently,” and then turns her fear into an angry attack on her younger sister, who had opened the panel. But her reaction is less guarded the next time the panel is opened, accidentally, by a “thunderous chord” on the piano during the performance of the tableau. Gwendolen falls to her knees, trembling, and has to be led away from the group (91). Eliot comments on Gwendolen’s recurring fears, “when, for
example she was walking without companionship and there came some rapid change in the light. Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself” (94–95). Eliot does not offer any explanation for Gwendolen’s fear of the painting, but the details of the intensity of her reaction, taken together with the information about her missing father, would suggest that Gwendolen identifies with “the obscure figure fleeing with outstretched arms” and that her unremembered father is the “upturned dead face.” The connection between Gwendolen’s fear of death and her fear of sexuality will become clear later in the discussion of her marriage to Grandcourt.

The subsequent losses in Gwendolen’s life add to her sense of injury. Her father’s remaining family does not supply any source of comfort; they are “so high as to take no notice of her mamma” (52). Nor is Gwendolen able to form any kind of attachment to her “unlovable” stepfather. Before his death he has “for the last nine years joined his family only in a brief and fitful manner, enough to reconcile them to his long absences.” He has been effectively as absent as her original father, and Gwendolen apparently feels no grief at his death (52).

Another injurious circumstance in Gwendolen’s life is her family’s frequent household moves, apparently a result of her stepfather’s (Captain Davilow’s) occupation (52). Eliot comments: “A human life . . . should be well rooted in some spot of native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth. . . . [T]hat prejudice in favor of milk with which we blindly begin, is a type of the way body and soul must get nourished at least for a time” (50). With every household move, a child feels cut off from people and environment in the same way she has earlier felt cut off from a parent. It is significant that Eliot connects rootedness to a place with the attachment of a baby to its mother’s breast. Melanie Klein has written that mourning reactivates the “infantile depressive position” that occurs when the infant reaches the stage of being able to recognize her mother as a “whole object.” At that time the infant experiences what amounts to a loss of her mother as an external and internal object (Segal 126). The loss of a father during infancy would reinforce and be reinforced by this loss of the mother; and these losses would in turn be reactivated later by frequent household moves—the loss of familiar, comforting surroundings.
Eliot’s portrayal of Gwendolen in her social setting provides still another reason for her sense of injury: her society’s treatment of women. One comes away from the novel with a clear understanding of the Victorian woman’s dependence on men—fathers, husbands, brothers, and uncles—not only for happiness and status, but for basic survival. Without a man, without a fortune, a woman’s existence was precarious. Yet marriage was not necessarily a happy state. From Gwendolen’s point of view, it meant putting one’s life in the control of another person. She is well aware of her society’s treatment of women, and she hates being a female. She says, “Girls’ lives are so stupid: they never do what they like” (101). Consequently she devalues the women in the story who have produced only daughters (Mrs. Mallinger and her own mother, Mrs. Davilow). She also devalues the role of married women, generally, who she thinks lead “dreary lives.” While she enjoys being sought after by men, she does not actually want to be married (68).

Gwendolen, then, having lost her sense of connection to her father, family, land, and society, suffers from a sense of abandonment and low self-esteem that underlies her egotistical behavior. Her hatred of others is a projection of her hatred of herself. Gwendolen’s only real attachment, to her mother, is excessively close, as Nancy Nystul also suggests in her Kleinian analysis of her character (47). On her wedding day Gwendolen tells her mother that she will always love her “better than anybody else in the world” (403). As she later tells Deronda, “I was very precious to my mother—and he [Grandcourt] took me away from her” (837). Her mother feels the same kind of attachment to her, the “flower of her life.” Yet her attitude, like Gwendolen’s, is ambivalent. She both loves and fears her daughter: “Your will has always been too strong for me,” she says (129).

In Kohut’s terms, Gwendolen’s overattachment to her mother amounts to a developmental arrest; she is unable to move toward the stage of adult female sexuality in which she can experience mature love. The depths of Gwendolen’s attachment, as well as the ambivalence of her feelings, can be inferred not only from the scenes with her mother, but also less directly from her excessive guilt about Lydia Glasher, the mother of Grandcourt’s children. Although Lydia does not appear very often in the novel, she is ever-present as the source of Gwendolen’s torment. She becomes for Gwendolen a Medusa, or symbolic mother figure, who turns Gwendolen to stone in her relationship with
Grandcourt by claiming him, the father figure, for herself. Lydia convinces Gwendolen that Grandcourt is obligated to marry her, his former mistress, and make their son his heir. But Gwendolen’s guilt about Lydia, who had left her own husband and first child to live with Grandcourt, is out of proportion to the actual situation. Neither Lydia nor Grandcourt has any love left from their old passion: Lydia wants to marry Grandcourt only for her children’s sake (387), and Grandcourt gives up any intention of marrying Lydia before he meets Gwendolen (386), although he willingly continues to support her and the children. Gwendolen’s torment derives in part from Grandcourt’s failure to reassure her about his past relationship; she fears competing with a former attachment (343). But her excessive guilt also reflects a deeper fear. Internal allusions in the novel connect Gwendolen’s fearful reactions to Lydia and to Grandcourt with her fear of the upturned dead face in the painting. At their first meeting at the archery match, Lydia wants Gwendolen to decide not to marry Grandcourt (189–90). At Ryelands on their wedding day, Gwendolen receives the diamonds and letter from Lydia (407). The details of the scenes at the archery match and at Ryelands “repeat and transform some of the elements” of the earlier scene in which Gwendolen reacts so violently to the painting (Poole 303–5). Thus Eliot connects Gwendolen’s fear of the sight of Lydia and later of Grandcourt with her fearful reaction to the upturned dead face. The later “Medusa-apparition” scene, when Lydia deliberately appears with two of her children before Gwendolen and Grandcourt when they are out riding (668), evokes in Gwendolen a reaction that calls to mind the three earlier scenes and adds to the evidence of a connection between her fears about her dead father, which Thomas P. Wolfe emphasizes in his Freudian analysis of her character (28–29), and a less apparent fear of her mother. Gwendolen is shocked when Grandcourt ignores Lydia and the children; she realizes she would be in Lydia’s socially isolated position if she took the step of separating from her husband: she feels trapped in the marriage. Grandcourt’s visible abandonment of Lydia and her children reenacts Gwendolen’s inner sense of abandonment: her father, by dying, has abandoned his wife and child. Moreover, Lydia’s punishment of her for marrying Grandcourt enacts her childhood fear of her mother’s punishment for desiring the father. After the Medusa scene, Gwendolen’s rage at Grandcourt becomes nearly unbearable, as she begins to wish for his death, which seems to Gwendolen the only way
out of her predicament. The wish for the father’s death is associated with the fear of the mother’s punishment.

Another aspect of Gwendolen’s fixation is her dread of becoming a mother herself. Her guilt about Lydia (in this case over the possibility of causing Lydia’s son to lose his inheritance) is again closely associated with the wish that Grandcourt might die (736). Eliot vividly describes the rage that Gwendolen feels when she is on the yacht with Grandcourt, who has her so firmly under his control.

And the intensest form of hatred is that rooted in fear, which compels to silence and drives vehemence into a constructive vindictiveness, an imaginary annihilation of the detested object, something like the hidden rites of vengeance with which the persecuted have made a dark vent for their rage, and soothed their suffering into dumbness. Such hidden rites went on in the secrecy of Gwendolen’s mind, but not with soothing effect—rather with the effect of a struggling terror. Side by side with the dread of her husband had grown the self-dread which urged her to flee from the pursuing images wrought by her pent-up impulse. The vision of her past wrong-doing [taking Grandcourt away from Lydia], and what it had brought on her, came with a pale ghastly illumination over every imagined deed that was a rash effort at freedom, such as she had made in her marriage [737].

Gwendolen is simultaneously enraged with Grandcourt and terrified of her murderous impulses toward him. Furthermore, her rage at her husband and her guilt about her sexual impulses are intermingled. Eliot verbally links Gwendolen’s “pursuing images wrought by her pent-up impulse” with the figures in the painting. Gwendolen is the figure fleeing from “the upturned dead face”—that is, from her own impulses (both incestuous and murderous) toward her dead father who has existed only in her imagination.

Pre-oedipal and oedipal conflicts are simultaneously at work. Contemporary psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the role of pre-oedipal issues in the resolution of the Oedipus complex. Melanie Klein was perhaps the first to see sexual development as “bound up with . . . object relations and with all the emotions which from the beginning mould [the child’s] attitude to mother and father” (Klein 419). The Oedipus complex, she believed, begins to develop during the phase when the infant begins to perceive the mother as a whole object. “People are recognized . . . as individual . . . and as having relationships with one another; in particular, the infant becomes aware of the important link that exists between his father and his mother. This sets the stage for the oedipus complex” (Segal
103). Although other theorists may differ from Klein on the timing of the Oedipus complex, most, including Kohut, now emphasize the role of pre-oedipal conflicts in its resolution. As Kohut puts it, “Behind the oedipal disturbances lie flawed self-object responses” (“Introspection” 405). Gwendolen, because of the conditions of her life beginning in infancy and reinforced by later experience, is not able to move from the pre-oedipal to the oedipal attachment, resolve the Oedipus complex, and become an adult female with a capacity for mature love.

During their courtship, Gwendolen is mysteriously attracted to Grandcourt. She begins to feel “a wand over her” (158) in his presence; he appeals to her more than the other men she has met, and she is assuming that she will become engaged to him. After she learns of the relationship with Lydia, however, she feels that “all men are bad” (192) and determines not to marry him. When she returns to Offendene after her trip to Leubronn, Grandcourt resumes the courtship despite her family’s financial loss. She realizes when he finally comes to propose that she does not want to let him go: she feels “alarm at the image of Grandcourt finally riding away. What would be left her then? Nothing but the former dreariness. She liked him to be there” (346). Although most critics assume that Gwendolen marries Grandcourt for financial reasons, the text makes it clear that her reasons for marrying him go deeper than her own and her mother’s financial need, which Gwendolen herself recognizes as only an “excuse” (665) for the decision. When her mother says, “I trust you are not going to marry only for my sake,” Gwendolen is “irritated at this attempt to take away a motive. Perhaps the deeper cause of her irritation was the consciousness that she was not going to marry for her mamma’s sake—that she was drawn toward the marriage in ways against which stronger reasons than her mother’s renunciation were yet not strong enough to hinder her” (357). Gwendolen and Grandcourt are like Narcissus and Echo. The roles are interchangeable: the Gwendolen who was once Narcissus is punished by Nemesis and becomes an Echo. She cannot let Grandcourt go. In Ovid’s myth, Echo, punished by Juno for trying to cover up Jove’s affairs with the nymphs, is able to say only “the last thing she hears” (Metamorphoses 68). She cannot start a conversation (i.e., she cannot take initiative), nor can she “fail to answer other people talking” (i.e., she is overly compliant). Echo is infatuated with Narcissus; she is also trapped inside herself,
unable to express her feelings for him. She is forced by Juno into a passive role for encouraging Jove’s affairs with the other nymphs. This is perhaps a disguised way of saying that Echo’s own wishes about Jove, the father, are being punished by Juno, the mother. The punishment is a kind of passivity, representing castration or mutilation (or effectively, a degree of impotence or frigidity), like the punishment for looking at the Medusa (turning to stone). Gwendolen’s mysterious attraction to Grandcourt is like Echo’s infatuation for Narcissus: Gwendolen is attracted to Grandcourt because he has, and will continue to have, power over her. Gwendolen, passive in her relationship with him, is punishing herself for her own incestuous impulses. In marrying Grandcourt, Gwendolen is also reinforcing the pattern of male behavior that exists in her mind. Like her own father and stepfather, Grandcourt has left the woman who bore his children.

Grandcourt is attracted to Gwendolen for similar mysterious reasons. He wants to marry her, even though he is aware that she does not love him. Their personalities mirror one another; each is attracted to the other’s pride and coldness. After their marriage he becomes increasingly domineering and jealous (of her friendship with Deronda), as she becomes increasingly paralyzed with fear, guilt, and anger. Each is trapped by the other. Grandcourt is Gwendolen’s double, her mirror image, the “upturned dead face” in the portrait which causes her to “flee with outstretched arms.”

In the story of Narcissus, the youth goes to a sheltered pool, surrounded by grass and untroubled by men or beasts. Here Narcissus looks into the pool and falls in love with the image that keeps him “spell-bound” (Ovid 70). The pool symbolically represents the sheltering mother. Narcissus is bound by an image that fuses himself and his mother; it is a shadow or memory of that time when they seemed to be one person. He finally dies an early death: he wanes slowly until nothing is left of his body.

Gwendolen is bound to Grandcourt as Narcissus is bound to his image. Otto Rank has written about the use of doubles in Western literature, in particular about the use of mirrors, shadows, portraits, and twins. This use of the double motif “appears an effluence of narcissistic ties, of self-infatuation, which, just as in the child, plays a large role among primitive peoples, and which we also see in the neurotic individual” (Erich Stern, qtd. in Rank xviii). Rank also emphasizes the connec-
tion between narcissism and the fear of death. He writes that “the idea of death . . . is denied by a duplication of the self incorporated in the shadow or in the reflected image” (83); and that often in literature a character will resort to suicide, which he carries out on his double, in order to escape this fear of death.

Gwendolen’s look in the mirror is a defense against her sorrow—a denial of the importance of her loss of her father, and a denial of her own fear of death. She is looking at the combined image or fantasy of herself and her parents, to whom she is still psychologically attached. In other words, her self-image is a fantasy construction, a fusion and condensation of herself, her mother, and her missing father. By marrying Grandcourt, her double, she does not have to let go of her fantasy. Yet she also wants to slay the image that controls her. When Grandcourt drowns, Gwendolen later confesses to Deronda, “I saw my wish outside me” (761). She also refers to “a dead face” and says, “I shall never get away from it” (753). Once again, Eliot makes a connection with the “upturned dead face” (her father) in the portrait. Gwendolen’s wish for Grandcourt’s death is a disguised wish for her own death, the death of her fantasy construction—a death that represents her only hope of “release” from her dilemma. Narcissus says that death will take his trouble away; he pines away looking into a pool of water. Gwendolen has wanted her “trouble” to be taken away; Grandcourt dies by drowning in the “pool of water.”

Gwendolen, released from the control of her double, lives to be cured of her disorder. Her growth is facilitated by Daniel Deronda, with whom she has a “transference” relationship, which, as Laurence Lerner (“Education” 361) and Eugene Hollahan (“Therapist” 65) also suggest, is like the relationship between patient and therapist. But Grandcourt is part of her “therapy” too. As Gwendolen’s double, he is the first object of her transference. Gwendolen focuses on him all the rage that has resulted from her childhood narcissistic injuries. Through her relationship with him Gwendolen becomes acutely conscious of that rage, which Kernberg emphasizes must be confronted directly in therapy. After Grandcourt dies, Deronda plays the role of therapist who listens to her confession of her rage and her murderous impulses. Through Deronda, Gwendolen completes the transference: her infantile attachments have become reactivated; he becomes for her a fused and condensed symbol of both father and mother, a man “moved by an affectionateness such as
we are apt to call feminine” (367). He is the first person apart from her mother that Gwendolen feels able to love. In the process of coming to care for Deronda, she is also moving toward a more realistic view of herself. Gwendolen experiences both the “idealizing” and “mirroring” transference, which Kohut says are two facets of the same developmental phase, and which may occur simultaneously or separately, and with differing degrees of emphasis, depending upon the individual in therapy (Analysis 107). In the idealizing transference, there is a “therapeutic activation of the omnipotent object” with whom the child attempts to remain attached (Analysis 37). In the mirroring transference, the “grandiose self” is reactivated. This is the phase in which the child attempts “to save the originally all-embracing narcissism by concentrating perfection and power upon the self” (Analysis 106). In Gwendolen’s case, not only does she “fall in love” (idealizing transfer) with Deronda, but she also takes on a more realistic, yet also more positive self-image (mirroring transfer). In coming to know and love Deronda, Gwendolen is coming to know and love herself. Deronda is Kohut’s “empathic therapist” who accepts her idealizing transfer, listens to her confession about her murderous impulses, eases her guilt about the cause of Grandcourt’s death (764), and guides her toward a more realistic attitude toward herself, while at the same time assuring her of her potential to help others.

Part of the idealization is that Deronda serves as Gwendolen’s superego, which is becoming integrated in her mind. This is a process of internalization which in a narcissistic personality has not yet been completed. As her superego, Deronda gives her advice when she needs it. When he advises her to be concerned about others she responds, “You mean that I am selfish and ignorant.” Deronda does not deny her insight, but at the same time he encourages her growth: “You will not go on being selfish and ignorant” (502). Gwendolen comes to see all her actions through the impression they will make on Deronda. During her marriage, the thought of Deronda keeps her from “acting out the evil within” (746). After Grandcourt’s death, she asks Deronda for advice about whether to accept any of the money left by his will; she wants “to secure herself against any act he would disapprove” (833).

Like a patient in therapy, Gwendolen imagines she is more important in Deronda’s life than she really is. Their meetings have “a diffusive effect in her consciousness, magnifying their communication with each
other, and therefore enlarging the place she imagined it to have in his mind” (647). Deronda responds to her too, however; he goes through a “countertransference.” He is attracted to her, but realizes he must control his reactions while at the same time not abandoning her. He feels a “nervous consciousness that there was something to guard against not only on her account but on his own”; yet “her words of insistence that he ‘must remain near her—must not forsake her’ continually recurred to him” (683–84). He is strong enough not to have to avoid her; he accepts her idealization because he is genuinely interested in her welfare.

In working through the transference, Gwendolen must face the fact of Deronda’s intended marriage to Mirah and his plans to go to Palestine. When she first learns about the marriage she is in despair. But just as a young female must accept the fact that her father belongs to her mother, so Gwendolen must accept the fact that Deronda belongs to Mirah. In coming to accept the reality of her impending separation from Deronda, Gwendolen is psychologically separating from her parents—a step that means her survival. Only by separating herself from their presence in her mind can she stop making herself the object of her own rage and murderous impulses. “I mean to live,” she says to her mother after he leaves (879). Gwendolen has gone through a process like Kohut’s “transmuted internalization” and become a more complete person.

Other characters in the novel are in situations that parallel Gwendolen’s. Deronda must also resolve the question of his relationship to his parents. But unlike Gwendolen, he does not know who his real parents are. He must find them, confront the truth about them, and find a way to separate himself from his shadowed memory of them.

Until he finds and confronts his mother, Deronda is aimless, not yet settled on a vocation or marriage. His “many-sided sympathy” threatens “to hinder any course of action” (412). One aspect of this many-sided sympathy is his tendency to attach himself to people who need to be rescued. He spends so much time helping his friend Meyrick with his academic problems at Cambridge that he flunks out himself. He also rescues Mirah, whom he finds standing on the bank of a river, from suicide. Eliot connects his desire to rescue her with his search for his mother: “The agitating impression this forsaken girl was making on him stirred a fibre that lay close to his deepest interest in the fates of women—‘perhaps my mother was like this one’” (231). Yet there is
something beyond this need to rescue in his attraction to Gwendolen—
“something due to the fascination of her womanhood.” His imagination,
at this point in the story, is “much occupied with two women, to neither
of whom would he have held it possible that he should ever make love.
Hans Meyrick had laughed at him for having something of the knight-
errant in his disposition” (370). On the one hand, Deronda is a sensitive
person who likes to help people. Yet on the other, he is something of a
lady-killer. Like Gwendolen, he possesses that narcissistic quality of
attracting and rejecting (in the sense of not seriously intending a relation-
ship that can be permanent) the opposite sex. In his last scene with
Gwendolen, when he finally “rejects” her by telling her he plans to
marry Mirah, he recognizes his “cruelty” to her: “Deronda’s anguish
was intolerable. . . . ‘I am cruel too, I am cruel,’ he repeated” (877).

Deronda is also like Gwendolen in his sense of rootlessness. He does
not know anything about his background, but as the novel progresses,
he slowly discovers and accepts his Jewish heritage. The need to feel
connected to a heritage and to a land is an extension of his original need
for his mother. Deronda responds to the Jewish liturgy in the way that a
child responds to its union with its mother: “the forms of the Juden-
gasse,rous[ed] the sense of union with what is remote” (414). As Feni-
chel explains, “Certain narcissistic feelings of well-being [for example,
religious or patriotic feelings] are characterized by the fact that they are
felt as a reunion with an omnipotent force in the external world. . . . The
longing [for such a connection] can be called the ‘narcissistic need’” (40).

When Deronda finally finds his mother, he must confront her rejec-
tion of him. She says, “I did not wish you to be born. I parted with you
willingly” (697). She explains that she rejected both the role of mother-
hood and her Jewish heritage because of her father’s oppression of her.
She is like Gwendolen in this: because she feels oppressed by a male-
dominated culture, she has no interest in the customary female role. “I
am not a loving woman,” she says. She has also, like Gwendolen, been a
femme fatale. “Men have been subject to me,” she says (730). She is only
able to be in male-female relationships in which one person has power
over the other. The passage in which Deronda meets his mother occurs
just before the scene in which Gwendolen, on the boat with Grandcourt,
recognizes the full strength of his control over her, along with her own
dread of becoming a mother. The two situations are parallel: a father’s
oppression is a factor in the “failure” of a daughter’s “maternal instinct.”
After Deronda directly confronts his mother's rejection, he becomes free of her hold on his mind. He can then find that "blending of personal love in current with a larger duty" (685) that he has been looking for. "I have always longed for an ideal task" (819), he tells Mordecai. He accepts his Jewishness; he helps Gwendolen, but lets her know the boundaries of their relationship; he proposes to Mirah; he takes on Mordecai's ideals and plans to go to the Middle East to work to establish a new state of Israel. He has succeeded in curing himself and finding the right combination of circumstances that will serve in his life as a substitute for the mother he never had.

Mirah's situation parallels both Gwendolen's and Deronda's. In her childhood her father has literally taken her away (from England to the Continent) from her mother, just as Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt has symbolically taken her away from her mother. At the time the novel takes place, Mirah is back in England looking for her mother. Like Deronda, she must face the reality of the loss of her mother—in her case, her mother's death; she must also "forgive" her father (by taking him into her household) before she is psychologically free to marry. She associates her Jewish religion and heritage with her mother and is able to find through it a satisfactory substitute, which, along with her marriage to Deronda, will serve throughout her life. Through this heritage she is able to retain her feeling of union with her mother: "If I got wicked I should lose my world of happy thoughts where my mother lived with me" (254). She associates her mother with her ideals: "When the best thing comes into our thoughts, it is like what my mother has been to me" (523).

Mordecai's situation parallels Gwendolen's, Deronda's, and Mirah's. In his case, an early death is the outcome of a life of oppression and rejection. He has been waiting for someone like Deronda, through whom his own life can be completed and extended after he dies. He refers to Deronda as "his new self" (551); and Deronda is described as "receptive" to him. His ties to his heritage and to his religion, which he passes on to Deronda, are substitutes for his attachment to his lost mother. He and Mirah, brother and sister, are psychological doubles, as are Gwendolen and Grandcourt. Mordecai, Mirah's double, dies, and Mirah is released to achieve psychological maturity on her own.

A principle source of the unity of Daniel Deronda, then, is in the psychological situation of the characters. Each must find a way to leave
behind old, disappointing parental images and find replacements that will be sustaining throughout adult life.

The novel also illustrates what happens to the “maternal instinct” when a woman feels oppressed and/or abandoned by men. This brings us back to the myth of Narcissus. According to Ovid’s version of the story, Narcissus’s mother, the naiad Liriope, was raped by Cephisus, the river-god. Narcissus’s birth is the result of the rape—a situation that implies both male dominance and male abandonment—feelings about which a mother, left without a mate, would all the more intensely transfer onto a child. Narcissus’s “disorder” derives at least in part from the parenting of a mother who feels oppressed and abandoned, and yet is likely to be all the more closely attached to him because she has no husband or other children. Narcissus is also the child of a missing father. A child in this situation, suffering from grief, anger, and fears about his loss, defends himself by inventing a father in his mind to replace the one he has not had. Narcissus is not able to separate himself from a fantasy construction that includes the self, mother, and imagined father of his infancy. To be unable to separate self from parental images is to be unable to grow. Gwendolen, whose psychological situation parallels Narcissus’s, is cured of her disorder. In the process of transferring her parental images onto Grandcourt and Deronda, she is able to separate herself from them: Grandcourt drowns and Deronda marries someone else. In working through the transference, Gwendolen comes to see herself clearly as she really is, and not as the image or fantasy construction she had formerly projected of herself. Her growing self-knowledge is her path to maturity.

Some critics, like Evelyn Butler, have interpreted the outcome of the novel as a punishment for Gwendolen, who is left alone after she loses Deronda. Eliot’s intention to show that Gwendolen ultimately gains from her loss is clear in her response to Blackwood’s positive assessment of the proofs of the first 256 pages of the novel: “It will perhaps be a little comfort to you to know that poor Gwen is spiritually saved, but ‘so as by fire’. Don’t you see the process already beginning? I have no doubt you do, for you are a wide-awake reader” (Letters 6:188). Besides reflecting Eliot’s psychological acuity regarding the necessary losses entailed in the process of human growth, the novel, with its unconventional ending, reflects a “more acute assessment of marriage and of marriage
plots” than do the “conventional modes of closure employed by the
[Victorian] novel’s standard love-plots,” as Joseph Allen Boone
expresses it (65–73). Other critics also view the novel as more “modern”
than her earlier works. In his study of The Novel and Society, Grahame
Smith sees in Daniel Deronda the beginnings of a movement away from
“the great European achievement of the social novel.” He observes that
Eliot’s last novel moves outside English society to a “wider international
perspective” (210), at the same time that it marks the shift toward the
portrayal of the “interior landscape” that characterizes the modern novel
(212). Noting the connection between Gwendolen’s inner world and the
English society presented by the author, Smith also sees in Eliot’s por-
trayal a “total rejection of her society” (209). Jean Sudrann, also empha-
sizing Eliot’s sense of alienation, suggests that “George Eliot felt her
own alienation in terms more ‘modern’ than Victorian, that she sought
to define that experience by making it the central subject of her last
novel, the only one to have a contemporary setting, and that she then
had to bend to new uses the conventional forms of the novel to express
the new subject matter” (433). As Sudrann interprets the ending, Gwendolen is left “solitary, certainly, and aware” for the first time of the
“vastness” of the world beyond herself (454); and, “Her kindly parting
from Deronda, releasing him from responsibility, shows a new—if fee-
ble—action of will in ‘asserting herself’ in the immensity.” In her view,
Gwendolen “has passed through a crisis of alienation so that she may
possess her self” (455).

After the publication of Daniel Deronda, Eliot wrote her lifelong
friend Sara Hennell on her fifty-seventh birthday (November 22, 1876):
“It is remarkable to me that I have entirely lost my personal melancholy.
I often, of course, have melancholy thoughts about the destinies of my
fellow-creatures, but I am never in that mood of sadness which used to
be my frequent visitant even in the midst of external happiness. And
this, notwithstanding a very vivid sense that life is declining and death
close at hand” (Letters 6:310). Eliot’s statement suggests the possibility
that by the time Daniel Deronda was completed, she had experienced in
herself at least a partial resolution of the sense of loss that she portrays in
her character Gwendolen.

Joseph Weisenfarth explains that Eliot’s “formal structure in which
the dynamics of personal development proceed” seems indebted to
Goethe’s idea, expressed in the German epigraph of chapter 39, of
placing oneself “before a wise man.” He observes that “Gwendolen places herself before Deronda and he serves her, reluctantly, in the role of wise man; indeed, he becomes her Daniel. Deronda, in turn, places himself before Mordecai who serves him, willingly, as a wise man; he becomes his Ezra. The understanding that these wise men have of their charges leads to the regeneration of both Gwendolen and Deronda. They experience a ‘transmutation of self’” (Notebook xxxviii). Weisenfarth notes that the phrase “transmutation of self” is used in the novel by Deronda to explain the legend of the Buddha who, upon seeing a tigress unable to feed her young, offered his body to be devoured by them. Deronda interprets the story to a group of friends, including Mirah, as “an extreme image of what is happening every day— the transmutation of the self” (523). In this scene Eliot’s characters attempt to put into words the idea that is dramatized both in the legend of the Buddha and in the story of Gwendolen and Deronda. I would suggest that George Eliot’s last novel, Daniel Deronda, enacts that painful process of the author’s own self-transmutation, which she ultimately achieved through the creation of her works of art. To put it in psychoanalytic terms, the artist, during the creative process, enters into a transference, or fantasy, through which she can reenact and attempt to rework her own past. Through the process of Kohut’s “transmuted internalization” she can, like Gwendolen in her relationship with Deronda, strengthen herself by reworking the missing elements in her experience of her parents. Through this process, her rage is diminished, and her “personal melancholy” eased, as her identity as an artist is achieved. Perhaps like Gwendolen, the author had, through the writing of her fiction, finally “passed through [her] crisis of alienation so that she [might] possess herself.”