Visionary Excitability and George Eliot:
Judeo-Mythic Narrative Technique in Daniel Deronda

Barbara Stufflebeam
Honors Thesis
April 21, 1986
Readers of *Daniel Deronda* have long noted the tension in the novel between the so-called "Jewish" and "English" halves, and understandably so. Not only are the lives of Gwendolen and Deronda lived separately for much of the novel, but Gwendolen's carefully drawn psychological portrait contrasts strongly with the air of myth and prophecy in Deronda's discovery of his heritage and destiny. Critics, following Leavis in *The Great Tradition*, have considered Deronda's story vastly inferior to Gwendolen's, an unbelievable moral fairy-tale peopled with flat characters. But if we consider the novel, and the Deronda story especially, as constructed with an awareness of a characteristically Judaic narrative style we can see both as resonant with each other, if not fully unified. Eliot's effort to incorporate new ideas into the novel by means of the "Jewish" plot may not be an entirely successful one perhaps, but it is wrong to suggest as some do that Deronda's story is unnecessary and unlikely dead weight because it is not marked by the same kind of psychological style as Gwendolen's. Instead, the key to seeing the two as less disjointed than some have thought is to recognize that in order to write about the search for a new life and a better world, Eliot is experimenting with a new fictive mode, based on an entirely different tradition of narrative, one better suited to her Judaic theme. It is unrewarding to judge *Daniel Deronda* with a set of standards drawn almost entirely from *Pride and Prejudice*, or even from *Middlemarch*. By examining in what ways the novel is rooted in the unique narrative world of the Jew, we will find that truth in *Daniel Deronda* is the province of the imagination, and that the system of moral imperatives Eliot constructs is intimately wound with the fictive vision that many have found unpalatable. This style of active vision, that at times appears to draw
events along in resonance with it, is the key to a new perspective on the widely perceived disjunction between the two plots, and since an understanding of it tends to redefine for the reader what in the novel is truly real, it may help to counter charges of woodenness of character and unlikeliness of plot in Deronda's story.

Since Eliot has created in Deronda a man increasingly under the sway of vision or fiction as he moves ever further into the world of the Jew, it seems clear that to examine the novel as discourse on conscience and moral identity would require first a look at the distinctively Judaic thought-world Deronda comes to inhabit which in turn changes our understanding of the rest of the book. We might then see Eliot using Deronda as a moral exemplar in a Judeo-mythic and visionary mode rather than as a flat and priggish cipher. As if Eliot wished to draw attention to this compositional style, artists in the novel, like Klesmer, seem intuitively aware of this connection, and right-thinking characters like Mordecai have not a little of the artist in them. So comprehensive is this connection between story and sanctity, that visions or fictions seem to stand in the place of God to the characters in the novel. They demand awareness and prompt action, with tragic results for those who hesitate. Finally, we can focus on Gwendolen and to what degree her story has been enhanced by our understanding of mythic vision in Daniel Deronda. We will find that she is tragically out of step with his visionary capacities and thus with the moral world of the novel. It would seem that Gwendolen not only indulges in unrealistic fantasy, like Rosamund Vincy, but ignores the prophetic signs that might have warned her of the consequences of taking the wrong narrative course. We will add to her list of errors an insensitivity to fictive dictates.
As Eliot herself points out in *Daniel Deronda* and elsewhere, a nation deprived of its land must depend on its book. And indeed, Jewish history and character has been strongly marked by its literature. Text reading and interpretation lies at the very heart of Judaism as a religious and cultural tradition. It can be said that the character of the Jewish people as a whole has been formed by centuries of close critical and hermeneutic engagement with their texts, which created an understanding of the intimate connections between history and narrative that is unique and has contributed greatly to the Jew's vision of himself in society.

The primary text for any Jew is, of course, Torah. The current critical interest in the Bible as literature has demonstrated that to treat the Bible as religious object only, or as cultural artifact, is to miss the powerful presence of historical narrative that the Jew has always known. Old Testament narratives, written and redacted over the course of centuries, are explicative texts, explicitly composed with their ends in view, often working from an older fragment of poetry or folklore. Though the product of so many authors, the text itself is remarkably consistent, with later editorial additions often taking care to use as much as possible a similar style and diction so as to violate the work's integrity as little as possible. This argues for a people for whom the text was central, even in the first millennium BCE. It is a work filled with powerful imagery, naming, and wordplay; many of the story cycles relate to others, using similar images and ideas in order to evoke associations with their subject matter or add to or comment on it. The picture we get is of a national epic, time counted in human lives, and the whole punctuated with dream, vision, the miraculous, and punctuated by the real presence of God. In its composition and content, God speaks in narrative
and in the history of a people.

Later rabbinic authorities of the classical period continued composing and living by narrative histories. Midrashim, or illustrative homiletical or explanatory tales, were written after the Torah had been canonized, in order to address perceived gaps in the texts. They usually began with a text about which there seemed some doubt, or that had provoked a dispute among readers. An example, one of a staggering number:

"On that day God created Adam. He fashioned Adam in the image of God; Male and Female he created them. (Gen. 5:1-2) Said Rabbi Jeremiah, When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first person, He created it androgynous, for it says 'Male and Female he created him'. Rabbi Samuel Ben Nahman added: When the Holy One created Adam, he created him with two faces, i.e., as two forms joined at the back. Later he split them, giving each one its own back.

Indeed, the hebrew can be read in that way, languages with no written vowels being open to all sorts of interesting interpretations of this sort. We note that atmosphere here is identifiably that of Old Testament narrative, with its air of the unknowable and extraordinary intentions of God being expressed through what seems to the reader outright fable. By means of paradox and linguistic inversions, God is seen as doubly-sexed, and human sexuality is recast as the rejoining of the sundered. But these were received, and are still received by Hasids and other highly orthodox Jews as revealed facts, on the following principle. Since the Torah was divine, it could have no flaw. Therefore, any observable gap in the text had an explanation, one which if discovered by the observant Jew would provide more meaning for Israel.

Midrashim had the same status as Torah, and were in fact called "Oral Torah", or "the other Torah". But even the previous reverential attitude toward text was gone one better by the Rabbis. It came to be believed without question, that not only were both divine but that they existed in
their current form before creation, that the reason the narratives within the original resembled human existence was because God used it as a blueprint for his earth. Among other things, this made Torah simultaneously recorded history and fulfilled prophecy. Eventually midrashim appeared that proved beyond doubt that Torah in all forms was coexistant with God, a kind of deity in itself. Midrash making became the process of discovering what was already there, what had always been there. The Bible itself became a treasure hunt, and it was said that when a particularly difficult interpretation had finally been agreed upon, God clapped his hands with delight and said, "My children have defeated me!"

Torah and midrash were credited with healing power, stories were told of Rabbis who had healed with the brilliance of their reasoning. They could also imperil the soul, many a discussion came with warnings that the topic could be catastrophe for the impure or inexperienced midrashist. As they changed what had been with each new interpretation, they came to change even what was, and the textual discovery and debate could bring the midrashist or his hearers into a state of union with God. Torah had been endowed with ontological significance, with the power of active agents to make things be. The ontological description is not an idle one, for in this world so permeated by textual vision, time and ordinary causality become irrelevent. Narrative histories that we would dismiss as mere fable are perceived of by the Jew as in some sense more real than what he sees around him everyday.

This perception of self, history and narrative was by no means extinct in Eliot's day. The work of Elie Wiesel and others carries on the tradition even now. Fictions for the Jew are not works of art, but conduits to higher reality. For Eliot, the Jew was largely defined by his
distinctive history. It is this connection between fictivity and reality that characterizes the world of Daniel Deronda. Indeed, Eliot herself seems to refer to this paradox in her epigraph to Chapter 1. It expressly addresses questions of fictivity in texts and in the real world in its discussion of the connections between "Science" and "make-believe", reality and art, and time. Daniel Deronda is a world of fiction certainly, in the sense that it is a created world. Yet fiction is also an instrument of the novel's theme, an active agent, drawing the events along in resonance with itself, as in Torah. Eliot seems to insist in the novel that real life has a relation to art, especially the art of narrative, in a way that is more than the novelist's traditional task of translating "life into art." Though the work abounds in echoes of and allusions to Jewish history and Old Testament narratives, she is not using these in an allegorical manner. The key point of resonance is the dynamic of storytelling described above, one which has significance for the morally illustrative tale she gives us. Again and again, events narratively forecast come to pass in a way that is ironic, bizarre, or that comments on Eliot's more developmental drama. She inverts time for us, the end of the story dictates its beginning as it does in Torah and midrash. In the novel's most significant and most striking moments, the end of the story intrudes itself upon the action in a prophetic manner quite out of keeping with Eliot's usual mode of careful developmental sequence.

In Daniel Deronda imagination and artistry, fiction and vision, are keys to events, and the worlds of reality and vision are allied as they are in the epigraph to Chapter 1, and in mythic or archetypal narrative. Eliot has suggested in other work that artistic or visionary expression is
far superior to the insipidity of ordinary lives ("Armgart"), but in
Daniel Deronda, (as to an extent in The Lifted Veil), she goes so far as
to imply that to be in resonance with one’s personal prophetic vision and
not to struggle against it is a signifier of moral superiority, and more
than that, is a force for real action in the novel itself. This is more
than Eliot using biblical symbolism to discuss Jews. Because Eliot’s
subject is the forging of national and personal identity and vision, the
form of the visions themselves do not "stand for" anything. The novel is
not symbolic in that sense. Rather it evokes a world of connections
between fictive vision and immediate reality. These connections can
explain seeming oddities in her story, temporal inversion for example, and
can also provide us a double meaning for "character" that reflects on her
system of moral requisites. This is most clearly seen in Daniel's own
story.

Deronda is the bridge, the key, between the ancient and the modern,
Jew and Gentile, he defines the moral world for us, he is Mordecai’s
chosen, qualified to be and to communicate the Jew, in the novel and in
his destiny. By him all things are judged, both in the sense that he
engages in the process of judgement often and because the reader must
always use him as gauge to right action. But Deronda is more than a
static repository for the novel’s conception of ethics. It is clear that
his admirable nature is in some way the result of his Judaism, and there
is no doubt that his status as a Jew is characterized by mythic vision.
Therefore we might also suspect that it is this very thing about him, the
sometimes uncomfortable sense of fictivity in operation, sometimes
straining the reader’s credulity, that underlies the whole moral pattern
in Daniel Deronda. Our assurance for this is Deronda himself. With a
view of the novel that includes an understanding of good as allied with
mythic vision, we can see that it is when Deronda permits his story to
take its own course that he is rewarded with knowledge and joy. Thus his
famed passivity is less a paralytic flaw than an unconsciously wise
submission to moral and mythic necessity.

This becomes clear as we examine his character, for it is when he
first begins his associations with Jews (other Jews) that he begins to be
drawn into vision. The moment at which his own story intrudes itself upon
him (ch. 17) finds him rowing, skullcap and beard fitting him to find his
Hebraic destiny. By this point in his story, we should be expecting a
miraculous visitation, for Deronda has become a species of vessel, waiting
to be filled. That we should have expected some judeo-mythic significant
event is perhaps putting it strongly, for up to this juncture we have been
treated to Eliot’s more usual character development. The establishment of
his shrinking nature and good judgement have been established with great
delicacy and authenticity. Still, there is the question of his parentage,
and its uncertainty establishes a temporal gap for the reader that cannot
help but provoke speculation. His past is unknown, his future in doubt
due to his unwillingness to choose a profession, and in this moment on the
river he seems quite literally to exist in a temporal vacuum. His
visionary capacity seems not yet operative, for imaginative speculations
about his origins have not been satisfactory, and he has given them up in
favor of a supposed truth, that Sir Hugo is his father. Still, even that
temporary formulation leaves much unexplained, and as though to parallel
this situation, his nature, his character, forms itself around this lack
until his characteristic indecision is formed. Into this void is poured
Mirah and all that she calls up, represents, and introduces him to--the
beginning of his search for his own Judaism. Eliot furnishes the scene for us when she describes his resemblance to a Titian, (a Biblical scene, without doubt), his disinclination to things "merely English", even his skullcap suggests the yarmulke. He is the changeling, awaiting the discovery of his patrimony, and all of his realistically constructed history has looked forward to this moment.

But this is not the static symbolism of the fairy-tale hero. His personality has been formed around a textual, even an archetypal dynamic of emptiness and fulfillment. His waiting itself may be the strongest clue to his story. We are reminded of the anecdotal view of the Jew as he who is forever waiting, for the Messiah most memorably, but also for a better and more felicitous turn of events. Always something comes to fill the waiting, some action or demand, a burning bush within which is the presence of God. We know for the Jew this vision was and is no purely symbolic thing, and neither is it for Deronda. His story literally reaches out to pull him in. We note that after his first sight of Mirah he rows upstream away from her, but turns in response to the powerful image she presents to him and moves with the current back to her. In just one of many such scenes in the novel, the flow of water seems to herald the demands of vision. Here Eliot is clearly using the Judaic narrative dynamic, as she does throughout the novel, to establish a double meaning for "character".

Mirah is his perfect mate, for she is clearly in tune with fictive truth. When he takes Mirah to the Meyrick's, we are hardly astonished that they have just finished a novel and are wishing for a miraculous appearance when Mirah and Deronda arrive. Again, the story they have been reading, concerning aid to the afflicted who fight in a good cause,
creates a narrative gap to be filled. Her first words to them have startlingly Biblical sonorance as well. When she says "I am a stranger. I am a Jewess. You might have thought that I was wicked", her measured diction recalls instead "I am a stranger in a strange land", or "My father was a wandering Aramean". At this moment of prescient significance, Mirah's words resonate with the major themes of the novel. Because the Meyricks are sympathetic, literary, artistic people (we have just seen what sort they are, how tastefully they decorate and so forth) they are sure she is a good Jewess rather than a bad one, and they are right. As far as they are concerned the story henceforward, like Catherine Arrowpoint's operetta, is on wheels and will go of itself. Queen Budoor and Prince Camaralzaman will overcome whatever obstacles lie in their way, since both are now firmly enmeshed in this imaginal web.

Mirah's arrival contains yet another story, and it is in her account of her life that we see another strong association between the moral and fictive structure of the novel. Her tale of abduction and betrayal at the hands of her father veers between lurid morality play, or cautionary fable, and straightforward circumstantial narrative. We note that though she had the opportunity to be both "angel" and "queen", at the hands of a corrupt nobleman, she rejected it as wrong, leading us to suspect that she means both the wrong thing to do and the wrong resolution to her tale, for she is no Esther to bed with a king for her father's sake. By the end of her story she too was waiting for her emptiness to be filled, Ruth in the alien corn. It is no accident that as she stood by the water her whole life recounted itself before her eyes, for it creates a pregnant narrative pause designed for the entrance of a rescuer. She considers also the
history of her people, and tries to fit her suicide into a proper narrative framework, further echoing the judaic sense of synthesis, of dynamic, between history and personal narrative.

We may find an illustrative comparison in the account of Jacob's struggle with the mysterious night-visitor by the river in the book of Genesis, and his accompanying vision of a conduit between earth and heaven. That moment in his history, so full of significance for the history of the Jews (it is his children who will make the nation, if he lives), narratively makes its point by pointing back to Jacob's sense of guilt at cheating his father and brother and forward to his apprehension at meeting Esau, whom he has not seen since the crime. It highly suggestive psychologically of his torment, and midrashists have pointed out with surprising acuity that it is really himself and his own history with which he struggles, and with the destiny he cannot escape. Because he could not live any other story than the one chosen for him, it was after this that Jacob was renamed Isra-el, "God-Wrestler".

It is this kind of torment that Mirah undergoes by the river, as she struggles with her father, his crimes against her, and the real and deathly power of the history of her race. This is not to say that Eliot is trying to suggest Jacob, only that it is this characteristically cultural weaving of personal with collective history that saves the scene from static symbolism, for it is in the manner of the storytelling that we find the most meaning.

Hence, it is to some extent into a textual gap that Deronda steps as rescuer. The beginning of his association with Jews is also the beginning of his discovery of purpose; both Judaism and the first inklings of his moral mandate are established in fictive terms. It is this very fictivity that assures the reader that the path he is
taking, however hesitantly, is the correct one. He was both the answer to a prayer and a happy ending. She is a real example of the true and good for Deronda and for us, for while he only waited, she waited with faith. He rescues her in response to the demands of the story, he appears when he does because it is right that he should do so, and because if he does not, the necessary meetings will not take place, completing the moral and ethical whole. Throughout the novel, faith seems to have both religious and narrative significance. When characters are true to visionary demands, they are then closest to God. Though her faith had wavered as she stood by the water, it was renewed when Deronda appeared. Prayers are answered and the right way found whenever fictivity takes a hand in events. Providence wields a pen in *Daniel Deronda*.

In this sense Mirah and her brother Mordecai function as a kind of conduit to the coincidental or miraculous. Their religious faith is always inseparable from the sense of the mythic force for action in the novel, these two things together constitute the strongest moral and ethical framework in the novel. In terms of Mirah’s own character as described by Eliot, this is almost certainly because she possesses unusual intuitive or visionary capacities. We must note carefully who seems possessed of, or insensible to, this intuitional fictive vision. Consider the interview with Deronda which begins drably enough with Mirah’s appreciation for the joys of home life with the Meyricks, joys she missed after her father took her from her mother and brother. Upon Deronda’s remarking that he also had no joyful family reminiscences, Mirah replies, "No?...I wish you had. I wish you had had every good." This is said by Eliot to be
"...uttered with a serious ardor as if they had been part of a litany...", (p. 522). With this significant association of history, of memory, with religiosity, the general conversation goes on with the Meyrick’s joining in, on the subject of goodness in general, with a particular emphasis on Deronda and Mirah. As we might have expected, the subject is framed mythically.

In this scene Mirah’s assessment of the myth of the Buddha is that it must be true because it is so beautiful. She sticks to this in the face of some good-natured joshing from Mab, and reminds us that during her exile the strongly felt presence of her mother became a vision of such importance that it not only made her squalid life bearable but sustained and fed her developing religious faith. The presence of the vision of "the most beautiful and best thing", even if it is not fleshed out in one’s surroundings, comprises the only reality worth having, a moral reality. In Mirah’s case, the visionary presence enabled her to retain her goodness, and even her naivete, in ways that seem on the face of it to be impossible. Even the kindly Mrs. Meyrick, ever willing to believe the best about anyone, had her doubts when she heard Mirah’s story. The reader also may find her innocence in the face of corruption difficult to believe, until it is demonstrated in the text. At that point there seems to be little to do but accept that Mirah has the key to some higher reality— in the story as told, her mother must have been real, real because she was beautiful and good. Judaic "realism" clearly differs greatly from the English novelistic tradition. It is precisely this visionary cast that guarantees the mother’s goodness.

Deronda seems to be in tune with this, though his formulation
seems overly pedantic when he says this function is, "... an extreme image of what is happening every day—the transmutation of self." (p. 523). Though Deronda seems to think this function is relegated only to the life of the mind, in Eliot's novel it is literally true—the visionary can transmute one not only from bad to good but from Vienna to London, and most significantly, from foundling to Jew. The tale of the Buddha seems to have real power also, as the girls compare Deronda to the saint/deity they seem to bind him conscientiously to his throwing of himself to the hungry Gwendolen who in turn is brooding over her conscience.

Mordecai's is another visionary character, and perhaps even more powerfully evocative of events than Mirah's. It would appear that it is on Mordecai's certainty that the whole question of Deronda's Judaism turns. In his characteristic and passionate waiting there is simply no room for doubt that Deronda is a Jew. Eliot seems to have turned her authorial function over to Mordecai as he waits for his emptiness to be filled in some of the most seeping passages in the novel.

Mordecai is a visionary in the intellectual and political sense, certainly, but he also shares in Mirah's emotional and intuitive capacity, qualifying him as prophet and seer, as magician even. After the coming together of the two changelings or foundlings by the river, Deronda begins his circuitous path to discovering Mirah's brother, the elusive Ezra Cohen, and drifts with the current to him as he had to Mirah. We learn (hardly to our surprise) that Mordecai's mind "wrought so constantly in images" that the dividing line between known and divinated disappears, that his thinking
resembles dreaming in this sense (p. 530). So powerful is this faculty that he expects not just a being to answer his great need, but a Being. Over the years his envisioning of this Being had clarified to a beautiful youth possessed of a noble gravity and refinement of bearing. Who but Deronda? So powerfully is this process described that the reader cannot but half believe that Mordecai invented him. And this intuition can be true in the sense that he possesses actively operating mythic vision. Eliot hints at this when she says that Mordecai’s is a "visionary excitability" (p. 572), combining the rational and emotional in such a way as to at least see the future, "...an emotional intellect may have absorbed into its passionate vision of possibilities some truth of what will be...". Perhaps it is only the astonishing detail of Mordecai’s precognition that gives us the sense that he is the real author of Daniel’s existence. In any case, in his envisioning he appears to have mirrored exactly the composition of midrash, the revision of past and future reality in light of present need.

Deronda’s arrival by boat is another of the novel’s moments in which time is inverted, the end of the day/the beginning of the sabbath, reinforcing our sense that this too is a moment of destiny, a place out of time. This mystic arrival heralds the beginning of the passing on of knowledge, the progress toward the moment, just before Deronda sails for Genoa, when Mordecai can say that Deronda stands beside him "on the mount of vision" (P.600). Daniel’s miraculous appearance is in response to the demanding fictive necessity for revelations, revelations having less to do with Genoa than with Sinai.
Here we may pause and argue for some deliberate referencing on Eliot's part. We know that she was familiar with midrashim, for she has Mordecai use one to illustrate Mirah's great love for Deronda (p. 803). It is arguable that she would have been familiar with one of the most famous of all, that states that when Moses received the law on Sinai the souls of all Jews, the entire nation of Israel past, present and future, were present to witness the gift of the most powerful binding text of all, the Covenant. If so, she would have placed the suggestive passage immediately before his discovery of his parentage. This being the case, it but remains to Eliot and her vision to rejoin him with this host so that he may do them service.

Daniel's more immediate portion of revelation comes at the hands of Leonora, and also after a period of waiting fraught with significance for Deronda and the novel. Eliot tells us that as he waits and looks out his window, everything seems to gather personal meaning, and relate to himself and his story, reminding us of the manner in which fictive vision itself imbues his history with meaning.

Leonora may be as disappointing to the reader as she is to Deronda, for she seems at first in no way in sympathy with the strain of active vision that she paradoxically seems to have set in motion. We may be surprised when we compare her with other artists who are, Klesmer for example, or those who are capable of artistry or visionary sympathy such as the Meyricks and Catherine Arrowpoint. Certainly her first words to Deronda on the subject of her art have to do with the number of men who followed her from city to city, and she seems to have been as egotistically impatient with even Sir
Hugo's adoration as Gwendolen was with Rex's. Like Gwendolen, she twice marries from fear rather than love, and says she cannot love, and is thus overwhelmingly out of step with Deronda and company. She seems a kind of awful echo of Klesmer's contempt for actresses who are valued for their beauty alone, rather than their artistry.

But she may perhaps be forgiven for her heartlessness and might be seen as an aid to the fulfillment of vision, as she clearly seems to have been the instrument of the fates by means of her giving over of herself entirely to fictivity in several senses. It might be argued that Deronda gets his intuitive sensitivity from her, and thus fits him for the society of other artists or appreciators of art in the novel. His status as the son of a famous actress rather than a landed peer, say, places him even more firmly in the visionary and ethical realm inhabited by the Klesmers, the Meyricks, and Mirah herself. In addition, her status as artist provides a fictive basis for her decision to give her son up to Sir Hugo.

For the giving up of her son to an Englishman was a necessity after all. Without a youth marked by uncertainty, Daniel could not have developed his distinctive personality, a stilly waiting sensibility that allows him to recognize the course of vision when it comes. One may feel that she could well congratulate herself for having seen the right course better than her father. However, we are disturbed by Deronda's impression that his reveries of a mother seemed more real than this woman. We are immediately reminded of Mirah's vision of her mother and all that it meant to her, how real it truly was. Still, Deronda's grieved comparisons of this scene with his imaginative projections of a welcoming maternal presence are
misguided, though natural. They are clearly fantasy resulting from personal desire rather than the seeking out of true visions, though Deronda says they seemed more "real" than the dramatic Leonora. On the other hand, Leonora, connected to the mythic fates by Eliot's chapter introduction, is a figure of much powerful significance. She seems in the grip of fictive demand, as she tells Deronda, it seemed the force of what her father called "right", Judaism, that caused her to relent and call him to her. Clearly, rightness and fiction are allied in this all-important scene, as Deronda is freed to seek what might not improperly be called his fate. As a kind of fatidic knell to the overwhelming personality, Leonora says that as she lies ill, all but the early events of her life, her marriage and the repudiating of her son, fade from her. This clearly reflects Daniel's selective vision as he waited to see her, and is yet another prophetic omen of the fulfilled vision.

This is entirely appropriate, as those events are all that is important to the powerful fictive deities in Daniel Deronda. Once more we have the sense of some brooding force outside the action as we learn that Kalonymos, after one sight of Deronda in the synagogue and upon learning his name, upbraided Leonora with seemingly full knowledge of the whole tale, "It was as if everything had been whispered to him in the air."

What can this mean but that fateful stories are wafted to the necessary ears by inky gods, so that the necessary ends may be written?

Though she tried to obstruct the path of vision, and is still angry, no "strong faith" is within her to resist. We cannot doubt it, for faith and fictive vision are allied. When the task needed to
be done she had the faith, albeit unknowing faith, and now we are sure that Deronda's sense of unreality is misleading. Her story (and his) is stronger, truer than his nostalgia for what never was. Leonora seems to sense the significance of story here, "But I shall have told you everything--and what to reproach, since I have made you glad you are a Jew?". Indeed, this is just exactly what she has done, what purpose she served from the beginning. She did not make him glad by revealing his heritage to him, his experiences previous to the interview did that. Paradoxically and characteristically for this novel, she did so by releasing him to his fate when he was an infant. She thereby freed Deronda to complete his story, thus serving as a vehicle of vision.

Leonora might be seen as a frustrated, and even frightening, spectre of failed vision. Her life certainly seems arid enough, with career blighted and the ability to love undeveloped. She has locked herself away from the springs of joy open to Deronda and his friends. In her grand and ruined figure we might catch an echo of another who suffers from failed or faulty vision, Gwendolen Harleth. Our examination of Deronda and his fictive mode will add another dimension to the "English half" of the novel, for Eliot has recast her egoist as being so in part by reason of a capacity for vision that she ignores and represses. We will find that her story has many parallels to Deronda's, hers is a fictively painted, doubly defined study of moral character linked to imaginal characterization as well. Yet at every turn it is clear that her connections to vision are of a disturbingly negative kind, and suffer the distorting effects of an ego that seems to wish to grasp whatever power of
fictivity is within reach and twist it. Yet this wish is frustrated, and eventually it is the kind of vision that permeates Deronda's world that pulls her into its current.

From the first we are treated to Gwendolen's version of fictive characterization. Having just read the prophetic epigraph to the first chapter, we are spectators of a scene at the gaming tables in Leubronn as Gwendolen, all unknown to herself or the reader, loses her last funds and in that same moment, has her last taste of the stylish freedom to which she is accustomed. We are clearly cast as an audience to the play at the tables, and to a play in a larger sense as well. The scene is described with the careful attention to detail of the greatest drama, so that nothing may be lost on us. The faces around the gaming table are described in dramatic terms, as the bored boy behind his gambling mother is for Eliot, "...a bedizened child stationed as a masquerading advertisement on the platform of an itinerant show,..." (p.36). Eliot's observation that each face is masked in negativism, lifeless in its monotony of effort, associates the artificially heightened dramatic elements of the scene with moral decay, or "the small drama of personal desires" he condemns so roundly in a later interview with Gwendolen. Faces from every nation and of every age are represented, so that it appears almost the world in microcosm. Here we are treated to Deronda's vision of the young lady at the tables, a woman whose beauty is only matched by her daring, yet both of these seem superseded by her vanity and joylessness. As we are treated to some of Gwendolen's thoughts as she notices Deronda's attention, we see that she is vain indeed. The first level of fictional framing of persons and events thus seems
simple, it amounts to no more than that, in this highly artificial and decorative setting, Gwendolen sees herself and is seen as a dramatic and striking figure.

Yet this drama is also a real one, in more ways than the reader or the actors can yet know. Deronda clearly senses the purposelessness and decay of the figures there, and pities the beautiful Gwendolen. She, for her part, is no less aware of the dramatic properties of the moment, but to less purpose. Here Eliot shows us clearly to what extent Gwendolen’s egotism is based on a fictive mode of behavior. Her concern in this introductory scene is altogether with how she appears to others, especially Deronda, rather than with what she is doing and its possible consequences.

This is the reader’s first intimation of the degree to which Gwendolen’s behavior is tied up with fictional images and associations. For her, the reality of a present or supposed future situation is less “real” than her fictive image of it, or of herself. But what distinguishes this fictive reality from Mirah’s is its individual egotism. At the tables, she is concerned only to seem as striking in defeat as she looked in victory. Ironically, it is only as the reader looks back to this scene that it becomes apparent that at this moment Deronda has just met Mirah and been clothed with visionary possibilities. She, on the other hand, like the gamblers is continually “masked” in negative vision, with disastrous consequences; Gwendolen’s dramatic, essentially fictional pose is clearly at odds with the reality of the situation, the current of spiritual vision that Deronda’s watching presence represents.
When the story moves back in time to Gwendolen's arrival with her mother and sisters at Offendene, we see that this fictive proclivity is characteristic of her, and Eliot very frequently uses overtly fictional images, framing devices or diction to discuss her. Almost her first act at Offendene is to pose as Saint Cecilia, at the piano and before a mirror, and bringing the household to a standstill in order that they may witness her pose. We can see that Gwendolen insists that others be her audience, for she needs continual applause to make her effects. Yet it is clear that she truly cares nothing for her audience, and in this too she is in conflict with true or real vision, for there is always the sense with Deronda of a collectivity of all Jews, and even all persons possessing or in tune with imaginative vision. In contrast, Gwendolen perceives of others as fitting or not fitting their roles in life according to her whim. She often engages in the making real of her own visions in light of present desire, like the midrashist, and she has been ceded the power to make these characterizations real.

When asked to help with the family finances to the extent of teaching her sisters, in order to save the expense of tutors or governesses, Gwendolen says of her sister Alice, "It would be much better for her to be ignorant, mamma: it is her role, she would do it well" (p. 58). When her long-suffering mamma rebukes her for her unkindness, Gwendolen replies, "I don't see why it is hard to call things by their right names and to put them in their proper places." We see first of all that Gwendolen can indeed condemn her sister to ignorance if she chooses, but further that Gwendolen seems to have a confused notion of where a social role ends and reality begins. She
seems to imply more by her use of the French word, *role*, than is meant by our modern usage, in reference to social roles and role-modeling.

When this statement is coupled with the one immediately following which implies that this assessment of Alice is real, she seems to mean by this word the making real, in public and private life, of a dramatic conception of the self. If Alice is truly as untalented as Gwendolen believes, there is no use trying to educate her. The key to resolving this situation is to fabricate a suitable characterization for her. This characterization would serve not only to provide poor Alice with a place in life, but would remove an onerous duty from Gwendolen. The ordinary difficulties of life may be solved by means of a recourse to fictivity. Thus, were Alice only to content herself with the creditable presentation of herself as an ignorant girl, and do it in a suitably winsome way, all would be well.

It is an astounding statement, one that reveals to what extent Gwendolen believes that one's place in society, one's place in life, depends upon the ability to carry off a role for which one is well suited. Clearly, Eliot is saying more here than that Gwendolen is an early example of that modern-day monster, the narcissist, for though narcissistic she surely is, it is not a simple narcissism. For Gwendolen, life is not just a matter of keeping up appearances, or even making a good appearance. For Gwendolen the appearance and the reality have become one. Gwendolen is the sum of her visions of herself. The inverted, even perverted resemblance to vision and reality in Deronda's story is clear.

Paradoxically, though Gwendolen incurs the first of many
disastrous events by means of perceiving of herself as an actress in a private drama, Eliot, by presenting her two main characters to us in the same way points to a narrative reality. The tableau at the gaming tables introduces the idea of social reality as a matter of roles, or parts, and subsequent exposure to her confirms this for the reader. We will find that Gwendolen has lots of company in envisioning her fictive self, as wife for example, in unrealistic ways. Eliot seems to suggest that part of the negative aspect of privilege is a wholesale participation in negatively fictive vision that distances one from what is genuine. She seems to point to a social-satirical portrait of what it is that Deronda’s fulfilled visions will need to combat, indifference and outright cruelty. The two kinds of vision in the novel seem to be inverse relation to each other, for the more Gwendolen indulges in grandiose fictivity, the less we admire her.

Yet each time we are exposed to this element of vain authorship on Gwendolen’s part, Eliot includes another level of fictive comment that seems always to relate to the eventual outcome of her true drama. When Gwendolen poses as Saint Cecilia upon her arrival at Offendene (p. 55), we can clearly see a commentary on Gwendolen’s moral character, questions of sanctity, (which if she ever had she will violate most completely by marrying Grandcourt), her artistry (which is nonexistent, as we see in her interactions with Klesmer), and her status as martyr, (which she will be after her marriage to Grandcourt). In the same way that Gwendolen does not see the difference between the role and the reality as regards Alice, she cannot see that her pose will also become the reality. In some sense, even though she’s wrong (her behavior should
be better grounded in reality and ethics) she's also right (she has chosen the perfect figure to stand for her and what will eventually happen to her). It would appear that imaginative Gwendolen has some visionary capacity at least, for she has told herself and us a true lie. There is some indication of the presence of active, shaping vision here. Yet Gwendolen appears not to sense the significance of her poses. She feels that they are static and infinitely malleable, we note the bloodless and bodiless discussion of what nose is appropriate for what character, as though Saint Cecilia were canonized for her appearance. This is in strong contrast to discussions on art and literature at the Meyricks. It would seem that when discussing her role in life, or another's, she can approach the Deronda-like connection between image and reality, seems to partially intuit it, but she lacks the element of visionary faith. She sees and she does not see, and thus Gwendolen has more in common with Lamia than a sinuous form. Zeus granted Lamia the ability to remove and replace her eyes at will (though what use this was to her I have not been able to discover).

Yet with all the indications we have had of Gwendolen's stunted but occasionally powerful openness to fictive vision, it is not until she arranges for an amateur theatrical that we see true vision forcing itself upon her and the unmistakable indications that Gwendolen's trouble is more than petty selfishness. As she has done in the past, she is looking for a way to appear to her best advantage, but the term "tableau" is oddly apropos. This is perhaps the best example of Gwendolen's unremitting efforts to freeze a vision, to control her fiction, so that it will suit her notions of
what is desirable and good, and as such serves as a kind of keynote for her story. In this case, Hermione from Shakespeare’s "The Winter’s Tale" (another story of lost children and hidden identities) provides Gwendolen with the opportunity to display her fine instep in a situation that requires no effort from her, and certainly no artistry or imagination. It is yet another in a long line of efforts to freeze a moment in time, and arrange to live forever, statuelike, in a series of pleasant scenes in which she is the center of admiration. The frozenness of her pose seems to us an ugly parody of the kind of timelessness that envelops Deronda and Mirah at the moment when their fictive gods intrude. The contrast is so strong that when the enigmatic panel flies open, the effect is thus less the mysterious intruding on the ordinary, than the real erupting into the fictitious.

The dead face staring skyward and the fleeing figure can be no others than the brutal Grandcourt, and Gwendolen herself. At this point the story appears to be telling itself backward, with the end forecast from the beginning. Had the painting simply been on the wall, described by the author but unnoticed by the characters, we might have understood it as a more conventional foreshadowing. But the painting literally puts itself forward, demanding notice. A narrative device has become an event to be accounted for, to be reckoned with. Gwendolen's unreasoning terror points to a deeper level of fictive reality, that of the end of her story and her husband's death.

The sight of Gwendolen speechless with terror before the painting points back to her pose as Saint Cecilia, when she panel was first discovered. Certainly her bloodless face would make a better
representation of the martyr at the moment that she first apprehends her fate. Indeed, Gwendolen's story in its entirety does remind us of the lives of the saints, with its elements of wrong repented for and the sinner led to the light. We are suddenly in a world of awful portents, of fictive and symbolic visitations. Her unreasoning dread, the mysterious power of which we have seen before, is allied by Eliot with Gwendolen's "root of conscience", (p.95). This would seem strong evidence that she could, if she would, join in Deronda's world of fictive faith. She is not utterly evil, and the gods of narrative appear to deem her not unworthy of guidance or warning.

Klesmer appears understand the presence of forceful fictivity, in his assessment of the scene as a "magnificent bit of plastik" (p.92). In the word's meaning of "artistic power" rather than "impersonation", Klesmer appears to have seen something others do not see. He seems intuitively aware of the distinction between Gwendolen's inferior play-acting, and the real artistic or visionary power of the scene before him, and the significance of it. He seems to see some outside force operating here, a fictive power affecting events. He is certainly aware that Gwendolen is no artist and that the panel flying open was not part of her plan. Yet he is quite genuine in his appreciation of the scene as it occurred. We see that he uses the word twice, once to Gwendolen in its sense of "impersonation" in order to allow her to save face, but the first usage of the term is literally startled out of him as the trembling girl is led away, and his hearer is the ever-sensitive Miss Arrowpoint. He seems to know something we do not know, to be in tune with a different strain of vision.
Indeed, Klesmer's visions of the real and not real as they relate to art are so keen that he will point out to Gwendolen, desperately seeking a way out of life as a governess, that though she might be a real lady, she could not present the artistic reality on the stage; she might be James's "real thing", but true artistic vision is beyond her, and it is strongly expressed in the novel that artistic or visionary expression is far superior to the insipidity of ordinary lives. It is as if the artist is in tune with something mythic, with a view of time and events that is godlike, encompassing both the beginning and the end. He can be seen as associated with Mordecai in his role as seer, as prophet for the novel's fictive truth. Though Klesmer cannot be said to be as truly prescient as is Mordecai, in his own life he seems a true author of events, particularly in the scenes surrounding his engagement. He seems to understand as an artist what Mordecai understands as a Jew, that right action is keyed to the rightness of vision, present action must be in tune with future resolutions. His presence, along with Deronda's, also demonstrates the degree to which active vision in the novel adds depth to Eliot's social satire of the philistinism of the English. His interactions with Bult, Catherine's unwelcome suitor, make clear that he believes artistry to have a real effect on the world. "Art" then, is simply the rubric under which Klesmer puts his visionary power. We find it difficult not to suppose that some of his speeches are Eliot's, thinly disguised under a comic accent and appearance.

Faithless Gwendolen, on the other hand, is learning an opposite lesson--to be sorry she ever married. Her growing discontent with
her marriage and corresponding interest in Deronda are reflected in
the flawed mirror of erroneous fictivity, the "negative mask" rather
than the true vision which brings joy. In the series of discussions
with Deronda, on which she grows increasingly dependent as her misery
grows, there are continuous and ever clearer hints that Gwendolen has
no faith in the visionary or truly fictive, and thus cannot benefit
by what warnings she receives.

Tellingly, Gwendolen had been used in the past to think of others
as "like stale books" (p. 485). This flatness of vision is clearly
allied with her growing sense of abandonment and previous static
envisioning of her future. Indeed, that her visionary capacities are
dead seems her whole trouble. We notice here that her interest in
Deronda is still only an interest of novelty, the enlivening touch is
yet to come. But as before she seems to have frustrating fits and
starts of insight, "I wish he could know everything about me without
my telling him", she adds immediately afterward. Indeed, as we have
seen, his being able to do so would be the best sign of health we
could wish for her or anyone else in the novel. Mysterious knowledge
is the sign of moral health, though his status with her as a kind of
priest augers well. We see that in this scene she is again with a
mirror, as she often is, but rather than flatly mirroring the admired
and admiring Gwendolen the image has softened into a companion,
suggesting that Gwendolen has opened her narrow world a little. Even
better in this scene is her conversion to an interest in Deronda "not
by words only but by imagined facts", (emphasis mine). Her
conscience has entered a new current, a different vision than the one
she has heretofore engaged in. She is inclined to backsliding
however, as in their
conversation about the lost sheep. "It is a very ancient story", says Deronda the apprentice seer. "That is a way of speaking, it is not real", she replies (p. 494). She seems tone-deaf to the right cues, she must see that the reallest of the real is fictive in Daniel Deronda.

Deronda’s role in regard to her after her marriage becomes that of instructor in realities. In their first interview after the party at which she rashly wears the turquoise necklace as a bracelet, (pp. 505-510), Deronda makes it clear that it is the "small drama" of ego that amounts to "inanity", and is "necessarily impious", thus once more associating image and moral reality. He explicitly identifies her false imagination as the trouble with her, and advises developing a sense of community with others via "real knowledge" or interest, the emotional intellectual capacity he and Mordecai have. Most solemnly he advises that she use her fear to guard her against further transgressions. This fear can only remind the reader of her seemingly irrational fears earlier, as at the tableau. We see that in effect Deronda is urging her to use the only connection to true vision she has, her terror, which is charged with the transforming vision that may avert evil. Her willingness to do this seems to imbue her with the first voluntary use of positively prescient vision we have yet seen, "It may be—it shall be better with me because I have known you." Deronda, for his part, characteristically senses the consequences of Gwendolen’s weakness, and significantly in light of what we know about currents and vision, feels like a bound man watching her drown.

This beginning, though undercut by Grandcourt’s scurrilous
implications that Deronda is keeping Mirah as a mistress, is followed by real effort and renewal of faith, in Deronda and his visions for her. When, after her husband’s accusations, Deronda seems "odious" to her, ominously, along with "poetry and lofty doctrine", his face seems to her a mask, like the frozen faces at the gaming table at Leubronn. Yet it is a mask that she sees through. She begins to have insight into the ugly envisionings of Grandcourt, though her faith is imperfect. "She did not foresee--she could not wait to foresee." (p.651), and rushes to Mirah’s house to assure herself of the charge’s untruth. This lack of willingness to open herself to the healing capacities of foreknowledge is our sign that Gwendolen has much yet to learn. Again, in this scene it is "faith" Eliot says she lacks, the ability to distinguish between true and untrue vision.

After her husband’s studied insult in sending the unspeakable Lush to intimate that he was aware before their marriage of the exact state of her knowledge about Mrs. Glasher, she begins to show heartening signs of carrying a truer faith into a kind of exile. Part of this renewed resolve is her likely vision of herself as a friendless and despised woman should she leave her husband, and the realization that she has no right to quit her unpleasant bargain, once made (p.666). She seems to be using her envisioning abilities positively now, for we could imagine an unrepentant Gwendolen imagining herself a mysterious and sought-after figure, in the event of a scandalous separation. Her more realistic picture is grounds for encouragement on the one hand, yet dishearteningly her moment of empathy with Mrs. Glasher heralds a new realm of visionary and
threatening portents of her husband's death.

Gwendolen's growing homicidal impulses are checked in their resolution by Grandcourt's interruption of her interview with Deronda. Ironically and appropriately, she will not see him again until Grandcourt is dead. At this juncture, Eliot seems to imply that he also has prescience of a sort, truly negative fictivity, for he seems to be able to read her mind on occasion. It seems a tossup whether he brought on his own death or her increasingly effective envisioning killed him. Certainly his body pulled away by the tide both fulfills the dreadful promise of the plastik in her tableau.

Gwendolen's healing consists of her gradually bringing her own vision of her life, flat and flawed, into line with Deronda's. Increasingly she comes to believe in truth that it would be better with her because she had known him. Still, it seems strongly implied that this is not enough to make her like Mirah, Mordecai or Deronda. She is still dwarfed by his vision, as she had felt dwarfed by open spaces in nightmares. That it will be better with her is still self-centered vision, and her last communication is full of doubt as to her usefulness to others, a doubt the reader may well share. On the other hand, there is no doubt that Gwendolen was the focus of a truly overpowering and malevolent fictive force, which she surely invited. It can be hoped that she can reverse the polarity. After all, by the time of Deronda's last revelation to her, the fact of his impending marriage, she could begin to accept the notion that through letters he could be to her what Mirah's mother, or Mordecai's awaited Being, had been to them—the unrealized yet truly real presence of renewed vision.
Daniel Deronda is admittedly a sometimes confusing work, since Eliot seems to suggest that inasmuch as narrative reflects life, life may be seen as obeying certain narrative principles. It is certainly not the case that a Judeo-mythic view of the novel dissolves all conflict between the two worlds of the novel, but Eliot’s first chapter epigraph suggests that she sees no easy distinction between the real and envisioned, the imaginative and the empirical. Both interact in a way that presents the supernatural intruding on the mundane, the ordinary resolutions of life obeying a higher law, a narrative law. As such it is a novel with much to say to us about the imaginative capacity of men and women, and how it may be used to kill or heal, as with the wise midrashists.

Hence Daniel Deronda cannot be viewed as a novel with a "good" and a "bad" half, one obeying causal laws and one operating in the realm of fantasy. It is wrong for Leavis to suggest that were Deronda’s character pared to his priestly function, Daniel Deronda would be a better work. That would leave the novel only a pretty pilgrim’s progress. Indeed, Daniel and Gwendolen’s story is not a "progress" in the usual sense. There is too much evidence to suggest that Gwendolen is part of the novel’s fictive ontology with all its paradox and air of legend that binds Deronda himself, and that her refusal to recognize or place any confidence in it is a clear key to her moral blindness. Her narrowness of vision consists of more than selfish insistence on her own way, coupled with a dawning willingness to change. Her defects are more complex than a wish to see herself admired, and her cure more difficult than developing the ability to see another’s point of view. She must always be seen in Deronda’s
light, and since he must be seen as the fulfiller of an imaginative
destiny, part of the resolution to her dilemma lies in her not only
learning to believe as he does, but to become part of the same strain
of compelling vision. In the same way, Deronda is more than
Gwendolen's angelic confessor. Indeed, without the paradoxical and
fictive elements of his history, Gwendolen's moral progress would
lose much of its evocative power, for her development at every stage
points to and is judged against Deronda's status as participant in
active vision, rather than simply as the possessor of a good
heart.

In this manner, Eliot appears to be manipulating the reader's
expectations of events over time. From the beginning Gwendolen and
Deronda seem locked into a story that they must fulfill. This seems
to be in strong contrast to her otherwise realistic style, in which
moral choices have a predictable effect on persons and events. Yet
the epigraph to her first chapter addresses this contrast between
what can be rationally expected and what seems mysteriously fated.
As she points out, literature too has power over us, and is but
another way to order experience. Science treats time and events in
time as though they were a series of discrete entities. In this
view, the past may become more intelligible in view of intervening
events, but these are viewed as meaningful only insofar as they are
the result of causation. Any other formulations are seen as
serendipitous coincidences, and we smile when we call them "poetic
justice". Art, however, treats time as a unified thing, with past
and future presented as interconnected, as in lived experience.
Literary critics, for example, have always read the beginning of a
novel with full knowledge of its resolution, and adjusted their
evaluations accordingly. More importantly, in poetic literature of
all kinds, time expands and contracts, speeds and slows, in response
to human events. This perception of temporal elasticity is common to
human experience, and it is clear that Eliot belongs to the century
of Freud and Jung, both of whom were engaged in the effort to root
human experience in dynamically active and healing fictive symbolism.
Hence, compositionally Eliot's moral drama is not simply a series of
discrete moments or accreting decisions, but is significant in those
numinous moments "outside of time" which punctuate ordinary reality.
The temporal gaps and inversions in Deronda's story stand as strong
commentary on Gwendolen's diseased versions of them.

Evaluating the novel as containing a Judaic thought-world and
compositional style reveals that Eliot, as usual, is remarkably
accurate in her facts and her perceptions of the Jewish historical
and visionary identity, and its applications to the wider spectrum of
human personal and political experience. We may find some historical
justification for the form of the novel as well, and not only that
having to do with Eliot's well-known concern with imaginative
national identities, or her distaste for anti-semitism. The Jew in
the 18th and 19th centuries was, as we can see in Eliot's writing,
something of a new presence in European cities. Napoleon's path was
strewn with ghetto walls, such was his dedication to assimilation.
His policy of emancipation and citizenship for Jews greatly
heightened the visibility of Jews in Europe. The Jew was still,
however, a nation within a nation and the easier contact with Jews in
Eliot's England had done little more than present the average Briton
with an impenetrable mystery. In the age that spawned modern science and that placed a high premium on reason and progress, it could be observed that black-robed persons could be seen on the streets who had little or no inclination to enlighten the Gentile, even should the Gentile wish to be enlightened. In truth it was quite literally an ancient world intruding on the modern one, and in some sense the novel's problematic structure displays just this pattern. The "Jewish" half of Daniel Deronda occupies the same position in the novel that the Jew inhabited in England, and it is ironic to note that it has raised much the same kind of suspicion.