

*A Hermeneutical Study of the Midrashic Influences  
of Biblical Literature on the Narrative modes,  
Aesthetics, and Ethical Concerns  
in the Novels of George Eliot*

*Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts  
in the Department of English  
of Rhodes University*

*Bronwyn Law Viljoen*

*December, 1993*

## Contents

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Abstract  | iii  |
| 1. Eliot's Midrash: Revitalising an Old Method              | 1    |
| 2. Prophecy and Art: "The Lifted Veil"                      | 18   |
| 3. The Feminine Christ in <i>Adam Bede</i>                  | 30   |
| 4. A Midrash on Genesis                                     | 52   |
| 5. <i>Felix Holt</i> and the Book of Esther                 | 82   |
| 6. Prophecy, Exile, and Redemption in <i>Daniel Deronda</i> | 107  |
| Select Bibliography   | 137  |

## Abstract

The thesis will examine the influence of Biblical literature on some of the novels of George Eliot. In doing so it will consider the following aspects of Eliot criticism: current theoretical debate about the use of *midrash*; modes of discourse and narrative style; prophetic language and vision; the influence of Judaism and Jewish exegetical methods on *Adam Bede*, "The Lifted Veil", *The Mill on the Floss*, *Felix Holt*, and *Daniel Deronda*.

Literary critics have, for a long time, been interested in the influence of the Bible and Biblical hermeneutics on literature and the extent to which Biblical narratives and themes are used typologically and allegorically in fiction has been well researched. In this regard, the concept of *midrash* is not a new one in literary theory. It refers both to a genre of writing and to an ancient Rabbinic method of exegesis. It has, however, been given new meaning by literary critics and theorists such as Frank Kermode, Harold Bloom, and Jacques Derrida. In *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Kermode gives a new nuance to the word and demonstrates how it may be used to read not only Biblical stories but secular literature as well. It is an innovative, self-reflexive, and intricate hermeneutic process which has been used by scholars such as Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, editors of *Midrash and Literature*, a seminal work in this thesis.

Eliot's interest in Judaism and her fascination with religion, religious writing, and religious characters are closely connected to her understanding of

the novelist's role as an interpreter of stories. In this regard, the prophetic figure as poet, seer, and interpreter of the past, present, and future of society is of special significance. The thesis will investigate Eliot's reinterpretation of this important Biblical type as well as her retelling of Biblical stories. It will attempt to establish the extent to which Eliot's work may be called *midrash*, and enter the current debate on how and why literary works have been and can be interpreted. It will address the questions of why Eliot, who abjures normative religious faith, has such a profound interest in the Bible, how the Bible serves her creative purposes, why she is interested in Judaism, and to what extent the latter informs and permeates her novels.

## Chapter One

### Eliot's Midrash: Revitalising an Old Method

Doubles and plurals everywhere. *Elohim*, the sexes, two trees in paradise. Nothing hits the mark, or the right mark in *Hamlet* - except the play. Construct, then, a mousetrap that will catch a sublimer evidence. I see the angel struggling ("you must bless me before dawn") but he has many wings and at cock-crow I find scattered feathers only, a barnyard token. What is it anyway, this fairy trace, but his snare to keep me interpreting? Like a dream we wake up with, fading into a half-life of minutes.

GEOFFREY HARTMAN<sup>1</sup>

The narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* laments "that we can so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else" (2, 1, 209).<sup>2</sup> George Eliot seems both to celebrate and to lament the necessity of metaphor in her fiction: on the one hand it restricts the artist, who must explain everything in terms of otherness. On the other hand, however, metaphor presents the artist with polysemy; it offers a world of likeness and difference, oneness and unending variety. When Eliot recognizes this kaleidoscope of infinite possibilities she revels in what the imagination can achieve in storytelling. Eliot returns, like so many other artists, to the myths of the past to exploit their limitless creative potential in her writing. Her stories resemble

---

<sup>1</sup>"The Interpreter: A Self-Analysis", 215.

<sup>2</sup>References to the novels, except *Felix Holt*, indicate book, chapter, and page. References to *Felix Holt* indicate only chapter and page.

these past myths, but are also different, and her re-creation of them is hermeneutic web-spinning. This return to, specifically Biblical, myth will be explored in this thesis. I will show how Eliot rereads Bible stories and not only relocates them in a new context, but reinterprets them, subverts them, and deconstructs them. In some instances, Eliot finds whole stories or parts of stories useful for this narrative process. For instance, she reinterprets the Old Testament Book of Esther in *Felix Holt*, and writes a new Genesis, from Creation to Flood, in *The Mill on the Floss*. In other places, Eliot reshapes characters and themes from the Bible, creating Christ figures in Dinah and Daniel, reinterpreting Old Testament prophets in Mordecai, and redefining the themes of exile and redemption in *Daniel Deronda*. All of this points to an interest in hermeneutics, history, prophecy, and mythology, all testified to in Eliot's numerous notes on the subjects in her notebooks, and in frequent references in her letters. Her interest in prophecy as a vehicle for her artistic intentions is especially significant. It is as if Eliot, searching for a mediator between "God and the world" (Feuerbach, 80), seizes upon the prophet as the one "being of the imagination" (Feuerbach, 81) who is poet, seer, interpreter, and priest. The prophet is God's mouthpiece, and in Eliot's Religion of Humanity, in which the human is divine, the prophet-poet is her most articulate and insightful interpreter of "that roar which lies on the other side of silence" (*Middlemarch*, 2, 20, 226). Judah Halevi's *Khuzari*<sup>3</sup>, has a pertinent

---

<sup>3</sup>The *Khuzari* is largely apologetic, presenting an argument for Judaism in the form of a Platonic dialogue. Many critics have linked this work to George Eliot's ideas about Judaism and her conception of the character of Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda*.

comment about imagination and creativity. Al Khazari asks the Rabbi "How can I individualise a being, if I am not able to point to it, and can only prove its existence by its actions?" to which the Rabbi replies, "It can be designated by prophetic or visionary means. Demonstration can lead astray" (199). This thesis will show how Eliot constantly makes the connection between imagination, or more specifically art, and prophecy, gesturing to past, present, and imagined future through this medium.<sup>4</sup>

In an essay from *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot describes the imaginative power of the prophet and points to the fine balance that the latter seems able to maintain, despite the danger (to which Latimer in "The Lifted Veil" succumbs) of a lapse into solipsism. The prophet's "fine imagination" is

always based on a keen vision, a keen consciousness of what *is*, and carries the store of definite knowledge as material for the construction of its inward visions. Witness Dante, who is at once the most precise and homely in his reproduction of actual objects, and the most soaringly at large in his imaginative combinations (236).

Dante's power lies in his ability simultaneously to reproduce "actual objects" and imaginatively to combine them to generate new visions. Again using Dante as example, Theophrastus speaks of the power of the seer which may even manifest itself in madness. The passage is long, but is worth quoting as it clearly articulates Eliot's concerns:

powerful imagination is not false outward vision, but intense inward representation, and a creative energy constantly fed by susceptibility to the veriest minutiae of experience, which it

---

<sup>4</sup>Prophecy in this sense, is not simply 'foretelling', but rather 'forthtelling'. Seeing into the future is prophecy in its narrowest sense; the true prophet is a commentator, an interpreter of past and present, a mediator between the spiritual and material worlds.

reproduces and constructs in fresh and fresh wholes; not the habitual confusion of provable fact with the fictions of fancy and transient inclination, but a breadth of ideal association which informs every material object, every incidental fact with far-reaching memories and stored residues of passion, bringing into new light the less obvious relations of human existence .... Dante .... distinguishes the ideal truth of his entranced vision from the series of external facts to which his consciousness had returned. Isaiah gives us the date of his vision in the Temple - "the year that King Uzziah died" - and if afterwards the mighty-winged seraphim were present with him as he trod the street, he doubtless knew them for images of memory, and did not cry "Look!" to the passers-by.

Certainly the seer, whether prophet, philosopher, scientific discoverer, or poet, may happen to be rather mad: his powers may have been used up, like Don Quixote's, in their visionary or theoretic constructions, so that the reports of common-sense fail to affect him, or the continuous strain of excitement may have robbed his mind of its elasticity. It is hard for our frail mortality to carry the burthen of greatness with steady gait and full alacrity of perception. But he is the strongest seer who can support the stress of creative energy and yet keep that sanity of expectation which consists in distinguishing, as Dante does, between the *cose che son vere* outside the individual mind, and the *non falsi errori* which are the revelations of true imaginative power (238-40).

These qualities are most powerfully presented, first in Rufus Lyon in *Felix Holt*, and then in Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda*. Both characters embody an intensity of vision which takes its toll on mind and body. In Rufus's case, his predilection for prophecy makes him absent-minded and eccentric. Mordecai, Eliot's strongest prophet, suffers from consumption, as if his spiritual intensity cannot be sustained by his body. He needs the younger, stronger body of Daniel through which to live out his beliefs. After his initial wavering, Daniel recognizes Mordecai's prophetic stature, and finally embraces his vision.

George Eliot is aware of the frightening view of the world that prophecy may yield, an awareness all too evident in "The Lifted Veil". She shies away from this bleakness, associating Latimer's scepticism and cynicism with his

lovelessness. Herein rests the core of Eliot's poetic imagination (and it is essentially a romantic notion): mutuality, interdependence, duty, and love comprise the creed of her religion. If, in Kantian terms, God is dead, then Eliot finds a way to bring God to life again. She learns this from Hennell, Strauss, and Feuerbach, who suggest to her the mythic nature of religion, the inconceivability of a personal God, and, almost paradoxically, the life of Christ in the human soul. Renan teaches Eliot that Christ is fully human, which leads her to conclude that the human is fully God.

Eliot generates her fiction from within the framework of a patriarchal Judaeo-Christian discourse, with its patterns of sin and redemption, damnation and salvation. She exploits the myths of these religions, secularizing them and shifting the centre of control from God to humanity. This displacement is witnessed, not only in the thematic aspects of the novels, but also in the narrative stance. Eliot is well known for a strong narratorial presence in the text in the form of interjection and digression, defence of characters, and homiletic interpolation. In addition she creates an observer narrator who comes close to being a character in the story but retains the voice of an omniscient third person. This observer, though never known to us, except through the odd reference, is present at the end of *Felix Holt*: we are given the impression here that the characters in the story are personally known to the narrator, and the shift to the present tense underscores this:

As to the town in which Felix Holt now resides, I will keep that a secret, lest he should be troubled by any visitor having the insufferable motive of curiosity.

I will only say that Esther has never repented. Felix, however, grumbles a little that she has made his life too easy, and that, if it were not for much walking, he should be a sleek dog

(Epilogue, 606).

This is the voice of one who relates to the characters as if they were real people. The narrator invites us into the world of the novel, asking us to suspend disbelief and acknowledge the story as truth. The narrator's presence within the text, which is never acknowledged by the other characters, signals self-consciousness on the writer's part, the evidence of Eliot's exploration of the process of writing and storytelling. The "secret" of Felix's residence is well-placed narrative aporia: the speaker brings Felix to life by referring to him in the present tense, but in the same breath, casts doubt upon his existence by refusing to tell us where he lives. The narrator calls the desire to know this information an "insufferable motive of curiosity". This of course is the reader's own motive: the need to know, which the narrator disappoints. By doing so, Eliot defers the closure of interpretation and deconstructs the apparently realist turn of the narrative. This technique is also witnessed in *The Mill on the Floss*. Chapter 1 is narrated by a first person narrator who vanishes behind the text but reasserts her presence in the final chapter. In chapter 1, the narrator stands on the bridge over the Floss and relives the past in memories: "... I remember the stone bridge...". Her memories seem to make the text of the story that unfolds:

Now I can turn my eyes towards the mill again and watch the unresting wheel sending out its diamond jets of water. That little girl is watching it too: she has been standing on just the same spot at the edge of the water ever since I paused on the bridge (1, 1, 54-5).

The little girl is, of course, Maggie; the narrator is unknown. She returns at the end of the story: "Dorlcote Mill was rebuilt. And Dorlcote churchyard, - where

the brick grave that held a father whom we know, was found with the stone laid prostrate upon it after the flood, - had recovered all its grassy order and decent quiet" (Conclusion, 656). Again, "we" are implicated in the story: our acquaintance with the "father" (Mr Tulliver) is appealed to and hence our belief in the characters is taken for granted. This appears to be an attempt to assert the realism of the novel, but, as the chapter on *The Mill on the Floss* will demonstrate, the story has the texture of myth. Despite the repeated invocations of the realist mode, Eliot subverts that mode through the mythic nature of the story and the self-conscious presence of the narrator/writer in the text.

Perhaps the most interesting example of this narratorial hide-and-seek occurs in *Adam Bede*. Again, the narrator seems personally acquainted with the characters in the story, appearing at odd moments as Adam's friend who knows the story of his life (he calls Adam "our friend"). There is an enigmatic character at the beginning of the novel whom we are tempted to associate with this narrator, but who is referred to in the third person as "the traveller", "the horseman", and "the stranger". This figure rides into town (rather like the proverbial Dark Cowboy in any modern Western film) just before Dinah is to begin preaching on the common. We are told that the traveller, when he sees Dinah is "struck with surprise as he saw her approach and mount the cart - surprise, not so much at the feminine delicacy of her appearance, as at the total absence of self-consciousness in her demeanour" (1, 2, 66). His surprise elicits a silent observation, the irony of which only becomes apparent at the end of the novel when women preachers are banned by the Methodist church: "A sweet

woman,' the stranger said to himself, 'but surely nature never meant her for a preacher'" (1, 2, 67). The stranger is nonetheless, charmed by Dinah's preaching and "cease[s] to doubt, as he had done at first glance, that she could fix the attention of her rougher hearers" (1, 2, 71). He departs in the light of a setting sun:

The stranger, who had been interested in the course of her sermon, as if it had been the development of a drama - for there is this sort of fascination in all sincere unpremeditated eloquence, which opens to one the inward drama of the speaker's emotions - now turned his horse aside and pursued his way, while Dinah said, 'Let us sing a little, dear friends;' and as he was still winding down the slope, the voices of the Methodists reached him, rising and falling in that strange blending of exultation and sadness which belongs to the cadence of a hymn (1, 2, 76).

That is the last we hear of the stranger. Frank Kermode calls this kind of aporia the "riddle of the Man in the Macintosh" (alluding to Joyce's *Ulysses*).<sup>5</sup> This appears to be a little teasing on Eliot's part, as if she entices the reader by the presence of the mysterious stranger, but then removes him from the text without any explanation. He seems to ride off into that space between text and reader, which modern theorists call intertext. He invites interpretation but disappoints any attempts to do so.

*Daniel Deronda* has some examples of this absence, the space in the text

---

<sup>5</sup>Kermode discusses the same phenomenon in the Gospel of Mark. At the arrest of Jesus, the narrator tells us that a boy with a linen cloth flees naked from Gethsemane, leaving his shirt behind in the hands of his would-be apprehenders (Mark 14:51-2). Kermode relates this strange narrative detail to the apparently unfinished ending of Mark, showing that our constant search for answers to these hermeneutical mysteries testifies to our need for fulfilment or closure in the narrative. Kermode shows that closure is not an imperative for the writers of the Gospels (*Genesis of Secrecy*, 49-73).

which both invites and defies interpretation.<sup>6</sup> The plot itself depends upon a number of secrets: Daniel's parentage, the relation between Mordecai and Mirah which Daniel eventually uncovers, Grandcourt's 'secret' affair with Lydia Glasher. The novel's beginning *in medias res* evokes the reader's curiosity, functioning as a kind of mystery which the narrator will unravel, but even then, the narrator casts doubt on the possibility of ever arriving at a beginning; the epigraph for chapter 1 informs us that beginnings are "make-believe" and that "No retrospect will take us to the true beginning" (1, 1, 35). Nonetheless, some of the novel's 'secrets' are resolved, while others remain unsolvable. The ending of the novel is perhaps the best example of this: Eliot leaves to the imagination of the reader the mission that Daniel and Mirah are to undertake. Garrett Stewart has this to say of the ending of the novel:

What Eliot's text would seem ... to leave us with is indeed an objectivity, a cultural object, as easy to recognise as it is difficult to describe or circumscribe: the vast humanist programme of her art, her always moralised imagination of the 'larger life'. Rather than offering a reified image of the conceiving and constructive mind, that is, her text *puts us in mind*: of all that is to be left done by the work of thought in action (96).

Daniel's work is to put thought into action, and his mission is a part of "the vast humanist programme" of Eliot's art, which, she realistically acknowledges, remains incomplete:

Like Mordecai's cultural masterplan, Eliot's writing also

---

<sup>6</sup>Mary Wilson Carpenter cites the silence about Daniel's circumcision in the novel as just such an absence, one which deconstructs the novel:

the reader must deconstruct his or her own reading of *Daniel Deronda*, for the interpretation of everything present in the text depends on the discovery of the crucial element missing from the reader's construction of the text - the Circumcision, in its full hermeneutical significance ("Apocalypse of the Old Testament", 67).

constitutes a work 'authorised' by being perpetually re-worked in the mind of the reader, inconclusive and thus endless, in short readable - in that brand of reactivation, that form of remembrance, known as interpretation (97).

The joy, and perhaps the frustration, of interpretation is its variability. Frank Kermode's conclusions about the 'secrets' of narrative and our need for closure are apt here:

What is the interpreter to make of secrecy considered as a property of all narrative, provided it is suitably attended to? Outsiders see but do not perceive. Insiders read and perceive, but always in a different sense. We glimpse the secrecy through the meshes of a text; this is divination, but what is divined is what is visible from our angle .... the world is our beloved codex. We may not see it, as Dante did, in perfect order, gathered by love into one volume; but we do, living as reading, like to think of it as a place where we can travel back and forth at will, divining congruences, conjunctions, opposites; extracting secrets from its secrecy, making understood relations, an appropriate algebra .... World and book, it may be, are hopelessly plural, endlessly disappointing; we stand alone before them, aware of their arbitrariness and impenetrability .... Hot for secrets, our only conversation may be with guardians who know less and see less than we can; and our sole hope and pleasure is in the perception of a momentary radiance, before the door of disappointment is finally shut on us (*Genesis of Secrecy*, 144-5).

This brings us to the term *midrash*. The current debate about the use of midrash as a hermeneutic tool, not limited to Biblical exegesis but of value in the interpretation of secular texts as well, is really a debate about interpretation itself. Modern critics have found that Jewish hermeneutical methods provide useful models for the interpretation of literature.<sup>7</sup> Midrash has been redefined to give a name to some of the storytelling methods of modern writers. I have found the term useful for describing some of the aspects of Eliot's fiction.

---

<sup>7</sup>It is beyond the scope of this thesis to describe in any detail theorists' use of rabbinic hermeneutics. Susan Handelman gives an overview of this subject and provides some fascinating insights.

Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick summarise the history of the term thus:

In rabbinic literature *midrash* designates both a genre of biblical exegesis and the compilations in which such exegesis, much of it initially delivered and later transmitted orally, was eventually preserved. The genre of midrash flourished most dramatically in the land of Israel during the periods of the Tannaitic and Amoraic Sages (70 C.E. to 220 and 220 to 400 C.E., respectively). Important collections of midrashim emerged continually, in diverse settings, from the fifth to the sixteenth centuries, though our knowledge of how or why midrashim were actually generated is extremely sparse (ix).

The earliest Jewish interpreters of Scripture believed that interpretation, written down and preserved, was as important as the original revelation of Torah. Indeed, interpretation was seen as the continuation of revelation, and as long as it was practised the canon of Scripture continued to be dynamic and of vital importance to the community of faith. Interpretation was seen to unlock the secret meaning of the text so that it could be applied to life: without application Torah is dead and so too is the community whose life depends upon the revelation of God in Torah.

Midrash, in its earliest form, existed as inner-Biblical exegesis. Michael Fishbane explains that this exegesis formed part of the authoritative text of Torah. In some cases it is easy to identify the threads of interpretation in the text, but in others it is very difficult to separate original from interpretation: scribal commentary obtrudes into the text and establishes its authority alongside the original. This commentary will insert passages from elsewhere in the Old Testament into the section being interpreted, giving it a new meaning and point of reference. The scribes create what Fishbane calls "a simultaneity of voices ... and they do not cancel each other out" (*Garments of Torah*, 13-14). The

revelation of God in Torah emerges in the interpretation:

Whether aggressive or naive, fully self-conscious or the product of divine inspiration, textual exegeses in the Hebrew Bible oscillate between the authoritatively given lemma and its renovation through syntactic, semantic, or generic manoeuvres. One may say that the entire corpus of Scripture remains open to these invasive procedures and strategic reworkings up to the close of the canon in the early rabbinic period, and so the received text is complexly compacted of teachings and their subversion, of rules and their extension, of topoi and their revision. Within ancient Israel, as long as the textual corpus remained open, Revelation and Tradition were thickly interwoven and interdependent, and the received Hebrew Bible is itself, therefore, the product of an interpretative tradition (*Garments of Torah*, 18).

The shift from the original text to this interpretative tradition involved a "shift to a new historical setting" (Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 408).

This hermeneutical practice was the fore-runner of later extra-Biblical rabbinic exegesis in which two branches of midrash can be identified: legal midrash (*halakkah*) and narrative, non-legal midrash (*aggadah*). The dominant principle of inner-Biblical exegesis is that, in order to have meaning, the text must be actualised, and hence the need to interpret applied just as strongly to later exegesis. A definition of the word *darash* from which *midrash* is derived may be "to give an account of" (Bruns, 628). In interpreting the text for a new socio-historical setting, the rabbis demand that it give an account of itself, that it establish its relevance for a community that is different from the community to which the original law or narrative was revealed. Furthermore, it is only when this new community acts upon Torah as revealed and interpreted that Scripture becomes a living reality; without action it is meaningless. It is the task of midrash "to [mediate] between text and situation" (Bruns, 629), so that the text acquires meaning in the world through being acted upon.

Believing their task to be essential to the life of the community, the rabbis saw significance in every sentence, phrase, word, and letter of Scripture. Nothing was to go uninterpreted and hence the characteristic extravagance of midrash. There was not only one way to interpret but many, because the text possessed a wealth of hermeneutic potential. One rabbi's reading may have been different to another's: text and interpreters were seen to be participants in a dynamic colloquy. Midrash is thus "multiple, heterogeneous, and conflicting ... multiform ... but also holistic as a social practice; no one interpretation stands by itself, because no one rabbi speaks as a solitary reader" (Bruns, 632).

In their zeal to demonstrate the vitality of this social practice, the rabbis may be accused of over-reading. But they are unashamed of hermeneutic extravagance. The text must be actualised, which may call for interpolation, excessive cross-referencing, amplification, and even omission. What is created out of the old story is a new story which reaches far beyond the old and says things that the original never anticipated. These characteristics of midrash make it an attractive hermeneutic tool for modern exegetes, not only in Biblical hermeneutics but in the interpretation of a variety of literary texts.

There are, however, some objections to the use of the term in literary theory. William Scott Green describes midrash as "kaleidoscopic" (164); it turns in upon itself, examining the text from within a conceptually limited and thematically narrow perspective. It is ideologically positioned and makes Scripture entirely self-referential. This characteristic may be demonstrated by

examining a part of "A Midrash on the Last Days"<sup>8</sup> from Vermes's *The Dead*

*Sea Scrolls in English:*

*1... [I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them that they may dwell there and be troubled no more by their] enemies. No son of iniquity [shall afflict them again] as formerly, from the day that [I set judges] over my people Israel (2 Samuel 7:10).*

This is the House which [He built for them in the] last days, as it is written in the book of Moses, *In the sanctuary which Thy hands have established, O Lord, the Lord shall reign for ever and ever* (Exodus 15:17-18). This is the House into which [the unclean shall] never [enter, nor the uncircumcised,] nor the Ammonite, nor the Moabite, nor the half-breed, nor the foreigner, nor the stranger, ever; for there shall My Holy Ones be. [Its glory shall endure] forever; it shall appear above it perpetually. And strangers shall lay it waste no more, as they formerly laid waste the Sanctuary of Israel because of its sin. He has commanded that a Sanctuary of men be built for Himself, that there they may send up, like the smoke of incense, the works of the Law (245-6).

A few points can be noted here: the first is the use of Exodus to explain what is meant by "the House". Similarly, in the rest of the text there are references to Amos, the Psalms, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, all of which are offered as explanations of certain details in the original Samuel passage. Secondly, the phrase "as it is written" precedes the Exodus reference. The same formulaic statement appears before the other cross references. The interpreter cites Scripture against Scripture, keeping the exegesis firmly within certain theological parameters. Thus, while the rabbis seek "to explain the deeper meaning of a biblical text" (Croatto, 49) in this and other midrashim, their meaning is always to be found

---

<sup>8</sup>This midrash is a

collection of texts assembled from 2 Samuel and the Psalter, and combined with other scriptural passages, serves to present the sectarian doctrine identifying the community with the Temple, and to announce the coming of the two Messiahs, the 'Branch of David' and the 'Interpreter of the Law' (Vermes, 245).

within a specific religious discourse. Green objects to the use of the term midrash, arguing that because midrash substantiates one Scripture with another ("as it is written"), it is a closed system of interpretation. At the same time, the phenomenon of *ketiv* and *qere*, meaning that what is *written* is not the same as what is *read*<sup>9</sup>, renders the text linguistically closed. In the light of this then, Green describes midrash as "an exercise ... in the dictation, limitation, and closure of what became a commanding Judaic discourse" (165). While Green is right about the methodology of midrash, he overlooks a point that the rabbinic method of exegesis makes, that the text must be actualised for the community and a certain degree of textual manipulation may be required to bring about this resurrection. Gerald Bruns makes the point that this does not mean, and it did not mean for the rabbis, that one can interpret indiscriminately:

it would make no sense to wonder whether one could "apply" midrashic techniques as a method of literary criticism, say, by interpreting wildly, saying whatever one pleases: saying whatever one pleases is *not* midrash. On the contrary, it would be more true to say that midrash gives us an insight into what interpretation always is (whatever the method) when interpretation *matters* to human life. In hermeneutical terms, midrash shows the historicity of understanding (632).

Kermode describes midrash as "a symbiosis of interpretive and creative writing" (*Genesis of Secrecy*, xii), a process in which "discrepancies and indecencies are eliminated by the invention of romantic narrative" (83). The writer rewrites the story "as a way of finding in an existing narrative the potential of more narrative" (xi). Midrash is not only a mode of interpretation,

---

<sup>9</sup>These terms refer to the practice, in Hebrew, of reading something different from what is written. For example, the word *yhwh* (the name of God), would be read as *adonai* (Lord): the sacredness of God's name renders it unpronounceable.

but a method of storytelling, a dynamic and creative process in which one narrative emerges from the hermeneutic potential of another. Kermode suggests that as this takes place, the new story performs the hermeneutics on the old story, so that consonance between the texts is established as well as "a figural relation of the new to the old" (*Genesis of Secrecy*, 89). In his analysis of the Gospel of Mark, Kermode shows that the writer makes use of Old Testament narratives, names, themes, and laws, but alters these so that they suit the purpose of his narrative. He weaves a story that is an interpretation of an older story, a redefinition of the original revelation, a narrative that his readers will recognize and yet not recognize.

The Old Testament is seen as living on in a new revelation, but a hermeneutical key is required to unlock the door between old and new. Midrash is this key. Its discourse may well be described as closed because of its theological presuppositions and its imperative of finding the meaning of Scripture within Scripture. What matters, however, in this debate, is not so much the end result of the exegesis, but its methodology. Midrashic interpretation is motivated by the need to find meaning in a story for a faith community. This community demands relevance of the story, the discovery of latent meaning beneath the manifest narrative. Kermode suggests that midrash is the "essential illuminant" of the original text and that it "confers an ultimate, unsuspected meaning" (*Genesis of Secrecy*, 86). More than this, it sees within the older narrative the possibility of more narrative, of an ongoing hermeneutical cycle into which the interpreter's imagination is co-opted. The exegete does not simply retell from a new perspective, but creates something unique from the

text of an older narrative.

By aligning midrash and the novel we can say something about the way in which "stories or hints of stories are generated by the art of interpretation; and about the way in which, both in midrash and the novel, the authors address themselves to the new whilst adhering to what has been transmitted to them from the past" (Fisch, 228). Midrash is a term that encapsulates so much of what Eliot does in her fiction: her retelling of Biblical stories is interpretation of old myths as well as creation of new; her narrating devices, aporia and constant return to Biblical motifs resemble midrash's intricate explication of Scripture, as well as its concern to show the ongoing relevance of age-old laws, traditions, and stories.

## Chapter 2

### Prophecy and Art: "The Lifted Veil"

Will Ladislaw in *Middlemarch* explains to Dorothea that

'To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern, that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely ordered variety on the chords of emotion - a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge. One may have that condition by fits only' (2, 22, 256).

Latimer, in "The Lifted Veil", may be Eliot's poet cynic, the darker side of the Will Ladislaws of her fiction.

George Eliot's unusual story is framed by *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*. Eliot interrupted her writing of the latter to produce this story. It is, in many ways, an attempt to define the relationships between art, life, and history and, in this sense, comments on what she had already attempted in *Adam Bede* and what she was doing in *The Mill on the Floss*. The story can also be read as a commentary on all of Eliot's work: her perception of the prophet as artist, her presentation of realism, her interpretation of interpretation, and her subversion of literary conventions dominated by a masculine discourse.

Latimer's story is an interpretive exercise in which he, as narrator, looks back over his life, recalling events and his responses to them, interpreting their meanings. This 'reading' of his life is performed in the light of a prevision of his own death. He hopes to fill up the space between childhood and death

with a story. Before telling the story, Latimer has already seen and communicated the ending of it to his reader: the story of his life will end in death, which is not unlike every other story; we all know that death will be the end of our 'stories', but the difference with Latimer is his foresight of the exact time and day of his demise. His reading begins neither *in medias res* nor at the beginning, but at the end, and in doing so undermines itself. Charles Swann suggests that

Because ordinary temporal and narrative order is so obviously disturbed, the question of why (and how) we read a story is directly raised. We do not read this tale to find out what the ending will be - because we have already been told it. The fact that Latimer ends by writing the sentences he has read so often before ensures that we read the story as being profoundly, if perversely, concerned with the problematics of reading and writing (46).

If Latimer has the gift of prophecy, he is an artist. There is, however, something deeply disturbing about his art and his vision of the world. He is both a reader and a writer, but his reading is undertaken with the knowledge of closure in mind, and his writing begins where it ends: it is unable to transcend the finality of death.

Latimer's prevision, rather than serving as a regenerative force, sours his life, his narrative. Eliot demonstrates that the creative, imaginative power of prophecy is the same power that produces narrative. The artist, like the prophet, understands the world, sees beyond the apparently real and tangible, and has the power to transform what is seen. This is where Latimer, as artist, fails.

Latimer has previsions of events and places, and is able to read minds and predict actions. His foresight is morally debilitating because he despises

people for their petty thoughts and shallow opinions, as well as for their inability to surprise him. They can keep no secrets from him; all is disclosed and only Bertha Grant, whose mind he cannot read, interests him. He falls in love with her because she represents the unknown, the unforeseeable: in his dreary existence she is the only source of mystery, and mystery gives narrative its impetus.

Latimer tells us that as a child he had a period of physical blindness (280) and, as a young man, was plagued by ill health. It is after a bout of illness that he has his first vision, which, he hopes, signifies the birth of the artist in himself. He is overjoyed and reflects on the meaning of the vision:

Was this a dream - this wonderfully distinct vision .... No, it was not a dream; was it - the thought was full of tremulous exultation - was it the poet's nature in me, hitherto only a troubled yearning sensibility, now manifesting itself suddenly as spontaneous creation? .... I believed - I hoped it was a picture that my newly-liberated genius had painted in fiery haste, with the colours snatched from lazy memory (288-89).

These thoughts reveal the tentative hope that he may turn out to be a poet and prove wrong his father's misguided attempts to educate him as a scientist. But his story shows that this is not to be. The poet inside Latimer is lost before any good can come of his visions. Instead his story reads as a tale of despair, darkness, and irredeemable narcissism.

In Latimer's childhood his mother was his only source of security. After her death he recalls that "there were no loving eyes looking at me" (280). This awareness of loss seems to play an important role in his self-conception. Latimer's physical blindness and illness prefigure a moral blindness, despite his visionary gift, and a spiritual illness brought about by his increasing

contempt for people whose petty thoughts he can hear. Also, the loss of the "loving eyes" of his mother suggests the loss of a positive, feminine spiritual influence. Thus, although he can hear "a roar of sound where others find perfect stillness" (301) and has previsions of events, he refers to this strange ability as a "diseased participation in other people's consciousness [that] continued to torment me" (301). Latimer exists in the presence of thoughts that sicken him and he foresees situations which he feels powerless to avert. Indeed, it may be that the visions are a way of projecting his own disillusionment onto the world. The first vision of Prague as a grey, cold city reflects Latimer's own state of mind: the city rises before him first in a vision and then in reality, as an image of his own disenchantment.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the visions of his brother's death, the horror of his marriage to Bertha, and, finally, his own death emanate from a consciousness that moves towards the inevitability of sorrow and death with morbid resignation. His foresight does not save him or turn him aside from a course of action: he foresees the failure of his marriage to Bertha, but marries her anyway.

Eliot presents a visionary whose prophetic gift, rather than being transformative, is destructive. Deprived of love and the influence of his mother, and dominated by a father who is contemptuous of his son's sensitivity and "poetic nonsense" (309), Latimer cannot find personal happiness, nor indeed seems to believe in or want such a state. Contemplating his past,

---

<sup>10</sup>Lance St John Butler suggests that the description of Prague with its "surviving withered remnant of mediaeval Judaism" and the "darkened, dusty, Christian Saints" lies at "the core of George Eliot's view of the religion in which she was brought up .... Judaism is a darkened, even hellish religion, a Carlylean 'death-in-life', with Christianity little better" (77).

the adult Latimer thinks, "I believe I was thought to have a half-womanish, half-ghostly beauty" and that "I thoroughly disliked my own *physique*" (295). He is uncomfortable with his physicality because it represents the side of him that alienates him from his father. What appears feminine in his nature is, ironically, a part of himself that is a constant reminder of a lost mother.

Feuerbach, whose influence on Eliot we see time and again, considers the idea of a feminine personality participating in the Godhead. He has in mind the Catholic doctrine of the Virgin Mary, one which he affirms but reinterprets:

the idea of the Mother of God, which now appears so strange to us, is therefore not really more strange or paradoxical, than the idea of the Son of God .... the Virgin Mary fits in perfectly with the relations of the Trinity, since she conceives without man the Son whom the Father begets without woman (70-1).

He argues that the Son, who cannot exist without the Mother, displays "the womanly sentiment of God" and "implicitly urges upon us the need of a real feminine being" (71). This need expresses itself in love between mother and son, and the love between man and woman:

The love of the son to the mother is the first love of the masculine being for the feminine. The love of man to woman, the love of the youth for the maiden, receives its religious - its sole truly religious consecration in the love of the son to the mother; the son's love for his mother is the first yearning of man towards woman - his first humbling of himself before her (71).<sup>11</sup>

Feuerbach's theology is carefully translated into anthropology and functions, in places, as a model for human sexuality in its complexity. Feuerbach sets up a paradigm in which divinity is expressed in the human psyche: the relationship

---

<sup>11</sup>This exploration of human sexuality anticipates Freud's Oedipus Triangle.

between Father, Son, and Holy Mother is seen as a the desire for interdependence and meaningful relationship. The description of the Godhead illustrates human thinking about human sexuality. The absence of the mother, the feminine, suggests incompleteness, not only in Feuerbach's scheme, but also in Eliot's. Incompleteness, in turn, suggests shortsightedness, or, in Latimer's case, egoism. If the masculine mythos alone defines the world of the artist, then something vital is absent.

Latimer's relationship with Bertha is an attempt to recreate the lost relationship between mother and child. He is physically and emotionally attracted to Bertha. Her response to his attraction is patronising, an attitude which is not lost on Latimer: "I believe she must inwardly have delighted in the tremors into which she threw me by the coaxing way in which she patted my curls" (299). Her behaviour towards him resembles his mother's treatment of Latimer the child: "I had a tender mother: even now, after the dreary lapse of long years, a slight trace of sensation accompanies the remembrance of her caress as she held me on her knee" (280).

When the veil is finally lifted on Bertha's thoughts it is a

terrible moment of complete illumination ... the darkness had hidden no landscape from me, but only a blank prosaic wall: from that evening forth, through the sickening years which followed, I saw all round the narrow room of this woman's soul (323).

He feels passion for Bertha, which is at the same time a subconscious longing for his mother, but knows that his visions of her have a horrifying inevitability. The lifting of the veil on Bertha's soul, the last mystery in Latimer's life, constitutes the final and complete destruction of faith. The unknown is known: the narrative of Bertha's life is laid bare in all its prosaic banality. The 'veil' of

interpretation which sustains desire is removed, and nothing remains to Latimer but despair, and the awful wait for death.

All of this is overshadowed by Latimer's sense of inadequacy. His father's thoughts, which he hears, constantly remind him that "'That lad will never be good for anything in life'" (311). The poetic sensibility which seems about to come to fruition after Latimer's first vision is never nurtured by love and is overpowered by a lack of faith. The result is that Latimer's active imagination turns in upon itself and begins to die a slow death; knowledge of the world disintegrates into solipsism.

In this story, Eliot's exploration of the visionary is marked by a negative statement: Latimer is not a true prophet because he does not foresee relationships transformed, but further diseased and ultimately destroyed. The epigraph reads:

Give me no light, great Heaven, but such as turns  
To energy of human fellowship;  
No powers beyond the growing heritage  
That makes completer manhood (276).

Latimer's "light" is the pale shadow of death: the story begins and ends with his anticipation of his own demise. The power that he possesses alienates him from human fellowship and reduces him to a diseased and disillusioned cynic.

Latimer's inability to accept himself contributes to the stagnation of his prophetic gift. His apparently 'feminine' qualities make his father and brother intolerant of him. The education that his father gives him is an attempt to make him an "improved man" (283) but he knows that he will never live up to his father's expectations. His fascination with Bertha Grant is a passion for the feminine unknown that he has never been allowed to explore in his own

nature, the mother who was taken from him at an early age and whom he could never fully know. This is at the heart of his attraction for Bertha until the veil is lifted and he realizes that she hates him. This devastating revelation is, ironically, no surprise to him, for he has had a vision:

Behind the slim girl Bertha, whose words and looks I watched for, whose touch was bliss, there stood continually that Bertha with the fuller form, the harder eyes, the more rigid mouth, - with the barren selfish soul laid bare; no longer a fascinating secret, but a measured fact, urging itself perpetually on my unwilling sight (306-7).

His perception of Bertha is a delusion, and one which brings his perceived visionary gift into question. The "narrow room of her soul" is also the narrowness of his own soul. Latimer does not love Bertha, he loves an ideal of Bertha, the unconscious vision of his mother, the ideal woman. He loves in her the hope of finding a love which he lost in childhood, a love which is always overshadowed by the knowledge of death. His mother's death is the beginning of his own death. His loss of her signals the loss of his ability to see the world in any positive light. Normally Eliot would evoke sympathy for any of her characters who have suffered terrible loss and sadness, but in Latimer's case, the reader is repulsed by his cynicism. The childhood sadness is the beginning of the end, and Latimer's vision embraces this finality, unable to escape from it.

The reader is well prepared for the disclosure of Bertha's intentions to kill Latimer. All the characters that we have met through his diseased perceptions are shallow and selfish, except for Charles Meunier. We are not surprised to discover that Bertha cannot bear the sight of the man she has married. And yet, his most terrifying vision of her is only partly fulfilled. Before his marriage, Latimer sees Bertha before him as his wife. She is dressed

in white and has a glittering green serpent brooch on her breast. Her thoughts are "Madman, idiot! Why don't you kill yourself, then?" (304). When the vision seems about to come true, however, Latimer cannot read these thoughts in her mind. He tells us that as she stood before him in her white gown with her green jewellery, he could not read her mind:

I saw nothing in Bertha's mind, as she stood before me, except scorn for the look of overwhelming misery with which I sat before her .... "Fool, idiot, why don't you kill yourself, then?" - that was her thought. But at length her thoughts reverted to her errand, and she spoke aloud (327).

For the first time, we do not trust Latimer's vision, and, as his ellipsis and pause indicate, he does not trust his own recollection of the scene. He imposes the thought from his own vision on to Bertha's mind; there is in fact nothing that he can read there - "I saw nothing in Bertha's mind" is contradicted by "that was her thought". At this point, we may be forgiven for suspecting the narrator of bad faith, and for wondering whose thoughts we are reading: Bertha's or Latimer's? Are the terrifying visions, the irritating, trivial thoughts that he can hear, real or imagined? Why are his characters presented so completely without any compassion, why is every thought he hears a shallow one, and every gesture he reads affected? The story begins and ends with the contemplation of death, and throughout, the narrator anticipates chaos and evil. His visions, far from being true visions of life, are a death wish. He marries Bertha, knowing that her friendship will turn to hatred, because it is death for which he longs. The loss of the "loving eyes" of the mother, and the failure to find the replacement for this love in Bertha, make life intolerable for Latimer. He moves towards death agonizingly: "All that was personal in me

seemed to be suffering a gradual death ... It was as if the relation between me and my fellow-men was more and more deadened" (329). He loses all faith: "to the utterly miserable - the unloving and the unloved - there is no religion possible, no worship but a worship of devils" (330). Latimer's intensely pessimistic vision of the world does not, ultimately, invite sympathy. In telling his story, he betrays his egoism and chauvinism, both of which impose interpretations of the world on the unwilling listener. Eliot's hopes of communion, interdependence, faith, and the realization of the divine within the human consciousness, are mocked by Latimer's ghoulish tale.

Yet something which Latimer defines as "the one Unknown Presence revealed and yet hidden by the moving curtain of the earth and sky" (340) remains. The "Unknown Presence" may be the only thing that redeems Latimer's story, for as long as there is the slightest hope of the unknown, then there is still space for interpretation: the narrative will continue to live in countless readings and rereadings.

The deliberate departure from realism, or the "abandonment of conventional narrative" (Swann, Charles, 54) saves Eliot's story, and indeed her moral philosophy, which seems to have been sacrificed to Latimer's bleak view of the world. Swann suggests that Eliot's ghosts, "which are shadowy presences in the rest of Eliot's fiction, pushed back into the darkness unless the daylight of her usually fictional world should be fatally threatened", (56) are given the freedom of the narrative in "The Lifted Veil". The story, with its elements of the supernatural and its bizarre scientific experiment to bring back Bertha's maid from death, is so obviously a fiction that Eliot can risk her frightening

exploration of the darkness on the other side of the text.

The prophet in Eliot's fiction is an artist, a poet, a reader and interpreter of stories. Eliot explores prophecy as an instrument for the transformation of society, beginning with a statement of the negative: Latimer's prophecies bring alienation and death. True prophecy confronts the terrible shortcomings of human nature, but goes on to offer a new vision of the world that will energise society and renew fellow-feeling. True prophecy also fuses the masculine and feminine: it envisions wholeness and freedom. Latimer, deeply hurt by the death of his mother can never come to terms with the feminine: it is lost to him, and its absence has contributed to his alienation. The disappointment of lost love informs his vision of the world and humanity in general, and his idea of women in particular. The mysterious, beautiful Bertha who reminds Latimer of a Water-Nixie (291), is the embodiment of his disillusionment with women which began at that terrible moment when his mother left him.

Feuerbach's hypothesis is that

Where the Son is, the Mother cannot be absent .... To the Son, the Mother is indispensable; the heart of the Son is the heart of the Mother .... the Son is the yearning after the mother, because his womanly, tender heart found a corresponding expression only in a feminine body[?] .... The highest and deepest love is the mother's love (71-2).

Latimer's life is a living death because he mourns the loss of this feminine element. It is perhaps this notion of the feminine in the Godhead as described by Feuerbach that informs Eliot's midrashim in which she creates feminine prophets, priests, and Messiahs.

The resemblance of Eliot's protagonists, her prophets, priests, and Messiahs, to Biblical figures is a striking feature of her fiction. Eliot's departure

from archetype, and her evocation of characters and situations in a deliberate reworking of source material strikes me as crucial in the task of understanding her narrative project. The similarities make the differences more profound and the reinterpretation of a religious mythology more meaningful. Eliot is fascinated with Biblical characters because they stand between two worlds: the known, material world, and the partially known, spiritual world. These intermediaries are also "being[s] of the imagination" (Feuerbach, 81), in touch with a spiritual plane, and interpreting human experience.

Her stories may be read as midrashim because they always return to the text from which they first emerge. They may be called subversive because they radically reinterpret that text.

They are reinterpretations partly because they reintroduce the feminine as a major player in the spiritual drama, but also because they depart from the strictly religious and provide a secular vision of society, one in which there is no God but the god of human imagination and creativity, Feuerbach's notion of God: "Religion is human nature reflected, mirrored in itself .... God is the mirror of man" (63). This 'secular religion' hopes for the triumph of fellow-feeling over dogma.

"The Lifted Veil" initiates this discussion because it is Eliot's 'other' prophetic voice that speaks, the voice of the prophet trapped in solipsism, the poet disillusioned about the delusions of life and art, unable to come to terms with the feminine, the other, and therefore unable to see light, freedom, or fellow-feeling, those qualities towards which her other works aspire.

## Chapter 3

### The Feminine Christ in *Adam Bede*

Eliot's fascination with prophecy seems to have had its roots in the Evangelical fervour of her youth when she showed a keen interest in the interpretations of the Book of Revelation that were popular in the nineteenth century. She planned to draw up a prophetic chart showing the scheme of history according to the Book of Revelation (Haight, 24), but abandoned this project when she realized that there were many of these charts in circulation at the time. Nevertheless, her letters and notebooks point to an ongoing interest in this subject.

Eliot stopped attending church in 1842 (Haight, 32-36) and immersed herself in the study of German Higher Criticism of the Bible which provided her with ideas that were to inform all of her fiction. In 1840 she translated Strauss's enormously influential *Das Leben Jesu*, but two works published in England, reflecting the German influence, were also of major significance for her intellectual development. These were Charles Hennell's *An Enquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* which she read in 1842 and Robert Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect* which she reviewed in 1851. Eliot greatly admired Mackay's work which propounded the thesis, already found in German Higher Criticism, that certain parts of the Old Testament have a mythical dimension and that the Hebrew religion had its roots in the other

religions of Arabia, Palestine, and Phoenicia. Strauss confirmed for her the idea that all religions have their myths and argues that Christ is an expression of the human longing for the divine:

Humanity is the union of the two natures - God become man, the infinite manifesting itself in the finite, and the finite spirit remembering its infinitude; it is the child of the visible Mother and the invisible Father, Nature and Spirit .... It is Humanity that dies, rises, and ascends to heaven, for from the negation of its phenomenal life there ever proceeds a higher spiritual life .... By faith in this Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, man is justified before God; that is, by the kindling within him of the idea of Humanity, the individual man participates in the divinely human life of the species (780).

Eliot, reading this, can reject Christianity but maintain a faith in the value of religion and the idea of the communion of human souls in an infinite relationship of love. In this relationship, the imagination plays an important role in mediating between the world and humanity and between the infinite and the human soul.<sup>12</sup>

Another important influence was the work of Ludwig Feuerbach. She translated his *Das Wesen des Christentums* in 1854. Feuerbach describes the role of the imagination in religion:

---

<sup>12</sup>In a letter to François Albert-Durade in 1859, Eliot explained, Ten years of experience have wrought great changes in that inward self: I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves; on the contrary, I have a sympathy with it that predominates over all argumentative tendencies. I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity - to the acceptance of any set of doctrines as a creed, and a superhuman revelation of the Unseen - but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind, and I have the profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all ages .... my most rooted conviction is, that the immediate object and the proper sphere of all our highest emotions are our struggling fellow-men and this earthly existence (*Letters*, vol 3, 231).

It is the imagination alone by which man neutralises the opposition between God and the world. All religious cosmogonies are products of the imagination. Every Being, intermediate between God and the world, let it be defined how it may, is a being of the imagination. The psychological truth and necessity which lies at the foundation of all these theogonies and cosmogonies is the truth and necessity of the imagination as a middle term between the abstract and the concrete (Feuerbach, 80-1).

The imagination creates religious cosmogonies. All faiths and mythologies have saints, martyrs, redeemers and prophets who are the visionaries of religion, the intermediaries between God and the world. Eliot, fascinated in particular with the mythologies of Judaism and Christianity, transposes, and often subverts, the archetypes of these faiths to describe her Religion of Humanity.

Eliot is fascinated with Biblical and religious archetypes<sup>13</sup> because they are intermediaries between the finite and the infinite. They offer insight into a mysterious dimension beyond the known and, like Feuerbach's Christ, provide a bridge to the world of the imagination and feeling:

Christ alone is the personal God; he is the real God of Christians, a truth which cannot be too often repeated. In him alone is concentrated the Christian religion, the essence of religion in general. He alone meets the longing for a personal God; he alone is an existence identical with the nature of feeling; on him alone are heaped all the joys of the imagination, and all the sufferings of the heart, in him alone are feeling and imagination exhausted. Christ is the blending in one of feeling and imagination (Feuerbach, 148).

If these intermediaries are to be true prophets or truly Christ-like they must translate their intuition of another, greater world into the love of this

---

<sup>13</sup>Jung's notion of archetype may be defined as "typical human experience". Anthony Storr distinguishes between Jung's archetypes, and a more general use of the term as referring to "a situation, a figure or image, or to an idea of symbolic significance" (*Jung*, 41). It is the latter that I have in mind when using this term.

world; they must be transformed by their knowledge, and their knowledge must transform.

In an essay, "Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming", published in the *Westminster Review* in 1855, Eliot reviews the fundamentalist millenarian interpretations of Biblical prophecy by the evangelical Dr Cumming. She criticizes his methodology and his style but his chief crime, for Eliot, is that his interpretations demonstrate "the *absence of genuine charity*" (*Selected Essays*, 58). She argues that his works will not produce spirituality but

are more likely to nourish egoistic complacency and pretension, a hard and condemnatory spirit towards one's fellow-men, and a busy occupation with the minutiae of events, instead of a reverent contemplation of great facts and a wise application of great principles (60).

In Eliot's religious framework, then, religious teaching in the mouth of one who places dogma above fellow-feeling is anathema.

For Eliot, as for many critics and writers who were influenced by German Higher Criticism, prophecy was not to be narrowed down to specific forecasts of world events before and after the advent of Christ. After her religious conversion and her study of Hennell, Spinoza, and Strauss, Eliot no longer believed in the divine inspiration of the prophets. Instead, prophecy came to embody for her an imaginative way of seeing the world and humankind, a way of understanding society. The prophet, and similarly the figure of Christ, resemble the poet, visionaries whose insights provide an alternative to the current order of things in the material world and whose oracular powers expose the hollowness and oppressiveness of the status quo.

Thus, Eliot borrows names, prophetic language, and apocalyptic imagery

from the Bible to create prophets, prophecies, and Messianic or Christ-like figures that are radical reinterpretations of traditional and familiar characters and images, as well as subversions of archetypes. She not only wishes to demonstrate the importance of human communion, but she has another concern that struggles to take shape in her novels: her reinterpretations are a demonstration of the way in which the feminine prophetic voice has been silenced and the potentially redemptive power of feminine values has been subsumed by a male discourse. Her subversive midrashim give voice to the prophetess who has a new message for humanity. Ironically, the strongly patriarchal Jewish religious tradition and its offspring, Christianity, provide the material for these secular midrashim which return again and again to their original sources, each return signalling the beginning of a new movement away from the centre of a discourse constructed by a masculine domination of society.

This chapter explores Eliot's prophetic and Messianic characters, and their visions of the world in *Adam Bede*. It demonstrates how Eliot tentatively begins her search for an alternative, prophetic vision of society, an endeavour which comes to fruition in what was to be her greatest midrash and her last novel. It also shows how she subverts traditional readings of Biblical texts to invoke a new reality and a new religious discourse.

In *George Eliot's Mythmaking*, Joseph Wiesenfarth discusses Eliot's use of Greek and Biblical mythology. He suggests that Adam Bede is "likened to Prometheus by his action and his suffering" (81), but that he is also the Adam of the Genesis myth who "becomes closely associated with Jesus" (89). He

argues that this comparison allows Eliot to show the natural development in Dinah's character: because Adam is a type of Christ it makes sense that in the end Dinah should not need to distinguish between her love for Adam and her love for Christ. She is the "bride of Christ", therefore her ultimate fulfilment must come from her union with Adam: "Dinah comes to see that she has in her heart what other women have in theirs and in this way she finds a fuller life and a more profound fellow-feeling in the love of a man" (91). Wiesenfarth shows that Dinah is likened to the angel seated on the tombstone of the resurrected Christ (90) and to Rachel for whom Adam, like Jacob in the Old Testament, must work: "just as Jacob finds the blessing of his labors in finally winning Rachel, Adam finds his in finally winning Dinah" (93). Wiesenfarth demonstrates that the wedding at the end of the novel is a fitting finale to an inevitable love. It would seem, however, that the end of the novel is Eliot's capitulation to a male discourse: Adam becomes the patriarch, Dinah, forbidden to go on preaching, is the submissive wife, the bride of Christ. Mary Wilson Carpenter argues that Eliot is demonstrating a "prophetic martyrdom" (*Landscape of Time*, 35) at work in the text. She reads the ending of the novel as an affirmation of the silencing of women, but also points out that the narrative is ambiguous and duplicitous, and that it is deconstructed by its "hidden hermeneutic structure" (*Landscape of time*, 53).<sup>14</sup> The narrative cannot be

---

<sup>14</sup>Carpenter demonstrates that this "hidden hermeneutic structure" is located in readings from the Anglican Lectionary. She shows that the date of each significant event in the novel links it to a specific Anglican feast day and that therefore each event can be interpreted through the Biblical passages set for that day in the Lectionary. Thus, the novel may be read on two different levels, and this double-reading creates a tension and illustrates "the continuing difficulty of reading" (*Landscape of time*, 53).

trusted, therefore Eliot's apparent silencing of the feminine prophetic voice may also be read as a denunciation, and not a condoning, of the ban on women preaching.

I would like to go a step further than both Wiesenfarth and Carpenter and show that while Dinah Morris does indeed resemble prophets of the Old and New Testaments, she is also a priestess and Christ figure. She resembles the Jesus of the Gospels in her outdoor preaching, her ministry to the poor and sick, and her moments of solitary prayer (1, 15, 202). She is associated with the Christ of the resurrection through her appearance: "covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love" (1, 15, 204); and Adam's vision of Dinah's face represents "a resurrection of his dead joy" (6, 51, 545). She is also described as a "pictured Madonna" (326), and, in her attitude to Hetty, Dinah appears as priest-confessor and redeemer. Hetty denies her crime until confronted by Dinah who represents God's mercy: "... the pitying love that shone out from Dinah's face looked like a visible pledge of the Invisible Mercy" (5, 46, 505). Dinah emerges as stronger than Adam in the face of Hetty's terrible suffering. One might interpret Adam's struggle to visit Hetty in prison as his reluctance finally to bid goodbye to Hetty and to accept the death of the woman he has loved; but there is another aspect to Adam's suffering. Adam cannot visit Hetty because she is no longer, for him, the Hetty that he loved. She may resemble Hetty but "she was that Hetty's corpse, which he had trembled to look at the first time" (5, 43, 477). When he shares his grief with Bartle Massey he seems unable to

mention Hetty's name and when he finally visits her in prison he is struck by the resemblance of her eyes to the eyes of the Hetty he has loved: "... the eyes - O! the worst of all was the likeness they had to Hetty's. They were Hetty's looking at him with that mournful gaze as if she had come back to him from the dead to tell him of her misery" (5, 46, 505). The Hetty he has loved is dead to him, the living Hetty is only a reminder of her. It is not Hetty's death that Adam cannot accept, but the disintegration of an idealised vision of the feminine. Hetty is not the beautiful and innocent creature that he thought her to be. The real Hetty, with her shortcomings, is beyond his reach. Adam fails Hetty terribly and the final sign of this failure comes when he leaves the prison while Bartle Massey, the confirmed misogynist, displays more compassion and stays "to watch and see the end" (5, 46, 506). Adam's failure is Dinah's triumph. She suffers with Hetty, hears her confession, and goes with her to the gallows. She, rather than Adam, is the hero.

The narrator twice mentions Adam sitting in his "upper room" awaiting the verdict of Hetty's trial (5, 41, 466 and 5, 42, 471). Dinah visits Adam in this room and during her visit Bartle Massey "seemed transfixed, examining Dinah's face" (5, 46, 501). The Gospel of John records that after Jesus's crucifixion the disciples were gathered behind closed doors "for fear of the Jews", when Jesus appeared to them and comforted them (John 20:19-23).<sup>15</sup> Dinah, having come from Hetty's cell, which is like a tomb, as Jesus had come back from the grave, visits Adam to comfort him and ask him to come and see Hetty. The narrator of The Acts of the Apostles records that when the apostles

---

<sup>15</sup>All Biblical references are to the Authorised Version.

were gathered one morning in an upper room, they were visited by the Holy Spirit in the form of a rushing wind and tongues of fire (Acts 1:13; 2:3,4). This visitation, a baptism in fire, renews the apostles and marks the beginning of the establishment of a Christian community in Jerusalem. Adam's wrestling with Hetty's fate is described as a baptism:

Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. The yearning memories, the bitter regret, the agonised sympathy, the struggling appeals to the Invisible Right - all the intense emotions which had filled the days and nights of the past week, and were compressing themselves again like an eager crowd into the hours of this single morning .... Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity (5, 42, 471-2).

Dinah's visit to Adam therefore recalls two other visits: that of Jesus to his disheartened disciples, and that of the Holy Spirit in the form of fire to the apostles in the upper room. Like the Jesus of the Gospel who simply "stood in the midst of them" (Luke 24:36) though the doors were locked, Dinah enters quietly, transfixes Bartle and Adam with her appearance and before Bartle can reach the door to let her out she "was gone, with her light step, down the stairs" (5, 46, 503). Dinah's presence always suggests spiritual power. When she is not likened to a Madonna, she is compared to an angel by the other characters, and to Christ and the Holy Spirit by the narrator.

In her struggle against the "temptation" of loving Adam, Dinah resembles Christ in Gethsemane. After Hetty's trial she leaves the Bede home and, looking back at it, she prays a prayer that echoes the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane. He prays that his disciples will know joy and be kept from evil (John 17:1-26) and that he will do only God's will: "... nevertheless, not my will,

but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). Dinah prays:

'Make them glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted them, and the years wherein they have seen evil. It is thy will that I should part from them; let me have no will but thine' (6, 51, 539).

Again, when confronted with Adam's confession of love, Dinah tells him "I am not seeking my own will in going" (6, 52, 551), and "I must wrestle against that as a great temptation" (6, 52, 553). Dinah perceives her attraction to Adam as a potential disrupter of her communion with God, something that she must repress in order to be free to do the work she believes she is called to do, work which is both sacrificial and redemptive.

While Dinah is Jesus, Hetty, her *doppelgänger*, resembles the Eve of the Genesis story, whose fate, however, seems worse than Eve's. Hetty is tempted by Arthur Donnithorne as Eve is tempted by the serpent, and then, as Dianne Sadoff suggests, "Like Eve, she tempts Adam, who achieves a complex and ironic education in sexual knowledge and deception" (422). Eve is cast out of Paradise along with Adam to begin a life of wandering and hardship (Genesis 3:23). Hetty, after her liaison with Arthur in the oak grove, falls pregnant, and in her fear and shame sets out on a journey that will take her through despair to the brink of suicide. The oak grove is a kind of Eden which also has in it the beech tree that Adam later regards as "the boundary mark of his youth - the sign, to him, of the time when some of his earliest, strongest feelings had left him" (509-10). The Edenic grove is the place where innocence gives way to experience.

Hetty's life seems to bear the curse of the first Eve but, unlike her, she is denied the comfort of children and the companionship of Adam. Her

banishment from Paradise is reflected in her transportation; she is alienated from all loving companions. Arthur Donnithorne obtains a reprieve for Hetty, but it comes too late for her. The description of Arthur bringing the reprieve seems an attempt on Eliot's part to rescue Hetty at "the last moment". The melodrama of the episode, narrated in the present tense, reveals Eliot's uncertainty about this rescue:

The horse is hot and distressed, but answers to the desperate spurring; the rider looks as if his eyes were glazed by madness, and he saw nothing but what was unseen by others. See, he has something in his hand - he is holding it up as if it were a signal.

The sheriff knows him: it is Arthur Donnithorne, carrying in his hand the hard-won release from death (5, 47, 507).

Hetty's fate is worse than death: a life of exile and loneliness. It would seem that, after her trial, the narrator abandons Hetty. Adam and Dinah marry and have children; the Poysers go on farming, life continues as before, while Hetty remains the wanderer. Her suffering, however, seems to have been keenly felt by Arthur Donnithorne who returns to Hayslope years later, a much-changed man. He tells Adam:

'I could never do anything for her, Adam - she lived long enough for all the suffering - and I'd thought so of the time when I might do something for her. But you told me the truth when you said to me once, "There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for" (Epilogue, 584).

Hetty is a forsaken Eve. She may have obtained the forgiveness of Adam and unwittingly brought about a change of heart in Arthur Donnithorne, but not even Dinah's love can save her. She remains under a curse, like the curse on Eve (Genesis 3:15), and is doomed to a life of exile. Her unhappiness serves to undermine the happy ending of the novel and her transportation parallels the silencing of Dinah. Mary Wilson Carpenter points out that on other occasions,

Dinah and Hetty are identified with each other: they set out on their journeys on the same day, Mrs Poyser sees Hetty's resemblance in Dinah's face, and Dinah writes herself into Hetty's narrative when she remains with her in the jail, suffering with her, and accompanying her in the death cart to the gallows (*Landscape of time*, 52). Carpenter suggests that "Dinah shares Hetty's fate, is written into her history" (*Landscape of Time*, 51).

The connection between Hetty and Dinah is especially interesting when one considers the ways in which they are contrasted. Dinah, as we have seen, is associated with spirituality and purity. She is always described in terms of her spiritual presence. The long description of her in chapter 2 suggests that her religious life has clothed her physical being in simplicity and saintliness. The face is the face of a Madonna. The extract is long but worth exploring in some detail:

She held no book in her ungloved hands, but let them hang down lightly crossed before her, as she stood and turned her grey eyes on the people. There was no keenness in the eyes; they seemed rather to be shedding love than making observations; they had the liquid look which tells that the mind is full of what it has to give out, rather than impressed by external objects. She stood with her left hand toward the descending sun; and leafy boughs screened her from its rays; but in this sober light the delicate colouring of her face seemed to gather a calm vividness, like flowers at evening. It was a small oval face, of a uniform transparent whiteness, with an eagle-like line of cheek and chin, a full but firm mouth, a delicate nostril, and a low perpendicular brow, surmounted by a rising arch of parting, between smooth locks of pale reddish hair, The hair was drawn straight back behind the ears, and covered, except for an inch or two above the brow, by a net quaker cap. The eyebrows, of the same colour as the hair, were perfectly horizontal and firmly pencilled; the eyelashes, though no darker, were long and abundant; nothing was left blurred or unfinished. It was one of those face that make one think of white flowers with light touches of colour on their pure petals. The eyes had no peculiar beauty, beyond that of expression; they looked so simple, so candid, so gravely loving, that no accusing scowl, no

light sneer, could help melting away before their glance (1, 2, 67).

Everything about Dinah suggests light, gentleness, and self-restraint. The sun, the transparency of her face, her pale hair, and the comparison of her face to "white flowers" suggest a spiritual aura which is strong but not overpowering. She is delicate but not without strength, as suggested by the "eagle-like line of cheek and chin". As Dinah preaches her listeners are drawn to her voice and quiet fervour. These qualities make for a relationship between Dinah and Adam which is profoundly different to Adam's relationship with Hetty. When they begin courting, Dinah's calm spiritual influence restores Adam's joy. When he realizes the strength of his feelings, Adam "ha[s] no more doubt or hesitation as to his own wishes than the bird that flies towards the opening through which the daylight gleams and the breath of heaven enters". Dinah is strongly connected to Adam's memories of Hetty, and he feels that he is giving these memories "a new sacredness by loving her" (6, 51, 546). Again, Dinah is associated with light and spirituality. Her fight against her feelings for Adam is a struggle with her own sexual longings. They are in conflict with her relationship with God. When she refuses Adam's first offer of marriage she tells him that "We are sometimes required to lay our natural, lawful affections on the altar"(6, 52, 554). Wesley's Methodism was strongly puritanical, and its teaching warned especially against sexual passions. The language of religious devotion was, however, very sexual and the relationship with Christ, was frequently described in quasi-erotic language (Widdowson, 25). Dinah often speaks of the longing she has for God, the intense desire to perform his will, the satisfaction of God's love.

Hetty, on the other hand, is described in very different terms. The contrast between the two women is suggested by the kinds of work that they do. While Dinah sits "a-sewing" (1, 6, 121) in the kitchen of the Hall Farm when Arthur Donnithorne comes visiting, Hetty is in the dairy making butter. Captain Donnithorne ignores Dinah but is very curious to see Hetty as butter-making shows her to great advantage. The language describing Hetty's chores and her appearance is sensual:

And they are the prettiest attitudes and movements into which a pretty girl is thrown in making up butter - tossing movements that give a charming curve to the arm, and a sideward inclination of the round white neck; little patting and rolling movements with the palm of the hand, and nice adaptations and finishings which cannot at all be effected without a great play of the pouting mouth and the dark eyes. And then the butter itself seems to communicate a fresh charm - it is so pure, so sweet-scented; it is turned off the mould with such a beautiful firm surface, like marble in a pale yellow light! (1, 7, 129).

When Arthur Donnithorne enters the dairy with its "soft colouring of red earthenware and creamy surfaces, brown wood and polished tin, grey limestone and rich orange-red dust on the iron weights and hooks and hinges" (1, 7, 127), Hetty is "half-shy, half-coquettish" (1, 7, 129). Elsewhere Hetty is described as a "tropic bird" (1, 12, 175), and she has "the luxurious nature of a round, soft-coated pet animal" (5, 37, 425). Dinah's attire is always simple and demure, while Hetty dresses to draw attention to her voluptuous figure.

The contrast between the two is most apparent in the chapter entitled "The Two Bed-Chambers", and the juxtaposition of images in this chapter strengthens the impression that Hetty is Dinah's *doppelgänger*. While Dinah prays, Hetty dresses herself up and admires her reflection in the mirror, imagining the pleasure of being married to Captain Donnithorne. The narrator

describes the impression that Hetty might make on any man:

Ah, what a prize the man gets who wins a sweet bride like Hetty! .... The dear young, round, soft, flexible thing .... the little darling is so fond of him, her little vanities are so bewitching ... those kitten-like glances are just what one wants to make one's hearth a paradise (1, 15, 197).

Meanwhile, Dinah prays and meditates, and the eroticism of the language describing her prayer is finely presented:

She closed her eyes, that she might feel more intensely the presence of a Love and Sympathy deeper and more tender than was breathed from the earth and sky. That was often Dinah's mode of praying in solitude. Simple to close her eyes, and to feel herself enclosed by the Divine Presence; then gradually her fears, yearning anxieties for others, melted away like ice-crystals in a warm ocean (1, 15, 202).

Dianne Sadoff sees this connection between Hetty and Dinah as "a play of differences which implies, which approaches similarity" (421).

Later, when Hetty dresses up to look like Dinah, her resemblance to Dinah causes Mrs Poyser to drop a stone jug and exclaim, "Whatever do you mean by coming down i' that way, and making one think as there's a ghost a-walking i' th' house?" (2, 20, 273). But this incident also underlines the differences between the two:

The thought of Dinah's pale grave face and mild grey eyes, which the sight of the gown and cap brought with it, made it a laughable surprise enough to see them replaced by Hetty's round rosy cheeks and coquettish dark eyes (2, 20, 273-4).

The connection between Hetty and Dinah seems to end when Hetty is sent away, and her eventual death suggests the finality of their separation as well as Dinah's powerlessness, ultimately, to save her. But the severance is only physical: a new decree in the Methodist church bans women preachers, and this silencing of Dinah reestablishes the connection between her and Hetty.

Both are victims of an oppressive patriarchal system: Dinah because she is forbidden to go on preaching, Hetty because she cannot reveal her pregnancy to anyone and is driven to abandon her child. Neither Arthur Donnithorne nor Adam fulfils his responsibility to Hetty; she faces her horror utterly alone. Eliot has re-created two Biblical figures but has told their stories from a new perspective. Dinah, as Jesus, lacks his ability to redeem truly, not because she is weak but because society and the Methodist Church rob her of her power. She is the visionary who is denied the opportunity of imparting her vision to the world. Hetty, who relives Eve's temptation, betrayal, and banishment, is punished for the very things that make her human. The Eve of Genesis, who is also punished, becomes the archetypal mother while Hetty murders motherhood when she is driven to abandon her baby. Dinah and Hetty are trapped in a discourse from which Eliot, for the moment, sees no escape.

Adam collaborates in the silencing of women, and the end of the novel reflects his attitude to women but also illustrates Eliot's dilemma about her own narrative voice. We are told that Adam is Lisbeth Bede's favourite son. There is also a strong physical resemblance between them: "For Lisbeth is tall, and in other points too there is a strong likeness between her and her son Adam .... There is the same type of frame and the same keen activity of temperament in mother and son" (1, 4, 83). Yet, despite their similarities, Adam is frequently intolerant of his mother, displaying anger and displeasure towards her on several occasions. When he returns home to discover that his father has not completed a coffin that has been commissioned, he takes his anger out on Lisbeth. She shows motherly concern for him but he rejects her

sympathy and her offer of supper. He is kinder to Gyp the dog, and the narrator's voice interjects to comment on this behaviour:

Adam noticed Gyp's mental conflict, and though his anger had made him less tender than usual to his mother, it did not prevent him from caring as much as usual for his dog. We are apt to be kinder to the brutes that love us than to the women that love us. Is it because the brutes are dumb? (1, 4, 86).

The question posed by the narrator anticipates several references to the feminine voice. The comment is all the more significant when we learn later that Adam's old schoolteacher is Bartle Massey, who has this to say of women's voices: "I hate the sound of women's voices; they're always either a-buzz or a-squeak". Adam's reply is telling: "don't be so hard on the creatures God has made to be companions for us. A working man 'ud be badly off without a wife to see to th' house and the victual, and make things clean and comfortable'" (2, 21, 285). These are Adam's hopes for his relationship with Hetty. He believes that it is his duty to work hard for the woman he loves, to be her protector, and that she in turn will take care of his home. He tells Arthur Donnithorne that "I'd ha' worked hard for years for the right to kiss her" (4, 27, 345), and later that it is his duty to protect Hetty from harm: "She's all but a child - as any man with a conscience in him ought to feel bound to take care on'" (4, 28, 353). But despite his concern for her, Adam never really understands Hetty, and frequently misreads her. When he sees her angry at the harvest feast he has no interest in what has angered her, only in the way she looks: "really there was something quite charming in her pettishness .... he only felt a sort of amused pity, as if he had seen a kitten setting up its back, or a little bird with its feathers ruffled" (3, 23, 308). When

the dancing at the feast begins there is a subtle play of emotions exhibited in Hetty's face which Arthur Donnithorne reads all too well but which is completely missed by Adam. Arthur observes that "Hetty's face had a language that transcended her feelings": he reads the language of her expression and is filled with dread (3, 26, 330). Adam's thoughts are that Hetty "behaved so prettily, so quietly ... she smiled less than usual", but instead of wondering what it is that makes her smile less he thinks of their marriage, of coming home to her and "drawing Hetty to his side" (3, 26, 331). Adam also misreads Hetty's feelings for him, believing that she has stopped caring for Arthur and now loves him. His response to her trial reveals even more their estrangement

Adam's misreading of Hetty's narrative and his perception of women's work and the duties of husbands prepare us for his response to the banning of women preachers in the Epilogue. While Seth is disappointed that Dinah has submitted to the ban, Adam responds:

'There's no rule so wise but what it's a pity for somebody or other. Most o' the women do more harm nor good with their preaching - they've not got Dinah's gift nor her sperrit; and she's seen that, and she thought it right to set th' example o' submitting, for she's not held from other sorts o' teaching. And I agree with her, and approve o' what she did' (Epilogue, 583).

Dinah, clearly uncomfortable about this "standing subject of difference" changes the subject hastily and no more is said. The novel ends with Dinah inviting her weary husband into the house to rest for "it has been a hard day for thee" (Epilogue, 584). Adam is the potential Christ figure of the novel, the strong young carpenter, a man who, from the outset, is associated with sorrow and suffering. But the strong man is overshadowed by the feminine. Dinah, who is ultimately the true redeemer and is stronger than Adam in the face of Hetty's

suffering, is the feminine Christ, a new spiritual hero whose actions speak of a depth of fellow-feeling that none of the other characters attain. And yet, the roles are reversed once again, when the patriarchal Adam approves that she has ceased her preaching.

The new midrash, with its feminine Christ, overturns the old stories from which it derives its characters and meaning, and then is itself apparently subverted. Hetty, the fallen Eve, is a victim in the same way that Dinah, the womanly Christ is a victim. Dinah seeks to embrace a religion in which compassion dictates to the conscience. Her preaching is motivated by a genuine concern for the state of human souls, and her lifestyle displays a longing to reach beyond her own needs to those of others. Her silencing is a trick played on her by the very text that promises to emancipate her. The text places her within a new mythology and then demonstrates the illusory and transient nature of that mythology. The male voice triumphs, the feminine is either exiled like Hetty, or silenced like Dinah.

Seth's attitude, however, seems to deconstruct Eliot's perplexing and frustrating betrayal of her female characters. Seth believes that when women preachers were banned by the Methodists they should "ha' left the Wesleyans and joined a body that 'ud put no bonds on Christian liberty" (Epilogue, 583). Seth is identified with Dinah when Adam cuts him short on the subject of Dinah's preaching, but not before we know that there is a spark of revolt against Adam's patriarchy. Seth's name is important. In Genesis, Seth is the third son of Adam and Eve. The name means "appointed" and the reason for the name is given as follows: "For God, said she, hath appointed me another

seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew" (Genesis 4:25). Seth is thus Eve's consolation, as Uncle Seth in *Adam Bede* is Dinah's. Seth rebels against the patriarchy represented by Adam and the Methodist church and his rebellion signals a narrative ambiguity. This ambivalence is at the heart of Eliot's ongoing struggle to give her female characters a voice and a vocation. The apparently insignificant, but nevertheless telling, conversation at the close of *Adam Bede* is only the beginning of this aspect of her work.

A midrashic reading of the novel need not resolve contradictions and explain ambiguities within the story: these elements contribute to the richness of meaning in the text and in the space created between text and reader. This is how midrash functions:

Midrash ... while taking up the difficulty, does not try to make the text conform to a discursive ideal. Instead of offering systematic explications, the Midrash replays (often in narrative form) rather than resolves the problematics of the biblical text (Salmon and Elata-Alster, 178).

Furthermore,

What looks like accidental waywardness in midrashic thinking could also be described as giving equal and unprejudiced weight to all of the linguistic potentialities of the text. While attempting to disentangle the strands of a textual knot, the Midrash re-entangles itself by a new twist, thus repeating the knotting movement in one interpretative figure after another (Salmon and Elata-Alster, 179).

Thus we are faced with two alternatives in interpreting Eliot's *Adam Bede*: we attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction in the text by attributing the narrator's silencing of Dinah Morris to Eliot's demonstration of "prophetic martyrdom", or we read the duplicity of the text as an example of the midrashic "interpretive knot". Contradiction and double-sidedness lend meaning to the narrative and often constitute that meaning: "the midrash re-

entangles itself by a new twist". Midrashic interpretation means emancipating language, allowing the written text, with all of its contradictions and ambivalence, to speak for itself. Thus, the contradictions in *Adam Bede*, while they invite deconstruction, also defy resolution and proclaim their own signification within the larger framework of the narrative project.

The authorial voice enters the narrative without apology in chapter 17 to tell us that she "aspire[s] to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind". The mirror is a central image in most of Eliot's novels, including *Middlemarch*. "The mirror", the narrator of *Adam Bede* tells us, "is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused" (2, 17, 221). This is especially obvious, as we have seen, in "The Lifted Veil". The narrator of *Middlemarch* makes a similar observation about life seen under a microscope:

Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other smaller creatures actively play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom (1, 6, 83).

In all her fiction, Eliot admits to the possibility of endless plurality in the task of interpretation. *Adam Bede* opens comparing narration to sorcery: "With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you reader" (1, 1, 49). The narrator as interpreter is thus a magician, and magic, like prophecy, is art, endlessly creative, unpredictable, duplicitous, and transcendent. Thus while chapter 17 of *Adam Bede* draws attention to the

inspirational realism of Dutch painting, Eliot acknowledges that interpretation is a subversion of realism. Eliot's attempts to give faithful accounts of the lives of ordinary people are undermined by the fictive paradigm of storytelling, the infinite possibilities for reading. Therefore, "no story is the same to us after a lapse of time; or rather, we who read it are no longer the same interpreters" (6, 54, 573).

The next chapter, through an interpretation of *The Mill on the Floss*, will further explore the nature of metaphor and the duplicity of language.

## Chapter 4

### A Midrash on Genesis

This chapter will show how Eliot uses the framework, themes and characters of the first seven chapters of Genesis to create a startling and prophetic midrash in *The Mill on the Floss*. Eliot's deliberate retelling of the Genesis story from the Creation to the Flood is a troubled but cathartic exploration of her own role as a novelist, as well as an attempt to reflect a world view which encompasses both creation and apocalyptic death. Eliot invokes the familiar as a key to decoding the unfamiliar, and she perceives her story as a complex sign that stands for something more than itself. She simultaneously takes refuge in and laments over metaphor in writing: it gives room for creative interplay between words and ideas but, paradoxically, signals constraints on creativity.

Throughout the novel, the narrator speaks of signs, keys, and metaphors. Characters and reader are constantly challenged to understand signs and to find the right keys. The first time we are presented with the idea of the metaphor is when Mr Tulliver, rather frustrated at his wife's obtuseness, explains to her what he means by "You'd want me not to hire a good waggoner, 'cause he'd got a mole on his face". This expression, he tells her, is "meant ... to stand for summat else" (1, 2, 57-8). He is not thinking about a real waggoner or a real mole, but is using metaphor to describe Mrs Tulliver's

prejudice against people. She, however, seizes upon the literal and begins to discuss moles and waggoners, completely missing her husband's point. She does not have the key to decode the metaphor. Meaning, for her, is not locked up in a complex system of signs and abstractions, but is present, literal, and decipherable. The connections between words and what they stand for are obvious to her, and this simplicity frustrates her husband.

Eliot's attitude to metaphor is ambivalent. In the dialogue described above, the narrator has a chuckle at Mrs Tulliver's expense. The amusement is Eliot's own - she uses a method in which the story stands for something other than itself, but her metaphor requires a particular way of reading. Within this framework, nothing is as it seems and reading entails decoding. This is a useful tool for Eliot's creativity, but at the same time she demonstrates that always having to say one thing while meaning another is frustrating and limiting; metaphor is unreliable:

It is astonishing what a different result one gets by changing the metaphor! Once call the brain an intellectual stomach, and one's ingenious conception of the classics and geometry as ploughs and harrows seems to settle nothing. But then, it is open to someone else to follow great authorities and call the mind a sheet of white paper or a mirror, in which case one's knowledge of the digestive process becomes quite irrelevant. It was doubtless an ingenious idea to call the camel the ship of the desert, but it would hardly lead one far in training that useful beast. O Aristotle! if you had had the advantage of being 'the freshest modern' instead of the greatest ancient, would you not have mingled your praise of metaphorical speech as a sign of high intelligence, with a lamentation that intelligence so rarely shows itself in speech without metaphor, - that we can so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else? (2, 1, 208-9).

The capacity to read signs and decode metaphors sets characters apart in the novel. We are told that "Tom's faculties failed him before the abstractions

hideously symbolised to him in the pages of the Eton Grammar" (2, 1, 208). His inability to read signs sets him apart from Maggie and Philip. His tendency to take things at face value blinds him to hidden motives and feelings in other characters. He understands the physical and the outwardly obvious, but has little insight into emotions. As a child, his apprehension of physicality and a disturbingly sadistic bent in his nature make him fond of pelting toads, squashing insects, and taking his frustration out on Yap the dog by kicking him. Though tempted on occasion, he never strikes Maggie, because he "knew it was cowardly to strike a girl, and Tom Tulliver was quite determined he would never do anything cowardly" (1, 9, 147). Tom enjoys Philip's stories and shows particular interest in details of violence and tales of war. He judges men by their physical strength and athleticism, and for this reason he "never thoroughly overcame his repulsion to Philip's deformity" (2, 4, 239). He is motivated by "that desire for mastery over the inferior animals wild and domestic, including cockchafers, neighbours' dogs, and small sisters" (1, 9, 153). This observation is all the more telling when we read that Maggie is constantly likened to animals. She is compared to "a small Shetland pony (1, 2, 61), "a Skye Terrier" (1, 3, 64; 1, 4, 78) and a "pythoness" (79). The narrator frequently uses simile and metaphor when describing Maggie: she is represented in terms of what she is not.

Tom understands life within the parameters of crime and punishment. He means always to do the correct thing, and those who fail to do what is obviously right, deserve only punishment:

Tom ... had no decided views in grammar and arithmetic, regarding them for the most part as open questions, but he was

particularly clear and positive on one point, namely that he would punish everybody who deserved it: why, he wouldn't have minded being punished himself if he deserved it, but then, he never *did* deserve it (1, 5, 90-1).

This is a chilling foreshadowing of the way in which the adult Tom will treat his sister. It also introduces one of the dominant themes of the book that will be explored in this chapter.

Tom's inflexibility arises from his inability to interpret the outward signs of the hidden messages of the human heart, but this failure makes life seem very simple to him. There is only duty or waywardness, right or wrong, and all things are firmly fixed within this dualistic paradigm. *He* always knows his duty and will perform it unwaveringly. But Tom's greatest strength is also his saddest shortcoming: he is intolerant of Philip's sensitivity and harshly critical of Maggie's choices. His childhood cruelty to animals and his boyish contempt for girls becomes an uncompromising and destructive misogyny in adulthood.

Philip Wakem, on the other hand, is a storyteller and a reader of signs. Unlike Tom, who favours stones and swords, Philip has an "artillery of epithets and similes" (2, 4, 239). Moreover, Philip is frequently described in feminine terms, as if his physical handicap as well as his love of books and art, make him womanly. Certainly, in Tom's view and in that of society, Philip is weak and therefore effeminate. Mr Tulliver says of Philip that he "'takes after his mother in the face'" (2, 2, 230), and the narrator that his hair "waved and curled at the ends like a girl's - Tom thought that truly pitiable" (2, 3, 234). Philip's lonely life, his deformity, and his sensitivity make him, in Tom's eyes, less of a man. Philip's pain stems also from his inability to conform to the 'manly' role demanded by society:

Kept aloof from all practical life as Philip had been, and by nature half feminine in sensitiveness, he had some of the woman's intolerant repulsion towards worldliness and the deliberate pursuit of sensual enjoyment, and this one natural tie in his life - his relation as a son - was like an aching limb to him (5, 3, 431).

In society's view, and even in his own, Philip can never really be a son or a lover, and thus society, represented by Tom, will never approve of a union between Maggie and Philip. When he begs Maggie to love him, she tells him, "O, it is quite impossible we can ever be more than friends - brother and sister in secret'" (5, 4, 437). The roles of man and woman are reversed and the nature of their relationship is defined by the kiss at the end of chapter 4: "Maggie smiled, with glistening tears, and then stooped her tall head to kiss the low pale face that was full of pleading, timid love - like a woman's" (5, 4, 438).

There are echoes of Latimer in these descriptions of Philip, who also loses his mother when very young. Stereotyped descriptions of masculine and feminine challenged: Tom, physically strong, aggressive, and insensitive, fits the masculine stereotype but fails as a brother because he cannot read the signs of love or tolerate the passions that lead Maggie away from what he deems to be her duty. Philip is the truer man: his strength lies in his sensitivity and his understanding of what motivates Maggie.

Eliot's exploration of signs and symbols is most fully realized in Maggie. Unlike Tom, she knows that a word may mean several things. She discovers a new world in Tom's Latin Grammar, for instance, as she points out to Tom that the Latin *bonus* may mean "good" as well as "gift". The Grammar is Maggie's new-found delight:

she delighted in new words, and quickly found that there was an English Key at the end, which would make her very wise about

Latin at slight expense. She presently made up her mind to *skip the rules* in the Syntax, - the examples became so absorbing. These mysterious sentences snatched from an unknown context, - like strange horns of beasts and leaves of unknown plants, brought from some far-off region, gave boundless scope to her imagination, and were all the more fascinating because they were in a peculiar tongue of their own, which she could learn to interpret. It was really very interesting - the Latin Grammar that Tom had said no girls could learn (2, 1, 217, my emphasis).

Here, the language is described in terms of something other than what it is: "like strange horns of beast and leaves of unknown plants". The simile gives life to a dead language. Maggie revels in the freedom to read and interpret, and gains access to a world that traditionally would have been denied to her, one that she shares with Philip. The world of stories and knowledge, however, is a masculine domain, and Maggie only gains access to it by "skip[ping] the rules". The simile that brings Latin to life for Maggie is duplicitous, an illusion. So, Maggie's adventures into the world of Virgil, Euclid, and Aldrich will seem the key to happiness for a time only. The fruit of the tree of knowledge will become "thick-rinded" and finally "wrinkled" (4, 3, 380, 387), because it represents a masculine discourse into which Maggie's entry is transgressive, temporary, and ultimately illusory. Her powerlessness is directly related to her femininity. Her relationship with Philip will be cut off by the dominance of the masculine. Tom forbids their relationship and his prohibition is law because patriarchy gives him power and robs Maggie of power. Maggie can only achieve independence by breaking the rules of male dominance and female submission, first in her friendship with Philip and later through her elopement with Stephen; but her transgressions bring dire consequences.

Maggie longs for something or someone that will unlock the mystery of

her difficult life: "she wanted some key that would enable her to understand and, in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart" (4, 3, 379). When she discovers Thomas à Kempis, she believes she has found this key. Now her life may be read and, being read, endured. Philip tries to persuade Maggie that À Kempis is not the key to understanding. He tells her that she is blinding herself to what life may offer her. All Maggie knows is that À Kempis teaches her renunciation, and that submission to the pain and hardship of life is her salvation. In this way Maggie represses her longing for something more from life because longing only brings pain. Philip's books fill her with desires that can never be satisfied, so she resists the temptation to read them. But whatever knowledge Maggie seeks, whether it be the knowledge contained in Tom's schoolbooks or the spiritual knowledge that Thomas à Kempis offers, is an illusion. Mary Jacobus points out that

Knowledge in *The Mill on the Floss* is guarded by a traditional patriarchal prohibition which, by a curious slippage, makes the fruit itself as indigestible as the ban and its thick rind .... But the Latin, Euclid and Logic, which Maggie imagines 'would surely be a considerable step in masculine wisdom', leave her dissatisfied, like a thirsty traveller in a trackless desert ("Men of Maxims", 93).

Thomas à Kempis offers little more. Jacobus suggests that the comfort Maggie finds in Thomas à Kempis is a temporary way of managing desire because it teaches her to repress that desire ("Men of Maxims", 94). What Maggie perceives as spiritual fulfilment is, in reality, emotional repression.

When Maggie succumbs to temptation, she reads herself in the books that Philip lends her. She is particularly disturbed by *Corinne*, because she foresees that the blonde-haired woman will steal love from the dark-haired Corinne. Maggie, whose dark hair and skin have always occasioned comment

from her family, wishes for a story

'where the dark woman triumphs, it would restore the balance - I want to avenge Rebecca and Flora Mac-Ivor, and Minna and all the rest of the dark unhappy ones.'

Philip responds prophetically: "perhaps you will avenge the dark woman in your own person" (5, 4, 433).

The narrator points out that "the lines and lights of the human countenance are like other symbols - not always easy to read without a key" (3, 7, 334), and this indeed may be the key to understanding Eliot's narrative design. The human face is also a symbol: it tells a story but not one that is easily read. Mr Tulliver's is to Maggie "the dear, time-worn face which had been present with her through long years as the sign of her deepest love and hardest trial" (5, 7, 463). The cloven tree in the Red Deeps which Maggie glances at when Philip asks her if she can love him, is for Philip a bad omen, a sign of evil (5, 4, 436). Its significance is enhanced by the title of the chapter following immediately after this incident - "The Cloven Tree" (5, 5, 439). The tree appears to point to the end of Maggie's friendship with Philip, but may also reflect Philip's physical condition. Thus the metaphor may be read in many ways. Each interpretation adds to the life of the symbol. Eliot's point is that the tree can be said to stand for something other than itself, just as a story may stand for another story, and each time a story points back or forward to a precursor or a new interpretation, it requires a new way of reading. In order to gain deeper insight into the nature and purpose of the story, one is required to read it in the light of its predecessor and to consider the ways in which it overthrows that predecessor. Eliot's challenge to her reader is to read the signs,

just as Maggie and Philip read the signs, not as words with fixed meanings but as worlds requiring imaginative exploration. At the same time, Eliot, as writer, retains the privilege of creating illusions with language and story. Metaphor is both descriptive and duplicitous. A word may signify a world of meaning, but simultaneously, its meaning may be obscured. If we say a word means this, or that, we are perpetually delaying our apprehension of what it really means. This process of deferral, instead of leading the reader to clarity, throws the reader off the scent as it were - the metaphor can rarely be avoided. This duplicity is demonstrated in the discussion of *Adam Bede*, and can be seen at work again in *The Mill on the Floss*.

If Eliot points out that a word or sentence is rarely explained except by means of reference to another word or sentence, we may take this as providing a clue to our reading of her stories. The word, sentence, and story, within this paradigm, are signs of other words, sentences, and stories. They endlessly reflect each other, cover up for each other, decipher and interpret each other. I do not suggest that each of Eliot's novels borrows its storyline from one other source, but rather that she synthesises many stories in the process of inventing her own. In some of her novels, Eliot finds special meaning in particular strands of storytelling, and often these strands are Biblical. *The Mill on the Floss* may be read as a secular retelling of the first seven chapters of Genesis. Eliot uses the structure, themes, and many of the images from these chapters to illustrate a major concern in her creative and social philosophy.

In *The Mill on the Floss* Eliot uses Genesis 1-7 as a structural and thematic

framework.<sup>16</sup> The novel is divided into seven books, each of which echoes story and theme in the matching chapter in Genesis.

Genesis 1 tells the story of the six days of the creation of the world and of man and woman. Images of water dominate this chapter: verse 1 records that "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters", which reflects the idea that the world was created out of a primeval chaos of darkness and deep water.<sup>17</sup> In verse 6 God orders a "firmament" which will "divide the waters from the waters", and in verse 10 God gathers the waters together and calls them "sea". Book 1 of *The Mill on the Floss* is entitled "Boy and Girl" and records the childhoods of Maggie and Tom Tulliver; chapter 1 describes Dorlcote Mill situated on a "wide plain, where the broadening Floss hurries on between its green banks to the sea, and the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace" (1, 1, 53). The narrator, who is "in love with moistness", dwells on the "rush of the water and the booming of the mill" (1, 1, 54), in the same way that the Spirit hovers above watery chaos at the dawn of the world in Genesis. This watery world is the backdrop against which Tom and Maggie grow up. By beginning the novel with the story of

---

<sup>16</sup>In *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time*, Mary Wilson Carpenter argues that Eliot "parodies an age of prophetic history" in every book of *The Mill on the Floss*. She suggests that Eliot may have obtained the idea of a scheme of prophetic history from any one of the many indexes to prophetic history which were printed in many Victorian editions of the Bible (55).

<sup>17</sup>The Hebrew *tehom* in v2 has been translated in some editions as "sea of chaos" and as "primeval flood". In *Genesis: A Commentary* Gerhard Von Rad suggests that "Spirit of God" may be translated as "storm of God". Hence, God not so much hovers over the deep as stirs up a storm in the "damp primeval element". Von Rad also points out that the cosmic abyss described here has been associated with the Babylonian myth of creation (49-50).

childhood, Eliot invokes traditional ideas of innocence and paradisaical simplicity. She, however, undermines these associations by painting a picture of a childhood that is far from Edenic. Rather, it is fraught with anxiety for Maggie and disrupted by Tom's boyish cruelty to animals, insects, and his little sister. The apparently paradisaical world of Dorlcote Mill and the Floss and the freedom of childhood suggested by the title of the first book are subverted by the constant, monotonous beat of the mill and the pain of growing up in a less than ideal world.

Eliot has duplicated the symmetry in the first seven chapters of Genesis: before the world exists there is a watery deep in the midst of which God creates the firmament, and after it has been in existence for a time it returns to this watery chaos. God looks upon creation after each of the six days and pronounces that it is good, but six chapters later he repents that he has made humanity and destroys life on earth with a flood. Maggie and Tom spend much of their childhood playtime on the banks of the Floss and they die in an embrace in the waters of a flood.

Chapter 2 of Genesis sees the completion of creation and the second account of the creation of human beings.<sup>18</sup> In this account God creates man from dust and then woman from the man's rib. God plants a garden in Eden and places the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the centre of the garden. The man and woman are forbidden to eat of the fruit of this tree.

---

<sup>18</sup>Source critics have attributed this puzzling retelling of the Creation story in Genesis 2 to a different strand of tradition from that which produced the first account in Genesis 1. Literary critics, however, would argue that repetition is a deliberate literary device on the part of the writer of the story. R.E. Clements gives a useful overview of the way different methodologies interpret the Pentateuch.

The garden and the river that divides into four are central motifs in this chapter. The garden is the scene of humanity's innocence and pleasure, and of its betrayal and shame. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the centre of this garden may stand for many things. When the man and woman disobey God and are tempted into eating the fruit of the tree, they discover the difference between good and evil. Before this, they experience only contentment and joy; after this knowledge they encounter shame, guilt, and unfulfilled desire.

Book 2 of *The Mill on the Floss* is called "School-time" and recounts the beginnings of Tom's education with Mr Stelling and his visits from Maggie. Tom cares little for the knowledge which he acquires at school and has little aptitude for studying, while Maggie thirsts for knowledge. Mr Stelling is impressed with her quickness but points out to both children that girls have, "a great deal of superficial cleverness: but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow" (2, 1, 220-21). Eliot's ironic tone signals a protest against this opinion, one which Maggie herself will later voice. Maggie's intellectual superiority over Tom gives her no advantages in a society where, according to Lawyer Wakem, men "don't ask what a woman does - we ask whom she belongs to" (6, 8, 543). Rather, it places her at a severe disadvantage, as she herself recognizes. Later Maggie shuts out the pleasure of reading because it makes her yearn for things that she cannot have. When Philip tries to woo her back to reading she calls him a tempter (5, 3, 429). Knowledge, like the knowledge represented by the tree in Genesis, is too painful for Maggie. Rather than being her salvation, as Philip hopes, it will be

a part of her downfall. We recall also that Maggie's access to the world of Latin and history is associated with transgression. When she reads Tom's Latin books Maggie skips the syntax rules and goes on to the examples which are far more exciting. Her cleverness, which Mr Stelling recognizes but undermines, is a challenge to the accepted order of things in which girls are taught how to be good wives while boys are educated. Cleverness in a girl represents transgression. Maggie breaks the rules, as does her predecessor Eve in Eden. By tasting the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Eve calls down disaster upon her idyllic world. In the same way, Maggie's thirst for knowledge and experience will result in unhappiness and, ultimately, death.

The last chapter of book 2, "The Golden Gates are Passed", has the strongest allusions to Eden and to the loss of innocence, which Genesis 3 describes. There are also echoes here of *Paradise Lost*: Maggie's promise always to greet Philip with a kiss is

void like so many other sweet, illusory promises of our childhood:  
void as promises made in Eden before the seasons were divided,  
and when the starry blossoms grew side by side with the ripening  
peach - impossible to be fulfilled when the golden gates had been  
passed (2, 7, 263).

Book 3 will retrace and describe the downfall of Mr Tulliver, but here at the end of book 2, Tom and Maggie leave the dubious Eden of childhood behind, after hearing of their father's bankruptcy, and pass into the difficult, adult world of the knowledge of good and evil. The description of their departure from the Stellings echoes the departure of Adam and Eve from Eden in the closing passage of *Paradise Lost*:

In either hand the hastening angel caught  
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate

Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast  
 To the subjected plain; then disappeared.  
 They looking back, all the eastern side beheld  
 Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
 Waved over by that flaming brand, the gate  
 With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms:  
 Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon  
 The world was all before them, where to choose  
 Their place of rest, and providence their guide:  
 They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,  
 Through Eden took their solitary way (xii, ll 537-649).

Tom's and Maggie's departure from school echoes this passage:

The two slight youthful figures soon grew indistinct on the distant road - were soon lost behind the projecting hedgerow.

They had gone forth together into their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares. They had entered the thorny wilderness, and the golden gates of their childhood had for ever closed behind them (2, 7, 270).

It may seem that Eliot, if she is constructing the novel on the structure of Genesis 1-7, loses the pattern at this point (Adam and Eve are only sent from the garden at the end of chapter 3 of Genesis). Book 3 of the novel, however, backtracks to the events leading up to Tom's departure from school so that the ending of book 2 is a forecast of what happens after Mr Tulliver's financial ruin.

Chapter 3 of Genesis focuses on the events leading up to the Fall. Book 3 of *The Mill on the Floss* is called "The Downfall". In Genesis, Adam and Eve are banished from Eden to a life of work and hardship. Eve is cursed with pain in childbirth. She will desire her husband who will rule over her (Genesis 3:16). Her seed will bruise the serpent's head and the serpent will bruise the heel of her seed (3:15). The curse that Mr Tulliver makes Tom write into the family Bible at the end of book 3 echoes this curse. Mr Tulliver instructs Tom to

"write - write as you'll remember what Wakem's done to your father, and you'll make him and his feel it, if ever the day comes. And sign your name Thomas Tulliver'" (3, 9, 357). The writing of the curse transfers authority from father to son and Tom becomes his father's avenger. The curse will also taint Maggie's life. Tom, who displaces his father as the lawgiver, is given authority over Maggie. This is confirmed by his silencing of her when she protests against the curse: "Be quiet, Maggie! said Tom. 'I *shall* write it'" (357). Thus Adam is made Eve's ruler by decree in the novel as in Genesis and both are promised a life of pain and hardship. Adam is condemned to working a soil which will yield thorns and thistles (3:17-18). Tom labours to repay his father's debt, giving the best years of his life to a joyless task. Maggie faces life without books or love, "nothing but poverty and the companionship of her mother's narrow griefs" (3, 5, 320). Her greatest struggle, the source of her pain and rage, is her powerlessness to fulfil her hidden dreams:

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

No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it. A girl of no startling appearance, and who will never be a Sappho or a Madame Roland or anything else that the world takes wide note of, may still hold forces within her as the living plant-seed does, which will make a way for themselves, often in a shattering, violent manner (3, 5, 320).

Later, Maggie recognizes this powerlessness as the curse of womanhood. When Tom condemns her relationship with Philip Wakem, comparing his own obedience to his father's wishes to her apparent disobedience, Maggie voices

her frustration: "Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world'" (5, 5, 450). Eliot retells the story of the relationship between Adam and Eve, their temptation and Fall, and the resulting curse on humanity, as a story of brother and sister, loss of innocence, and the powerlessness of women before the authoritarianism of society. Authority is presented as a curse: it destroys the lives of women as well as of men. Maggie and Philip (who, as indicated above, is presented in feminine terms and is a victim like Maggie) are powerless before Tom and Stephen Guest, who represent masculinity and law.<sup>19</sup>

The image of the river in the novel is important, perhaps suggestive of the river with four heads flowing out of Eden. Each tributary connects the places through which it flows to the original source in Paradise.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>Robert Polhemus argues that the relationship between Tom and Maggie is doomed to tragedy because of their latent, mutual incestuous desire. Their relationship is characterised by dominance and submission, and their loyalty to each other is marred by Tom's misogyny and Maggie's rebellion. Thus their commitment to each other hovers between love and the fear of the other (176). He suggests that this incestuous impulse leads to a martyrdom in which Maggie is "a sacrificial emblem - a saint - of erotic faith, just as Saint Ogg, the charitable oarsman of olden times who ferried the Virgin, was a Christian saint" (169). In the light of this argument, the sibling bond becomes a symbol of transgression.

<sup>20</sup>Von Rad says of the rivers in Eden:

What an inexpressible amount of water was in Paradise, if the river, after having watered the garden, could still enclose the entire world with four arms and fructify it! All the water outside Paradise, which supplies all civilizations, is, so to speak, only a remainder or residue from the water of Paradise. This strangely profound section strives without doubt to sketch the real geographical world. It projects an extremely archaic map of the world. But one must remember that in the Orient water is absolutely the basis of all civilized life. Here we find ... a close connection between earth and garden on the one hand and the historical world of man on the other. The ... passage ... means to emphasize ... the topical significance of Eden for men

(continued...)

The Floss functions in a similar way. It rushes down to the sea, joining the life of Dorlcote Mill to St Oggs further downstream and ultimately to the big seaports. The metaphor is extended and, by implication then, the apparently insignificant trials and tragedies of the inhabitants of Dorlcote Mill become connected to the wider stream of human existence. The novel presents life as an ever moving flow in which all human endeavour is connected by the onward movement of time and experience. This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in chapter 1 of book 4. The narrator considers the differences between the ruins of small villages once destroyed by floods on the banks of the Rhône, and "those ruins on the castled Rhine which have crumbled and mellowed into such harmony with the green and rocky steeps, that they seem to have a natural fitness, like the mountain pine" (4, 1, 361). The ruins on the Rhône are reminders of "a narrow, ugly, grovelling existence" (362), while those on the Rhine reflect the "romance" of

a time of colour when the sunlight fell on glancing steel and floating banners: a time of adventure and fierce struggle - nay, of living, religious art and religious enthusiasm; for were not cathedrals built in those days and did not great emperors leave their western palaces to die before the infidel strongholds in the sacred east? (4, 1, 361-2).

The narrator then equates the "old-fashioned family life on the banks of the Floss, which even sorrow hardly suffices to lift above the level of the tragicomic" (362) with those sordid ruins on the Rhône. The narrator, however, cautions that the images of family life are not to be dismissed, and argues that

---

<sup>20</sup>(...continued)

outside Paradise by the reference to that unbroken stream of water from Paradise (*Genesis: A Commentary*, 79-80).

these apparently insignificant lives point to the "mystery of the human lot". The Floss, which "flows forever onward and links the small pulse of the old English town with the beatings of the world's mighty heart", is like "the onward tendency of human things", and thus

The suffering, whether of martyr or victim, which belongs to every historical advance of mankind, is represented in this way in every town and by hundreds of obscure hearths: and we need not shrink from this comparison of small things with great; for does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest? (4, 1, 363).

Jonathan Arac points out that

the harmony of the Mill and the Floss that marks the first pattern of the book is contradicted by a contrast of the 'mill-like monotony' of deadening singleness with the dangerous double eddies of passionate fluxes and refluxes (78).

While the river rushes onward, receding and flooding, the mill on the river remains constant and monotonous. This reflects the two halves of human experience: the wayward passions and yearnings of the heart and the "concentrated singleness" of quiet lives. He suggests that while these two aspects of human life are in contrast, they are also complementary: "If both wholeness and division make life tragic, each also makes life livable" (79).

In book 4, Eliot, who may be thinking of the second tragedy of the Genesis account of human history, the murder of brother by brother in the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), compares the mediocrity of provincial life with the broad panorama of the story of human existence. Her narrator cautions the reader not to see the lives of her characters as trivial, but to view them alongside the apparently great. Her metaphor establishes a link between places, people, and histories. Thus, the Genesis story of a spurned offering,

jealousy, betrayal, murder, and deceit may be told again in another story of failure, loneliness, and humiliation. In Genesis, Cain is given a distinctive mark; in *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie's dark hair and skin seem to predetermine her fate as much as her passion, rebelliousness, and anger do. Her physical attributes distinguish her from her family, and make her an outsider who is rejected by her Dodson aunts.<sup>21</sup>

The image of the river is frequently linked to Maggie, especially as she moves towards her final destiny. Her mother unwittingly prophesies Maggie's death by drowning: she worries about Maggie "wanderin' up an' down by the water, like a wild thing: she'll tumble in some day" (1, 2, 60). Maggie's future is described as being "like the course of an unmapped river: we only know that the river is full and rapid, and that for all rivers there is the same final home" (6, 6, 515). Philip has a dream about Maggie "slipping down a glistening, green, slimy channel of a waterfall, and he was looking on helpless" (6, 8, 544). This premonition is echoed when Maggie feels that her attraction for Stephen Guest is like "sliding downwards in a nightmare" (6, 11, 568), or as if she is being pulled into a "current, soft and yet strong as the summer stream!" (6, 11, 569). When she elopes with Stephen, the sensation of drifting downstream is both physical and emotional. Happiness seems to be like a "soft stream" flowing over her and she surrenders to the feeling (6, 13, 595). The river imagery is associated with Maggie's moral conflict as well as with her sexuality. We recall

---

<sup>21</sup>Quinone argues that, following on Byron's *Cain*, the figure of Cain in post-Romantic consciousness becomes the figure of vitality and rebellion. He demonstrates how Abel confirms the rigid structures of prevailing religion while Cain is the angry, questioning, imaginative, and desperate figure who perceives the hypocrisies of this world.

that the Floss hurries down towards the sea and "the loving tide, rushing to meet it, checks its passage with an impetuous embrace" (1, 1, 53). The river is checked by the embrace of the sea. The meeting of both means the end of the river. Thus, the soporific effect of sexual attraction is threatened by the engulfing tide of consummation as well as by events beyond Maggie's control. Again, there is a certain ambivalence in the presentation of the river: it is swift and powerful like the force of human passion, as well as deceptively tame. Its fluctuation is contrasted with the steady, deadening beat of the mill.

Maggie is associated with two legends about rivers. The first is represented by the picture in a book that Maggie reads as a child, showing a woman drowning in a river; Maggie explains to Mr Riley that the woman is a witch:

'they've put her in, to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned - and killed, you know, - she's innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman. But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned?' (1, 3, 66).

Maggie is often described as a witch or a demon. Her drowning may prove her innocence, but as the child Maggie points out, if the witch drowns what good is her innocence to her? I will return to this question.

The other legend is that of Ogg the son of Beorl who ferries the Virgin across the river. The Virgin's blessing upon Ogg is that, "henceforth whoso steps into thy boat shall be in no peril from the storm, and whenever it puts forth to the rescue it shall save the lives both of men and beasts" (1, 12, 182). In a conversation with Lucy and Maggie, Philip remarks that he hopes that Maggie does not like boating more than anything, "else she will be selling her

soul to that ghostly boatman who haunts the Floss - only for the sake of being drifted in a boat for ever'" (6, 13, 584). Little does Philip know how close to the truth he is. His comment is echoed in the dream that Maggie has when she is with Stephen on the river:

She was in a boat on the wide water with Stephen, and in the gathering darkness something like a star appeared, that grew and grew till they saw it was the Virgin seated in St Ogg's boat, and it came nearer and nearer till they saw the Virgin was Lucy and the boatman was Philip - no, not Philip, but her brother, who rowed past without looking at her; and she rose to stretch out her arms and call to him, and their own boat turned over with the movement and they began to sink, till with one spasm of dread she seemed to awake and find she was a child again in the parlour at evening twilight, and Tom was not really angry (6, 14, 596).

Maggie's dream expresses her guilt at having betrayed Lucy and Philip, as well as her fear of Tom. The legend is transformed by these emotions, so that, unlike St Ogg's boat, Maggie's boat is overturned in her dream. In order to escape the awful confrontation with death in the dream, Maggie takes refuge in the relative security of childhood; this may also signal her retreat from sexual surrender to Stephen. The dream serves as a chilling prophecy of her death.

Genesis 5 records the generations of humankind, beginning with Adam and ending with Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah. Each patriarch begets sons and daughters, but only the sons and their grandsons are named. This pattern may be seen reflected in book 5 of *The Mill on the Floss*, "Wheat and Tares". Mr Tulliver dies and the authority of the father over the daughter is transferred to the son and brother. Maggie must now answer to Tom; she is trapped in a sibling relationship of dominance and submission reflected in her promise on the Bible that she will neither see nor write to Philip without Tom's

permission. The Bible, the same one in which Tom wrote down his father's curse on Wakem and his descendants and signed himself Thomas Tulliver, represents the authority of the father, and Maggie must submit to it. Mr Tulliver's death brings a temporary reconciliation between Tom and Maggie, but their embrace is a prevision of the death embrace at the end of the novel. It would seem that death, with its annulment of all earthly ties and constrictions, is the only possible means of unity for Tom and Maggie.

In book 6 of the novel, there are fascinating echoes of Genesis 6 which chronicles the escalation of sin on the earth, God's regret that he has created humanity, and his decision to "destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13). The chapter opens with a puzzling description of the origin of the giants:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown (Genesis 6:1-4).<sup>22</sup>

The union between the sons of God and the daughters of man produces giants, "men of renown". By a string of subtle inferences Eliot retells this story. Stephen is referred to as tall in comparison to Lucy; his piano-playing is thunderous and he looks down at "the Little lady" from his "tall height" (6, 1,

---

<sup>22</sup>Von Rad's explanation for this strange prologue to the story of the Flood is that the writer wanted to show the corruption of humanity: the union of gods with humans signals a disturbance in nature as a result of sin: "overlapping decrees were broken, decrees by which God had separated the upper realm of the heavenly spiritual world from that of man (*Genesis: A Commentary*, 115). This disturbance in nature would culminate in the Flood.

475). Lucy refers to herself as "a little, insignificant thing", which prompts the question, "are Mr Guest's sisters giantesses?", from Maggie (6, 2, 479). Maggie is also tall and towers over her "slight, aërial cousin", calling her a "dear tiny thing" (6, 2, 480-1). Aunt Pullet comments on Maggie's broadness and height and, next to Bob Jakin's tiny wife, Maggie is like a "colossal statue" (6, 4, 499). These physical similarities between Maggie and Stephen prepare the reader for their inevitable mutual attraction. Stephen becomes like one of the "sons of God" and Maggie, with her "colossal" stature, is associated with him before their eventual elopement. Maggie's liaison with Stephen is the physical manifestation of Maggie's spiritual rebellion against the law that has bound her all her life. Maggie's desire to enter the world of masculine wisdom as a child constitutes her first trespass against tradition; her secret meetings with Philip in the Red Deeps constitute a rebellion against the law embodied in her brother, and her attraction for Stephen is Maggie's final abandonment of the call to familial duty and loyalty. Maggie is condemned by her inability to remain within the boundaries that society has ordained for her. She, like Eve, is a transgressor, and, like the witch in the story, must be cast into the river in order that her innocence or guilt may be demonstrated.

Maggie's fall from grace is a long process that will result in her death in the flood. Death seems like Maggie's vindication: drowning proves that the witch is innocent. But as Maggie the child pointed out, the death of the innocent undermines her vindication. Thus Maggie's death is problematic. There is, however, ample preparation for the drowning at the end of the novel. Maggie's transgression, within the paradigm created for her by the male

characters, especially Tom, calls for punishment. Tom's inflexible code of honour demands punishment for those who fail to do their duty. Maggie and Tom, as the ostensible Adam and Eve, have left behind the Eden of childhood and in chapter 1 of book 6, "A Duet in Paradise", they are replaced. When Lucy and Stephen are seated in the parlour and Stephen is about to play a piece from Haydn's 'The Creation', Lucy informs him that "Philip burst into one of his invectives against 'The Creation' the other day ... he says it has a sort of sugared complacency and flattering make-believe in it". Stephen responds with scorn:

'Oh pooh! He is the fallen Adam with a soured temper. We are Adam and Eve unfallen - in paradise .... You will sing the whole duty of woman - "And from obedience grows my pride and happiness"' (6, 1, 474).

Stephen reads himself and Lucy into the creation story. Lucy will play the part of Eve differently because she, unlike Maggie, is not a transgressor, and so they will be Adam and Eve unfallen. Their paradise is undisturbed until Maggie comes to visit. Then the temptation of a forbidden passion destroys this second Eden.

The title of book 6, "The Great Temptation", suggests that the events of Genesis 3 will be re-enacted; but it also recalls the growing corruption on the earth recorded in Genesis 6 which will lead the Creator to look down upon the creation with regret and ordain its destruction. In this book, Maggie's and Stephen's elopement in the boat takes them away from the ties of family and friendship into a moral wilderness. The elopement prefigures that final, fatal boat-ride that Maggie will embark on with her brother. The boat recalls the motif of the ark in Genesis, but unlike the ark which is Noah's security from

the torrent, the boat becomes a part of Maggie's terrifying nightmare. Her journey of self-discovery, which began in an Eden, now takes her towards ultimate self-knowledge in death.

The title of book 7, "The Final Rescue", is ironic, ambiguous, and, in many ways, a deconstruction of the novel. It may point to Maggie's salvation through repentance. Lucy enacts the role of saviour, bringing Maggie forgiveness and acceptance. We never, however, believe that Maggie's punishment fits her crime, and so the title also suggests that Maggie's death is a rescue from alienation and humiliation in St Oggs. Gillian Beer claims that death "rescues Maggie from the grim, cramped future that the social determinism of the plot has seemed to make inescapable" ("Beyond Determinism", 88), while Gilbert and Gubar argue that despite the narrator's assurance of reconciliation "Tom and Maggie *were* divided: only in the fatal fusion of their incestuous *Liesbestod* can Eliot heal their breach" (494).<sup>23</sup> The title also suggests that Maggie's death rescues her from the pain of renunciation, return, and rejection. Death is also Maggie's final sacrifice of self. She rows down the Floss in search of her family whom she fears in danger, and, at the moment of death, Maggie is Tom's rescuer, both physically and spiritually. But the rescue is illusory: both are swept under by the wave. The flood, which unmistakably recalls the Flood in Genesis 7, represents, in Maggie's troubled mind, "that awful visitation of God which her father used to

---

<sup>23</sup>Carol Christ, in "Aggression and Providential Death in George Eliot's Fiction", argues that the drowning functions "both to rescue Maggie from the life of self-sacrifice that she has embraced and to resolve the anger between her and her brother" (136).

talk of - which had made the nightmare of her childish dreams" (7, 5, 651). It is the apocalyptic culmination of her fears and desires, and the physical enactment of her impulse towards self-sacrifice. The flood is linked, paradoxically, to Maggie's earliest memories of home: her recollection of the flood of her childhood nightmares brings with it "the vision of her old home - and Tom -and her mother", as well as an overwhelming sense of being utterly lost and alone. The darkness of the storm reflects Maggie's alienation from home and community: "O God, where am I? Which is the way home?' she cried out, in the dim loneliness" (7, 5, 651). Her frantic paddling towards the Mill is accompanied by:

an undefined sense of reconciliation with her brother: what quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone, and we are all one with each other in primitive mortal needs? Vaguely, Maggie felt this; - in the strong resurgent love towards her brother that swept away all the later impressions of hard, cruel offence and misunderstanding, and left only the deep, underlying, unshakable memories of early union (7, 5, 652).

This longing is dramatised in the embrace of brother and sister at the moment of death: they "had gone down in an embrace never to be parted - living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together" (7, 5, 655). At the final hour, the illusory innocence of a childhood Eden is recalled and invoked as a vindication for the pain of adulthood that both Tom and Maggie have endured. The trouble with this moving and dramatic finale is the reader's suspicion of Eliot's struggle to persuade herself that this is the best way to end the troubled relationship between Tom and Maggie. Perhaps it enacts Eliot's longing for reconciliation with her own brother, a reconciliation earnestly

desired, but never truly believed possible. Gillian Beer argues that in the ending of this novel George Eliot allows herself

that fulfilment of immersion and self-denial, the obliteration of self in familial love, which she steadfastly resisted in her own adult life. What we have in *The Mill* is an apparently deterministic order which in its conclusion whirls backwards into desire, instead of into understanding and rationalisation. George Eliot is fascinated by the unassuageable longings of her heroine. She allows them fulfilment in a form of a plot which simply glides out of the channelled sequence of social growth and makes literal the expansion of desire ("Beyond Determinism", 88).

The plot of the novel seems to move relentlessly towards resolution: Maggie has sinned and must be punished and then forgiven, brother and sister must be reconciled. But Maggie's death defies resolution. Beer suggests that for women who are under oppression, the need to rebel - the need to transgress - cannot take place within a plot that relies upon a renunciation of the past and an acceptance of the "determined present". Therefore, the end of the novel is a "symbolic outcry" against this sequenced, deterministic order of things ("Beyond Determinism", 89).

Though "In their death they were not divided" (Conclusion, 657) is the epitaph on Maggie and Tom's grave, we recall Maggie's girlish question about the witch's innocence: "what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned?" (1, 3, 66). This innocent but penetrating question and the title of book 7 deconstruct the narrative and express a profound scepticism on Eliot's part. Despite the description of wondrous reconciliation in death, Eliot can never forgive Tom for destroying Maggie, nor even allow Maggie to forgive her brother. Vindication, forgiveness, and reconciliation are swept away in the wake of the violent storm. As the narrator describes at the end of the

novel, some things are restored, but other things are lost forever:

Nature repairs her ravages - repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labour. The desolation wrought by that flood, had left little visible trace on the face of the earth, five years after

....

Nature repairs her ravages - but not all. The upturned trees are not rooted again - the parted hills are left scarred: if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair (Conclusion, 656).

In the Genesis story, the Flood may be read as the Creator's renunciation of his own work - an apocalyptic retraction of all that he had deemed "good" and "very good" in the six days of Creation. Because of the corruption of humanity "all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died" (Gen 7:22). George Eliot uses this quotation in the first chapter of book 4 when describing the imaginary journey down the Rhône and Rhine rivers. The ruined villages on the banks of the Rhône tell "how the swift river once rose, like an angry, destroying god sweeping down the feeble generations whose breath is in their nostrils and making their dwellings a desolation" (4, 1, 361). Eliot reads in the stories of the Creation, the Fall, the growing corruption of humanity and the Flood that destroys all life on earth, the drama of human history. Gillian Beer shows that Eliot perceives a deterministic process at work in the ineluctable sequence of human life. Within this order of things "there is no space, no interruption, no moment, which can escape from sequence". The organization of experience is caught up in this all-inclusive law and any desire to escape is "wish-fulfilment, impossibility, something freakish and fitful" ("Beyond Determinism", 81-82). This is precisely what Maggie's death signifies: the desire to break the sequence that determines her experience, resulting in

annihilation. I would add to Beer's argument the suggestion that the deterministic process is set in motion by an essentially patriarchal order. Thus Maggie's "final rescue", if it is any rescue at all, is a rescue not only from the inevitable map of her future, but also from the masculine law that has oppressed her.

Thus, the Genesis narrative describes the setting in motion of history and the disruption of that history by the same Being who set it in motion. The determined order of things is halted by means of a flood that destroys every living thing on earth except for the righteous man and his family in the ark. Eliot, as the creator of the novel, sets Maggie's life in motion. She has Maggie break the rules that govern her existence as a woman; this transgression halts her history. Her destruction is both a punishment for her sin of disobedience and a symbolic revolt against determinism and oppression.

Eliot reinterprets the story, inserting many elements of the original. She exploits the Genesis themes of temptation, transgression, betrayal, corruption, and regret, and recreates Adam and Eve. Her retelling struggles to break out of the cycle of history set in motion by the will of an omnipotent Creator and operates within that deterministic and male-defined paradigm, challenging, undermining, and ultimately rejecting it. Maggie's death is the only possible way out of the cycle, but, while it expresses Eliot's profound anger, it does not offer hope of an alternative to the present order of things.

Eliot's re-creation of the Genesis narrative, which illustrates her concern with the duplicity of metaphor, resembles its precursor because it invokes the same themes, recasts the same characters, but is unlike its precursor because it

inverts the world of values upon which the precursor was established. As in Bloom's model of revisionism, Eliot's story swerves away from the story which gave it birth, recalls it but renounces it. Some of the imperatives in the Genesis narrative are undermined: the survival of Noah is imperative for the continuation of God's plan for the earth. Maggie's death signals her creator's desire to halt a process, to begin a new discourse which is not defined by the principle of dominance and submission. At this point in her fiction, this is as far as Eliot seems able to go in positing an alternative history. She is very angry with society, knows that something must change, but is uncertain as to how the vision will be realized.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup>The novel *Romola* will not be discussed in this thesis but it is interesting to consider that Eliot resurrects Maggie Tulliver in the character of Romola. Romola is in a similar position to Maggie, and two aspects of her story resemble Maggie's story, but with differences: her journey down the river takes her to a place where she becomes a Christ figure to a community almost destroyed by disease; and the flood that kills Tito emancipates Romola so that she can do important work. The anger against society expressed in *The Mill on the Floss* is channelled into Eliot's vision of a redeemable society in *Romola*.

## Chapter 5

### *Felix Holt* and the Book of Esther

George Eliot closes her "Introduction" to *Felix Holt* with an allusion to Dante's *Inferno*:

The poets have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the under world. The thorn-bushes there, and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams. These things are a parable (Introduction, 84).

The last sentence of this passage points back to Dante as well as forward to stories that might spring from different readings of Dante. The tortured souls in Dante's underworld are figures in a parable, as are Eliot's own characters, who come to life in the stories that she creates from the histories we know. Like the blood that is "darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory", old stories, replete with the memories of humanity, feed life into new stories. These stories are parabolic: their meanings are simultaneously half known and half hidden.

The last sentence of the passage also echoes the phrase used by Jesus in the Gospels. When asked to explain the parable of the sower, Jesus tells his disciples that he uses parables, "that seeing they may see, and not perceive; that hearing they may hear, and not understand" (Mark 4:11-12), as if the parables, deliberately obscure, may only be understood by some, but even

these will neither perceive nor understand. Kermode points out that parables are dark sayings<sup>25</sup> that require interpretation to complete them, and that the narrative of the parable, though it invites interpretation, retains some measure of obscurity (*Genesis of Secrecy*, 24). The important thing about parables is that they require interpretation, and their "darkness" means that any number of interpretations may be relevant. This is significant for Eliot's reading of Biblical stories, and our reading, in turn, of Eliot's reading. Eliot retells these stories, decoding their obscurities and weaving in her own obscurities.

Stories about ordinary people can be read as stories about humanity in general, for, as Eliot points out time and again in her fiction, there are unknown histories and ordinary lives that are full of meaning and beauty. The narrator of *Felix Holt* tells us that "there is much pain that is quite noiseless; and vibrations that make human agonies are often a mere whisper in the roar of hurrying existence (Introduction, 84), while the narrator of *Adam Bede* explains that "human feeling is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth: it does not wait for beauty - it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it" (2, 17, 224). The narrator of *Middlemarch* points out that many human sorrows and joys make up the web of human history, but that if we were to know of all of these life experiences we would we overwhelmed:

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with

---

<sup>25</sup>Kermode explains that in the Greek Bible, *parable* is "equivalent to Hebrew *mashal*, which means 'riddle' or 'dark saying' but ... it can extend its range to include 'exemplary tale'". Sometimes the Greek word is also used to translate *hidah*, meaning 'riddle' (*Genesis of Secrecy*, 23).

stupidity (2, 20, 226).

Eliot's narrative project is to reach to the "other side of silence", and give us a glimpse of some of the small human tragedies that go unnoticed in the world.

Augmenting this, is her belief in the organic nature of society:

there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life, from the time when the primeval milkmaid had to wander with the wanderings of her clan, because the cow she milked was one of a herd which had made the pastures bare.

People "are rooted in the common earth" (*Felix Holt*, 3, 129), linked to each other, and to the greater universe. George Levine argues that in her late novels, Eliot is "projecting and testing a vision of the world that reaches beyond the fragments and discontinuities of ordinary perception to the continuous perdurable cosmos" (15). The storyteller is like the weaver "unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they [are] woven and interwoven" (*Middlemarch* 2, 15, 170): stories interpret stories; they are all parts of the collective memory of humanity, and they change shape, reinterpreting their precursors. Eliot's fiction reflects this connectedness. She defines form in art as "the limit of that difference by which we discriminate one object from another ... a limit determined partly by the intrinsic relations or composition of the object, and partly by the extrinsic action of other bodies upon it". Thus, form is concerned with the tension of difference and likeness between parts that combine to make a whole:

Form ... must first depend on the discrimination of wholes and then on the discrimination of parts. Fundamentally, form is unlikeness ... and in consistency with this fundamental meaning, every difference is Form. Thus, sweetness is a form of sensibility, rage is a form of passion, green is a form both of light and of sensibility. But with this fundamental discrimination is born in necessary antithesis the sense of wholeness or unbroken connexion

in space and time: a flash of light is a whole compared with the darkness which precedes and follows it; the taste of sourness is a whole and includes parts or degrees as it subsides. And as knowledge continues to grow by its alternating processes of distinction and combination, seeing smaller and smaller unlikenesses and grouping or associating these under a common likeness, it arrives at the conception of wholes composed of parts more and more multiplied and highly differenced, yet more and more absolutely bound together by various conditions of common likeness or mutual dependence. And the fullest example of such a whole is the highest example of Form: in other words, the relation of multiplex interdependent parts to a whole which is itself in the most varied and therefore the fullest relation to other wholes (*Selected Essays*, "Notes on Form in Art", 232-34).

Thus, as John P. McGowan points out, Eliot seeks to "maintain the tension between individual and context, between separate identity and definition by interaction" (185). Interaction generates energy and creativity, and takes place not only between characters and their environments, but between one story and another, and between the text and the reader. History is a complex web of stories that overlap, repeat each other, and generate new stories. The new stories are both like and unlike the old. In this interactive process "The narrator's flexibility follows the flexibility of a world in which subjects acting with and reacting against one another create society" (McGowan, 186). Paradoxically, this connection between the world and people, this continuity of different strands of narrative, this essential wholeness of history is made fragmentary and discontinuous through interpretation. Differences in interpretation create multiplicity, and herein is the life of the interpreted text.

This chapter will show that *Felix Holt* self-consciously explores storytelling, ways of reading, and interpretation through the depiction of the lives of individual characters as stories to be read within the text, and the text itself as a retelling of a story: the narrator invites reading within reading. The

characters in the novel are engaged in interpreting and decoding on a number of levels, and the recurrent references to reading, writing, documents of various kinds, interpretation, and revelation all point to a concern with stories. The chapter will explore connections between the Book of Esther and *Felix Holt* as proof of this concern. The connections between these two stories will be shown to be an expression of Eliot's perception of the unfolding and blurring of history through interpretation.

In *Felix Holt* there are numerous references to histories and narratives. In the "Author's Introduction", we are told that when the coach passes through Treby Magna the coachman tells the story of Transome Court and those who have lived there. His interpretation of the history of Transome Court is the first that we hear, and, we are told, it has remained unchanged through the years. The narrator of the novel also tells us that events of the past are always felt by future generations, so that no matter how unchanged the story may be, its effects reverberate through time:

And such stories often come to be fine in a sense that is not ironical. For there is seldom any wrong-doing which does not carry along with it some downfall of blindly-climbing hopes, some hard entail of suffering, some quickly-satiated desire that survives, with the life in death of old paralytic vice, to see itself cursed by its woeful progeny - some tragic mark of kinship in one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before, and to the life that is to come after, such as has raised the pity and terror of men ever since they began to discern between will and destiny (83).

Despite the effects of past words and actions that are felt by "woeful progeny", many of the stories within the story that is the novel remain undisclosed. We are only given the barest details of Mrs Transome's past: "save in a bitter little speech, or in a deep sigh heard by no one besides Denner, she kept all these

things hidden in her heart" (8, 199). Felix Holt tells very few of the secrets of his past, except to allude to "six weeks' debauchery" (5, 142) and the effect that this has had on his view of the world. Esther's own past is hidden, even from her, and Rufus Lyon's story is also surrounded by secrecy. The plot of the novel is such that secrets have to be uncovered in order to bring about a denouement. Revelation then requires interpretation and often action, as Harold Transome recognizes when he asks to know the secrets of the past: "'Mother,' ... 'tell me the truth, that I may know how to act'" (48, 583). The histories of these characters are partly known and partly obscured, and to be interpreted by other characters, as well as by the reader, they must be brought into the light. This process of disclosure and subsequent interpretation is painful, especially for Mrs Transome, whose past, returning to blight her present is like "a long-expected letter, with a black seal" (48, 583).

We are also told that there are different ways of reading the same story. When Rufus Lyon tells Esther the truth about his past he "regard[s] his narrative as a confession - as a revelation ... of his own miserable weakness and error", but Esther regards it as "a revelation of another sort: her mind seem[s] suddenly enlarged by a vision of passion and struggle, of delight and renunciation, in the lot of beings who had hitherto been a dull enigma to her". Rufus's "act of unfolding to her" changes Esther's perception of her father, and he becomes "the object of a new sympathy" (26, 354).

The two newspapers, the *Duffield Watchman* and the *North Loamshire Herald* demonstrate how the same text, that is, the text of an individual life, may be read from diverse perspectives, with no assurance that one way of

reading is closer to the truth than another, or even that these perspectives come close to truth at all. They tell two different stories about Harold Transome, and the narrator tells us a third:

these large-minded guides of public opinion argued from wider data than could be furnished by any knowledge of the particular case concerned. Harold Transome was neither the dissolute cosmopolitan so vigorously sketched by the Tory *Herald*, nor the intellectual giant and moral lobster suggested by the liberal imagination of the *Watchman* (8, 195-6).

Indeed, the epigraph of this chapter, quoting Shakespeare, warns us that "Rumour doth double like the voice and echo". The narrator tells us that the "talkative maiden, Rumour" is not the "youthful winged beauty with flowing garments" depicted by artists, but is really "a very old maid, who puckers her silly face by the fireside, and really does no more than chirp a wrong guess of a lame story into the ear of a fellow gossip" (8, 191). Any story, subjected to idle gossip, changes shape according to the motive and perspective of the teller. But this is true of all story telling, not just that which may be classed as gossip. Later, when Harold Transome convenes a meeting to discuss what can be done to have Felix acquitted we are told that "The gentlemen who gathered in the room at the White Hart were - not as the large imagination of the *North Loamshire Herald* suggested, 'of all shades of political opinion,' but - of as many shades as were to be found among the gentlemen of that country" (47, 577). Ironically, at the end of the novel, the concluding political assessment is left "to the all-wise - I mean the newspapers" (Epilogue, 606). This tongue-in-cheek closure leaves history to the arbitrariness of interpretation, and suggests that truth is subjective, shifting, and open-ended. Again, the novel is deconstructed right at the end. Not only is the final word on the political and economic status

of Treby Magna left to the highly questionable wisdom of the press, but the narrator returns to secrecy: "As to the town in which Felix Holt now resides, I will keep that a secret", and this because Felix may "be troubled by any visitor having the insufferable motive of curiosity" (Epilogue, 606). Here, Eliot invokes 'truth' by suggesting that some may want to go and visit Felix, as if he were a real person, and by doing so within the parameters of the fiction of her novel, she brings that very truth into question. The novel cannot claim truth any more than can the newspaper: interpretation is fiction.

Not only is there a past for each character, as well as different ways of reading this past, but the characters themselves are stories to be interpreted. The narrator guides *our* reading of the text of an individual life, as is the case when her "in fact" contradicts the way in which the newspapers have 'read' Harold Transome (8, 197). She also demonstrates how the characters within the text of the novel read each other. On his first visit to Rufus Lyon, for example, Felix Holt remarks, "You're thinking that you have a roughly-written page before you now'", and indeed Rufus "felt a slight shock as his glasses made perfectly clear to him the shaggy-headed, large-eyed, strong-limbed person of this questionable young man". But Rufus "checked any hasty interpretations", telling Felix, "I abstain from judging by the outward appearance only" (5, 140). Rufus, accustomed to interpreting complex Biblical texts, and having faith in the grace of God to work great wonders in the unlikeliest manner, reserves judgement, leaves interpretation of character open. Later when Esther struggles to understand Felix's aspirations, he tells her it is "'Because you can't see my history or my nature'" (27, 362). Rufus, too, is puzzled by the meaning of

Felix's life which, ultimately, proves more difficult to interpret than the theological texts that he studies. When Felix is arrested for murder, Mr Nuttwood tell Rufus that "The whole affair [is] dark and inscrutable". Rufus is distressed by the complexity of the situation:

He cared intensely for his opinions, and would have liked events to speak for them in a sort of picture-writing that everybody could understand. The enthusiasms of the world are not to be stimulated by a commentary in small and subtle characters which alone can tell the whole truth; and the picture-writing in Felix Holt's troubles was of an entirely puzzling kind (37, 466).<sup>26</sup>

Rufus, with all of his wisdom and insight, is unable to interpret the events leading up to Felix's arrest. The commentaries on the Bible, with their "small and subtle characters" and their claims to truth, fail Rufus. This "affair" calls for another way of interpreting.

The narrator invites the reader to interpret characters, often in a convoluted and subtle manner. We are invited, for example, to read Harold Transome's character through a series of indirect comparisons: Felix expresses disgust that Esther enjoys Byron, who represents everything that Felix claims he has renounced. He especially despises her fondness for "Childe Harolde". By means of the doubling of names, Eliot associates Harold Transome with Byron's hero. He too is the epitome of all that Felix dislikes and distrusts. In a frank discussion about Harold's character, Esther and Harold discuss his

---

<sup>26</sup>Eliot uses the term "picture-writing" in her essay "The Natural History of German Life":

It is an interesting branch of psychological observation to note the images that are habitually associated with abstract or collective terms - what may be called the picture-writing of the mind, which it carries on concurrently with the more subtle symbolism of language (*Selected Essays*, 107).

virtues and shortcomings in literary terms, at first in seriousness, then lapsing into playful badinage about his unsuitability as a romantic figure:

'... I am conscious of not having those severe virtues that you have been praising.'

'That is true. You are quite in another *genre*.'

'A woman would not find me a tragic hero.'

'O, no! She must dress for genteel comedy - such as your mother once described to me - where the most thrilling event is the drawing of a handsome cheque.'

'You are a naughty fairy,' said Harold .... 'Confess that you are disgusted with my want of romance.'

'I shall not confess to being disgusted. I shall ask you to confess that you are not a romantic figure' (43, 540).

This subversion of the notion of the romantic hero is in striking contrast to the terms in which Esther perceives Felix. Her impulse to speak in Felix's defence at the trial is cast in highly romantic language. She sees herself as "the voice of right and truth" who will speak out against injustice on behalf of the man who has become her hero:

When a woman feels purely and nobly, that ardour of hers which breaks through formulas too rigorously urged on men by daily practical needs, makes one of her most precious influences: she is the added impulse that shatters the stiffening crust of cautious experience. Her inspired ignorance gives a sublimity to actions so incongruously simple, that otherwise they would make men smile. Some of that ardour which has flashed out and illuminated all poetry and history was burning to-day in the bosom of sweet Esther Lyon. In this, at least, her woman's lot was perfect: that the man she loved was her hero; that her woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current (46, 571).

This is not the case in Esther's relationship with Harold Transome. When he proposes marriage, she is shocked by the disclosure that his first wife was a slave, and at this point, through a careful shift, Harold becomes a Byronic character in a new story:

Hitherto Esther's acquaintance with Oriental love was derived chiefly

from Byronic poems, and this had not sufficed to adjust her mind to a new story, where the Giaour concerned was giving her his arm (43, 541).

This signals a shift in Esther's sympathy and her perceptions of the world, which had hitherto been a romance that she fancied herself to be living. In this self-made construct, she had viewed the demands of everyday life and the claims people made upon her as annoying interruptions of her romantic narrative. After her visit to Transome Court, and partly owing to Felix Holt's influence, Esther's daydreams of wealth and luxury give way to a larger vision. Immersed in her own narrative, she turns from books to contemplation about the meaning of her history: "Esther found it impossible to read in these days; her life was a book which she seemed herself to be constructing - trying to make character clear before her, and looking into the ways of destiny" (40, 498). Here, Esther is given the autonomy of the author: her life is a story, and along with the authority of authorship comes the burden of responsibility.

Mrs Transome's life is also referred to as a story, one that has lost all its charm and become a tale about entrapment in the mistakes and regrets of the past, and the lovelessness of the present:

— she moved to and fro amongst the rose-coloured satin of chairs and curtains - the great story of this world reduced for her to the little tale of her own existence - dull obscurity everywhere, except where the keen light fell on the narrow track of her own lot, wide only for a woman's anguish (34, 438).

In the case of Mrs Transome, Eliot conflates images of writing and painting.

We are told that

She had no ultimate analysis of things that went beyond blood and family - the Herons of Fenshore or the Badgers of Hillbury. She had never seen behind the canvas with which her life was hung. In the dim background there was the burning mount and the tables of the law; in the foreground there was Lady Debarry

privately gossiping about her, and Lady Wyvern finally deciding not to send her invitations to dinner. Unlike that Semiramis who made laws to suit her practical licence, she lived, poor soul, in the midst of desecrated sanctities, and of honours that looked tarnished in the light of monotonous and weary suns (40, 494).<sup>27</sup>

Mrs Transome is a bitter and passive recipient of the waywardnesses of fate. Unlike Esther, who is writing her own life, Mrs Transome has been robbed of the autonomy of authorship, is unable to change the course of her life, and is frozen into static and joyless regret. The happy face of her youth is captured in a portrait above the mantel-piece at Transome Court. Jermyn, visiting the house, studies the portrait, and when Mrs Transome enters the room, it is as if "by some sorcery, the brilliant smiling young woman above the mantel-piece seemed to be appearing at the doorway withered and frosted by many winters, and with lips and eyes from which the smile had departed" (42, 513). While Mrs Transome's sanctities lie desecrated, beyond interpretation, frozen in a lifeless portrait, Esther's future lies open before her, promising to give meaning to "that past which had created the sanctities and affections of her life" (38, 476). When the disclosure of her inheritance is made to Esther, she feels that she is "moving in a world charged with forces". She has been given a vision which is open to many interpretations (38, 476), while the dream of Mrs Transome's youth, is a static portrait of lost happiness: Esther too notices the painting of Mrs Transome:

Mrs Transome's full-length portrait, being the only picture there, urged itself too strongly on her attention: the youthful brilliancy it represented saddened Esther by its inevitable association with

---

<sup>27</sup>Semiramis was a "Mythical queen of Assyria, wife of king Ninus, who succeeded him, after having, some stories say, contrived his murder" (Notes appended to Penguin edition of *Felix Holt*, 671).

what she daily saw had come instead of it - a joyless, embittered age (49, 585).

Esther narrowly escapes this fate which would come with marrying into the Transome family. We are alerted to this disturbing possibility by Harold's remark when he comes upon Esther in the drawing-room: "Don't move, pray," ... 'you look as if you were standing for your own portrait'" (40, 498).

The conflation of painting and poetry, and the tension between life and art, is expressed in a digression by the narrator, after Matthew Jermyn asks Mrs Transome to tell Harold the truth about the past. The allusions to Dante's *Inferno* are strong, and, in the metaphor, the narrator refers to Dante's art as a "canvas of poetic story":

There is heroism even in the circles of hell for fellow-sinners who cling to each other in the fiery whirlwind and never recriminate. But these things, which are easy to discern when they are painted for us on the large canvas of poetic story, become confused and obscure even for well-read gentlemen when their affection for themselves is alarmed by pressing details of actual experience (42, 520).

Much of the action in the novel is dependent on disclosures of the past in different documents. Maurice Christian's notebook with the chain and seals and the smudged names revives Rufus Lyon's buried memories and agitates his conscience so that he feels bound to tell Esther who she really is. Up until now Esther has read the story of her life in one way, but at this point the story takes a dramatic turn. She is no longer what she believed herself to be and she must reread her life with a new text appended.

Tommy Trounsem tells Christian that he discovered that he was "'born to property'" from a clerk who read the "'parish register'" (28, 378). There are numerous documents that determine the fates of individuals: wills, legal

statements, and lawyers' letters reveal to Esther and Harold Transome their real position in the world and the way their destinies could be mapped out.

The character who is most associated with books and reading is Rufus Lyon, the strange little Dissenting preacher whom schoolboys nickname 'Revelations'. His study is crammed with "his store of old books, which lay about him in piles so arranged as to leave narrow lanes between them" (4, 131).

He is immersed in this world of books and is

too short-sighted to notice those who tittered at him - too absent from the world of small facts and petty impulses in which titterers live. With Satan to argue against on matters of vital experience as well as of church government, with great texts to meditate on, which seemed to get deeper as he tried to fathom them, it had never occurred to him to reflect what sort of image his small person made on the retina of a light-minded beholder (4, 131-2).

When Esther goes to visit for a while at Transome Court, he withdraws deeper into this world of paper and writing so that when she comes home to visit him he is "almost surrounded by a wall of books, with merely his head peeping above them" (41, 503). The world that he inhabits is that of the Old Testament. He believes that the stories of the Old Testament abound with messages and lessons for society, and his speech is full of Biblical allusions. He tells Felix, "I have uttered such names as Brougham and Wellington in the pulpit. Why not Wellington as well as Rabshakeh? and why not Brougham as well as Balaam? Does God know less of men than He did in the days of Hezekiah and Moses?" (5, 146). Unlike Mrs Transome who "found ridicule of Biblical characters very amusing" (1, 105), Rufus acquires sincerity, compassion, and wisdom from his study of the lives of the heroes of his faith. Rufus's immersion in the Bible, however, often means that the line between stories and the reality outside of

the text is blurred. When he and Esther are informed of her claim on Transome Court we are told that "he was so accustomed to the impersonal study of narrative, that even in these exceptional moments the habit of half a century asserted itself, and he seemed not to distinguish the case of Esther's inheritance from a story in ancient history" (38, 475). Rufus instinctively reads the present in the light of stories of the past. He sees the workings of providence in Esther's life, and, significantly, when their lives are threatened by great change and the future is uncertain, he finds that his "studies have gone somewhat curiously into prophetic history" (41, 504). When Esther pays a surprise visit from Transome Court she finds him "absorbed in mastering all those painstaking interpretations of the Book of Daniel, which are by this time well gone to the limbo of mistaken criticism". She opens the door to hear him

rehearsing aloud a passage in which he declared, with some parenthetic provisoes, that he conceived not how a perverse ingenuity could blunt the edge of prophetic explicitness, or how an open mind could fail to see in the chronology of 'the little horn' the resplendent lamp of an inspired symbol searching out the germinal growth of an antichristian power (41, 503).

For Rufus, the vision in Daniel is prophetically explicit and its symbolism is clear.<sup>28</sup> In the same way, his reading of Esther's history convinces him that her life is providentially arranged. Yet to Esther the meaning of her story is

---

<sup>28</sup>Mary Wilson Carpenter discusses the nineteenth century interest in the prophecies of Daniel. She points out that Eliot would have been familiar with interpretations of the prophecy of the 'little horn'. 'Continuous historical' expositors in the early part of the century claimed that "the year 606 gave rise to the 'double apostasy' of papal Rome and Mohammedanism, thus fulfilling the prophecies of Daniel's 'little horn' and St. John's 'reign of the beast' (Antichrist), or 1260 days" (*Landscape of Time*, 8). Eliot's later rejection of the continuous historical school of prophecy would account for her comment here that the interpretations of Daniel which Rufus is reading "are by this time well gone to the limbo of mistaken criticism".

unclear. Rufus tells her, "you have been led by a peculiar path, and into experience which is not ordinarily the lot of those who are seated in high places", but Esther is uneasy: "There was no illumination for her in this theory of providential arrangement" (41, 505). Her father may sense a greatness awaiting her, but until her history is closed neither we, the readers of her narrative, nor Esther herself can know its outcome or full significance. What is more, there is no guarantee, when we are removed in time and space from the events narrated in the story, that they will have the same meaning that they had for their participants or the interpreters that preceded us.<sup>29</sup> The role of prophecy in interpretation is important in this chapter. While Rufus puzzles over the "painstaking interpretations" (41, 503) of Daniel, Esther is "entirely occupied with Felix Holt's prophecy that she would marry Harold Transome" (41, 509). Rufus believes that human destiny is providentially arranged, and that the study of prophecy will disclose the fate of the individual and of the world. He is proved wrong: Felix's prophecy, which seems to fit the pattern established by a determined course of events, is never fulfilled, and Esther learns that she can write her own story.

George Eliot's use of the Old Testament in the writing of *Felix Holt*, particularly the Book of Esther, reveals her concern with the interpretation of stories. Most of the elements of the Biblical story are present in the novel but, under Eliot's hand, emphases shift, hidden themes are brought to the surface, characters are given new roles, and assumptions are challenged.

---

<sup>29</sup>We recall the comment by the narrator of *Adam Bede* that "no story is the same to us after a lapse of time; or rather, we who read it are no longer the same interpreters" (6, 54, 573).

The patriarchal world of the Persian court, where women are kept like beautiful ornaments for the pleasure of the king, is translated, in *Felix Holt*, to Transome Court. There are two queens in the Book of Esther: the beautiful Vashti who, because of her refusal to obey the king's command to come before his guests and display her beauty, is dethroned; and the lovely Esther whose beauty pleases the same king so that she is made queen in Vashti's place. The Queen Vashti of Transome Court is Mrs Transome, but she is queen of a rather neglected palace and the epigraph hints at the neglect that she herself suffers: "I am Grey" (1, 85). We are told that "Mrs Transome was wont to look queenly of an evening" (1, 102):

Her person was too typical of social distinctions to be passed by with indifference by any one; it would have fitted an empress in her own right, who had had to rule in spite of faction, to dare the violation of treaties and dread retributive invasions, to grasp after new territories, to be defiant in desperate circumstances, and to feel a woman's hunger of the heart for ever unsatisfied (1, 104).

Here, political metaphors describe Mrs Transome's personal struggle and hardship. The factions, violation of treaties, retributive invasions, and desperate circumstances are Mrs Transome's relationships which have caused her so much pain: she is despised and neglected by the men she has loved. In reply to Matthew Jermyn's question whether Harold is good to her, she replies bitterly, "O, to be sure - good as men are disposed to be to women, giving them cushions and carriages, and recommending them to enjoy themselves, and then expecting them to be contented under contempt and neglect" (9, 201). To her waiting-woman Denner she complains: "What is the use of a woman's will? - if she tries, she doesn't get it, and she ceases to be loved. God was cruel when he made women'" (39, 488). Eliot's attitude to the character she has created in

Arabella Transome is ambivalent: she evokes strong sympathy for a woman who has been disappointed by life and has had the misfortune to love men like Matthew Jermyn, but she also holds her responsible for the way her life has turned out. In Mrs Transome's dressing room, Denner changes "the dishevelled Hecuba-like woman whom she had found half an hour before" into "the majestic lady in costume". Denner's act of throwing an Indian scarf over Mrs Transome's shoulders is "putting the finishing touch to Mrs Transome's dress", as if she were completing a painting (39, 489). In the strong contrast between the Hecuba and the majestic woman, Eliot expresses the tragedy of a broken will. But she seems also to suggest that much of Mrs Transome's unhappiness is a consequence of her own inability to be resigned to her lot and to accept the consequences of the choices she has made. The desolation and despair that Esther reads in "the threadbare tissues of this majestic lady's life" (49, 585) help her to avoid the fate of Mrs Transome, the fate of a vibrant, strong-willed woman who is a nonentity in her own home. The probable execution of Vashti in the Bible story is given an ironic twist in Mrs Transome's story: when Denner finds her in her room after Harold has told her that he knows the truth about Matthew Jermyn, she utters the agonizing cry, "I am not going to die! I shall live - I shall live!" (50, 594). It is not death that terrifies Mrs Transome, but life.

Esther is described as "a light-footed, sweet-voiced Queen Esther" (6, 160), who "believe[s] that in the eyes of a high-bred man no young lady in Treby could equal her" (16, 266). Esther of the Bible story has the beauty that wins her the king's favour. Describing Esther Lyon to his mother, Harold says

that she is "an uncommonly fine woman - steps like a queen" (36, 453). The heroines of both stories are orphans, cared for by benevolent uncles, and, like the Jewish maiden who becomes queen, Esther seems destined for greatness. Harold Transome tells her, "you are past your majority; you are empress of your own fortunes - and more besides" (40, 501). As in the old story, Eliot's Esther Lyon at first does not comprehend the extent of her influence at Transome Court, but finally realizes that her choices will affect the lives of many. Visions of wealth and luxury soon fade before the harsh reality of Mrs Transome's desperate lot: her "solitary elevation to wealth, which out of Utopia she had no notion how she should manage, looked as chill and dreary as the offer of dignities in an unknown country" (44, 551).

In this reinterpretation of the story of Esther, the relationship between the old queen and the prospective new one is important. Esther and Mrs Transome form a bond that springs from mutual recognition. Mrs Transome sees in Esther something of her former spiritedness, while Esther perceives in Mrs Transome an image of who she could become if she married Harold. There is also an unseen link with Harold's first wife: if Esther remains at Transome Court she will be one of the women in Harold's harem: Harold Transome is Eliot's King Ahaseurus whose court is reconstructed in a wonderfully farcical episode in chapter 43. The diplomacy and political intrigue of the Persian court, where Esther pleads for her people, Haman plots against Mordecai and the king, and Ahaseurus is the vacillating monarch, is

replayed here.<sup>30</sup> Mrs Holt is the intercessor and Mr Transome senior and his grandson are the comic embodiment of King Ahaseurus. This scene comes immediately after a crucial stage in Esther's personal growth, and underscores the deflation of her dreams of Utopia: Esther, like her Biblical precursor, agonizes over her moral duty:

It was difficult by any theory of providence, or consideration of results, to see a course which she could call duty: if something would come and urge itself strongly as pleasure, and save her from the effort to find a clue of principle amid the labyrinthine confusions of right and possession, the promise could not but seem alluring. And yet, this life at Transome Court was *not* the life of her daydreams: there was dulness already in its ease, and in the absence of high demand; and there was the vague consciousness that the love of this not uninteresting man who hovered about her gave an air of moral mediocrity to all her prospects. She would not have been able perhaps to define this impression; but somehow or other by this elevation of fortune it seemed that the higher ambition which had begun to spring in her was for ever nullified (43, 524).

After this serious meditation comes the farce: Mrs Holt, who has confused notions about "king and parliament" (43, 532), comes to Transome Court to plead with Harold to intercede to the king on Felix's behalf. The seriousness, both of Esther's moral dilemma and Felix's imprisonment, is undermined as comedy takes over. Royalty is parodied in the old Mr Transome and his grandson Harry. Mrs Holt is struck by Mr Transome's somewhat kingly attire: "his furred and unusual costume appear[ed] to indicate a mysterious dignity which she must hasten to include in her appeal" (43, 533).

---

<sup>30</sup>In an essay on the Book of Esther, Jack M. Sasson argues that: "the comic potential of the story is richly exploited, and laughter at human vanity, gall, and blindness becomes the vehicle by which the writer gives his tale integrity and moral vision. Were it not for its modern pejorative connotation, 'travesty' (wherein serious subjects are treated lightly) would suit Esther as a literary category" (339).

Later, in the "stony spaciousness" of the entrance hall with its statues of Apollo, Bacchus, and Silenus, and its "heavy stuccoed angels" (43, 541-2), all of which suggest an empty decadence, Harry, the young tyrant, capers about in his red and purple costume. Harry's 'subjects' are squirrels, dogs, servants, and Job Tudge. Mr Transome, the epitome of senile royalty, enters, dressed in an Oriental scarf and, assuming that he must be very influential, Mrs Holt asks him to speak to the king about Felix. When Harry suspects that Mrs Holt is threatening his grandfather he storms at her and beats her with his "mimic jockey's whip" (43, 545). When this violence seems ineffectual, he bites her, as he did Mrs Transome earlier in the novel. At this point, the scene erupts into chaos and Esther, descending the stairs, restores peace. This comedy is juxtaposed with the conversation between Harold and Esther about what can be done for Felix. Harold assures Esther that for her sake, he will "spare no effort on behalf of such a young man". At this, Esther

felt pleased with him; she was open to the fallacious delight of being assured that she had power over him to make him do what she liked, and quite forgot the many impressions which had convinced her that Harold had a padded yoke ready for the neck of every man, woman, and child that depended on him (43, 538).

Like King Ahaseurus who promises Queen Esther twice that he will give her up to half of his kingdom (Esther 5:6, 7:2), Harold pledges to do whatever pleases Esther. We cannot, however, forget the forsaken Vashti who is deposed because she will not obey a command, or the bitter mother who is made to look fine against a background of satin cushions, but whose pain is brushed aside as inconsequential. We know that, despite his admiration for Esther, Harold

regarded women as slight things, but he was fond of slight things in the intervals of business; and he held it among the chief arts of life to keep these pleasant diversions within such bonds that they should never interfere with the course of his serious ambition (16, 266).

His misogyny is physically represented in his son who bites Mrs Transome and Mrs Holt because they pose a threat to the world in which he reigns as king of the animals in his menagerie.

Harold Transome is Felix Holt's *doppelgänger*. Their attitudes to women are similar, though Felix's intolerance of them is far more sinister: to Felix, "women [are] a curse; all life is stunted to suit their littleness" (10, 212). Yet, Felix is also Esther's teacher, who embodies better values, in Esther's mind, than those represented by Harold Transome. It is difficult to assess Eliot's attitude to Felix whose name, rather than Esther's, provides the title for the novel. He is presented as dogmatic and insensitive, barely concealing his misogyny, on the one hand, yet the custodian of morality, whose face is "worthy to be called 'the human face divine'" (30, 398) on the other. Esther sees him "as an influence above her life, rather than a part of it; some time or other, perhaps, he would be to her as if he belonged to the solemn admonishing skies, checking her self-satisfied pettiness with the suggestion of a wider life" (37, 468). Felix wants to rewrite Esther's story so that she will not be like "the foolish women who spoil men's lives" (10, 212). What Felix desires is "one beautiful woman whose mind [is] as noble as her face [is] beautiful - who [makes] a man's passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life" (27, 364). Felix marries Esther because she becomes someone who will not hinder his life. We are given the impression that the marriage takes place

because Esther learns a "just subjection" and has a sense of "dependence and possible illumination" when she is with Felix (43, 523). Notwithstanding, Esther's "strange story of an alienated inheritance" (38, 474), becomes "an unbroken history sanctified by one religion" (44, 551). Her religion is Felix, through whose eyes she sees the world to be a different place from the Utopia of her daydreams.

Two other characters must complete Eliot's rereading of the book of Esther: Rufus Lyon, the Dissenting minister, is Mordecai, the real hero of the Bible story, who refuses to do obeisance to Haman; and Lawyer Jermyn, who, like Haman, "trusts no bond except that of self-interest", whose plotting and swindling is like a game of chess in which he must outmanoeuvre his opponents (29, 383), and whose ruin is inevitable. When King Ahaseurus discovers Haman on the queen's couch pleading for his life, he suspects adultery and is enraged. This moment in the Book of Esther is replayed in *Felix Holt* when Mr Transome discovers Jermyn alone in the drawing room at Transome Court after the latter has just had an interview with Mrs Transome. Obviously accustomed to seeing the lawyer with his wife in days gone by, Mr Transome, the cuckolded husband, stammers, "Mr Jermyn? - why - where is Mrs Transome?" (43, 520). As Jermyn is leaving, it is the wicked Harry who plays Ahaseurus's part: "thinking he had an eligible opportunity, [he] turned round to give a parting stroke on the stranger's coattails " (43, 520): the adulterer is reprimanded; in Esther, Haman is hanged on a fifty cubit high

gallows (7:9,10).<sup>31</sup>

In an essay on the reinterpretation of the *Akedah*<sup>32</sup> in modern literature, Michael Brown suggests that the encounter between Abraham, Isaac, and God has "struck different responsive chords over the centuries, as evidenced in the divergent midrashim which emerged to interpret the Biblical myth". By midrash he means "all post-Biblical reworkings in prose or poetry of Biblical myth" (99). This chapter has demonstrated a similar process at work in the novel *Felix Holt*. Brown shows how modern Jewish writers have used the Hebrew *Akedah* myth in different ways. Some "rewrite the Biblical story - and history as well - in order to escape their implications" (104), while others "relate only to the underside of the myth, seeing it mainly as one which raises questions about faith or denies God altogether" (102). For some writers this particular myth has "come to symbolize not faith beautiful, but faith misguided and destructive" (111). In *Felix Holt* and in her other novels, Eliot makes use of myths of the Old and New Testaments to show, on the one hand, how history repeats itself and is reflected in the stories that we tell; on the other hand, her reinterpretations play with the possibilities of changing the determined pattern

---

<sup>31</sup>Sasson describes the downfall of Haman:

Everything falls together at Esther's second soirée. She denounces Haman; the king is angered and rushes out to reflect; a terrified Haman turns to Esther for succor; the king returns to find his vizier prostrate on his wife's couch and suspects the worst. When Harbona comes in with the announcement that Haman had planned to kill the very man whom the king recently honored for loyalty, Haman's fate is sealed (341).

<sup>32</sup>The *Akedah* is the story in Genesis 22 of God's instruction to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham obeys God but as he is about to kill his son, God intervenes. Abraham, who is praised for his faithfulness, offers up a ram in Isaac's place.

of history. Her essentially secular stories, in recalling religious myths, challenge notions of God and fate. Her 'religion', like Feuerbach's, is anthropological, and explores the absence of God.<sup>33</sup> Ironically, however, while Eliot articulates the possibility of a religion without God, she returns to the myths of the Bible and the language of religion to do this. Despite her atheism, "her writing is dominated by religious discourse to the point that it cannot be read separately from the vocabulary, the symbolic systems, the codes and the narrative syntax of the Judaeo-Christian tradition" (Butler, 81). This is confirmed by her use of Judaeo-Christian narrative, as in the case of *Felix Holt* and *Esther*. Her retelling of Biblical stories revivifies, but, paradoxically, challenges the symbolic systems of those stories.

---

<sup>33</sup>Perhaps there is no other Old Testament book more appropriate for this exploration than *Esther*, which is distinctive for its absent God: the name of God is not mentioned at all. Characters are responsible for their own destinies and the fate of the Jews is seen to be in the hands, not of God, but of their leaders in Queen Esther and Mordecai.

## Chapter 6

### Prophecy, Exile, and Redemption in *Daniel Deronda*

George Eliot writes in the epigraph at the beginning of *Daniel Deronda* that "No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in heaven or on earth, it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out" (1, 1, 35). This novel, her last, as well as her most ambitious and experimental, is, in many ways, about beginnings. It returns to the concerns which motivated her fiction from its earliest beginnings in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, to the prophetic and apocalyptic in Biblical history which fascinated the young Mary Ann Evans, and, in a broader sense, to a search for the roots of Western Christianity. In this monumental narrative endeavour to uncover beginnings, Eliot draws on all that Strauss, Feuerbach, Renan, Spinoza, the historian Kuenen, and others have taught her. She also returns to stories from the Bible that have informed her faith and her agnosticism, her Christianity, and her Religion of Humanity. She interprets these stories in the light of research into Kabbalah, Jewish history, and hermeneutics. Thus, the numerous echoes of Biblical characters and myths that resound in this novel are not simply allusory, nor are they only an experiment in typology, that exegetical method used by the early Christians to lend

credibility to their interpretations of the Gospel and the life of Jesus.<sup>34</sup> Rather, they are, as in some of her earlier novels, an experiment in the secularization of religious stories, and, simultaneously, a rereading and a deconstruction of these stories to serve her thematic and moral purposes.

Shaffer shows that Eliot makes use of the German school of higher criticism "in presenting on a vast scale the development and dissolution of historical civilizations, in examining the nature of historical time and event, and in seeking the forms of the prophetic and poetic imagination" (233). She draws upon Biblical stories to explore the ways in which Jewish mythology and history have given shape to a Western, Christian version of history. Lyn Pykett, in her examination of Eliot's use of typology, argues that "*Daniel Deronda* marks a significant development beyond Realism in the direction of symbolism, myth and epic and it also marks a definitive movement beyond history" ("Typology and the End[s] of History", 64).<sup>35</sup>

In "Narrative and History", J. Hillis Miller suggests that the novel is a chain of displacements - displacement of its author into the invented role of the narrator, further displacement of the narrator into the lives of imaginary characters ... displacement of the 'origin' of the story (in historical events or in the life experience of the narrator) into the fictitious events of the narrative (456).

---

<sup>34</sup>Tzvetan Todorov points out that typology was an exegetical method used by the New Testament writers. This methodology assumes a relation between two phenomena, an earlier and a later one, and in this relation "the first announces the second, the second accomplishes the first" (118). The New Testament is full of examples of typology, especially in the writings of Paul. Todorov also points out that typology is frequently used in psychoanalysis (119).

<sup>35</sup>Pykett suggests that the novel moves from history to Metahistory: it is about the making of history. She notes that the term Metahistory is used by Hayden White in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*.

In *Daniel Deronda* there is an additional form of displacement at work.<sup>36</sup> Eliot's narrative records a debt to Biblical mythology, but, at the same time, moves away from this very mythology and reinterprets it. This is what Handelman terms "a heretic hermeneutic ... a complex dialectic of identification and displacement" (137). Thus, Eliot begins her story within a particular Biblical mythos, but then undermines this mythos with a retelling that relocates meaning outside the patriarchy of Biblical mythology, the God-centred faith of Judaism and Christianity, and the determinism of history. She is not merely alluding, but making a paradigm shift. She is not a typologist, as Pykett suggests, because in typology the second story confirms the first; Eliot's stories deconstruct earlier stories. In previous chapters, this deconstruction and reinterpretation has been associated with the term midrash. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's particular form of midrash is an intricate and complex reworking of many elements of Biblical stories.

In the rich tissue<sup>37</sup> of the text of *Daniel Deronda*, she has woven the strands from Biblical themes of exile, vision and prophecy, priesthood, covenant, and redemption.<sup>38</sup> This chapter will explore Eliot's use of themes and characters from this book and other Biblical materials.

The theme of exile is an important one in *Daniel Deronda*. Jean Sudrann

---

<sup>36</sup>This displacement resembles Bloom's "revisionary ratios" in which the young poet 'swerves away' from the precursor poet, simultaneously acknowledging a debt to the precursor and establishing a unique identity. Bloom's term for this 'swerving away' is *clinamen* (*Anxiety of Influence*, 66).

<sup>37</sup>Roland Barthes points out that the etymology of the word 'text' suggests the image of something woven: "it is a tissue" (39).

<sup>38</sup>This is not to suggest that Eliot uses only Biblical stories, but her use of other sources, Greek mythology for instance, is beyond the scope of this discussion.

suggests that the double plot and the series of melodramatic episodes reflect this theme and place the novel alongside modern novels exploring alienation and self-dissolution (435). The novel is about rootlessness and loss of security. Most of the characters are exiles, both spiritually and physically. The narrator describes Gwendolen's childhood as a perpetual "roving from one foreign watering-place or Parisian apartment to another, always feeling new antipathies to new suites of hired furniture, and meeting new people under conditions which made her appear of little importance" (1, 3, 52). Gwendolen has no "spot of a native land .... where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection" (1, 3, 50), and is therefore a "princess in exile" (1, 4, 71). Part of Gwendolen's journey towards self-awareness involves a process of learning how to cope with perpetual exile. She sees marriage to Grandcourt as a means of gaining power and independence through wealth: it is a way to surmount her social exile. This marriage represents a ticket to the fashionable world, but is also a gamble in which her gain becomes another's loss. Ironically, Gwendolen's rebellion against the restrictions on women which render them powerless and leave them with no happy alternatives to marriage is expressed in the very decision to marry. She believes that Grandcourt will accommodate her desire for independence:

He seemed as little of a flaw in his fortunes as a lover and a husband could possibly be. Gwendolen wished to mount the chariot and drive the plunging horses herself, with a spouse by her side who would fold his arms and give her his countenance without looking ridiculous .... He did not appear to enjoy anything much. That was not necessary: and the less he had of particular tastes or desires, the more freedom his wife was likely to have in following hers. Gwendolen conceived that after marriage she would most probably be able to manage him thoroughly (2, 13, 173).

But she misjudges Grandcourt and her shortsightedness leads her into a relationship which is stifling, humiliating, and frightening, a more severe exile than she had hitherto known. Through marriage, Gwendolen's spiritual exile is heightened because she is brought to despair and the brink of criminality.

This spiritual isolation is illustrated through Gwendolen's reaction to the "dead face and the fleeing figure" behind the sliding panel (1, 6, 91) in the house at Offendene. Her fright at the picture is related to the "spiritual dread" which overwhelms her when she is confronted with natural and spiritual grandeur:

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. The little astronomy taught her at school used sometimes to set her imagination at work in a way that made her tremble: but always when someone joined her she recovered her indifference to the vastness in which she seemed an exile (1, 6, 94-5).

Gwendolen's response to the vastness of the spiritual universe resembles ecstatic religious experiences. Her "spiritual dread", which she cannot explain, is similar to religious dread as described by Kierkegaard, for whom religious experience is associated with the experience of nothingness (Shaffer, 262). The fear is thus of nothingness and annihilation. Religion has lost its dogmatic, credal power but retains its hold on the passions and the imagination.

Gwendolen's exile illustrates a link between theology and pathology, the roots of which idea Eliot finds in Feuerbach. Gwendolen's alienation is essentially a self-imposed isolation from other people. She abdicates responsibility in the Feuerbachian relationship in which a person is both I and thou, which implies the dependence of people upon each other and Nature. Gwendolen's

withdrawal from this relationship places her in a position of utmost isolation in the universe, and her vague awareness of this fills her with dread. Shaffer explains that the *mystical* origins of the I-thou relationship may be found in Gnostic and Kabbalistic thinking: Adam is the soul containing all souls; his fall scattered the sparks of the soul everywhere, and the moral duty of humans is to restore the spiritual unity of souls (255). From this comes the Kabbalistic doctrine of the transmigration of souls, which will be explored later (pg 123). Until Gwendolen acknowledges her isolation and attempts to enter the circle of human communion, she remains alone. Her gradual spiritual integration is facilitated by her relationship with Daniel which begins as a sexual attraction but is transmuted into a spiritual bond. The sexual passion of their relationship becomes religious passion, and Daniel, the potential lover, becomes confessor and redeemer.

The theme of 'exile and return' is a very important one in the Old Testament.<sup>39</sup> Gwendolen's exile is linked to that of the Jewish characters through her association with Daniel as well as with the parallels between her experience and that of the Princess Halm-Eberstein. All of the Jews in the novel

---

<sup>39</sup>Hans Walter Wolff points out that the Hebrew word for return, *shûb*, appears frequently in the Old Testament, especially in the work of the Deuteronomistic Historian, which includes Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. In this strand of tradition, a return from disobedience to God is the guarantee of God's blessing on the Jews despite the hardships of exile. An example of this is Deuteronomy 30:1-10, where the catchword appears 4 times (91). This passage also introduces the notion of a circumcision of the heart: if the people return to God, then "the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deut 30:6). The summons to return is, says Wolff, "the peculiar interest of this first comprehensive history not only of the Old Testament but of world literature" (100).

are exiles in one way or another. Mirah, cut off from her mother and brother, alone and afraid in England, resembles Hagar who, after Eve, is the first exiled woman in the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> When Mirah is rescued by Daniel her isolation is expressed in her look which is "full of wondering timidity, such as the forsaken one in the desert might have lifted to the angelic vision before she knew whether his message were in anger or in pity" (2, 17, 234). This echoes the scene in Genesis 16:7, when the forsaken Hagar encounters the rescuing angel in the wilderness. We are told later that Daniel "had naturally some resentment on behalf of the Hagers and Ishmaels" (5, 36, 489). This is in reference to Lydia Glasher and her children, and suggests that Daniel identifies with the alienated because of his own sense of alienation. Lydia Glasher also resembles Hagar because she has had Grandcourt's children but their inheritance is threatened if he marries Gwendolen. Lydia is, like Hagar, the forsaken woman, cut off from society and security.

Two other Jewish characters, Kalonymos, the friend of Daniel's grandfather, and Klesmer, the flamboyant musician, are portrayed as wanderers and exiles. According to William Baker, Klesmer's name is a Polish-Yiddish word meaning 'itinerant musician' (*George Eliot and Judaism*, 234). In a quip to Mr Bult, Klesmer describes himself as "Elijah. [I am] the Wandering Jew" (3, 22, 284), which betrays an awareness of his position on the periphery

---

<sup>40</sup>Hagar is Sarah's handmaiden by whom Abraham has a child, Ishmael. After the birth of Sarah's son Isaac, Sarah banishes Hagar and Ishmael. The two wander into the wilderness, and, before succumbing to thirst, they are rescued by an angel (Gen 16:4, 21:8-21). Sarah banishes Hagar because she fears that Isaac will lose his inheritance. The same tension dominates the relationship between Gwendolen and Lydia Glasher.

of fashionable English society. He has access to this world through his marriage to Catherine Arrowpoint but nevertheless remains an outsider and something of a curiosity to the other characters. It is not only his Jewishness that alienates him, but his art as well. Klesmer's self-assurance and sense of vocation suggest that he has accepted and indeed, is defined by, his exile. Kalonymos, Daniel's link with his Jewish heritage, says "I choose to be a wanderer" (8, 60, 789), which suggests that his exile is partly self-imposed. Kalonymos and Klesmer are presented as the guardians of a religious and cultural heritage. Kalonymos has the chest containing his friend's manuscripts and when he gives Daniel the key he is handing over Daniel's past. In accepting the key, Daniel accepts not only a vocation but also the exile that is part of being Jewish, for the Jews are the "archetypal aliens" (Sudrann, 439). Not only is their alienation evident in a modern world, but it was also the experience of their Biblical predecessors: Adam and Eve who were sent from Eden; Abraham, the wanderer from Ur of the Chaldees; the slaves of the Egyptians whose exile was lived out in forty years of wandering in the wilderness; the many prophets of the exile, and, most importantly, the exiled Israelites in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup>

This theme is of particular importance with reference to Daniel and Mordecai. Daniel is an exile, initially because of his uncertain position in society. He is sure, even as a child, that "there was something about his birth

---

<sup>41</sup>Old Testament scholars point out that the Old Testament, most of it composed in the aftermath of the Babylon exile, again and again bears witness to this most significant and momentous event in the life of ancient Israel. It shapes so much of Hebrew thinking about faith, the land, and nationhood.

which threw him out from the class of gentlemen to which the baronet belonged" (2, 16, 209). He believes himself to be different from other boys, and is painfully aware that he is excluded from an inheritance because his father is unknown. He is like Gwendolen in this respect: neither can claim "a spot of a native land" for their own. Daniel's namesake in the Old Testament is an exile in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:1-7).<sup>42</sup> Deronda resembles the Daniel of the Old Testament in his alienation which is both spiritual and social, his role as the interpreter of visions, and his part in the Jewish return from exile.<sup>43</sup> He, like Mordecai, becomes a prophet in exile.

Both of Mordecai's names suggest his connection with Old Testament figures who were leaders during the exile of the Jews in Babylon. Mordecai, a palace official in the court of King Ahasuerus, is uncle to Esther (Esther 2:5 and 8:2). Mordecai's other name, Ezra, links him to the priest and prophet of the exile who played a prominent role in the return to Jerusalem. In her "Oriental Memoranda" Eliot notes that Ezra was responsible for the establishment of a

---

<sup>42</sup>Mary Wilson Carpenter demonstrates that the Book of Daniel plays a major role in the structure of the novel. She shows that the numerical symbolism in Daniel is repeated in *Daniel Deronda*: the seventy chapters of the novel, for instance, point to the prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24. Carpenter discusses various interpretations of this prophecy with which Eliot would have been familiar and points out that many Christians in the nineteenth century saw the prophecies in Daniel as prophecies about the end of history ("Apocalypse of the Old Testament", 59).

<sup>43</sup>Shemaryahu Talmon explains that  
The author of Daniel adopts and develops certain Biblical traditions, moving from the genre of prophecy to that of apocalypticism. Building on Jeremiah's divinely inspired assurance that Israel would experience a restoration of its fortunes seventy years after the destruction of the Temple ... he foresees a new redemption of his people after seventy times seven years (349).

synod of the Jews after exile (MS 710, f18, 47), and also that the name Cohen "signifies originally *diviner*. Afterwards the word was taken in the sense, *minister of God*, and applied to the priests of Jehovah" (MS 710, f12, 37). The prophet of the exile is described as a scribe of the Law of Moses and a priest (Ezra 7:21). Carpenter notes that the name Ezra

places Mordecai in a conservative, priestly tradition that counteracts the conception of him as a fanatic with illusory notions and symbolizes his capacity to shape the future by envisioning the past. The revelation of Mordecai's other name, in fact, lies at the heart of Eliot's idea of how prophetic vision functions in a scientific age to end the individual's exile from history and the Christian's exile from Judaism ("Apocalypse of the Old Testament", 64).

Mordecai is also a wise administrator who reads Torah to the returnees (Nehemiah 8:2). Clearly, his leadership role in the exile is important for Eliot's characterization of Mordecai, whose vision of a Jewish return, both physical and spiritual, to Israel, sustains him until he finds a disciple to take up the vision. Carpenter notes that "Both Mordecai and Klesmer are compared to Elijah, the prophet whose forty day exile in the desert was seen as a type of Christ's forty days of temptation in the wilderness" ("Apocalypse of the Old Testament", 60).

After the meeting at the Hand and Banner, Daniel considers the impact of Mordecai's impassioned speech. He thinks of others like Mordecai who are "martyrs of obscure circumstance, exiled in the rarity of their own minds", obscured by a "cloud of loneliness". He feels sure that, in meeting Mordecai, he has "been brought near to one of those spiritual exiles" (6, 43, 605).

By presenting almost all of the characters in the novel as aliens in one way or another, Eliot creates a metaphor for society in which the links between

the Jewish and English characters in the novel evoke a sense of the "fellowship of human travail" (Sudrann, 445).

As we have seen, the experience of exile in Babylon pervades the Old Testament and is frequently treated in some of the Old Testament traditions as a punishment upon Israel for her apostasy.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the plea from the leaders and prophets of Israel is to return to God and thereby gain his blessing. The result of a return to Yahweh is suggested by the prophets Jeremiah and Hosea. If Israel returns, Yahweh will have compassion on her (Jeremiah 30:3), and he will also "circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed" (Deuteronomy 30:6). The prophets later saw the actual return to Jerusalem as the reward for faithfulness in exile (Hosea 14:4-8, Jeremiah 31:4-7). Thus in Biblical terms, exile constitutes alienation from God, which is then expressed as a literal alienation from Jerusalem. In *Daniel Deronda*, the exile is both public and private: in the inner life, it constitutes an alienation from self as witnessed in Gwendolen; in the public sphere, it is an alienation from people and society, as witnessed especially in Mordecai. The return that Eliot envisions is a reconciliation with the self and a meeting of souls. Gwendolen's private journey is paralleled with Daniel's gradual movement towards Mordecai. Sudrann suggests that, ultimately, Gwendolen confronts her spiritual dread. When Daniel finally tells her, at the end of the novel, of his decision to marry Mirah, Gwendolen's sense of spiritual isolation is most immediate:

she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious

---

<sup>44</sup>Wolff notes, in reference to 2 Kings 17:13, that "Because the call to return and thereby also the covenant made with the fathers ... were ignored, the final judgement upon Israel took place" (91).

movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving (8, 69, 876).

Gwendolen recognizes that Daniel has a life apart from her own and the realization of her relative insignificance in the world is sobering. After this crisis, and a day and a half of grief, Gwendolen awakens from sleep and immediately comforts her mother: "Ah, poor mamma! You have been sitting up with me. Don't be unhappy. I shall live. I shall be better" (8, 69, 879). Her first thought for her mother signals Gwendolen's entry into the circle of human communion, and recognizing this, her next thought is that she will live and be better: "she has passed through a crisis of alienation so that she may possess herself" (Sudrann, 455).

While the stories of exile in the novel are reenactments of Biblical stories, they are also a reinterpretation of what constitutes exile, and what is required for a return from exile.<sup>45</sup> Shaffer proposes that Eliot recognized the mythological nature of the Old Testament through her reading of Hennell and her translation of Strauss. But it was Feuerbach's anthropological theology, in which the human is elevated to the level of the divine, that "provided her with the materials for reconstruction" (232). The myths are retold and reconstructed in *Daniel Deronda*.

Stories of prophecies, dreams, and visions are also reinterpreted in the novel. The Biblical figure of Daniel is important in this respect because not

---

<sup>45</sup>Brueggemann notes that in the period after the destruction of Jerusalem (587) the "governing metaphor" of Hebrew literature was *Exile*: "In this brief definitive period in Old Testament faith, pastoral responsibility was to help people *enter into exile*, to be *in exile*, and *depart out of exile*" (*Hopeful Imagination*, 1).

only is he an exile, but he is also a seer. The visions and prophecies in the Book of Daniel have been interpreted by Christians as prophecies pertaining to the kingdoms of the earth and the final end of the world. George Eliot was familiar with these interpretations through her reading of German higher criticism and Protestant Biblical exegesis. After her rejection of Christianity, Eliot attacked theologians who continued to interpret history using apocalyptic prophecy (Carpenter, "Apocalypse of the Old Testament", 57). Nevertheless, Biblical prophecy continued to fascinate Eliot and to provide her with material, particularly for *Daniel Deronda*. William Baker comments that Eliot's notes on another prophet, Moses, taken from Kuenen's *Religion of Israel* "may be taken as another illustration of her fascination with visions and hermeneutics fictionally expressed in *Daniel Deronda*" (*Notebooks*, MS 710, Introduction, vii).

Gwendolen's illusions about her life correspond closely to her position as a spiritual and social outsider. Before her mother's financial ruin, Gwendolen has visions of herself as a goddess followed by a worshipping "cortège" (1, 1, 39). Frequently overcome by this pleasing daydream, she kisses her own image in the mirror, a gesture signalling spiritual isolation and exclusion of the other. When this sense of self begins to disintegrate, Gwendolen is unable to kiss her reflection in the mirror or even recognize herself "in the glass panels" (6, 48, 651). The illusion has become "a sick dream" (6, 48, 650). The self-assurance begins to recede when Gwendolen is confronted by Lydia Glasher. Looking at this woman, Gwendolen feels "as if some ghastly vision had come to her in a dream and said 'I am a woman's life'" (2, 14, 190). The terror of this nightmare is linked to her fear of insignificance in a vast

spiritual dimension, but it is one which she represses most of the time. She expresses it on her wedding night when she receives the packet of pearls from Lydia Glasher, during the Hermione play when the sliding panel opens, and, finally, at the death of Grandcourt when the picture of the dead face and fleeing figure returns to her in the image of Grandcourt's drowning face (7, 56, 758). The spiritual crisis that Grandcourt's death brings about happens at precisely the time when Daniel discovers the truth of his birth. The revelation that he is Jewish means that he can now act upon the vision that Mordecai has imparted to him. Gwendolen's vision at first paralyses her, but it assists in her movement towards self-knowledge.

Frequent allusions to Biblical prophets suggest that Eliot constructs the world of *Daniel Deronda* around Jewish and later Protestant eschatological visions of history. Eliot creates a universal, apocalyptic history which fuses Jewish and Christian mythologies, past and present (Carpenter, "Apocalypse of the Old Testament", 59). An important aspect of prophecy is its roots in the imagination. Through visions the prophet is likened to the artist, but "the chief poetic energy" is a "force of imagination that pierces or exalts the solid fact, instead of floating among cloud pictures" (4, 33, 431): the vision must begin in the real world, unlike Gwendolen's illusions. The link between poetry and prophecy is expressed in a description of Mordecai's face when Daniel first meets him and sees "such a physiognomy as that might possibly have been seen in a prophet of the Exile, or in some New Hebrew poet of the medieval time" (4, 33, 436). Also, after hearing Mordecai's speech in the Hand and Banner, Daniel thinks that he is "like a poet among people of a strange speech,

who may have a poetry of their own, but have no ear for his cadence" (6, 42, 587).

Deronda is an interpreter of dreams and visions. Like the Daniel of the Old Testament who is singled out because of his "understanding in all dreams and visions" (Dan 1:17) to interpret dreams for King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is the interpreter of Gwendolen's dreams. She feels instinctively that he understands her life, and Daniel recognizes that "her evident confidence in his interpretation of her appealed to him as a peculiar claim" (5, 36, 500). Later he becomes the custodian of Mordecai's vision, the embodiment of his hopes for the future of the Jews, the guardian of the prophetic treasures of the past. A seminal moment in the novel is that of Daniel rowing down the Thames with the setting sun behind him. He is seen by Mordecai who is standing on Blackfriars Bridge looking down into the river. When Daniel looks up he sees a familiar face "brought out by the western light into startling distinctness and brilliancy - an illuminated type of bodily emaciation and spiritual eagerness" (5, 40, 549). The connection with Moses is striking: Moses comes down from Sinai where he has looked upon the glory of God and is forced to cover his face before the Israelites because its brightness is frightening (Ex 34:35). There are also echoes of the Elijah/Elisha story here. Elijah, the great prophet bequeaths a double portion of his prophetic spirit to Elisha before being taken up into heaven on a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:9-14). The significance of this prophetic encounter between Daniel and Mordecai is startling: Mordecai sees in Daniel "the face of his visions" and believes that "in that moment his inward prophecy was fulfilled .... The prefigured friend had come from the golden

background, and had signalled to him: this actually was: the rest was to be" (5, 40, 550). Cynthia Chase's deconstruction of the novel attempts to show that Daniel "becomes what Mordecai claims he is" (221). In other words, it is as if Mordecai's intense desire for Daniel to be Jewish is the cause of his being Jewish. In this way "Causality, the subject, identity, representation, and origin are deconstructed or put in question ..." (220). Thus, prophecy becomes the cause rather than the predictor of events. At the same time prophecy, like history, religion, and art, is illusory. The description of myth as "the union of poetry and religion" (Shaffer, 291), would also be an apt description of prophecy in Eliot's novels. Shaffer suggests that the illusion of art exposes the illusion of history and hence of religion. Eliot uses the imaginative psyche of the prophet, who is an artist, both to deconstruct and to reconstruct history and religion. Eliot's prophets are interpreters, and history is their text. They interact with the myths of history and of religion to create a new history, in which the individual steers his or her own course, and a new religion in which the human is elevated to the divine. The prophet's predictions are imaginative reflections of the self upon society. Mordecai *predicts* that Daniel will take up his mantle like an Elisha, because this is what he desperately *wants* Daniel to do. The prophet sees things in the same way that the poet does. Both understand the world around them, both see clearer and further than the ordinary person, both present their hopes for the future in the cadences of poetry.

Mordecai is Eliot's synthesis of the prophets of the Old Testament. He is Moses the Lawgiver, he is Elijah, Ezra, and Ezekiel, and Hans Meyrick calls

him Jeremiah (6, 47, 641). Mordecai is also Eliot's reinterpretation of the Old Testament prophets. Eliot's reading of the Bible is influenced by her familiarity, not only with contemporary critics and historians, but also by her reading of Kabbalah. William Baker, in "The Kabbalah, Mordecai, and George Eliot's religion of humanity", argues that the Kabbalistic doctrine of the transmigration of souls is a key concept in this novel. Eliot's notebooks indicate that many of her ideas on Kabbalah come from Christian David Ginsburg's work *The Kabbalah, its Doctrines, Development, and Literature* (1863). Mordecai explains the doctrine of the transmigration of souls thus:

'In the doctrine of the Cabbala, souls are born again and again in new bodies till they are perfected and purified, and a soul liberated from a worn-out body may join the fellow-soul that needs it, that they may be perfected together, and their earthly work accomplished. Then they will depart from the mortal region, and leave place for new souls to be born out of the store in the eternal bosom. It is the lingering imperfection of the souls already born into the mortal region that hinders the birth of new souls and the preparation of the Messianic time' (6, 43, 599-600).

Mordecai then tells Daniel, "You will take up my life where it was broken" and, "I shall live in you. I shall live in you" (6, 43, 600, 603). Thus, Mordecai's yearning for a "second soul ... to help out the insufficient first - who would be a blooming human life" (5, 38, 530) is translated into a Messianic vision. Baker's essay argues that "the reasons for Mordecai's need of Daniel ... Can be classified according to the Kabbalistic doctrines of the banishment of the soul, its exile to strange forms of existence, and the possibility of the soul's return from exile through the special relationship between souls" (219). Eliot uses this doctrine from Kabbalah alongside Old Testament themes of prophecy, exile, and deliverance. Her reading of the Old Testament is a reinterpretation of

those themes, in the way that Kabbalah too is a reinterpretation of its precursor.<sup>46</sup>

Daniel's early responses to Mordecai are tinged with an apprehension that he is falling under the passionate spell of a dreamer. He is also afraid to disappoint a sick man who has fixed his hopes on what Daniel considers to be an illusion. He tells himself, however, that he must do justice to Mordecai's strongly held beliefs:

If we want to avoid giving the dose of hemlock or the sentence of banishment in the wrong case, nothing will do but a capacity to understand the subject-matter on which the immovable man is convinced, and fellowship with human travail, both near and afar, to hinder us from scanning any deep experience lightly (6, 41, 569).

Herein lies the key to the interpretation of prophecy: "the fellowship with human travail". Daniel begins to perceive the possibility of the fulfilment of his own deepest yearning through fellowship with Mordecai. The latter's vision is more tangible than Daniel's but not less real:

it was conceivable that as Mordecai needed and believed that he had found an active replenishment of himself, so Deronda might receive from Mordecai's mind the complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship which lay in his own thought like sculptured fragments certifying some beauty yearned after but not traceable by divination (6, 41, 570-1).

Daniel too is a visionary, and hence an artist. The "sculptured fragments certifying some beauty" are no less prophetic than the visions that Mordecai feeds upon. The roots of prophecy, therefore, spring out of human longing and hope, and fulfilment assumes human form. Religion provides the language to

---

<sup>46</sup>"Much of Derrida is in the spirit of the great Kabbalistic interpreters of Torah, interpreters who create baroque mythologies out of those elements in Scripture that appear least homogenous in the sacred text" (Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, 53).

articulate this longing and it clothes the hope of union with the other in the garments of ritual, creed, and sacrifice. But essentially, for Eliot, religion is the search for the divine within the human. Shaffer shows that German higher criticism had demonstrated that religion was a way of satisfying or suppressing the passions of the human heart, and that

George Eliot presents just that milieu in which religion loosens its hold but maintains the ideal forms of conscience, a landscape of images in which hallucination and delirium flourish and assume both their social form of wayward passion and their private form of rootless devotion seeking new rites (264-5).

It is precisely within this milieu that Daniel as deliverer is placed, and in Daniel's relationships with the other characters, the Feuerbachian links between theology and pathology as well as anthropology are most powerfully explored.

Throughout the novel Daniel is portrayed as a redeemer from the perspectives of the other characters. Descriptions of Daniel bear striking resemblance to Renan's Christ in *The Life of Jesus*, who is more human than divine, and is turned into a Messiah by the aspirations of his followers. Daniel "had the stamp of rarity in a subdued fervour of sympathy, an activity of imagination on behalf of others, which did not show itself effusively, but was continually seen in acts of considerateness that struck his companions as moral eccentricity" (2, 16, 218). Renan's Jesus "was, no doubt, more beloved than loving" and, "as often happens in very elevated natures, tenderness of the heart was transformed in him into an infinite sweetness, a vague poetry, and a universal charm" (59-60). Daniel also resembles Renan's Jesus in his relationships with women. Renan says of Jesus that

Women ... received him with eagerness. He manifested towards them those reserved manners which render a very sweet union of

ideas possible between the two sexes .... Three or four devoted Galilean women always accompanied the young Master, and disputed the pleasure of listening to and of tending him in turn (93).

The Meyrick sisters are enchanted by Daniel and he becomes something of an idol to them. Mab tells Mirah, "Kate burns a pastille before his portrait every day' ... 'And I carry his signature in a little black-silk bag round my neck to keep off the cramp. And Amy says the multiplication-table in his name'" (3, 20, 266). Mirah's adoration of him is placed in a rather more serious light. She believes his rescue of her to be ordained by God, while the Meyrick sisters are "impressed by his mission as her deliverer and guardian" (7, 52, 717).

Daniel is presented as Gwendolen's deliverer, but feels far less capable of effecting rescue, a "rescue for which he felt himself helpless" (6, 45, 620). The powerful attraction between Daniel and Gwendolen, which is noticed by Sir Hugo, Hans Meyrick, and Grandcourt, is balanced by the spiritual attraction between Daniel and Mordecai. In both relationships, Daniel is the reluctant Messiah. Gwendolen makes him her confessor: "Without the aid of sacred ceremony or costume, her feelings had turned this man, only a few years older than herself, into a priest" (5, 35, 485). Daniel, however, feels that "he [is] not a priest. He dreaded the weight of this woman's soul flung upon his own with imploring dependence" (7, 56, 754). Gwendolen nevertheless continues to appeal to him, and their mutual passion modulates into a religious devotion. Shaffer argues that "the sexual pathology of marriage and the sexual pathology of Christianity are both revealed through the medium of an intense liaison between a married woman and a young man she chooses to make her 'confessor'" (257). Daniel is priest and redeemer to Gwendolen by her fervour,

not necessarily by his desire to be all of these things to her. The same has been said of Daniel's relationship with Mordecai. He fulfils Mordecai's vision, not because he *is* a Messiah, but because Mordecai *wants* this of him. Daniel is Mordecai's interpretive key, the clue to the reason for his own existence, the answer to the longing for his future and the future of his people. He is the link in the chain of events of Mordecai's prophetic way of seeing. Susan Handelman describes the Christian doctrine of the incarnation as "a union of signifier with signified, same and other, desire and fulfilment, literal sacrifice, the word-become-flesh" (140). The same may be said of Mordecai's imaginative creation of a deliverer in Daniel.<sup>47</sup>

When Gwendolen makes her confession to Daniel he feels constrained to help her. She repeatedly begs him not to forsake her and his visits after Grandcourt's death demonstrate the extent to which he finally assumes responsibility for her. Thus Daniel "moves to the acceptance of a messianic role conceived in Christian terms" (Shaffer, 281). Shaffer also shows that a careful shift takes place at this point, in which Gwendolen becomes the redeemer (281). Faced with her terrible remorse, "Deronda could not utter one word to diminish that sacred aversion to her worst self - that thorn-pressure which

---

<sup>47</sup>Lance St John Butler also sees Daniel as Christ. He suggests that Grandcourt is Daniel's opponent, a Lucifer to his Jesus (140). He explores this relationship as an allegory not merely of goodness and badness in the lower-case, social, humanist sense, nor even of Good and Evil in the upper-case sense that implies transcendent properties in these entities, but, more specifically, of the spirit of Christ and the spirit of Satan at work in the world. The allegory, moreover, hardly deigns to employ surrogates. Deronda just *is* Christ, Grandcourt Satan. The soul for which they struggle is Gwendolen's and she is Humanity, erring, self-centered, blind but open to the power of goodness, amenable to Christ's message, redeemable (142).

must come with the crowning of the sorrowful Better, suffering because of the Worse" (7, 56, 762). At this moment she is the crucified one.

As in her other novels, Eliot feminizes the Christ figure, a hermeneutic shift which uncovers the extent of her subversion of the patriarchy of her Biblical sources.<sup>48</sup> In "The Wondrous Marriages of *Daniel Deronda*: Gender, Work, and Love", Joanne Long Demaria acknowledges the contentious nature of gender terminology, and the dangers of discussing 'typically' masculine and feminine characteristics. Nevertheless, she points out that certain traits would, in the nineteenth century, have been seen as belonging to either male or female, and therefore Eliot uses

a language of gender differentiation as it was commonly used in her time, even by feminist reformers. What is uncommon about Eliot's use of this language is that she elevates the 'masculine' search for vocation by conflating it with a 'feminine' instinct for love through the 'marriage' of two male characters (403).

The marriage metaphor is used to describe the spiritual union between Daniel and Mordecai. Demaria demonstrates that through this metaphor there is a fusion "between the public and the private, the masculine and the feminine" (411). Mordecai and Daniel are sensitive, receptive, self-sacrificing, ministering, gentle. These 'feminine' qualities facilitate their intellectual and emotional fusion (414), but they also demonstrate the way in which Eliot attempts to transcend gender. Her strong female characters in the novel seem to lack these qualities and therefore suffer immensely because they refuse to conform to the feminine mould. As many feminist critics have pointed out, her attitude to

---

<sup>48</sup>The chapter on *Adam Bede*, explored the feminization of Christ in Dinah Morris. In *Romola*, which is not discussed in this thesis, Romola is perhaps Eliot's most empowered woman. She is also a Christ figure.

feminism is ambivalent. In *Daniel Deronda* she expresses anger at the roles into which women in the nineteenth century were forced, but seems powerless, or reluctant, to create other roles for women. Thus, she has compassion on Gwendolen who rebels against the powerlessness to which her sex subjects her, and she sympathises with the frustration at the narrowness of the choices open to her. At the same time, however, she suggests that much of Gwendolen's problem lies in her inability to manifest the typically 'feminine' qualities of love and self-sacrifice. The same assessment is made of the Princess Halm-Eberstein: her rebellion against the Jewish patriarchy of her father's family is treated sympathetically, but Eliot is angry with her inability to fulfil the duties of a mother. Gwendolen describes the woman's lot thus:

'We must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like the flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants: they are often bored, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous' (2, 13, 171).

The Princess's description of a woman's position, especially a Jewish woman's position, is far more embittered. She speaks to Daniel of "the bondage of having been born a Jew", and the slavery of being a woman:

'... you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out - "this is the Jewish woman; this is what you must be; this is what you are wanted for; a woman's heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small, like Chinese feet; her happiness is to be made as cakes are, by a fixed receipt"' (7, 51, 694).

Gwendolen and the Princess refuse to accept this prescription but the refusal has a terrible price. Both women must live with the consequences of their rebellion. Eliot rescues Gwendolen by killing Grandcourt and by giving her a

redeemer in Daniel who will teach her how to be a better person, but she is unable to offer the Princess happiness.

Eliot's dubious compromise, effected within the framework of nineteenth century perceptions about the appropriate roles of women and men, is to give her male figures feminine qualities. She is unable to conceive a politically and socially emancipated role for a female character, a shortcoming which has earned her condemnation, so she creates a feminized Messiah.

Yet, this expression of the feminine within the masculine in Daniel and Mordecai, is another aspect of Eliot's attempt to transcend boundaries, to point to the discovery of the *thou* within the *self*. Thus her failure, perceived in one way, is also, perceived in another way, her triumph. A double-reading (to use Cynthia Chase's term) may be useful here. Apparently, Gwendolen and the Princess are punished for their rebellion against 'feminine' virtues, while Mirah is rewarded with happiness for her apparent acceptance of these virtues. But an episode involving the interpretation of a midrashic story in chapter 61 of the novel suggests otherwise. In this episode, Mordecai describes the evocation of "divine Unity" in the *Shemah*,<sup>49</sup> and relates it to the essential unity of humanity. He tells Mirah that because of the interdependence of humans, love leads one to self-sacrifice. He then suggests that "'women are specially framed for the love which feels possession in renouncing'" and illustrates this point with an interpretation of a story from "the later *Midrash*". Here is the story and Mordecai's interpretation:

'...the story of a Jewish maiden who loved a Gentile king so well,

---

<sup>49</sup>Deuteronomy 6:4.

that this was what she did: - She entered into prison and changed clothes with the woman who was beloved by the king, that she might deliver that woman from death by dying in her stead, and leave the king to be happy in his love which was not for her. This is the surpassing love, that loses self in the object of love.'

Mirah refutes this interpretation:

'No, Ezra, no,' said Mirah, with low-toned intensity, 'that was not it. She wanted the king when she was dead to know what she had done, and feel that she was better than the other. It was her strong self, wanting to conquer, that made her die' (8, 61, 802-3).

Mirah's reading of the story places her alongside Gwendolen and the Princess. She appears demure, chaste, and adoring of her brother and husband-to-be, possessing all the idealised qualities of woman, but her interpretation of the story overturns this view of her. She too feels powerless, and would choose victory over self-sacrifice. Eliot thus establishes an unspoken bond between her female characters, one which undermines stereotyping even when it seems to condone it. Mordecai strives to perfect renunciation in himself, taking the womanly example of self-sacrifice as his model, but Mirah rejects this view of woman, and creates another in which the woman seeks power.

Daniel's Messianic role, dramatically evoked by the scene at Blackfriars Bridge in which he not only appears to Mordecai as the fulfilment of his inward vision, but also as the Son of Man from the Book of Daniel (Dan 7:13), is extended beyond the purely religious. He represents an attempt to fuse many of the sharp dichotomies of the nineteenth century: East and West, God and man, male and female, the inner and the outer life, public and private, duty and passion, past and present, other and self. It is in this that Eliot moves away, not only from the mythologies that she draws upon, but also from the conventions of fiction in the nineteenth century.

Mordecai looks forward to "a new Judaea, poised between East and West - a covenant of reconciliation" (6, 42, 597). Daniel learns from Kalonymos that his grandfather had insisted on the need for a "balance of separateness and communication" (8, 61, 791), and he decides that he too will strive to achieve this balance. He will retain his Christianity, but make the restoration of the Jews his vocation (8, 60, 792). Thus he will effect the reconciliation that Mordecai foresees. Brian Swann argues that Deronda is Eliot's ecumenical hero, a "cultural fusion, a Protestant Jew, the realization of the Evangelical dream of conversion raised to universal meaning" ("Ecumenical Jew", 41). Unlike the Protestant Christianity of her era, which saw a sharp distinction between Christian and Jew, Eliot recognized the common roots of Judaism, Christianity, and other religions and envisioned a reconciliation. Strauss had taught her that both "Hebrew and Christian religions, like all others, have their mythi" (80) and Feuerbach that

My fellow-man is the bond between me and the world. I am, and I feel myself, dependent on the world, because I first feel myself dependent on other men. If I need not man, I should not need the world. I reconcile myself with the world only through my fellow-man .... A man existing absolutely alone would lose himself without any sense of his individuality in the ocean of Nature; he would neither comprehend himself as man nor Nature as Nature. The first object of man is man .... The *ego*, then, attains to consciousness of the world through consciousness of the *Thou*. Thus man is the God of man .... Only where man suns and warms himself in the proximity of man arise feeling and imagination. Love, which requires mutuality, is the spring of poetry; and only where man communicates with man, only in speech, a social act, awakes reason (82-3).

God, whether the God of the Jews or the Christians is "the Absolute self" (82), and the recognition of this self is attained only through the recognition of the other:

The other is my *Thou*, - the relation being reciprocal, - my *alter ego*, man objective to me, the revelation of my own nature, the eye seeing itself. In another I first have the consciousness of humanity; through him I first learn, I first feel, that I am a man: in my love for him it is first clear to me that he belongs to me and I to him, that we two cannot be without each other, that only community constitutes humanity (Feuerbach, 158).

Religion and poetry produce mythologies. The worship of another Being is the imaginative exploration of the human potential for good. Eliot sees that religion gives humanity a perfect self in God, a faith in the infinite possibilities that lie before us. Thus it is possible for Daniel to be both a Jew and a Christian, not a convert to one or the other, but an embodiment of both. He can travel to the East to help establish a homeland for the Jews, but he need not cease being a Christian. Perhaps what is sometimes perceived as Eliot's failure in this novel is not in the breadth of her vision and her ideal of perfect union, but rather in her inability to articulate that vision fully. She expresses anger at the status quo, she envisions alternatives, but she cannot make the transition. Perhaps the ending of this novel (we do not accompany Daniel on his mission to the East) is her recognition of her own inability to complete the vision: she invites the reader to do this for her. She can only project it into the future and make it an object of faith.

The ending of the novel also brings into question the idea of a union between desire and fulfilment and suggests Eliot's uncertainty as to whether fulfilment is ever possible. If Daniel is shown to be the deliverer from whom both Mordecai and Daniel's creator long, then the act of interpreting comes to an end. The open-endedness of the novel means that Eliot pulls the rug out from under her own feet. She sets Daniel up as priest, redeemer, prophet, then

sends him on a mission, the outcome of which is unknown. This is both an expression of faith and an admission that the act of interpretation can never cease. As noted earlier, Handelman explains the incarnation of Christ as a closure of the interpretive act. Once the word has become flesh, the polysemy of the word is cut off. Eliot is attracted to the Jewish version of history in which the Messiah is always to be and is not yet come (Hillis Miller, 472). This resembles Derrida's *différance* which is "to differ and to defer or postpone" (Handelman, 174).<sup>50</sup>

Daniel's mission to the East materialises only in that interpretive space between text and reader, in the same way that prophecy, exile, and redemption do. Garret Stewart asks:

When leaving off, where does a narrative leave the very attention that has sustained it? What are the readers left with - and left to? How, in other words, is a story's implied continuance beyond plot sometimes rendered as our own? (69)

His answers to these questions implicate the reader/interpreter in the creation of the text. The important thing is that the text, incomplete according to a midrashic reading, goes on being created in the very act of interpretation. No one interpretation may be allowed to close the story. The episode of the midrashic story illustrates that many interpretations are permissible and indeed welcome.

In a letter to John Blackwood Eliot says that "Conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a

---

<sup>50</sup>This is an act of perpetual deferment to which Derrida is so attracted (Handelman, 167). Sanford Budick, in "Midrash and the Scene of Interpretation", argues that "the writing described by Derrida ... has spaces and discontinuities and stops; no endings, no fulfilments" (*Midrash and Literature*, 205).

conclusion, which is at best a negation" (*Letters*, vol 2, 324). Later, to Sara Hennell she writes "Beginnings are always troublesome" (vol 3, 130). The epigraph of chapter 1 of *Daniel Deronda* suggests Eliot's concern with beginnings and asserts that "true beginnings" can never really be uncovered. Rather, the scientist and the artist must exercise their most creative impulses to find roots and origins, for they "can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning" (1, 1, 35). Like Kermode, who says that humans habitually reach for closure,<sup>51</sup> Eliot suggests that humans, habitual interpreters, require beginnings, and, not finding them, are forced to invent them. In *Middlemarch* the narrator says that "souls live on in perpetual echoes, and to all fine expression there goes somewhere an originating activity if it be only that of an interpreter" (2, 16, 190). The "originating activity" in *Daniel Deronda* reiterates themes and techniques from earlier novels, but carries them out of the sphere of provincialism and the private life to the broader sphere of world history and the collision between the private and the public life of the individual. Eliot's return to Biblical beginnings takes her beyond convention and history, so that her last novel is perhaps her least understood and appreciated, but at the same time her most prophetic. Hillis Miller suggests that "the only origin is an act of the will to power imposed on a prior 'text,' which may be the world itself seen as a text, a set of signs. Such signs are not inert" (468). The energy within these signs is given expression through Eliot's prophetic reaching beyond history: "she proposes a view of the writing of history as an act of repetition in which

---

<sup>51</sup>In *The Sense of An Ending*, and also *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Kermode examines this apparent need for closure in interpretations of the abrupt ending of the Gospel of Mark.

the present takes possession of the past and liberates it for a present purpose, thereby exploding the continuum of history" (Hillis Miller, 471). Hillis Miller suggests that this engagement with history only to undermine it, this constant reiteration, "frees both history and fiction, for the moment before the spider-web is rewoven, from the illusory continuities of origin leading to aim leading to end" (473). Beginnings are thus illusory, they do not exist as moments in time, therefore Eliot's "make-believe of a beginning" in the make-believe of Biblical mythology, as well as her deliberate avoidance of closure, may be her greatest acts of literary faith.

## Select Bibliography

The study of George Eliot and of religion in the nineteenth century are so extensive that it is impossible to provide a full bibliography. I have therefore compiled a list of the books and articles that have been most useful. There are some books in this list that have been consulted because of their importance to the area of research undertaken by this thesis but are not cited in the text.

Alter, Robert and Frank Kermode. *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. London: Fontana, 1987, 1989.

Arac, Jonathan. "Rhetoric and Realism in Nineteenth Century Fiction: Hyperbole in *The Mill on the Floss*". *George Eliot*. K.M Newton, ed. London: Macmillan, 1991: 65-82.

Armerding, Carl E. *The Old Testament and Criticism*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1983.

Baker, William. "George Eliot's Readings in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Historians: A Note on the Background of *Daniel Deronda*". *Victorian Studies* 15.1 (June 1972): 463-473.

----- "The Kabbalah, Mordecai, and George Eliot's Religion of Humanity". *The Yearbook of English Studies* 3 (1973): 216-221.

----- *George Eliot and Judaism*. Romantic Reassessment Series 45. James Hogg, ed. Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1975.

Barreca, Regina, ed. *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1990.

Barthes, Roland. "Theory of the Text". *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. Robert Young, ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981: 31-47.

- Beer, Gillian. "Beyond Determinism: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf". *Women Writing and Writing About Women*. Mary Jacobus, ed. London: Croom Helm, 1979: 80-99.
- *George Eliot*. London: Harvester, 1986.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. London: Oxford UP, 1973.
- *Kabbalah and Criticism*. New York: Seabury Press, 1975.
- *A Map of Misreading*. New York: Oxford UP, 1975.
- *Ruin the Sacred Truths*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Bonaparte, Felicia. *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination*. New York: New York UP, 1979.
- Brown, Michael. "Biblical Myth and Contemporary Experience: The Akedah in Modern Jewish Literature". *Judaism* 31 (1982): 99-111.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.
- and Hans Walter Wolff. *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*. Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1975.
- Bruns, Gerald L. "Midrash and Allegory: The Beginnings of Scriptural Interpretation". *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds. London: Fontana, 1987, 1989: 625-646.
- Butler, Lance St John. *Victorian Doubt*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.
- Carpenter, Mary Wilson. "The Apocalypse of the Old Testament: *Daniel Deronda* and the Interpretation of Interpretation". *PMLA* 99.1 (January 1984): 56-71.
- *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time: Narrative Form and Protestant Apocalyptic History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.
- Chase, Cynthia. "The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double Reading in *Daniel Deronda*". *PMLA* 93.2 (March 1978): 215-227.
- Christ, Carol. "Aggression and Providential Death in George Eliot's Fiction". *Novel* 9.2 (Winter 1976): 130-140.

- Clements, R.E. *A Century of Old Testament Study*. Rev. ed. Surrey: Lutterworth Press, 1976, 1983.
- Cockshut, A.O.J. *The Unbelievers: English Agnostic Thought 1840-1890*. London: Collins, 1964.
- Croatto, J. Severino. *Biblical Hermeneutics: Towards a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning*. Robert Barr, trans. New York: Orbis Books, 1987.
- Demaria, Joanne Long. "The Wondrous Marriages of *Daniel Deronda*: Gender, Work, and Love". *Studies in the Novel* 22.4 (Winter 1990): 403-417.
- Derrida, Jacques. *A Critical Reader*. David Wood, ed. Oxford: Blackwood, 1992.
- Eagleton, Terry. "Power and Knowledge in 'The Lifted Veil'". *Literature and History* 9.1 (Spring 1983): 52-61.
- Eliot, George. *Scenes of Clerical Life*. 1858. David Lodge, ed. London: Penguin, 1973.
- *Adam Bede*. 1859. Stephen Gill, ed. London: Penguin, 1980.
- "The Lifted Veil". 1859. *The Works of George Eliot*. London: Blackwood and Son, n.d.
- *The Mill on the Floss*. 1860. A.S. Byatt, ed. London: Penguin, 1979.
- *Silas Marner*. 1861. Q.D. Leavis, ed. London: Penguin, 1967.
- *Romola*. 1863. Andrew Sanders, ed. Penguin: London, 1980.
- "Brother Jacob". 1864. *The Works of George Eliot*. London: Blackwood and Son, n.d.
- *Felix Holt, The Radical*. 1866. Peter Coveney, ed. Penguin: London, 1972.
- *Middlemarch*. 1871-2. W.J. Harvey, ed. Penguin: London, 1965.
- *Daniel Deronda*. 1876. Barbara Hardy, ed. Penguin: London, 1967.
- *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. 2nd ed. London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1879.
- *The George Eliot Letters*. Gordon S. Haight, ed. 7 vols. New Haven: Yale UP, 1954.
- *Essays of George Eliot*. Thomas Pinney, ed. New York: Columbia UP, 1963.

- *Some George Eliot Notebooks: An Edition of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library's George Eliot Holograph Notebooks*. William Baker, ed. 4 vols. Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1976.
- *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook, 1854-1879; and Uncollected Writings*. Joseph Wiesenfarth, ed. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981.
- *Collected Poems*. Lucien Jenkins, ed. London: Skoob Books, 1989.
- *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings*. A.S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren, eds. London: Penguin, 1990.
- Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. 1854. George Eliot, trans. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper and Row, 1957.
- Fisch, Harold. "The Hermeneutic Quest in *Robinson Crusoe*". *Midrash and Literature*. Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Budick, eds. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1986: 213-236.
- Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.
- *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989.
- Freedman, H. and Maurice Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis 1*. 2nd edition, vol 1. London: Soncino Press, 1951.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. James Strachey, trans. London: Hogarth Press, 1964.
- Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.
- Gallagher, Catherine. "George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question". *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth Century Novel: Selected Papers from the English Institute 1983-1984*. Ruth Bernard Yeazell, ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985: 39-62.
- "The Failure of Realism: *Felix Holt*". *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 35.3 (Dec 1980): 372-384.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979, 1984.

- Goldberg, Michael. *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982.
- Green, William Scott. "Romancing the Tome: Rabbinic Hermeneutics and the Theory of Literature". *Semeia* 40 (1987): 147-168.
- Haight, Gordon S. *George Eliot: A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968.
- Halevi, Jehuda. *Kuzari*. I. Heinemann, ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1947.
- Handelman, Susan A. *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. "The Interpreter: A Self-Analysis". *New Literary History* 4.2 (Winter, 1973): 213-227.
- and Sanford Budick, eds. *Midrash and Literature*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1986.
- Hennell, Charles Christian. *An Enquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*. London, 1838.
- Higdon, David Leon. "George Eliot and the Art of the Epigraph". *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25.2 (Sept 1970): 127-151.
- Hillis Miller, J. "Narrative and History". *English Literary History* 41.3 (Fall 1974): 455-472.
- Hirsch, David H. and Nehama Ashkenasy, eds. *Biblical Patterns in Modern Literature*. California: Scholars Press, 1984.
- Jacobus, Mary, ed. *Women Writing and Writing About Women*. London: Croom Helm, 1979.
- "Men of Maxims and *The Mill on the Floss*". *George Eliot*. K.M. Newton, ed. New York: Longman, 1991: 83-98.
- Josipovici, Gabriel. *The Book of God: A Response to The Bible*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1988.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1967.
- *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1979.

- *An Appetite for Poetry: Essays in Literary Interpretation*. London: Collins, 1989.
- Lacocque, Andrew. *The Book of Daniel*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979.
- Landow, George P. *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art, and Thought*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *The Levinas Reader*. Sean Hand, ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.
- Levine, George. "George Eliot's Hypothesis of Reality". *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 35.1 (June 1980): 1-28.
- Loades, Ann and Michael McLain, eds. *Hermeneutics, the Bible, and Literary Criticism*. London: Macmillan, 1992.
- Mackay, Robert William. *The Progress of the Intellect*. 2 vols. London: 1850.
- McGowan John P. "The Turn of George Eliot's Realism". *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 35.2 (Sept 1980): 171-92.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. 1667. Alastair Fowler, ed. London and New York: Longman, 1971.
- Myers, William. *The Teaching of George Eliot*. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984.
- Nathan, Rhoda B., ed. *Nineteenth-Century Women Writers of the English-Speaking World*. New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Newton, K.M. *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist: A Study of the Philosophical Structure of Her Novels*. London: Macmillan, 1981.
- ed. *George Eliot*. New York: Longman, 1991.
- Polhemus, Robert M. *Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D.H. Lawrence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Poole, Adrian. "Hidden Affinities in *Daniel Deronda*". *Essays in Criticism* 33.4 (Oct 1983): 294-311.
- Preyer, Robert F. "Beyond the Liberal Imagination: Vision and Unreality in *Daniel Deronda*". *Victorian Studies* 4.1 (Sept 1960): 33-55.
- Purkis, John. *A Preface to George Eliot*. London: Longman, 1985.

- Putzell-Korab, Sara. "The Role of the Prophet: The Rationality of Daniel Deronda's Idealist Mission". *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 37.2 (Sept 1982): 170-187.
- Pykett, Lyn. "Typology and the End(s) of History in *Daniel Deronda*". *Literature and History* 9.1 (Spring 1983): 62-73.
- "George Eliot and Arnold: The Narrator's Voice and Ideology in *Felix Holt the Radical*". *Literature and History* 11.2 (Autumn 1985): 229-240.
- Quinone, Ricardo, J. *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991.
- Rabinowitz, Isaac. "'Word' and Literature in Ancient Israel". *New Literary History* 4.1 (Autumn, 1972): 118-139.
- Renan, Ernest. *The Life of Jesus*. 1863. London: Watts, 1935.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. Lewis S. Mudge, ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- Riley-Fast, Robin. "Getting to the Ends of *Daniel Deronda*". *Journal of Narrative Technique* 7.3 (Fall 1977): 200-217.
- Roberts, Neil. *George Eliot: Her Belief and Her Art*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975.
- Robinson, Carole. "The Severe Angel: A Study of *Daniel Deronda*". *English Literary History* 31.3 (Sept 1964): 278-300.
- Sadoff, Dianne F. "Nature's Language: Metaphor in the Text of *Adam Bede*". *Genre* 11.3 (Fall 1978): 411-425.
- Salmon, Rachel and Gerda Elata-Alster. "Retracing a Writerly Text: In the Footsteps of a Midrashic Sequence on the Male and the Female". *Hermeneutics, the Bible, and Literary Criticism*. Ann Loades and Michael McLain, eds. London: Macmillan, 1992: 177-197.
- Sasson, Jack M. "Esther". *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds. London: Fontana, 1987, 1989: 335-342.
- Scholes, Robert and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford UP, 1966.
- Shaffer, E.S. "*Kubla Khan*" and "*The Fall of Jerusalem*": *The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975.

- Sheets, Robin. "Language, the Bible, and the Problematic of Meaning". *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 37.2 (Sept 1982): 146-169.
- Showalter, Elaine. "The Greening of Sister George". *Nineteenth Century Fiction*. 35.3 (Dec 1980): 292-311.
- Shuttleworth, Sally. *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Steiner, George. *Real Presences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Stewart, Garrett. "'Beckoning Death': *Daniel Deronda* and the Plotting of a Reading". *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*. Regina Barreca, ed. London: Macmillan, 1990: 69-106.
- Storr, Anthony. *Jung*. London: Fontana Press, 1973.
- *Freud*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Strauss, David Friedrich. *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. 4th ed. George Eliot, trans. 1840. Peter C. Hodgson, ed. London: SCM Press, 1973.
- Sudrann, Jean. "*Daniel Deronda* and the Landscape of Exile". *English Literary History* 37.3 (Sept 1970): 433-455.
- Swann, Brian. "Eyes in the Mirror: Imagery and Symbolism in *Daniel Deronda*". *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 23.4 (March 1969): 434-445.
- "George Eliot's Ecumenical Jew, or, The Novel as Outdoor Temple". *Novel* 8.1 (Fall 1974): 39-50.
- Swann, Charles. "Déjà Vu: Déjà Lu: 'The Lifted Veil' as an Experiment in Art". *Literature and History* 5.1 (Spring 1979): 40-57.
- Talmon, Shemaryahu. "Daniel". *The Literary Guide to the Bible* Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds. London: Fontana, 1987, 1989: 343-356.
- Thomson, Fred C. "*Felix Holt* as Classic Tragedy". *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 16.1 (June 1961): 47-58.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Symbolism and Interpretation*. Catherine Porter, trans. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
- Vermes, Geza. *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. 2nd ed. London: Penguin, 1975.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. *The Message of the Prophets*. D.M.G. Stalker, trans. London: SCM Press, 1967.

- *Genesis: A Commentary*. 3rd ed. John H. Marks, trans. London: SCM Press, 1961, 1972.
- Welsh, Alexander. *George Eliot and Blackmail*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard UP, 1985.
- Widdowson, Peter, Paul Stigant, and Peter Brooker. "History and Literary 'Value': The Case of *Adam Bede* and *Salem Chapel*". *Literature and History* 5.1 (Spring 1979): 2-39.
- Wiesenfarth, Joseph. *George Eliot's Mythmaking*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977.
- Willey, Basil. *Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1949.
- Wilt, Judith. "Felix Holt, the Killer: A Reconstruction". *Victorian Studies* 35.1 (Autumn 1991): 51-69.
- Witemeyer, Hugh. *George Eliot and The Visual Arts*. New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1979.
- Wolff, Hans Walter. "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work". Frederick C. Prussner, trans. *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*. Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, eds. Atlanta, Ga: John Knox Press, 1975: 83-100.
- Zim, Rivkah. "Awakened Perceptions in *Daniel Deronda*". *Essays in Criticism* 36.3 (July 1986): 210-234.
- Zimmerman, Bonnie. "*Felix Holt* and the True Power of Womanhood". *English Literary History* 46 (1979): 432-451.
- "George Eliot and Feminism: The Case of *Daniel Deronda*". *Nineteenth-Century Women Writers of the English-Speaking World*. Rhoda B. Nathan, ed. New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1986: 231-237.