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'A Counterfeit Presentment': The Duality of Portraiture in the Novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy

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‘A Counterfeit Presentment’: The Duality of Portraiture in the Novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from The College of William and Mary

by

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Sarah Ross ‘12

Note on the Texts

I use the Oxford University Press editions of all four novels addressed in this thesis. For each of the sections, I follow the lead of George Eliot and use epigraphs, which, though not from the texts themselves, are thematically related and indeed enlightening for the succeeding discussions. When referring to characters, I take up the practice common among scholars and use the names by which the characters are known in their respective texts. Footnotes are given in the closest approximation to MLA style (2009).
I. Introduction: ‘A Counterfeit Presentment’

Look here, upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.

--Hamlet (III.iv.54-5)

Thomas Hardy, embarking in 1886 on what he did not know would be the “beginning of the end of his career as a novelist,” declared to himself: “Novel-writing as an art cannot go backward. Having reached the analytic stage it must transcend it by going still further in the same direction. Why not by rendering as visible essences, spectres, etc. the abstract thoughts of the analytic school?”¹ This statement marks the mid-way point of the literary timeline discussed in the following pages. Since the 1860s, George Eliot had reigned among the chief British novelists, using the “analytic style” of Dutch Realism to examine with vivid clarity the ordinary lives of her fellow Britons. Around the time of Eliot’s death, Thomas Hardy (Dorset-born and raised) rose to prominence as quasi-successor to the faithful depiction of English life, especially rural life, in novels. Throughout their works, both authors utilize the painted and, later, photographed portrait to explore questions of how the Victorians saw, read, and understood the wider aesthetic world, and what such knowledge said about both viewed and viewer.

As Kate Flint notes at the beginning her study, The Victorians and the Visual Imagination, British culture in the nineteenth century was “fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of the reliability – or otherwise – of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what they saw.”² Both George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, widely travelled and immersed in the art world on the Continent and in Britain itself, appreciated the pictorial literacy of their reading audience, creating literary portraits as lessons. By examining the ways in which these portraits appear in Eliot’s Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda and Hardy’s The

Woodlanders and Tess of the d’Urbervilles, I intend to show how these novels provide a connection between the plot-device portraits of mid-Victorian literature and the abstract literary artworks of the fin-de-siècle.

For the purpose of my study, the notion of “portraits” encompasses both explicit and implicit forms of literary pictorialism. In the strictest sense, Middlemarch includes the most portraiture, with the description of actual Renaissance art, as well as described fictional portraits within the text. All four books contain allusions to external works of art, such as Gwendolen Harleth’s nickname as the “Vandyck duchess” in Daniel Deronda and the likening of Angel Clare to one of the Two Apostles by Giotto in Tess. More importantly, however, both authors employ painterly and, in many cases, photographic methods to create a literary portrait of a character. Portraits in this wider sense take many forms, from the comparison between characters to the more frequent flashes which isolate a character so as to capture a moment of change. The manner in which characters are presented to each other – and to the reader – as bodies to be read, compared, and contextualized becomes central to an understanding of how to read an aesthetic object, and increasingly what such readings say about the reader. Often framing, in the form of windows and mirrors, is crucial in the delineating of portrait from prose – though this too will become complicated as the coming of modernism blurs the containing borders of art.

Across the four novels, protagonists are presented with choices, struggling to fulfill their roles in society either through marriage or vocation. In Middlemarch, Dorothea Brooke becomes trapped in her marriage to Edward Casaubon, yet increasingly aware of her attraction to outsider Will Ladislaw, while Dr. Tertius Lydgate attempts to balance his sexual and intellectual interests through marriage to Rosamond Vincy. Daniel Deronda portrays dual protagonists Gwendolen Harleth – also trapped in a marriage, this time to the sadistic Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt –
and Daniel Deronda, on his quest to help Jewish singer Mirah Lapidoth and her brother Mordecai. The ensemble cast of *The Woodlanders*’ country village interferes with each other’s lives, centering on the love triangle of woodsman Giles Winterborne, cosmopolitan doctor Edred Fitzpiers, and their mutual love interest Grace Melbury. Finally, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* offers its heroine as a “pure woman” who must constantly overcome her sexual past as she rebounds between Angel Clare and Alec d’Urberville. These novels become *Bildungsromane*, or coming-of-age stories, in the literal sense of the word: series of images, or *Bilder*, of their heroes and heroines.

In each of my four sections, I have highlighted important themes that help to inform the literary portraiture of each novel. Both authors engage deeply with the works and issues of Charles Darwin, John Ruskin, and early photographers such as Francis Galton. Yet each discourse could easily have continued through my entire study: photographic language and themes recur throughout *The Woodlanders*; Impressionism deserves further consideration with respect to *Daniel Deronda*. My intention in this paper is not to provide the complete examination of these themes, but rather to focus on some of the ways in which Eliot and Hardy used their literary portraiture to speak to a wider Victorian discussion on aesthetics, science, and modernity.

Dutch Realism provided for both George Eliot and Thomas Hardy a significant historical background for moral works of art. Two quotes from Eliot and Hardy clearly state each author’s goal in creating “Art.” Eliot’s words in 1856 apply broadly to her novels:

> Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People.

Hardy seems to depart from this Realist program in his biography, stating his belief that:

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Art is a real disproportioning (i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion) – of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence ‘realism’ is not Art.4

Yet at the heart of both statements is a commitment to directing the reader’s attention to the beauty of ordinary lives. The “distortion” of reality which seems to differentiate Hardy’s purpose from Eliot’s is in truth only a more explicit form of her “amplifying experience and extending… contact” through novels which are, after all, fictions. The question of real versus fictional, of true versus false, recurs throughout both Eliot and Hardy as they attempt to portray the vivid interiority of common characters.

Throughout this inquiry, I hope to explore fully the duality that is a central element of the literary portraiture of both Eliot and Hardy. In one way or another throughout these four works, portraits appear in pairs. In some, characters appear side-by-side, sharing portraits as a means of comparison and even competition. Other portraits contain the character him or (more often) herself as doubled reflection. Single portraits consistently beg the viewer to compare the likeness of the image to its living counterpart. The ability to read faces and bodies becomes an aesthetic language, speaking in “hieroglyphs” (a word which appears in three of the four novels, and implicitly in the fourth) to anyone able to read the signs. Constructions of bodies – as both past and present, both male and female, both parts and whole – underscore the duality of a realistic character who is simultaneously part of a fictional work.

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4 Hardy, Early Life: p. 299.
II. *Middlemarch*: Comparing Portraits

Could he have seen the heart, he would have cared very little for the lungs; but without the most distant imagination of the impending evil, without the slightest perception of any thing extraordinary in the looks or ways of either, he repeated to them very comfortably all the articles of news he had received from Mr. Perry, and talked on with much self-contentment, totally unsuspicous of what they could have told him in return.

--*Emma*, Jane Austen

There are several reasons why it is best to begin with *Middlemarch*. Eliot’s novel is, of the novels discussed here, chronologically first (published in 1871-2 in *Blackwood’s*, 1874 in single volume), and widely considered one of the greatest Victorian novels. *Middlemarch* is, like the other works considered here, deeply concerned with the interaction between art and life. The novel abounds with visual artists – more even than the painterly *Daniel Deronda* – as well as references to actual works of classical, Renaissance, and recent British art. The very term *ekphrasis* (or “the verbal imitation of works of visual works of art”)\(^5\) occurs more often in reference to *Middlemarch* than its now less-famous antecedent, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* (1860), which scholars often credit as Eliot’s inspiration.\(^6\) Within the novel, Eliot’s literary pictorialism falls into two related but separate categories: characters’ discussion of visual art as a form of or as opposed to poetry, and the *ekphrasis* of actual and fictive works of art. For the purposes of my discussion, I will look briefly at some important aspects of the painting versus poetry debate, before turning to examine Eliot’s literary portraiture within *Middlemarch*. Portraits function as lessons in reading an aesthetic language: in getting in touch with an emotional, irrational side of one’s self; in accurately reading what bodies have to say; and in gauging what one portrait says or does better than another.

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\(^6\) Witemeyer, p. 55-6.
The impulse to compare in *Middlemarch* applies not just to sisters or suitors, but also to the wider discussion of the sister arts. Eliot, as scholars have long noted, does indeed use works of art to give voice to one of the most important aesthetic debates of her day, known under its Latin phrase, *Ut pictura poesis* (usually translated to mean, “As in painting, so in poetry”). At its heart, this classical comparison equates visual arts to written ones by suggesting that audiences must approach all artistic media generally, keeping the whole work in sight rather than criticizing minute parts.⁷ John Ruskin moved the debate into moral territory (in 1859), arguing against the “careless and illogical custom of opposing painting to poetry, instead of regarding poetry as consisting in a noble use, whether of colors or words.”⁸ As the characters of *Middlemarch* learn to appreciate the respective merits of plastics and poetics, they improve their aesthetic vision and are better able to see beauty in everyday life.

Throughout *Middlemarch*, Eliot incorporates traditional depictions of classical scenes and religious figures into both the discussion of portraiture and the portraits themselves, most often centered on Dorothea Brooke. From the “Prelude” the narrator of *Middlemarch* primes the audience to see her heroine as one of those “later-born Theresas,” canonizing her by comparison to the child-martyr. Eliot immediately follows this hagiography with a portrait of her “Puritan” protagonist at the opening of Chapter 1:

> Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible,—or from one of our elder poets,—in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper. (Mm 7)

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From this initial portrait, Eliot introduces several issues which will reappear throughout the novel. First, the very comparison of Saint Theresa of sixteenth-century Spain (and then to “the Blessed Virgin [that] appeared to Italian painters”) and Dorothea Brooke of pre-Reform England begins a series of ekphraseis placing Dorothea on par, aesthetically and morally, with major religious figures and as subjects of devotional art. Over the course of the narrative, Dorothea is described as a “Santa Clara” (Mm 203), “Saint Catherine” (Mm 504), and, repeatedly, Madonna (Mm 7, 178, 726) [Appendix ii]. Eliot draws on the portrait convention, especially popular under Sir Joshua Reynolds and his contemporaries in the late-eighteenth century, of depicting sitters (usually women) as saints, muses, and other elevated and classical characters. Reynolds, perhaps the most famous English portrait painter, often chose to show ladies as in costume so, as he put it, to “dignify the female subject” by “dress[ing] his figure something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity, and preserv[ing] something of the modern for the sake of likeness.”

Reynolds summarizes the dual purpose of the painted portrait: to use artistic license to create an aesthetic object for consumption, while still creating a document – a “modern… likeness” – which gives the physiognomical facts of a person within a historical line. Certainly the narrator of Middlemarch means to confer a heightened status upon Dorothea, to play on her “poor dress” as the admirable choice of an aristocratic lady as much as to remove her from the “provincial fashion” which her beauty, worthy of an Italian master, transcends.

In order to educate her audience in a deeper sympathy for the common but equally real lives of others, Eliot transforms Dorothea’s Bildungsroman into a kind of Künstlerroman (i.e., the coming of age of an artist). Early in the novel, Eliot explores the Ut Pictura Poesis question by setting her chief artists, Will Ladislaw and his German friend Adolf Naumann, as

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representatives of poetry and painting respectively. In a much-cited scene during the period of
the Casaubons’ Roman honeymoon, Will and Naumann debate the merits of their arts: Naumann
contending that Dorothea would, to the (visual) artist, become an “antique form animated by
Christian sentiment—a sort of Christian Antigone—sensuous force controlled by spiritual
passion” (Mm 178);¹⁰ Will, on the other hand, rebuts that

‘you want to express too much with your painting. You would only have made a better or
worse portrait with a background which every connoisseur would give a different reason
for or against. And what is a portrait of a woman? Your painting and Plastik are poor
stuff after all. They perturb and dull conceptions instead of raising them. Language is a
finer medium. […]
‘Language gives a fuller image, which is all the better for being vague. After all, the true
seeing is within; and painting stares at you with an insistent imperfection. I feel that
especially about representations of women. As if a woman were a mere colored
superficies! You must wait for movement and tone. There is a difference in their very
breathing: they change from moment to moment.—This woman whom you have just
seen, for example: how would you paint her voice, pray? But her voice is much diviner
than anything you have seen of her.’

(Mm 178-9)

Ladislaw spells out a major concern of Eliot’s aesthetics, indebted in large part to the work of
German philosopher Gotthold Lessing, who argued that the inherent strength of poetry lay in its
ability to depict time as cause, moment, and effect rather than the momentary “flash” of
painting.¹¹ Thus it falls to Will – the foreign reformer – not only to debate the question, “How
can Dorothea be perceived and represented in her full reality?” but also to give voice to one of
the novel’s fundamental questions: what is the best strategy for “any visual representation of a
living human being”.¹² Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the role of Dorothea’s aesthetic mentor is filled
not by her firmly English, Establishment husband, but by the Polish-born, Continentally-

¹⁰ Gerhard Joseph explores the allusion to Antigone in his article, “The Antigone as Cultural Touchstone: Matthew
¹² Ibid., p. 62.
educated and -traveled Will Ladislaw. As we shall see, however, this artistic teaching goes two ways, and becomes as important for Will as it is for Dorothea.

The controlled, orderly Dorothea Brooke, with her Swiss education in self-denial, realizes during her honeymoon that her rational choice to become Mrs. Casaubon was flawed, yet cannot fully understand her error in the same way she cannot understand the paintings she is overwhelmed by in Rome. Through four key episodes surrounding Dorothea’s relationship to several portrait miniatures at Lowick – particularly that of Will Ladislaw’s grandmother and Casaubon’s “Aunt Julia”– Eliot provides her heroine with opportunities for displaced emotional exploration mediated through moments of art appreciation [Appendix iii]. Critic Elizabeth Hollander sees the portrait of Aunt Julia in particular as a point of intersection between “two of the many kinds of visual trope explored in the novel: the language of moral insight, whose dominant metaphor is the light of understanding, and that of aesthetic, and finally erotic susceptibility, whose chief metaphor is the contemplated likeness between real and depicted person.”

These two aspects of the portrait miniature – the clarity of sight, and the aesthetic nature of emotion – form the key points of Dorothea’s aesthetic education, particularly once she returns to the dark, aptly-named Lowick from the overwhelming Renaissance art of Rome.

In some ways, a novel containing life-size sculptures and grand paintings might seem to hinge shakily on one miniature portrait. Yet the intimate nature of the portrait miniature makes it ideally suited to Dorothea’s emotional trajectory. At first, Aunt Julia’s portrait fades into the background of Dorothea’s new boudoir, a family inheritance as meaningless to Dorothea as the

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13 Will, who according to Casaubon “chose… the anomalous course of studying at Heidelberg” (Mm 74), would not only have been educated at the origin of Lutheran and Calvinist theology, but also – studying in the early nineteenth century – exposed to and possibly taught by Hegel. The notion of Ladislaw’s German education, as he himself is aware, allows him to see the fruitlessness of Casaubon’s research. Eliot, who had studied widely in German and was the first translator of works by Strauss and Feuerbach, among others.

other decorations that have hung at Lowick since Casaubon’s own mother inhabited the room. As one in a group of miniatures – two sisters and two parents – Aunt Julia functions as part of a seemingly ordinary family album (Mm 69-70). Eliot reincarnates the two sisters in Dorothea and Celia, whose reactions to the miniatures differ greatly: while Celia muses on “a family who had all been young in their time—the ladies wearing necklaces,”15 Dorothea “wondered a little, but felt that it would be indelicate just then to ask for any information which Mr. Casaubon did not proffer” (Mm 70). Casaubon’s brief family history – that the two dissimilar sisters were “not alike in their lot” – gives a cursory summary of facts, unembellished by the details of feeling and motivation which led Aunt Julia to make her infamous “unfortunate marriage” (Mm 70), a term which will later be redefined by the many problematic couplings of the novel. That Dorothea remains, in this early stage in the novel, incurious about the fate of the woman whose portrait she now owns marks the initial stage of her emotional development. By introducing this story as a fragment, Eliot not only foreshadows how other important information travels in Middlemarch (that is, second-hand), but also supplements her overall trajectory of an aesthetic education.

With Dorothea’s return from her honeymoon in Rome, Eliot signals the beginnings of a total mental shift in her heroine’s sympathy. Dorothea’s sight, both literal and figurative, is a topic within the text. Being “rather short-sighted,” Dorothea prevents herself from accepting Sir James Chettham’s dog for fear “of treading on it” (Mm 28). Equally important to this actual myopia is Dorothea’s desire to be seen, not as Sir James’s portrait of a lap-dog lady, but as a woman with reforming “plans.” Throughout the novel, Dorothea can, as Celia puts it, “always see what nobody else sees; it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you never see what is quite plain”

15 Jewelry appears throughout Middlemarch both as the “trinkets” Dorothea disdains and the “fragments of heaven” she feels sensually (Mm 13). For more on Jewelry in Victorian fiction, see Jean Arnold, Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel (2011).
In framing her decision to marry the elderly scholar Casaubon, Dorothea hopes to act as secretary in order “to save Mr. Casaubon's eyes” (Mm 41). In the interim between the first and second appearances of Aunt Julia’s miniature, Dorothea and Casaubon’s relationship has been proved something of a marital catastrophe, largely because “She was as blind to his inward troubles as he to hers” (Mm 188). This strained vision is further exacerbated by the presence of the Romantic, young, and artistic Will Ladislaw, whose contrast to Casaubon forms one of the central love-triangles of the novel.

Overcome for a second time by unhappiness, Dorothea sits lonely in her boudoir, reading a history from the face of a nearby female subject:

her wandering gaze came to the group of miniatures, and there at last she saw something which had gathered new breath and meaning: it was the miniature of Mr. Casaubon's aunt Julia, who had made the unfortunate marriage—of Will Ladislaw's grandmother. Dorothea could fancy that it was alive now—the delicate woman's face which yet had a headstrong look, a peculiarity difficult to interpret. Was it only her friends who thought her marriage unfortunate? or did she herself find it out to be a mistake, and taste the salt bitterness of her tears in the merciful silence of the night? What breadths of experience Dorothea seemed to have passed over since she first looked at this miniature! She felt a new companionship with it, as if it had an ear for her and could see how she was looking at it. Here was a woman who had known some difficulty about marriage. (Mm 258-9)

Aunt Julia’s portrait functions at this moment to open a doorway to sympathy for Dorothea: moving from innocence to “experience,” the newlywed Mrs. Casaubon sees “a woman who had known some difficulty about marriage.” The previously unquestioned description of Julia’s “unfortunate marriage” becomes open to interpretation, and the judgment of society on what makes a “good” or “bad” marriage becomes more suspect in light of Dorothea’s own choice.

From Aunt Julia’s miniature to Dorothea’s image, the notion that a face holds something “difficult to interpret” becomes an important part of Eliot’s aesthetic message. Beginning with Dorothea’s conversation with Will Ladislaw in Rome, the heroine declares that art is “a language
I do not understand... just as you see what a Greek sentence stands for which means nothing to me” (Mm 73), recasting the symbols and tropes of art in terms of a foreign alphabet. Ruskin has previously asserted that understanding art requires “actual models, accompanied with that earnest mental as well as ocular study of each, which can interpret all this is written upon it, disentangle the hieroglyphics of its sacred history, rend the veil of the bodily temple and rightly measure the relations of good and evil contending within it for mastery.”

Eliot picks up this rhetoric of art as language, creating her own “actual models” with their foreign “hieroglyphics” which Dorothea must learn through her own “earnest mental study.” Like Greek and Latin (and unlike the language of gossip), Dorothea teaches herself the obscure language, and eventually the complex effects of character.

Dorothea’s widening scope of experience parallels the similarly disastrous choice of Tertius Lydgate, whose quest to reform the medical world is stymied by his whirlwind marriage to local beauty Rosamond Vincy. As scholar Frederick Karl notes, Middlemarch is a novel of “dualism: dual characters, dual situations, dual choices, dual natures.... [It] abounds in divisions, although not always of the most symmetrical kind.”

Lydgate, who is blind in large part to his own prejudices toward women and particularly to his idealized image of Rosamond, ensnares himself in a marriage which he can neither afford nor understand. His quest to find “the primitive tissue” of the human body (Mm 139) connects him more to Casaubon than Dorothea by highlighting his belief in a single enlightening “key” to both rational and irrational life. Lydgate believes he can separate the tissues and nerves of the body from the mind; yet, as he learns to his cost, the patterns and prejudices of many Middlemarchers (and particularly of Rosamond) are largely invisible on the body, and rather must be discerned from within it.

16 Witemeyer, p. 55.
17 Karl, p. 190-1.
As a study of bodies, *Middlemarch* challenges its characters’ and its readers’ assumptions about the various uses to which the body can be put. Lydgate is from the beginning of the novel searching for a better way to see, in order “to do good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world” by use “not only of the scalpel, but of the microscope” (*Mm* 139).\(^\text{18}\) His interest in finding a “primitive tissue” parallels Dorothea’s great “plans” for land reform,\(^\text{19}\) yet the Middlemarch patients, with their “Provincial” reluctance to change, mistrust both Lydgate’s refusal to prescribe useless medicines and his interest in dissecting cadavers. The popular Reform metaphor of the body politic – a societal body diseased by corruption and stagnation – comes through not only the political scenes in *Middlemarch*, but also the fluid way in which knowledge (i.e., gossip) flows from center to periphery. Lydgate’s story becomes, in many ways, an exploration of bodies in the same way Dorothea’s story revolves around art. Though certainly Lydgate understands the basics of bodily health, he – like Dorothea – must learn the ways in which those bodies think, feel, and act.

Lydgate, not often described as a portrait, marries perhaps the most framed and compared character in the novel, Rosamond Vincy. With the same tongue-in-cheek description which undermined the bland public portrait of Dorothea, Eliot’s narrator notes how Rosamond “was the reverse of Miss Brooke”:

> Rosamond, who had excellent taste in costume, with that nymph-like figure and pure blindness which give the largest range to choice in the flow and color of drapery. But these things made only part of her charm. She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs. Lemon's school, the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female—even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage.

\(^{(Mm\ 89)}\)

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\(^{18}\) Cell theory was not formally posited until 1839, several years after the novel’s action (centered directly before the passage of the Great Reform Act of 1832).

\(^{19}\) Mark Wormald explores the importance of the microscope and scientific discovery at the time of Middlemarch’s action, as well as G.H. Lewes’ studies of sea life and microscopy in general in his chapter, “Microscopy and Semiotic in *Middlemarch.*” (*Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (March 1996)) pp. 501-24.
Rosamond’s education has been in the school of society, a body which has since accepted her as a success, particularly when compared to other women. Her likeness to the mythological nymph/cow “Io” more than to Dorothea, becomes part of her pastoral portrait, repeated throughout the novel as she decks herself in flowers and attempts to liken herself to “lambs” and other creatures. As Hugh Witemeyer observes, from *Adam Bede* through *Daniel Deronda*, the pastoral as a “favorite theme of Renaissance painters is nearly always a sign of false idealization and egoism in George Eliot’s literary portraits.”

When compared to the admirably ordinary Mary Garth (a potential stand-in for Eliot herself), Rosamond only *seems* to come out on top:

> They did not think of sitting down, but stood at the toilet-table near the window while Rosamond took off her hat, adjusted her veil, and applied little touches of her finger-tips to her hair—hair of infantine fairness, neither flaxen nor yellow. Mary Garth seemed all the plainer standing at an angle between the two nymphs—the one in the glass, and the one out of it…. In fact, most men in Middlemarch, except her brothers, held that Miss Vincy was the best girl in the world, and some called her an angel. Mary Garth, on the contrary, had the aspect of an ordinary sinner….  

> “What a brown patch I am by the side of you, Rosy! You are the most unbecoming companion.” *(Mm 104-5)*

Though, according to the narrator, Mary presents the kind of ordinary face “Rembrandt would have painted… gladly” *(Mm 105)*, the people of Middlemarch are – like their predecessors in *Adam Bede* – untrained in Dutch painting, and thus falling into the same misreading of Rosamond (whose very name rings of the pastoral) as Renaissance heroine. Mary, aligned here with the Dutch Realism of Rembrandt, is “plainer” than Rosamond but more honest, able to state frankly that Rosamond is a “most unbecoming companion,” touching upon the overpowering,

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20 Witemeyer, p. 54.
even predatory, nature of the two (herself and her reflection) Rosamonds’ beauty. The dual
good quality of Rosamond, her apparently fair “nymph”-like docility versus her ego-centric power, are
visible in her portrait; yet, as the narrator hints, there are exceptions to those beguiled by
Rosamond’s beauty, namely the less sophisticated but more genuine Garths.

Prefiguring both Eliot’s most pictured female Gwendolen Harleth (*Daniel Deronda*) and
Hardy’s later social climbing beauty Grace Melbury (*The Woodlanders*), Rosamond views the
world from her privileged position in it, so that the beneficent movements and physical beauty of
Dorothea are relevant to her world only because “Rosamond was not without satisfaction that
Mrs. Casaubon should have an opportunity of studying her. What is the use of being exquisite if
you are not seen by the best judges?” (*Mm* 406). Her desire to be beautiful is at bottom a desire
for power, to compete with Middlemarch ladies in order to emerge as alpha female. Unlike
Dorothea – and, as we shall discuss in Section V, unlike Tess – Rosamond’s beauty is a tool of
her own sexual selection, a self-illuminating rather than radiating light. Not only Lydgate, but
also Will and later Dorothea attempt to shift Rosamond from her self-centered world view, she is
a native Middlemarcher with her social Darwinian teaching from “Mrs. Lemon’s school, the
chief school in the county” (*Mm* 89) too deeply ingrained to begin to see differently. Rosamond
remains only marginally wiser by the novel’s final pages, the kind of woman portrayed in
feminist criticism from Wollstonecraft to the present day. It must be said, however, that – from
Rosamond’s point of view – the narrative works in her favor: she claims the husband she desires,
controls him and eventually succeeds (in the *Epilogue*) in moving them to London, and
eventually remarries an even richer man. Her selfishness, while destructive to Lydgate and
obstructive to what he might have achieved for modern society, is effective in a way that
Dorothea’s selflessness would not have been. Eliot admits the necessity in sexual selection of
acting selfishly, but simply states in the closing lines of the novel that “there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it” (Mm 784-5).

Ultimately in *Middlemarch*, all the characters must learn to accept the dual sides of human nature: male and female; logical and aesthetic; selfish and selfless. Eliot, who takes part in the ancient debate about the merits of the sister arts, concedes that visual art must always, on some level, fail to capture the dynamic interiority of the human soul. As Reverend Farebrother and Dorothea assert late in the novel,

"character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do."

"Then it may be rescued and healed," said Dorothea. (Mm 692)

In order for the body to function as a healthy whole – rather than an amputated part (a life “maimed,” a word which reappears throughout the novel; Mm 763) – the self cannot be split in two, but rather must be integrated. Dorothea in particular must learn to value not just the cool rationality and self-denial which led her into her first marriage, but also those things “which cannot be defined or rationalized as worthy or unworthy in themselves but which must rather be enjoined to good or bad effect.”22

Fundamentally, Dorothea’s first marital choice fails to balance these two parts of her being: her illogical, self-serving emotional impulse and her logical, altruistic reason. Her mistake originates in what Gillian Beer identifies as Dorothea’s difficulty in “distinguish[ing] between love and learning.”23 Aunt Julia’s portrait takes on greater meaning in Dorothea’s mind not solely because she is learning to sympathize with this woman’s plight, but also because the miniature represents a connection which Dorothea subconsciously cherishes. To compensate for

22 Hollander, p. 184.
the unrequited feeling of her devotion to and frustration with her husband, Dorothea gives her sympathy to an object. Yet on the wall beside Aunt Julia’s portrait is a closer relation: the former Mrs. Casaubon, in miniature. That Dorothea does not dwell – or indeed mention again – her husband’s mother’s portrait, along with the shift in association from “Mr. Casaubon’s aunt” to “Will Ladislaw’s grandmother,” makes clear to the reader if whom Dorothea thinking:

Nay, the colors deepened, the lips and chin seemed to get larger, the hair and eyes seemed to be sending out light, the face was masculine and beamed on her with that full gaze which tells her on whom it falls that she is too interesting for the slightest movement of her eyelid to pass unnoticed and uninterpreted. The vivid presentation came like a pleasant glow to Dorothea: she felt herself smiling, and turning from the miniature sat down and looked up as if she were again talking to a figure in front of her. (Mm 258)

Dorothea focuses unconsciously on the female likeness of Will Ladislaw to recall not only his image but her own image in his eyes. In imagining Will, Dorothea is also reimagining herself as a complex body able to be interpreted, a subject of interest (and, more importantly, desire) to another person. Such a mirroring of vision – the shared sense of attraction – is entirely “pleasant” to Dorothea, yet her devotion to her husband and her reluctance to examine her own feelings interrupt her self-examination, and she all but flees the room.

Part of Dorothea’s attraction to Will Ladislaw stems from his ability to cross gender boundaries as part of his general aspect as “outsider.” With his surname announcing his Polish heritage and his German and Roman education, Will is immediately labeled in Middlemarch as a foreigner. As Gillian Beer notes in her chapter devoted to “The Woman Question” in this novel, Will “is outside the educational hegemony…. He is kin to women, not polarised against them. Ladislaw’s position, outside money inheritance, sharing the awkward financial dependency more often associated with women, does have the effect of reinforcing his feminisation.”

Ibid.
indeed cross gender boundaries: able to lie on Rosamond’s rug and sing music one afternoon, before spending the next on a scaffold speaking to Middlemarch voters about the importance of Reform. Already labeled as a transgressor, Will does not fear the company of women, while Casaubon and Lydgate both – with their more isolated schooling – fail to appreciate the female mind. Ultimately however, as Beer concludes, “Will is much freer than a woman in an equivalent position would be.” His wandering ways, from his flirtations with Rosamond and his “gypsy”-like entertainment of street-children (*Mm* 435), allow him to state that he “never had any caste” (*Mm* 434) in a way no woman could.

As a foil to Casaubon, Will provides youthful passion and reforming spirit, but as a potential husband, he is hardly a suitable choice for the cause-driven Dorothea. Only once Will stops appearing as the rug-reclining dilettante and commits himself to Dorothea’s own aesthetic code – to “make life beautiful—I mean everybody's life” (*Mm* 205) – can he be considered an appropriate match for her. As he becomes more invested in his work at the *Pioneer* (Mr. Brooke’s Reformist newspaper), Will is no longer the wandering painter “rambling in Italy sketching… beginning to copy ‘bits’ from old pictures, leaving off because they were ‘no good’” (*Mm* 433), but instead an engaged activist in the crucial reform years of the late-1820s and 1830s. Changing his medium from paints and pencils to newspaper ink and public oratory, Will relies more heavily on words than ever before. Yet, crucially, he is no more successful at conveying his feelings to Dorothea than she is at understanding hers; misunderstanding plagues

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25 Scholar John Rignall notes that, particularly considering Eliot’s own reading: “There may be the faintest echo of the contemporary conflict in the fact that the French-educated Lydgate suffers defeat in his ambitions as a medical scientist, while the product of a German university, Ladislaw, achieves a degree of success both in marrying Dorothea and in assuming a role in public life as a Member of Parliament.” Rignall, *George Eliot: European Novelist*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011) p. 38.

26 The Great Reform Act of 1832 was the first in a series of three sweeping reform bills, all extending suffrage from the landed gentry to the masses. The years of *Middlemarch*’s action take place in the immediate aftermath of the Catholic Emancipation Bill, which permitted Catholicism members to sit in Parliament for the first time since the 1680s. With this legislation came a new era of Whig government, led during this period by Sir Charles Grey.
both the poetic Ladislaw and the “poem”-incarnate Dorothea until they can learn to put mediating pictures aside and read each other correctly.

Dorothea is not blind to the double standard encapsulated in the portrait and its reception. Musing over the miniature a third time, Dorothea associates the ill-treated ancestress with “the living face that she knew, helping to concentrate her feelings” (*Mm* 349). Though not aware why, Dorothea becomes plagued with a sense of guilt, an awareness of past “wrong, to cut off a girl the girl from the family protection and inheritance only because she had chosen a man who was poor!” (*Mm* 349). The question of history and inheritance becomes one of gender, as Dorothea asks herself: “Was inheritance a question of liking, or of responsibility?” (*Mm* 349). Allowing herself to turn the past wrong into “what ought to be done” in the present, Dorothea comes to Will’s defense. Yet, as the narrator points out, “She was blind, you see, to many things obvious to others—likely to tread in the wrong places, as Celia had warned her; yet her blindness to whatever did not lie in her own pure purpose carried her safely by the side of precipices where vision would have been perilous with fear” (*Mm* 350). This partial blindness of Dorothea’s fails to fool either Will Ladislaw or Casaubon, the latter of whom unsympathetically guesses her true feelings.

Casaubon’s death opens Dorothea’s eyes to see fully not only herself, but also the way she has been seen by others. The fact that the codicil to Casaubon’s will works “as if Mr. Casaubon wanted to make people believe that you would wish to marry Mr. Ladislaw” (*Mm* 460) is almost less important than the way in which Dorothea learns of her husband’s final cold gesture. Third parties mediate the entire affair: Casaubon’s suspicions are written rather than spoken, and must be read by Dorothea’s legal intermediaries, Sir James Chettham (now Dorothea’s brother-in-law) and her uncle Mr. Brooke. Celia, who breaks the news, repeatedly
tells Dorothea what “James says” since she has not read the will herself. Dorothea, finally forced
to turn her focus inwards, experiences a kind of emotional “metamorphosis”:

Dorothea by this time had turned cold again, and now threw herself back helplessly in her
chair. She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague, alarmed
consciousness that her life was taking on a new form that she was undergoing a
metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs.
Everything was changing its aspect: her husband's conduct, her own duteous feeling
towards him, every struggle between them—and yet more, her whole relation to Will
Ladislaw. Her world was in a state of convulsive change; the only thing she could say
distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew. One change terrified her as if
it had been a sin; it was a violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband, who had
had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said and did. Then again she was
conscious of another change which also made her tremulous; it was a sudden strange
yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw. It had never before entered her mind that he
could, under any circumstances, be her lover: conceive the effect of the sudden revelation
that another had thought of him in that light—that perhaps he himself had been conscious
of such a possibility,—and this with the hurrying, crowding vision of unfitting
conditions, and questions not soon to be solved. (Mm 460-1)

Despite “thr[owing] herself back helpless in her chair,” she is – from the reader’s point of view
– virtually motionless, an image of despair mirroring that on the canvases of many Victorian
narrative paintings. It is her interior self rather than the external world which is undergoing
“metamorphosis,” her psychological “world [which] was in a state of convulsive change” visible
only to her mind’s eye. Part of the “violent shock of repulsion” from Casaubon is due to his
doubleness of mind, the dual attack of having “hidden” his thoughts from her sight as well as his
posthumous ability to shine a harsh light into the very corner of her mind where her feelings are
hidden from herself. The reality of her external world is not changed, but instead unveiled, seen
in its entirety for the first time. Her internal, emotional reality, on the other hand, changes
completely, forcing Dorothea to reexamine not only her readings of Will, but also of herself.

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27 For examples of Victorian paintings attempting to show inner psychological turmoil for women, see Frank Holl
The Wide Wide World (1873); John Singer Sargent, Repose (1911); Sir William Quiller Orchardson, Le Mariage de
Convenance (1883); and John Collier, “Indeed, indeed, repentance oft I swore!” (1906).
Even having realized her feelings, Dorothea remains incapable of reading Will, still considering their relationship a negotiation of past debt rather than present emotion. After a tumultuous emotional meeting in which Ladislaw announces simultaneously his decision to leave Middlemarch and his reluctance to leave her, Dorothea still imagines herself as a friendly benefactor rather than potential lover. Both lovers remain constricted, as Hollander describes, “by the entanglements of words – the words that bind legal documents, that convey facts and intentions, and that must be both uttered and interpreted in order to communicate directly.”

Dorothea offers the miniature of Will’s grandmother to him as reparation for the previous Casaubons’ unjust treatment; Will refuses, on the grounds that “It is not very consoling to have one's own likeness. It would be more consoling if others wanted to have it” (Mm 511). He storms out, thinking his love confession made and unreciprocated. For both, the change from purely aesthetic or purely logical being is incomplete: Will can see and feel Dorothea’s personal power, yet “would have required a narrative to make him understand her present feeling” (Mm 512). For Dorothea, on the other hand, “The actual state of his mind—his proud resolve to give the lie beforehand to any suspicion that he would play the needy adventurer seeking a rich woman—lay quite out of her imagination” (Mm 514). In order to reverse the process Will feels of both “turning to marble in each other’s presence” (Mm 511), they part, allowing Dorothea to relocate her final emotional phase onto the ownership of the portrait.

After Will’s dramatic exit, Dorothea returns to her boudoir cocoon and allows herself to be overcome with a “passionate grief which she herself wondered at”:

For the first time she took down the miniature from the wall and kept it before her, liking to blend the woman who had been too hardly judged with the grandson whom her own heart and judgment defended. Can any one who has rejoiced in woman's tenderness think it a reproach to her that she took the little oval picture in her palm and made a bed for it

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28 Hollander, p. 183.
there, and leaned her cheek upon it, as if that would soothe the creatures who had suffered unjust condemnation? She did not know then that it was Love who had come to her briefly, as in a dream before awaking, with the hues of morning on his wings—that it was Love to whom she was sobbing her farewell as his image was banished by the blameless rigour of irresistible day.  

(Mm 514-5)

To a certain extent, Eliot uses Dorothea’s restful pose to recall here the “sleeping Ariadne” to which she was first compared in Rome (Mm 176-7) in order to signal the awakening of Dorothea’s hitherto-dormant self-interest (i.e., that side of her which acts and feels for her own sake, rather than for or with others). 29 Here at last Dorothea, though confused by her emotions, allows herself to “dwel[l] on it without inward check” and, more importantly, to convert her potential emotional energy into kinesis (beginning first with removing her widow’s cap later in the chapter). Her transformation is nearly complete. The influence of the portrait – as artwork, as historical marker, as emotional catalyst – radiates beyond its frame, aiding Dorothea in making a similar decision for her own happiness in the real world, rather than becoming yet another dead portrait on Lowick’s walls.

Finally, in the climactic scene in which they confess their love, Dorothea and Will put equivocation aside and see each other plainly. At first, both partners visualize each other like works of art (Will a “Royalist portrait,” Dorothea frozen as before like a “queenly” statue; Mm 478-62). Yet as they discuss the impossibility of marrying with Will’s small income, they are treated to a spectacular display of natural force: a thunderstorm battering the window of the library. Dorothea, up to now enclosed at Lowick as she transforms into a vocal aesthetic being, at last is galvanized by the Romantic backdrop. Returning to the language of inheritance and debt, Dorothea becomes another Aunt Julia, prepared to “learn what everything costs” (Mm 762).

Having ceased to reserve her energy for pictures, Dorothea ultimately learns to abandon the impulse to frame others as works of art, and instead to live aesthetically through love.

In reading the solid, vivid bodies of *Middlemarch*, portraiture is “but [a] necessary starting-point” for the presentment of character.  

30 For Eliot, the inseparable nature of body and mind creates visible markers as cues to be read, indications of underlying vivacity or dullness. As Kate Flint argues, the “sustained consciousness of the symbiotic relationship between body and mind” is characteristic of *Middlemarch* of Eliot’s message to go beyond the merely physical world, and to see and ultimately appreciate the emotional reality embodied in each form.  

31 Portraits, then, function dually in the novel: first, to bring out the human characteristics in those who appreciate them; and second, to stand as pale comparisons to those very humans whose qualities they highlight. Eliot’s characters learn to read, and ultimately live, with aesthetic appreciation, thus learning to see the world realistically – but no less sympathetically – and to place higher value in worthy things.

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30 Witemeyer, p. 72.
III. Daniel Deronda – Photographic and Impressionistic Realism

Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadow’d livery of the burnish’d sun.
(Merchant of Venice, II, i, 3-4)

If Middlemarch is concerned with presenting whole, solid bodies as texts to be read, judged, and compared, Daniel Deronda questions where and how these bodies came to be. Eliot examines the nature of inheritance, with its connection to past and future, as it affects both protagonists – Daniel and Gwendolen Harleth – in a struggle to return to some kind of origin, whether personal, racial, or historical. Nationhood, a central theme of the novel, is cast on the body of George Eliot’s eponymous hero, a man whom Henry James criticized for being “a picture… not a person.”

Though Eliot begins with the antiquated painterly tradition promoted by the Mallinger family portraits and allegorical works by painter Hans Meyrick, she also moves much of her literary portraiture into the modern realms of photography (with its related issues of race and science) and of a Whistler-esque Impressionism in order to leave no doubt that her story exists in the present-day of her readers. Eliot unleashes a subtle yet fierce criticism of that “average mark of [British] culture,” the lack of sympathy for the Jewish people and, by extent, for humanity in general, by creating a vague and ultimately inconclusive portrait style as the successor to painting, and leaving her history of descent off at the still-forming present.


Eliot wrote to abolitionist author Harriet Beecher Stowe after Deronda’s publication: “There is nothing I should care more to do, if it were possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow men who differ from them in customs and beliefs. But towards the Hebrews we western people who have been reared in Christianity, have a peculiar debt and, whether we acknowledge it or not, a peculiar thoroughness of fellowship in religious and moral sentiment…. To my feeling, this deadness to the history which has prepared half our world for us, this inability to find interest in any form of life that is not clad in the same coat-tails and flounces as our own lies very close to the worst kind of irreligion. The best that can be said of it is, that it is a sign of the intellectual narrowness—in plain English, the stupidity, which is still the average mark of our culture.” George Eliot: The Critical Heritage. Ed. David Carroll. (New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 405.
Between the publication of *Middlemarch* and *Deronda* (serialized in eight installments between February and September 1876), several important events had taken place which bear mentioning here. First, Charles Darwin’s second (and debatably more inflammatory) book, *The Descent of Man* was released in late February 1871, too late to be fully integrated into *Middlemarch*; yet by 1874, when Eliot began writing *Daniel Deronda*, she had had ample time to examine Darwin’s latest arguments about the evolution of the human race. Major topics for Darwin’s inquiry – origins, adaptations over time, connections between ancestors and present-day descendants – reappear throughout *Deronda* as key concerns for Eliot.

Second, Eliot spent the middle months of 1874 traveling (as was her wont after the publication of her books), including trips to France and Wiltshire. Her France holiday – following a trip the previous year – placed her not only in touch with the latest in Continental politics and philosophy, but also in the direct aftermath of the First Impressionist Exhibition (March-April 1874). While Eliot did not attend the exhibition itself, she would certainly have come into contact with elite members of the art world who had. On her return, she and George Henry Lewes visited parts of Southwest England to find possible inspirations for her new project. In Wiltshire, Eliot and Lewes visited Lacock Abbey, the home of Henry William Fox Talbot, co-credited with the invention of photography. Though posterity has often neglected Henry Fox Talbot and favored Frenchman Louis Daguerre, the printed photographic culture which boomed in Britain and around the world since the 1840s owes its ubiquity entirely to Fox Talbot, who invented the positive-negative printing process. Anyone familiar with film

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37 He competed with Louis Daguerre for the right to that title after both published their findings on photographic prints in 1839. Scholars continue to dispute who truly merits first claim.
photography can give a basic description of the process: a chemically-treated plate is exposed to light, then removed and re-treated in a darkened space. The resultant image is a “negative” from which an infinite number of “positive” prints can be produced and reproduced at any time.

Lacock Abbey, Fox Talbot’s family home in Wiltshire, became the testing ground for the pioneer’s early work; twenty-five years later, Eliot would use the house as a model for what would become Topping Abbey, the Mallinger ancestral seat and the home of her photographic hero.

Third, another famed polymath, Francis Galton, published his treatise, *English Men of Science: Their Nature and Nurture* (1874), adding to his works on inheritance and the fledgling science of eugenics, on which he had been focused since 1865. Much of Galton’s work used the new “science” (for others, “art”) of photography to prove theories and reach conclusions. Within his studies, Galton created many examples of composite photographs of groups – families, workers, and races – to find both the underlying “type” of each group, and the way in which these separate “types” were connected to the larger human family [Appendix v]. His studies on Jews, as scholar Daniel Novak explains in his chapter on *Daniel Deronda*, provide insight not only into uses of photography for pseudoscientific inquiry, but also the way in which racial others were viewed in the late Victorian period. These three fields – evolutionary science, Impressionist painting, and photography – all had a dramatic impact on the novel Eliot was writing through mid-1876.

On its first page, *Daniel Deronda* begins with an epigraph about the difference between “Science, the strict measurer” and “His less accurate grandmother Poetry” in their conceptions of

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a “beginning” – or rather, the “make-believe of a beginning” (*DD* 3). As Gillian Beer has pointed out, from this introductory excerpt Eliot announces a story about origins, an examination of past and future through the embodiment of the present. Daniel himself spends most of the novel wondering about and later discovering his origins, having no memory of his parents and instead living with his “uncle” and guardian, Sir Hugo Mallinger, whose home at Diplow is characterized by its thoroughly English ancestral portrait gallery:

Two rows of these descendants, direct and collateral, females of the male line, and males of the female, looked down in the gallery over the cloisters on the nephew Daniel as he walked there: men in armor with pointed beards and arched eyebrows, pinched ladies in hoops and ruffs with no face to speak of; grave-looking men in black velvet and stuffed hips, and fair, frightened women holding little boys by the hand; smiling politicians in magnificent perruques, and ladies of the prize-animal kind, with rosebud mouths and full eyelids, according to Lely; then a generation whose faces were revised and embellished in the taste of Kneller; and so on through refined editions of the family types in the time of Reynolds and Romney, till the line ended with Sir Hugo and his younger brother Henleigh. (*DD* 140)

A veritable summary of the British portrait painting tradition, the Mallinger gallery stretches back through the centuries, connecting the modern-day “nose of the family” to those on the faces of pre-Reformation ancestors.

Sir Hugo’s generation is, to a large extent, facing the prospect of extinction over the course of the novel, forced to adapt their notions of the “limit of the conceivable” (*DD* 203) or suffer isolation and loss. The traditional families of the novel – the Mallinger-Grandcourts, the Davilow-Harleths, the Arrowpoints – are repeatedly associated with the painted portrait tradition, a fact made increasingly ironic as their status as moral superiors is undermined by their

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41 The Arrowpoints, who are distinctly more *nouveau riche* than either the Mallinger-Grandcourts or the Davilow-Harleths, are not as inflexible as the other families. Thus, when Catherine Arrowpoint makes the bold assertion of her right to marry Klesmer (the famous, foreign – and Jewish – musician) at any cost to her fortune or social standing, she alone begins her marriage for love. Her parents, though at first reluctant to accept the match, ultimately relent because they gain a famous son-in-law rather than lose a daughter they love in the union.
intransigence and, in the case of Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt, an absolute absence of goodness. As noted previously, Sir Hugo – with only daughters for his legitimate, biological issue – continues to rely on the traditional portrait for his family, calling on Meyrick late in the novel to paint a “picture of the three daughters sitting on a bank, ‘in the Gainsborough style’” (DD 684), a style which was already long outdated by 1876. Grandcourt’s mistress Lydia Glasher, though far from conventional, is surrounded by their children, as “three girls, seated round their mother near the window, [who] were miniature portraits of her—dark-eyed, delicate-featured brunettes with a rich bloom on their cheeks, their little nostrils and eyebrows singularly finished as if they were tiny women… [they] sat demurely enough for images of the Madonna” (DD 290). Yet this image is shattered by the discussion going on around them: Grandcourt sees this tableau family album because he is on errand to inform Lydia that he will publicly acknowledge neither her nor the children again.

In many ways, the painterly scenes of Deronda resemble those of Middlemarch: a Germanic artist-friend opens discussion between the primary love interests on questions of art and, eventually, a general aesthetic consciousness indicative of emotional sensibility. Yet aspiring painter and Daniel’s friend Hans Meyrick, try as he might to use Jewish heroine Mirah Lapidoth as his model, finds Mirah’s beauty transcends the mythic scenes he usually paints. In discussing his latest works with Daniel, Meyrick describes his final canvas:

“here is the fifth: Berenice seated lonely on the ruins of Jerusalem. That is pure imagination. That is what ought to have been—perhaps was. Now, see how I tell a pathetic negative. Nobody knows what became of her—that is finely indicated by the series coming to a close. There is no sixth picture.” Here Hans pretended to speak with a gasping sense of sublimity, and drew back his head with a frown, as if looking for a like impression on Deronda. (DD 392)

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42 Witemeyer, p. 76.
This fanciful reimagining of Mirah, unlike the portrait of Dorothea which Naumann attempted to paint, has none of the prophetic vision of the true artist;\(^4^3\) rather, Hans – by his own proud admission – has relied on a “pathetic negative” for the purpose of creating a crowd-pleasing, “sublime” image. Moreover, Hans uses the “ladies' edition” of the Berenice story – the Jewish queen whose incestuous relationship with her brother, late Roman emperor Herod Agrippa II, resulted in the forced abandonment of her faith and her exile – partly for personal gain (he imagines himself in love with Mirah). Hans, like Gwendolen in her momentary singing career, has been trained in the English society tradition to make a marketable product, and thus is not a “real artist” of the caliber of Mirah, or Daniel – both of whom are deeply averse to ostentation and sing for the expressive catharsis of singing.\(^4^4\) In Sir Hugo, Grandcourt, Gwendolen, and Hans, Eliot plays upon the ambiguity of her feelings for the portrait tradition to explore larger issues which inform not only the English “half” but rather the entire text. Where in \textit{Middlemarch} Eliot’s “literary pictorialism” does draw on “the English portrait tradition [which] provides access to the past and a welcome continuity between past and present,” \textit{Daniel Deronda} seems to be a departure, where the Mallinger gallery and the other painted portraits come to “symboliz[e] an inaccessible and dying elite whom the younger and less aristocratic characters cannot and should not imitate.”\(^4^5\) The painted portrait tradition is an anachronism, a literal hallmark of the aristocracy who were becoming increasingly peripheral since the Reform Act of 1867 (and were

\(^{43}\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 59-60.

\(^{44}\) Music is the primary privileged medium of expression in \textit{Deronda}, deeply tied to the Jewish tradition of singing the liturgy. (The singers of the novel – chiefly Mirah, Daniel, and Klesmer – are Jews.) The European opera scene was vibrant throughout Eliot’s life, and the “golden age” of Yiddish musical theatre in Poland which blurred the lines between opera performers and cantors began in 1876. The recent revolution in atonal music, including the first performance (in 1869) of Richard Wagner’s Ring Cycle was well known to Eliot, who was friends with Wagner, as well as having met Liszt during her elopement travels with Lewes in the 1850s. For more on Eliot, \textit{Deronda}, and music, see Delia da Sousa Correa, \textit{George Eliot, Music and Victorian Culture}; Shirley Frank Levenson, “The Use of Music in \textit{Daniel Deronda}”; and Alison Byerly, “‘The Language of the Soul’: George Eliot and Music.”

\(^{45}\) Witemeyer, p. 67.
soon to become even more so with the next Act of 1880); that Daniel is over another “type”
marks him as a man of the future, rather than the past.

Despite the assumptions and insinuations of her characters, Eliot essentially answers the
question of Daniel’s paternity in relation to the Mallinger family portraits. The narrator follows
the above passage with the contrasting image of Daniel:

But in the nephew Daniel Deronda the family faces of various types, seen on the walls of
the gallery, found no reflex. Still he was handsomer than any of them, and when he was
thirteen might have served as model for any painter who wanted to image the most
memorable of boys: you could hardly have seen his face thoroughly meeting yours
without believing that human creatures had done nobly in times past, and might do more
nobly in time to come. \(DD \text{ 141}\)

Daniel provides a face fit “as a model for any painter,” as well as the inspiring image of a bright
future. Already this iconographic depiction of Deronda foreshadows his status as an embodiment
of a messiah, a fact further underscored here by his being of a different “type” – a heavily
charged word in the context of Francis Galton’s work.

Instead of Deronda, the Mallinger line legally moves to Sir Hugo’s nephew, Grandcourt –
a character unique in Eliot in having no redeeming qualities. Gwendolen mistakenly believes she
can master her husband through her statuesque beauty,\(^{46}\) and imag(in)es Grandcourt – as, we
shall see, she sees most others – as reflections of her idealized self-image. Confronted by the
reality, however, Gwendolen finds herself trapped:

Grandcourt could not have been more unlike her imaginary portrait of him…. The correct
Englishman, drawing himself up from his bow into rigidity, assenting severely, and
seemed to be in a state of internal drill, suggests a suppressed vivacity, and may be
suspected of letting go with some violence when he is released from parade; but
Grandcourt's bearing had no rigidity, it inclined rather to the flaccid. His complexion had
a faded fairness resembling that of an actress when bare of the artificial white and red; his
long narrow gray eyes expressed nothing but indifference. Attempts at description are
stupid: who can all at once describe a human being? even when he is presented to us we

only begin that knowledge of his appearance which must be completed by innumerable impressions under differing circumstances. We recognize the alphabet; we are not sure of the language.  

(DD 91)

The contrast is not between Grandcourt and another man, but between Gwendolen’s “imaginary portrait” and his real presence. Here is a complete shift from the aesthetic message of *Middlemarch*: instead of a deepening understanding of the ways in which “reading” a portrait can be instructive, here the narrator dismisses the entire effort as “stupid” since, despite “recogniz[ing] the alphabet” – the markers of character – the “language” is effectively meaningless. Women, Gwendolen in particular, continue to fall into the trap of believing their own “imaginary portraits” and thus fail to see the terrible reality until it is too late.

Gwendolen Harleth might at first be seen as another avatar of Eliot’s earlier beautiful women: part-Hetty Sorrel, part-Rosamond Vincy; Gwendolen exists (at least in the beginning) to be *seen*. The Meyricks and the assorted society characters agree and refer to her as the “Vandyke duchess” (*DD* 477, 504, 552, 553, 560, 561, 685) [Appendix vi]. Yet Gwendolen’s beauty generates confusion as much as praise, beginning with the novel’s first sentence: “Was she beautiful? Or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance?” (*DD* 3). Though the other characters admit her good looks, they do so with reluctance and jealousy entirely unlike their reaction to the inspiring (if more vague) beauty of Daniel. As Anna Gascoigne remarks in reply to the discussion of her cousin’s “striking and statuesque” beauty, “Gwendolen was always beautiful – people feel dreadfully in love with her. I thought it a pity, because it made them unhappy” (*DD* 561). As Hugh Witemeyer points out: “Every time the narrator of *Daniel Deronda* asks us to admire Gwendolen in a graceful attitude, our response is qualified by our peripheral awareness that Gwendolen also admires
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[herself], a feeling Deronda voices when, trying to sympathize with her by his penetrating gaze, “while he was observing her he was himself under observation” (DD 360). Gwendolen’s beauty, though consistently described in terms of portraits (both classical and painted), does not bring her any closer to the other characters, but rather alienates her from them.

After learning of her family’s downturn in circumstances in Chapter II, Gwendolen sits alone and views herself in the mirror:

happening to be seated sideways before the long strip of mirror between her two windows she turned to look at herself, leaning her elbow on the back of the chair in an attitude that might have been chosen for her portrait. It is possible to have a strong self-love without any self-satisfaction, rather with a self-discontent which is the more intense because one's own little core of egoistic sensibility is a supreme care; but Gwendolen knew nothing of such inward strife. She had a naïve delight in her fortunate self, which any but the harshest saintliness will have some indulgence for in a girl who had every day seen a pleasant reflection of that self in her friends' flattery as well as in the looking-glass. And even in this beginning of troubles, while for lack of anything else to do she sat gazing at her image in the growing light, her face gathered a complacency gradual as the cheerfulness of the morning. Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forward and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm. (DD 12-13)

For Gwendolen, the performance of beauty is a self-affirming gesture, a narcissism reiterated throughout the novel as she presents herself to be mirrored, both “in her friends’ flattery as well as in the looking-glass.” Yet, as the passage above foreshadows, this “ naïve delight” predates any of the “inward strife” of her marriage to Grandcourt and the loss of her virginal, separate identity.

Gwendolen’s self-image clouds, rather than elucidates, her ability to read the images of others. The narrator further undermines this perception with the depiction of Grandcourt as an Italian portrait: “omitting the cigar, you might have imagined him a portrait by Moroni, who would have rendered wonderfully the impenetrable gaze and air of distinction; and a portrait by

that great master would have been quite as lively a companion as Grandcourt was disposed to be” (*DD* 267). Flat, unsympathetic, and ultimately lifeless as a Moroni portrait [Appendix vi], Grandcourt proves to be *just* a painting in a way which would have been unthinkable in *Middlemarch*. Their entire courtship is a travesty, from Grandcourt’s “dead” image to his wedding present: the diamonds sent from Lydia become instead “poisoned gems” (*DD* 303).

Gwendolen imagines she can breathe her own life into lifeless images as easily as she appears to do to her reflection; but of course this narcissistic point of view cannot hold, and she does not know how to fight the “lifeless” Grandcourt she once hoped to control.

Grandcourt’s horrific image appears repeatedly to Gwendolen as the “dead face” on the tapestry at Offendene, and later as his own drowned face in Genoa. She first sees the “dead face,” hidden behind a panel but uncovered by her small sister Isabel, when visiting her husband-to-be’s house, and hurriedly attempts to lock the face away, hiding from what – if she were honest with herself – would be the associated image of her new husband. When next the death mask appears, however, Gwendolen is caught off-guard. Performing for a gathered dinner party, Gwendolen poses to be the statuesque Hermione in the tableau vivant of *A Winter’s Tale*, a layered image of woman-as-statue-as-woman-as-statue. When suddenly the panel springs open at the dramatic music of the party, Gwendolen shrieks and freezes:

> She looked like a statue into which a soul of Fear had entered: her pallid lips were parted; her eyes, usually narrowed under their long lashes, were dilated and fixed. Her mother, less surprised than alarmed, rushed toward her, and Rex, too, could not help going to her side. But the touch of her mother's arm had the effect of an electric charge; Gwendolen fell on her knees and put her hands before her face. She was still trembling, but mute, and it seemed that she had self-consciousness enough to aim at controlling her signs of terror, for she presently allowed herself to be raised from her kneeling posture and led away, while the company were relieving their minds by explanation. (*DD* 49)

Gwendolen retreats from the scene and becomes almost a marble “statue” herself before leaving the room. Her natural fear instinct – to freeze – is both animalistic and aesthetic. Some of the
party decide Gwendolen’s shriek is part of her acting, while others compliment her sensitivity to
the “eccentricity” of the picture and even wonder whether the image was conjured by a
“medium” whom the narrator reveals to be none other than Isabel (DD 50). The foreshadowing
of both portraits – of the “dead face” and the statuesque Gwendolen – points to her ultimate
moment of petrification, when she sees Grandcourt drowning in the sea and is paralyzed,
allowing him to drown. As she recovers, she frantically wonders to Deronda, “a dead face—I
shall never get away from it” (DD 590). For scholar Jim Reilly, this scene draws on what he sees
as many of her artistic tropes and could be considered “the high-point in Eliot’s art,” merging
artistic media and subverting expectations of performance, action, and reality.48

In such moments of fear, Gwendolen’s self-image is obscured by her momentary loss of
control. When confronted (via letter) by Lydia Glasher, Grandcourt’s mistress and her alter-ego,
Gwendolen suddenly “could not see the reflections of herself” (DD 303), a moment which, as
Jules Law writes, counters the transparent figures of the novel (namely, Deronda) and blocks
Gwendolen’s view of herself.49 Daniel does allow Gwendolen the opportunity to reflect on her
actions without the gratifying (and damaging) image of her own beauty – his mere presence, at
the right moments, becomes the catalyst for her change. Crucially, after her disastrous marriage
when, “looking at the rows of quaint portraits” in the Abbey, Eliot chooses to describe
Gwendolen not in painterly but rather in photographic terms. Imagining Daniel to be losing
respect for and ignoring her, Gwendolen recoils emotionally: “No chemical process shows a
more wonderful activity than the transforming influence of the thoughts we imagine to be going
on in another…. Poor Gwendolen was conscious of an uneasy, transforming process” (DD 362).

pp. 122-32.
49 Jules Law, “Transparency and Epistemology in George Eliot's Daniel Deronda.” (Nineteenth-Century Literature,
Unlike the visceral internal metamorphosis of Dorothea’s moments of attempting to reconstruct Ladislaw’s thoughts, Gwendolen’s changing perspective—illuminated by Daniel’s presence—comes into view by “chemical process.” The discomfort Gwendolen feels at Daniel’s glance, which triggers this change, places Gwendolen between the painted portrait she seems to others and the dangerously fluctuating photograph of a modern woman.

While Daniel catalyzes this “chemical process” in Gwendolen, he appears to others as another kind of developing image. Photography, both its jargon and its tropes, appears throughout Daniel Deronda as the dual signifier of visible change and invisible constancy. The photographic notion of latent images coming into view characterizes Daniel himself as he discovers his Jewish origins. At the same time, the character of Deronda has long given readers and scholars pause, even famously causing scholar F.R. Leavis to discredit the “daydream unrealities” which characterized the “bad part” of the novel, so disembodied and abstracted is Daniel. More like a benevolent spirit or muse, Daniel brings out the best in others while appearing to them as the embodiment of their hopes. In eschewing the limelight which Gwendolen craves, Daniel (who is, like Mirah and his mother, an excellent singer) refuses to advertise his talents and thus deliberately creates a less distinct image of himself, more able to use his “many-sided sympathy” (which in the same paragraph is called “plenteous, flexible” and “diffusive”, DD 307) when he can to reshape himself to fit the needs of others.

Most dramatically, Daniel appears as if by accident at what Jules Law labels “critical moments” in the text, particularly for the Jewish characters, serving them while inching further toward his discovery of his own Jewish heritage. As Law explores in his chapter on Deronda, the first such moment of the novel begins in Daniel’s vision of Mirah contemplating suicide, while

the second shows Mordecai’s similar sight of Daniel emerging as if in answer to his prayers.\textsuperscript{51} In the first scene, Daniel rows on the Thames at the hour “when thinking and desiring melt together” (a phrase we shall return to again later): “He was forgetting everything else in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at, thinking how far it might be possible habitually to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape” (\textit{DD} 160). Daniel’s vision, so often appropriated by the narrator as a view to other characters, here transcends his subjective self and in fact partially disembodies him. Like (and yet unlike) Tess Durbeyfield, Daniel’s spiritual quality radiates beyond his body and creates an almost abstract, dream-like world around himself. These moments, which stem from Daniel’s interiority, are unlike the portraits created of him by others, and seem to reinforce at once the accidental nature of life and the fatedness which characterizes his timely arrivals.

Though the heyday of British portraiture had passed into cliché for Eliot, the burgeoning genre of Impressionism provided a highly modern artistic alternative to the scientific portraiture of photography.\textsuperscript{52} Immediately preceding the passage cited above in which Daniel begins “forgetting everything else in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at,” he rows on the river among “the lengthening shadows and mellow light, when thinking and desiring melt together imperceptibly […] disposed him to linger

\textsuperscript{51} For Law, the fact that these critical scenes occur on the river, particularly within the novel’s abundant imagery of water, fluidity, and drowning, becomes “For the male characters” part of “the dominant epistemological trope—that is to say, the privileged site for working out problems of knowledge and perception” since “For both Deronda and Mordecai the dynamics of specularity is subordinated to the dynamics of flow, and their problem is thus […] how to merge with others without losing identity” (Law, 265).

\textsuperscript{52} Scholars have largely dismissed the possibility that Eliot’s literary pictorialism might be considered “impressionistic,” citing her commitment to representation as the justification for such claims. In discussing the opinions of Eliot on various art, Witemeyer recalls Eliot’s admiration for Ruskin and writes that “it seems likely that she would have found Whistler’s impressionistic \textit{Nocturnes} as incomprehensible as Ruskin did” (\textit{George Eliot and the Visual Arts}, 19). Further inquiry on Eliot’s ocular and aesthetic choices would, I believe, be profitable to qualifying some assumptions.
as if they had been an unfinished strain of music” (*DD* 160). Eliot’s visual imagery – the crepuscular light, the “double glow” of the Thames against the Richmond Bridge, the “melt[ing] together” of distinct objects in the field of vision – hint towards what the allusion to “music” identifies as James McNeill Whistler’s *Nocturnes*. Painted during the 1870s, these works – often classified as British Impressionism alongside those of J.M.W. Turner – borrow their titles from Chopin’s musical counterparts. Eliot had been, as noted previously, in France in the summer following the first Impressionist show in 1874; she had visited both the Grosvenor and Dudley Galleries in London, the latter of which was home to Whistler’s *Nocturnes* between 1871-5.53

Though it might seem likely that it is Eliot’s own opinion that the paintings seen by Mordecai in the National Gallery leave only an aftertaste of “disappointment” (480),54 her description only two pages later seems to become another *nocturne*, in which Mordecai’s imagination spontaneously planted him on some spot where he had a far-stretching scene; his thoughts went on in wide spaces; and whenever he could, he tried to have in reality the influences of a large sky. Leaning on the parapet of Blackfriar's Bridge, and gazing meditatively, the breadth and calm of the river, with its long vista half hazy, half luminous, the grand dim masses of tall forms of buildings which were the signs of world-commerce, the oncoming of boats and barges from the still distance into sound and color, entered into his mood and blent themselves indistinguishably with his thinking, as a fine symphony to which we can hardly be said to listen, makes a medium that bears up our spiritual wings. Thus it happened that the figure representative of Mordecai's longing was mentally seen darkened by the excess of light in the aerial background. (DD 406)

Here Eliot uses the avant-garde visual language of Whistler’s riverscapes to prefigure Deronda, who has been rowing on the river since the beginning of the novel.55 Though different from the Turner-inspired literary impressionism of Hardy’s later works, *Deronda* does at least show Eliot

54 Even more publicly exhibited was perhaps Whistler’s most famous work, *Arrangement of Grey and Black (Portrait of the Artist’s Mother)*, which went on show at the National Gallery when completed in 1872.
55 Law identifies the river as “the male characters’ dominant epistemological trope—that is to say, the privileged site for working out problems of knowledge and perception” (Law 265).
experimenting with the newer painting movement in addition to photographic portraiture, placing Daniel even further from the antiquated Vandycks and Gainsboroughs of the older generation.

For Novak, the “diffusive sympathy” and spectral nature of Deronda make him a “model Jew” in several ways. Galton believed, as did some others, that the “Jewish race” made an ideal case study because, without a homeland, they had not adapted to any one environment; instead, they “survived culturally by a hermeneutic process – through interpretation and reinterpretation – rather than through transformation.”\(^{56}\) By keeping in touch with a single text, the self-described “People of the Book” became a nation of spirit rather than of body, retaining a living link to the dead by “a series of re-embodiments – Mordecai’s re-embodiment in Deronda, Deronda’s discovery of his Jewish origins, and the ‘becoming-body’ of the Jewish national home.”\(^{57}\) Daniel becomes literally a new body for Mordecai, who tells his “prefigured friend” how his mission to reshape the Jewish national body “has sunk into me and dwelt with me—fading, slowly fading: it was my own decline: it paused—it waited, till at last it brought me my new life—my new self—who will live when this breath is all breathed out” (DD 423). Even upon first seeing Daniel, Mordecai frames his vision in terms of ancient promise and future fulfillment:

the long-contemplated figure had come as an emotional sequence of Mordecai’s firmest theoretic convictions; it had been wrought from the imagery of his most passionate life; and it inevitably reappeared—reappeared in a more specific self-asserting form than ever. Deronda had that sort of resemblance to the preconceived type which a finely individual bust or portrait has to the more generalized copy left in our minds after a long interval: we renew our memory with delight, but we hardly know with how much correction. And now, his face met Mordecai’s inward gaze as it had always belonged to the awaited friend, raying out, moreover, some of that influence which belongs to breathing flesh; till by-and-by it seemed that discouragement had turned into a new obstinacy of resistance, and the ever-recurrent vision had the force of an outward call to disregard counter-evidence, and keep expectation awake. \((DD 411)\)

\(^{56}\) Beer, *Darwin’s Plots*: p. 190.

\(^{57}\) Novak, p. 92.
It is not for his distinguishing marks, but rather the vague “resemblance to the preconceived type,” that Daniel announces himself visibly to Mordecai. Whereas the gentile characters’ view of Deronda is obscured by his lack of legitimate parentage (his face with “no reflex”), his true likeness is not the “Mallinger nose” but a “spectral inheritance.”

By the close of the novel, Daniel accepts his Jewish inheritance without abandoning his English upbringing, a composite image of his two equally important inheritances. As Gillian Beer summarizes, the novel tackles the “question of typology” in numerous ways as Eliot gives ambiguous treatment to the old and new ways of portraiture and depiction in general: “Is it possible to rupture the links of descent and to set out anew? – (as Daniel Deronda’s mother has attempted to do) – or is genetic inheritance what most determines us? – (as Daniel’s history might suggest). Can fiction propose fresh possibilities, or will it find itself inevitably retelling the old stories[?]”

Contrary to whatever Sir Hugo and especially Daniel’s mother, the Princess Halm-Eberstein, desire, his latent Judaism emerges from beneath the veneer of his English upbringing. Indeed, as Beer continues, he “discovers his true inheritance through his Jewish past and through his matrilineal succession to Judaic culture. But he does not cease to be an Englishman. Like Klesmer, […] Deronda is enriched by the double past, both genetic and cultural.”

This dualistic ability of Daniel’s to play both parts, to fulfill equally his role as English gentleman and prophesied Jewish deliverer, disqualifies him from the classical, static tradition of painted portraiture and places him once again in the thoroughly modern realm of the paradoxically clear and vague portrait photograph.

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58 Ibid., p. 117.
59 Beer, 182.
60 Ibid., p. 188.
Eliot creates in Daniel not an “individual but typical” character, intended both to reinforce the notion of scientific teleology and to undermine it. Beyond the acknowledged fact that his face is of a different “type” to the Mallingers, Daniel is characterized by his “diffuse sympathy” which at times puts him “in danger of becoming and remaining a ghost – a ‘yearning disembodied spirit,’”\textsuperscript{61} like the wandering sympathizer Jude Fawley;\textsuperscript{62} yet, ultimately he embodies and inspires in all who see him a dual sense of past and future. Daniel fits the “type” or mold of Mordecai’s foreseen prophet, yet simultaneously he exists at the intersection of past and future which, from the novel’s first words, are described as a “make-believe.”

Jules Law equates Daniel Novak’s perpetual “not-yet-visible body” of the Jewish nation to the Wittgensteinian concept of signs: “the idea that every sign is occupying just the right space for itself, just the space that one would have needed to fill anyway even if the sign were not there.”\textsuperscript{63} As he and the narrator acknowledge, however, Mordecai did not know precisely what he was looking for until he found it. Daniel’s appearance on the river at both pivotal moments – first for Mirah, later for Mordecai – is either dramatically convenient or, as the characters contend, fated. In a larger sense, this problem – of unbelievable prophecy versus more incredible accident – persists throughout the novel, pointing to a fundamental ambiguity of the narrative. As Gillian Beer summarizes, Eliot uses her authorial choices as one of the novel’s subjects by pitting “narrative authority… against the authority of chronology or of social ties and brings into consciousness another kind of generation and descent: that of the text and its ordering….We \textit{happen} to hear about them first. But we happen to hear it first because the author chose to tell it

\textsuperscript{61} Novak, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{62} Jude Fawley, upon further inspection, bears many resemblances to Daniel Deronda: his young tender feeling, his hunger for learning, his ghostly ability to haunt the places which others inhabit, his quasi-incestuous love, etc. Even his name marks Jude as Hardy’s revision of Eliot’s Jewish hero almost twenty years on, destined to wander in an English desert beset by hardship rather than discover his true national home. Cf. Hardy, \textit{Jude the Obscure}: Ch. IV.
\textsuperscript{63} Law, p. 258.
that way.”

Eliot refuses to resolve her own question, concluding the novel with Mordecai’s death “which is both parting and reunion – which takes me from your bodily eyes and gives me full presence in your soul” (DD 695) and leaves her story in her own unfinished present, with an unwritten future for Deronda as much as for her readers. Daniel’s image becomes a spiritual composite, the layered, ghostly portrait of multiple visions of his face and his purpose.

Elizabeth Sabiston, in her chapter on Daniel Deronda, explores what she considers the “key to unity” for this novel plagued by its apparent English and Jewish “halves”: “the hidden allusion to Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice,” which provided the epigraph to my section. This allusion is, she admits, hidden in plain sight, for the basic concerns of both works – the racial body, prejudice, legitimacy, performance – are nearly identical, particularly in their use of Judaism as the body over which to discuss these issues. For Sabiston, the picturing which occurs chiefly between Gwendolen and Daniel is that of the “reflecting mirror” as they learn to see, and judge – like the Daniel of Merchant – themselves better. Like The Merchant of Venice – and, for that matter, like the Berenice legend Deronda disliked for Mirah – the ending of Deronda is deliberately troubling. Gwendolen returns to Offendene, as if “to an origin that she and the narrator know to be a fiction”; meanwhile Daniel and Mirah prepare for their trip to Jerusalem, the Jewish homeland which does not in 1876 yet exist. How happy is this happy ending? As we turn from Eliot to Hardy, many of the concerns – particularly of gender and of evolution – will carry over toward a similarly uneasy conclusion.

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66 Ibid., p. 183.

67 Law, p. 275.
IV. The Woodlanders – Partial Portraits

Bring me no more reports; let them fly all:
Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot taint with fear.
(Macbeth, V, ii, 1-3)

In the ten years between the publication of Daniel Deronda and Thomas Hardy’s novel, The Woodlanders (1886-7), George Eliot had died and the mid-Victorian period had ended. From the first, Hardy was compared to Eliot – even to the extent of being accused of being another pseudonym for Eliot68 – because he seemed to share her commitment to literary realism in the lives of common people. His novels, set in the “Wessex” landscape Hardy knew intimately from birth, brought the scope of a wider world to humble, usually agrarian characters. By the 1880s, however, the valorization of rural life became for Hardy a fallen image; The Woodlanders, in particular grapples with Hardy’s growing skepticism about his parents’ generation’s way of life in the southwest of England, and the equally uneasy alternative of the scientific progress from the city. Hardy’s refusal to rely on a consistent source of light, framing, or representation characterizes The Woodlanders as the first of Hardy’s radical later novels, one in which partial bodies, partial plots, and partial sight come to signal the decline of a universally-held belief system.

It is worth stating at the outset of this section that, not unexpectedly, formal portraiture is thin on the ground in The Woodlanders, restricted like many of his novels to the Wessex world of Hardy’s own childhood. Hardy’s narrator, like Eliot’s, is suspicious of superficial portraiture due to the inherent difficulty even “from the highest point of view, to precisely describe a human

68 Havelock Ellis, praising Hardy’s work in 1883, noted how “many people were still uncertain about the sex of the new writer, and reviewers of Thomas Hardy’s works were occasionally doubtful whether to speak of ‘him’ or ‘her’. The minute observation, the delicate insight, the conception of love as the one business of life, and a singularly charming reticence in its delineation, are qualities which, if not universally characteristic of woman’s work in fiction, are such as might with propriety be attributed to it—at all events from an a priori standpoint” (Ellis, 115).
being, the focus of a universe—how impossible” (W 35). Without a National Gallery to visit or Roman statuary to pose beside, the “art” in the novel (apart from allusively) takes on a decidedly sinister character. Poetry becomes Marty South’s charcoal writing on the wall, prophetic both of Grace Melbury’s dual fate and Giles Winterborne’s death. Felice Charmond, in a grotesque parody of her much-performed cosmetic routine, must first sponge off Dr. Fitzpiers’s red blood which stains the “white paint” of her fence, before disguising him with her “practised hand at such work… padding and painting Fitzpiers with the old materials of her art” (W 240-2). Rather than portraits, Charmond’s house is adorned with man-traps, “relics of a barbarous time happily past” (W 54). Rather than a Romanticized image of natural beauty, Wessex provides a Darwinian arena within several time frames, from the paleontological to the human. The woods themselves become another “distinctly Hardian Garden of Eden.” At the opening of the story, the natives of Little Hintock criticize the neighboring town for its recent cosmopolitanism, complaining that “Now at Great Hintock you do see the world a bit” (W 6). In The Woodlanders, then, the problem of description is not one of picture versus poetry, but rather one of vision.

The question of seeing – so important to Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda – becomes for Thomas Hardy a study of optics, of lenses and angles. Hardy – a keen draftsman, photographer, and art historian who had considered “becoming an art-critic” before his first literary success – alludes to several artists from various traditions (e.g. Vandyck, Wouvermans, Prout) over the course of the novel. The literary portraiture of The Woodlanders, however, takes

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69 Marty’s inscription – “O Giles, you've lost your dwelling-place, / And therefore, Giles, you'll lose your Grace” (W 99) – connects The Woodlanders to the notion of translation and fate, both essential to the Biblical story of Daniel and Belshazzar, as well as foreshadowing the even more grim instances in Tess of the d’Urbervilles (see Section V of this thesis).

70 Gillian Beer discusses Hardy’s use of multiple time scales throughout his fiction, and particularly as they relate to Tess (Beer, Darwin’s Plots: 224).


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no single form. Each character appears through multiple layers of vision, mediated through the eyes of the self, fellow characters, and the narrator. The term used by Ruth Bernard Yeazell to describe Hardy’s “lighting design” proves useful for our purposes: portraits are “partial—both in the sense that they call attention to some details but not others and in the sense that the light at issue is often suffused with the perceiver's subjectivity.” More literally, the light which illuminates (or, more often, obscures) the woodlanders disembodies them, not by transmuting them into ghosts, but by reducing them to parts. Hardy refuses to re-assemble these bodies in any one way over the course of the novel, instead creating a number of possible constructions which often providing more insight into the viewer than the viewed.

Hardy begins this partial dissection from the first chapters of *The Woodlanders*, opening with the broad landscape of the road and narrowing his focus toward the single framed window of Marty South, as viewed and approached by the barber Percomb. As the narrative eye approaches her window, Marty sits in her living room in the darkness of night, working to thatch the spars she had collected during the day. Though Hardy begins with the painterly tradition popular across Dutch Golden Age scenes and Victorian narrative canvases – that of the illuminated, working woman at the window [Appendix i, vii] – the all-encompassing detail of such works is not the same light which shines on Marty. Instead the narrator focuses on her hands as they work by firelight:

> The young woman laid down the bill-hook for a moment, and examined the palm of her right hand, which unlike the other was ungloved, and showed little hardness or roughness about it. The palm was red and blistering, as if this present occupation were as yet too recent to have subdued it to what it worked in. As with so many right hands born to manual labor, there was nothing in its fundamental shape to bear out the physiological

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73 Ruth Bernard Yeazell, “The Lighting Design of Hardy’s Novels.” *(Nineteenth-Century Literature, 64.1 (June 2009))* p. 58.
74 Dutch Golden Age painters such as Gerard (or Gerrit) Dou (1613-75) frequently painted images of women performing manual labor indoors, framed in doorways or windows and lit by candle- or sunlight through a secondary window.
conventionalism that gradations of birth show themselves primarily in the form of this
member. Nothing but a cast of the die of destiny had decided that the girl should handle
the tool. (W 10)

Marty is reduced, as she looks at herself, to her “red and blistering hands” which, seen as if
separate from her body, become androgynous and accidental. She has, as her hands explain, only
recently begun to work in a traditionally male occupation as the sole income provider for herself
and her dying father. Marty’s is ultimately not a “woman’s fate” (i.e., marriage; W 155). Instead,
beginning with her “manual labor,” she evolves gradually into an androgynous being, like fellow
female woodlanders “wearing men’s jackets on their gowns” (W 49). Here, Marty’s own vision
of her utility as a laborer of a dying trade foreshadows her performance as a monument rather
than a woman in the novel’s final pages.

Yet what Marty sees about herself is not what catches the eye of the narrator. Her sole
“pretension to beauty” resides “in one prominent particular—her hair” which seems, in its
“unmanageable” radiance and difficult-to-define “approximation to chestnut” color (W 10), to
obscure the rest of her features. Hardy blurs the distinction between the narrator’s point of view
and that of Percomb, who has been watching Marty throughout the scene. The reader becomes
increasingly aware of his presence in the next paragraph:

In her present beholder's mind the scene formed by the girlish spar-maker composed
itself into an impression-picture of extremest type, wherein the girl's hair alone, as the
focus of observation, was depicted with intensity and distinctness, while her face,
shoulders, hands, and figure in general were a blurred mass of unimportant detail lost in
haze and obscurity. (W 10-11)

Percomb frames Marty, exaggerating her rich-colored hair in his mental image where her vision
saw only her rough hands. Nor, as the scene reveals, is his portrait disinterested: he has come to
buy her hair from her, to sell as a wig for local aristocrat Felice Charmond. Hardy, who changed
the distorted image of Marty from a “pre Raphaelite” to an “impression-picture” in editing, means to equate this subjective view of Marty to the most avant-garde school of art in which subjective, dismembering vision is conveyed on the canvas. In doing so, he suggests again the failure of other eyes to see a human being fully, since the brain breaks down optical stimuli into points of light and color. Percomb’s predatory gaze, furthermore, sees Marty as a commodity, a desperate woman from whom he can make a profit based on her most important (and thus, in his eye, greatest) attribute: her hair.

The ensuing exchange, ultimately resulting in Marty South “mercilessly cutting off the long locks of her hair” (W 19) becomes the act of severance which echoes throughout the novel, including the resounding crash of the felling of her father’s tree. Hardy’s description of the “rape of her locks,” including Marty’s refusal to “turn again to the little looking-glass, out of humanity to herself, knowing what a deflowered visage would look back at her,” highlights several key issues for Marty and for Hintock society as a whole. The word “deflowered” not only refers to the figurative loss of her virginity (she never marries), but also points to the loss of her pastoral beauty (she is deflowered). Here, as elsewhere, Hardy re-casts body parts in the role of natural life – her “chestnut hair” seems “like waving and ropy weeds” (W 19) – in order, as scholar John Paterson puts it, to “make the ordinary in nature extraordinary in ways that do not draw attention to themselves,” namely by comparing Nature to Nature itself. That Marty’s hair takes on a life of its own, redirecting the course of the novel, only underscores the almost-living quality of all organic matter.

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75 The Woodlanders, fn. to p. 11.
76 The sexuality of hair has been a subject of much scholarship, particularly the seminal work by Galia Ofek’s *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2009) and Elisabeth Gitter’s “The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination” (1984).
The partial blazons undertaken by Percomb and by Marty herself appear within three pages amidst a variety of other kinds of portraits: as a silhouette seen from outside her house lit by “a riband of light” (W 9); as the disembodied feminine hands working tirelessly at rough work; as the room in which she sits, marked by references to the “social position of the household in the past” (W 9); as a fated figure dutifully carrying out her destiny; as a face with its cares “to be interpreted as readily as a printed word by an intruder” (W 10); and as in the vision in the mirror quoted above. The novel is bookended by portraits of Marty South, who, in the final scene to be discussed below, is transformed into an androgynous silhouette standing guard over the grave of Giles Winterborne. She, like the trees, is slowly stripped down to a trunk, having “rejected with indifference the attributes of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism” (W 330-1). Marty ultimately becomes a living grave-marker more than a woman. Rather than choosing one privileged point of view from which to see Marty, Hardy approaches her from multiple perspectives.

Hardy employs framing conventions to delineate his literary portraits from the flow of narrative, chiefly using windows and mirrors to create boundaries for his characters to inhabit, or, more often, to transcend. Tropologically, of course, the woman at the window pervades Victorian literature nearly as often as the woman in the mirror.78 The vision of Marty South, however, does not provide a clear glimpse into a young woman’s life, but rather proves from the

78 In addition to the examples in Eliot discussed previously, much of Victorian narrative painting featured women framed by windows or mirrors. Many recalled lines of medieval or medievalist poetry (e.g. Millais’ Mariana (1851) and Holman Hunt’s Lady of Shalott (1905), both referring to works of Tennyson). As recently as Spring 2011, the Metropolitan Museum in New York curated an exhibition entitled, “Rooms with a View: The Open Window in the 19th Century”; Ruth Beth Yeazell discusses windows as filters of light and spatial barriers in her article (“Lighting Design”), while Barbara Hardy examines “The Woman in the Window” in her chapter from Perspectives on Self and Community in George Eliot: Dorothea's Window. As noted above, the woman in the mirror is the subject of Jenijoy La Belle’s Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988.
outset of the novel the imposed layer and frame of each gaze. As scholar Simon Gatrell notes in his discussion of Hardy’s drawing “In a Eweleaze near Weatherbury” (1898):

At first for Hardy, Wessex was a real place seen through lenses that distorted, displaced, redistributed details, but which permitted chosen aspects of its culture to pass unhindered; gradually, as his vision changed, the lenses allowed more and more of the environmental detail to come through with only minimal alteration, until, after the publication of the map of Wessex […] the only distortion of the real caused by the lenses of the imagination worn by the writer was the presence of the lenses themselves, transparent, but not quite perceptible.79

Though eventually the “distortion” of glass is negligible for Hardy’s vision of his landscape, he maintains a Pateresque consciousness of his own vision throughout his work.80

Yet, when glimpsing characters in their domestic environments, the line between window and mirror often becomes blurred so that, as Susan Miller asserts, the “membrane of the window […] becomes, under the lamplight, a one-way mirror,”81 reflecting rather than simply framing. Part of this duality comes from the early days of photography, where Daguerre’s precious images at certain angles became “reflective” sheets of glass or metal.82 Scholar Joan Grundy notes that “As for reflections, judging by the number of times images seen in mirrors or window-panes functioning as mirrors occur […] they are a minor obsession of” Hardy’s.83 Throughout his novels and even across his poetry, Hardy returns to this dual play between window and mirror, in poems such as “I Look Into My Glass,” “The Pedigree” (the “uncurtained panes of my window-square” become “a mirror now”), and “The Photograph.”84 The polysemy of “glass” – at once

84 His poem “The Pedigree” also continues with the metaphor of tree as family history: “So, scanning my sire-sown tree, / And the hieroglyphs of this spouse tied to that, / With offspring mapped below in lineage, / Till the tangles troubled me, / The branches seemed to twist into a seared and cynic face / Which winked and tokened towards the window like a Mage / Enchanting me to gaze again thereat” (Thomas Hardy, “The Pedigree.” *Moments of Vision*).
standing for looking-glass, eye-glass, and hour-glass – works specifically in *The Woodlanders* to underscore the presence of even the clearest lens, imposing barriers and frames on the natural world. Moreover, these surfaces are just as likely to reflect the viewer’s portrait as to show one.

Grace Melbury appears framed throughout the novel, both observing and observed in the context of her paradoxically native and foreign home. The spatial barrier of the window which separates her from the outside world appears most often in her interactions with Giles Winterborne, from whom she feels alienated by her cosmopolitan education. After returning to Little Hintock, she appears repeatedly in windows both as seer and seen. Increasingly, her view of the woods occurs in windows, including in her honeymoon suite as the newly-married Mrs. Fitzpiers, looking down (both literally and metaphorically) on Giles Winterborne (*W* 158-61) and again, only a few pages later, settled in to her married home (*W* 168). Giles, for the most part, is “Othered” by windows, an outsider looking in. Rather than a man, he seems the “something which darkened the windows” of the Melbury house, with a gift (a new horse) for Grace (*W* 75).

The role of gazer and gazed upon is further complicated by the window:

Looking up, they saw Giles in person mounted on horseback, and straining his neck forward, as he had been doing for some time, to catch their attention through the window. Grace had been the first to see him, and involuntarily exclaimed, "There he is—and a new horse!" On their faces as they regarded Giles were written their suspended thoughts and compound feelings concerning him, could he have read them through those old panes. But he saw nothing: his features just now were, for a wonder, lit up with a red smile at some other idea. (*W* 75-6)

Hardy layers vision upon vision until the scene is transformed into a multiple-portrait: Giles, “lit up with a red smile” and “mounted on horseback”; and Grace and Mr. Melbury, whose faces are “written [with] their suspended thoughts and compound feelings.” Crucially, Giles cannot read their expressions “through those old panes.” Giles, with little experience in anything but plain-
speaking, cannot fathom Grace’s mixed feelings and her father’s contradictory actions. Yet, as Grace must admit after Giles’s death, he—along with Marty—was literate in trees:

[They] had been able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; to them the sights and sounds of night, winter, wind, storm, amid those dense boughs, which had to Grace a touch of the uncanny, and even the supernatural, were simple occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew. (W 297-8)

Giles, unlike Grace or Fitzpiers, is fluent in “the tongue of the trees and fruits and flowers themselves” (W 298). The division repeatedly signalled by the window thus places them on opposite sides of a language gap, where neither can translate the words of the other into meaning.

As the novel unfolds, the landscape of the woodlanders is littered with body parts like Marty South’s hair: Percomb’s dissecting gaze is transferred onto the two gold coins he leaves to tempt Marty, sitting reflected in the mirror like “a pair of jaundiced eyes” (W 15); elsewhere we see Grammer Oliver’s “large organ of a brain” (W 109); Suke Damson’s “lovely molar” (W 153); legs (or clothes) caught in man-traps; hands working; arms waving, etc. These parts, like Marty’s callous hands, manage to work independently of the whole person, particularly for the true woodlanders, with “Copse-work, as it was called, being an occupation which the secondary intelligence of the hands and arms could carry on without requiring the sovereign attention of the head” (W 24). Frameless in the wide expanse of Nature, bodies are distorted by and absorbed into the landscape. In Hardy’s light, the body is, as James Paterson puts it, broken down into “head or a face, a mouth or an eye, a nostril or a lip, […] surprisingly changed into the nonhuman, into an aspect of Nature eerily and incongruously other than human.”

Unsurprisingly, the Continental characters (the Norman-named Fitzpiers and Charmond) are selfish to the point of solipsism because of their ability to frame the world around society, even when embodied solely by themselves. Fitzpiers can dissect bodies but (like Lydgate before him)
cannot understand the human characters: here, the mythical, illogical woodlanders. Thus when Fitzpiers looks out the window at Giles and the other woodlanders, he declares he sees members of “a different species” (W 161), as alien to him as the trees. Grace, though married only two months before, immediately retorts to her new husband that he is different “from me too, then. For my blood is no better than theirs” (W 161).

Hardy extends the catalogue of partial bodies in The Woodlanders beyond his characters onto the world they inhabit. The woods, which function like many of Hardy’s landscapes as another character in the novel, are made not simply of branches and leaves but of “spectral arms” which go on “rubbing each other into wounds” (W 129, 15), the latter word used repeatedly by Giles to refer to his emotional scarring. As Simon Gatrell notes, Hardy’s “trees in the novel are becoming human, and the humans are arborescent…. Hintock people observe the profligate behaviour of birds and trees, that have no memory, no power of calculation, and so repeat these foolish acts.” This mimicry reflects back on the trees, whose anthropomorphized limbs act with the same violence as their human counterparts. Fitzpiers’s exclamation at John South’s fixation with his elm – “What is a tree besides a life! Cut it down” (W 93) – speaks not only of his inability to understand anything beyond himself and the dissecting science he studies so dispassionately, but also of a cosmopolitan attitude toward the woodlands and Nature in general.

All the characters throughout The Woodlanders desire to place their world within a frame, struggling to keep chaos in check by relying on their (admittedly vague) religion, which is itself a conglomeration of mismatched parts. Despite, or perhaps because of, the characters’ constant invocation of “fate” – under the various guises of “predestination,” “circumstance,” “(the die of) destiny,” “the natural course of things,” even once the omniscient (disembodied)
“Eye watching over us” (W 322) – the very notion of a beneficent providence becomes ridiculous, and fatally so.\(^8^7\) The pages leading up to Grace’s wedding, for example, are laden with references to a “curious fatefulness” in the form of a partial, powerful being: the “prophetic ear,” the unknown seamstresses who weave as if to “enclose her very heart”, and finally the “finger of fate [which] touched her and turned her to a wife” (W 155-7). Hardy mixes several mythologies into the novel, particularly centered on Giles who is himself at once “Autumn’s very brother” (W 185) traversing the Norse “Ginnung-Gap” of the woods (W 15) yet plagued by the feeling that “the Fates were against him” (W 67). This uneasy employment of parts of a variety of mythologies undermines the claims of any one to objective truth, pointing instead to the human desire to believe in – to idolize – something.

Both fathers in the novel – George Melbury and John South – unintentionally reinforce the absurdity of such belief systems: Melbury feels bound by his promise to Giles’s father that their children will marry; South becomes obsessed with the elm tree he has known since birth, yet convinced that it is coming to kill him. Grace Melbury’s father considers it his “duty” to “let such a girl throw herself away upon him—a thousand pities!” (W 31), yet compelled by an evolutionary and social imperative to provide for Grace the greatest chance of improvement, in the form of Fitzpiers, whose blood is both old (from a historical, “romantical family”; W 144) and new, infused with London and Continental lines. At cross-purposes with himself, Melbury repeatedly interferes with his daughter’s love life, externalizing his conscience and calling it “fate,” only to feel beholden and even oppressed by it, and – more importantly – to weave together a web of interactions which ensnares rather than includes his daughter.\(^8^8\) By the time

Grace feels the “Daphnean instinct” – Hardy’s allusion to the Greek myth of a daughter fleeing pursuit to preserve her chastity, and escaping by being transformed by her father into a tree – it is too late: Melbury has already refused to let his Grace become a woodlander – a Winterborne. Though her final departure with Fitzpiers is the fulfilment of Melbury’s earlier wish that Grace can “drive past [him], looking the other way” (W 145), his sadness is undercut by the reader’s knowledge that the situation is largely of his own doing.

Unlike his daughter Marty, John South fixes his gaze outside, fitting the woodlands into the single frame of his bedroom window. For South, the tree becomes a fetishized second self, coming, as Kevin Moore discusses, to “represen[t] his desire for wholeness (for the whole body) in the absence of his being able to perceive it.”\(^89\) When the tree is felled (after its limbs are amputated, or “shrouded”), however, South dies anyway, since in Michael Steig’s view it is his “obsession [which] provides the force of the shock that kills him.”\(^90\) In other words, in the absence of his pseudo-reflection, South cannot bear to see himself as man and not a tree, and dies in crisis. His superstitious association with so clear a “natural icon is a fragment of the romantic past, a past which stands for a whole which is no longer conceivable and therefore no longer possible. His tree fancy alienates him from the ‘real’ woodlands,”\(^91\) as well significantly as from the woodlanders he might once have represented. Like Marty’s severance of her hair, South’s sacrifice of his tree and his short-lived “suffering squares nothing,” creating instead a ripple of consequences “caus[ing] all to fall down dominoes style.”\(^92\)

The tragedy of The Woodlanders arises from the reader’s ability to see what should have been, to watch helplessly as the characters drive themselves to extinction. Hardy deconstructs

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\(^89\) Moore, p. 116.
\(^90\) Steig, p. 106.
\(^91\) Moore, 116.
\(^92\) Ibid., p. 127; p. 116.
bodies, both human and arboreal, and re-builds them into stranger, almost alien characters whose entire world seems to take after their pattern. The story, in a larger sense, becomes one possible arrangement of the pieces of the puzzle, one version of history in which love, marriage, sickness, and death are tragically rearranged and repeated. In Darwinian terms, the novel is marked by vestigial plots – present within the story but ultimately unused – which might, had the evolution of the narrative gone a different way, resulted in a happy ending. In Gillian Beer’s terms, Hardy creates several “persistently almost-attained happy alternatives [which] are never quite obliterated by the actual terrible events” so that the “reader is pained by the sense of multiple possibilities, only one of which can occur and be thus verified in time, space, and actuality.”

The novel closes with the departure of the next generation, leaving the older woodlanders to lament the inevitable discord of modern life despite having created it. Giles, beholden to outdated codes of chivalry, returns unprotected to the woods only to fall sick and die. Meanwhile Felice Charmond, antagonist to the woods and their native workers, is murdered in France by a jilted American lover, dying only to allow the bored Fitzpiers to return to Little Hintock to reclaim his wife. The tragedy of Giles’s death is undermined by Grace’s reconciliation with Fitzpiers, a reversal of the “Daphnean instinct” (to protect her chastity by becoming a tree) she felt upon her marriage. On some level, that fate is reserved for Marty, who resembles the stripped trees she can read and sympathize with, yet who must stand sentinel as the world continues without her. Whether truly destined or fated by their own folly, the woodlanders have very little chance of surviving into the next generation. Like the abandoned happiness of Jude the Obscure, The Woodlanders concludes in the liminal space between de-romanticized past and uncertain future, only hinting at the self-perpetuating cycles of each new generation.

93 Beer, p. 223.
V. *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* – Two Worlds and the Black Flag

“Even now their whispers pierce the gloom:
*What dost thou in this living tomb?* ... 
But as, on some far northern strand,
Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone—
For both were faiths, and both are gone.
Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.”

-- “Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse,” Matthew Arnold

More perhaps than any of the three previous novels, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is a portrait of its heroine. Tess provides for Thomas Hardy a seemingly ordinary “pure woman” – as the novel was controversially subtitled – through which to show both a vibrant interiority of an honest woman and the fierce, unsympathetic external world which condemns her. In many ways, Tess retains parts of the previous novels: the hagiography of the St. Theresa of *Middlemarch*; Gwendolen’s cursed diamonds; Daniel’s face without “reflex” in the ancestral portrait gallery; the clash of Nature and humanity in the ensemble tragedy of *The Woodlanders*. Yet, as we shall see, Tess reworks and transcends these scenes: she must clash against Hardy’s bitter Christianity with her spiritual self; she does not desire to reflect the “family face”;\(^94\) she did not marry her husband for his diamonds or position; rather than naming herself Teresa d’Urberville, she asks simply, “Call me Tess.” Thomas Hardy had considered several titles for his penultimate novel, including an early idea, “The Body and Soul of Sue,”\(^95\) a phrase which points directly to the tension in the text – namely the two contrasting images of Tess: the sensuous fallen “Daughter of

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\(^94\) Thomas Hardy, “The Heredity.” *Moments of Vision.*

\(^95\) Hardy would, of course, make a heroine out of Susannah Brideshead in his final tragedy, *Jude the Obscure*; the name “Tess” came later. Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited*: pp. 272-3.
the d’Urbervilles” (another possible title) versus the spiritual, even pagan woman of Wessex. Through his dual treatment of the portraits in the novel, Hardy shows the “ache of modernism” (T 140) – or, as Matthew Arnold put it, the sense of “wandering between two worlds”\(^\text{96}\) – not just as it applies to Tess, but to the entire text.

Between concluding The Woodlanders in 1887 and the first publication of Tess in 1891, Hardy spent significant time reviving his lifelong interest in art history, particularly in and after his 1887 trip through Rome, Florence, Venice, and in London later that year upon his return. Like Shelley and Byron before him, Hardy found Venice in particular to be captivating (despite the first few rainy days), particularly in its palette of “blue and sunlight”: “Venice requires heat to complete the picture of her. Heat is an artistic part of the portrait of all southern towns.”\(^\text{97}\)

Upon visiting the monumental Doge’s Palace, Hardy remarked:

> The faces of the Doges pictured on the frieze float out into the air of the room in front of me. ‘We know nothing of you,’ say these spectres. ‘Who may you be, pray?’ The draught brushing past seems like inquiring touches by their cold hands, feeling, feeling like blind people what you are. Yes: here to this visionary place I solidly bring in my person Dorchester and Wessex life; and they may well ask why do I do it... Yet there is a connection. The bell of the Capanile of S. Marco strikes the hour, and its sound has exactly that tin-tray timbre given out by the bells of Longpuddle and Weatherbury, showing that they are of precisely the same-proportioned alloy.\(^\text{98}\)

These frescoed men, inextricable from the walls of the palace, become statements of a single, intertwined inheritance of art-history. The portraits, moreover, are ancient, ghostly, and “cold,” part of a city that sounds and even feels to Hardy like present-day Dorset, yet which resists the modern viewer as something foreign, out of touch. As we shall see later, the doges and the Venice trip as a whole had a profound impact on Tess’s literary portraiture.

\(^{96}\) David J. le Laura, “‘The Ache of Modernism’ in Hardy’s Novels.” (ELH. Vol. 34, No. 3 (Sep., 1967)) pp. 380-399.

\(^{97}\) Hardy, Early Life p. 254.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., pp. 252-3.
Hardy’s troubled attitude toward these great men of Venice becomes an integral part of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as, from the title onward, the question of Tess’s heritage becomes part of the greater theme of history. On the night of their wedding, Angel surprises Tess by taking her to the “one of [her] ancestral mansions,” Wellbridge Manor, upon entering which they see two life-size portraits on panels built into the masonry. As all visitors to the mansion are aware, these paintings represent women of middle age, of a date some two hundred years ago, whose lineaments once seen can never be forgotten. The long pointed features, narrow eye, and smirk of the one, so suggestive of merciless treachery; the bill-hook nose, large teeth, and bold eye of the other suggesting arrogance to the point of ferocity, haunt the beholder afterwards in his dreams. *(T 234)*

These d’Urberville ancestresses resemble Gothic creatures rather than the stately Mallinger ancestors of *Daniel Deronda*, particularly since, as Angel realizes with discomfort: “The unpleasantness of the matter was that, in addition to their effect upon Tess, her fine features were unquestionably traceable in these exaggerated forms” *(T 235)*. Yet Tess’s physical resemblance to her d’Urberville ancestors is part of a larger ambiguity: to what extent does the genealogical fact of her descent make her a d’Urberville, and, more crucially, does it matter? Like the doges in Venice, the “horrible women” *(T 234)* from whom Tess descended are fixed to the wall, unmoveable and uninterested in what comes after themselves. When in the novel’s final pages Hardy describes how despite Tess’s hanging, “the d’Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing” *(T 420)*, he underscores the futility of continuing to rely on antiquated notions of heredity as relevant to modern people.

The question of descent recalls an instance from Hardy’s Venice holiday, directly following his visit to the Grand Council rooms of the Doge’s Palace:

He was curious to know if any descendants of the powerful Doges were left in decayed modern Venice. Mr Curtis told him that there were some in Venetian society still—poor, but proud, though not offensively so. The majority were extinct, their palaces being ruinous. Going on to Mrs Bronson’s immediately afterwards, the Contessa M— called. She was a great beauty, having the well-defined hues and contours of foreigners in the
south; and she turned out to be one of the very descendants Hardy had inquired about…. [She wore] a white veil with seed pearls, and a light figured skirt of yellowish colour…. This correct, modern lady, the friend of his English and American acquaintance in Venice, and now his own, was to him primarily the symbol and relic of the bygone ancient families; and the chief effect, he said, of her good looks and pretty voice on him was to carry him at one spring back to those centuries.  

Though, as the biography mentions, “there are resemblances” between this Contessa and the heroine of Hardy’s short story, “A Group of Noble Dames,” everything from the lady’s appearance to her paradoxical historical presence is characteristic of Tess. The d’Urberville name, then, provides Tess with nothing she does not already have: apart from her looks, she can only inherit the “extinct” line, whose “ancestral manor” house has had “partial demolition” (T 235) and whose reputation is for one of conquest and rape (a reputation fulfilled by the usurper Alec more than herself; T 82). Instead, like the “correct, modern” descendants of the doges, Tess has the pride of a noblewoman without the fixtures; she is, as she says, “a peasant by position, not by nature” (T 252). The text presents both sides of the heredity argument, creating a Tess who is at once both worthy of and better than her aristocratic inheritance.

Almost paradoxically, Tess does have a “regal” face and personality, both worthy of the d’Urberville name and deserving of better. For the narrator, Tess’s nobility is entirely individual, dimly visible beside the “horrible” d’Urberville women but “dazzling” in Nature. She wears: “Minute diamonds of moisture from the mist… upon Tess's eyelashes, and drops upon her hair, like seed pearls” (T 146-7), making the finery given to her by both Angel and, later, Alec, seem artificial in its gratuitousness. Yet, like the rest of the novel, Tess’s view of Nature is complicated. She sees natural phenomena – wind, rain, night – as condemnations of herself from

99 Hardy, Early Life: p. 255.

100 Ibid., p. 256.

101 Bullen, p. 203. The word “dazzling” which appears in various forms throughout the novel taps into a complex network of allusions, including Milton and Keats (Moore, 184) as well as Turner (Bullen, 192).
“some vague ethical being whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other” despite the narrator’s repeated insistence that “She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly” (T’97-8). For Tess, as for the woodlanders before her, the natural world is no longer an untainted place of refuge. In practice the writing on Tess’s walls is not poetry, but Biblical damnation (T’91-2).

Part of the difficulty of gauging Tess’s portrait is what Kaja Silverman calls the “curious instability of Tess’s image,” her tendency to “slip visually in and out of focus, often oscillating between two or more representations.” Part of this double-vision comes from the multitude of views of her created by other characters, and her own uneasy existence as a young [“daughter of nature”] versus as a “fallen” Christian woman. The hypocrisy of many of the Christian characters – of her seducer Alec Stoke-d’Urberville, who becomes an itinerant preacher only to seduce Tess a second time; of the supposedly agnostic Angel Clare, whose Protestant upbringing reappears as condemnation rather than forgiveness of Tess in her suffering – adds to the confusion Tess herself feels, and ultimately the reader’s sense of tragedy.

The tension between Tess’s aristocratic yet humble nature becomes problematic once characters learn of Tess’s d’Urberville ancestry. Significantly, it is the male characters of the novel who attempt to rename Tess Durbeyfield as d’Urberville throughout the novel, constantly remarking on her regal beauty and aristocratic likeness. In the novel’s first scene, Tess is entirely absent as her father learns of their lost connections and drunkenly decides to adopt the old name, failing to take the hint that the d’Urbervilles “don't live anywhere. You are extinct—as a county family” (T’15). When Tess first sees Alec, she is surprised by the new “embodiment of a

"d'Urberville” whose face, unlike hers, does not have “the sublimation of all the d'Urberville lineaments, furrowed with incarnate memories representing in hieroglyphic the centuries of her family's and England's history” (T 45). Unfortunately, the family history for “deal[ing] the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time” (T 82) becomes usurped along with the family name, so that Alec Stoke-d'Urberville seduces the true descendant of the “mailed” ancestors. The connection to the d'Urberville name begins Tess’s downfall giving her a “poor wounded name” which no one will help to heal.103

Most tragically, Angel, who originally professed his hatred for nothing more than “what's called a' old family” (T 143), proves a hypocrite when he learns of her dormant family history. Angel immediately insists that Tess “must spell your name correctly—d'Urberville—from this very day,” thereby erasing her real name and its connections to the rural “-field” of her present and himself beginning to call her “Mistress Teresa d'Urberville” in the same breath as begging her to change her name to Clare, to “Take my name, and so you will escape yours!” (T 207). Part of Angel’s difficulty in believing Tess comes from his own liminal beliefs, neither wholly atheistic nor wholly evangelical. As David J. de Laura argues in his article, Angel embodies “a whole generation of ‘advanced’ but misdirected thought” in clinging to a Christian morality while ceasing to have faith in the religion as a whole.104 He too is living between two worlds, and feels the “ache of modernism” which he hears in Tess’s speech (T 140). Angel falls back on the conventions of his upbringing – preconceptions of his Puritan Christian parents,105 his fad-following brothers, and his elevated social standing – and thus at the crucial moment a “slave to custom and conventionality” (T 284).

103 The epigraph of Tess, citing Two Gentlemen of Verona (I.ii.114-115).
104 de Laura, p. 385.
105 As the narrator ironically indicates, the Clares, unlike their more modern son, would almost certainly have forgiven and accepted Tess.
As previously mentioned, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* contains several portraits of its heroine which resemble but depart from those in the previously discussed novels. While Gwendolen Harleth, along with several of the characters discussed previously, appears in her mirror early in the novel as she begins her catastrophic quest to marry a rich man who she can beguile with her beauty, Tess has already gained what the villagers might call “simply a liberal education” (*T* 112): she has already been seduced by Alec, had and buried her baby, and returned to her father’s home. Tess is not warmed by her reflection, nor able to turn away with renewed optimistic certainty. Instead, recalling the important marks on her personal timeline:

> She suddenly thought one afternoon, when looking in the glass at her fairness, that there was yet another date, of greater importance to her than those; that of her own death, when all these charms would have disappeared; a day which lay sly and unseen among all the other days of the year, giving no sign or sound when she annually passed over it; but not the less surely there. When was it? Why did she not feel the chill of each yearly encounter with such a cold relation? …Of that day, doomed to be her terminus in time through all the ages, she did not know the place in month, week, season or year. (*T* 111-2)

Her reflection, rather than framing the face of a young woman, shows the “Symbols of reflectiveness [which] passed into her face” (*T* 112). Tess is acutely aware of the transience of her beauty and, by extension, her life; the time-scale she inhabits is only a small fraction of the larger arc of Eternity, unpredictable and unfathomable. The portrait of Tess here becomes an abstract musing on death and punishment, as she wonders whether her fall is permanent: “Was once lost always lost really true of chastity?” (*T* 112). Tess’s question is answered by the unfolding of the plot, through Angel’s tragically belated forgiveness, thus characteristic of Hardy’s lonely characters, who misstep because, like Grace Melbury, they have “a mournful want of some one to confide in” (*W* 156).

While the sun provides the chief source of light in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, the literary portraiture relies more often on the figurative light of the gaze as characters illuminate each
other, to varying degrees of success. Tess and Angel fail to see each other except by the “emotive” power of light for which a source cannot be determined. Tess creates mental portraits of Angel, dwelling inwardly on him as the “perfection of masculine beauty” to the extent of idolizing him, “her Antinous, her Apollo even” (T 211, 408). Yet Angel is aware of her awe, “sometimes catch[ing] her large, worshipful eyes, that had no bottom to them looking at him from their depths, as if she saw something immortal before her” (T 211). Angel, on the other hand, views Tess in the dawn – both of their relationship and of the day – as having “a sort of phosphorescence” in which “She looked ghostly, as if she were merely a soul at large” (T 146). Angel’s first awareness of Tess is not through her body – rather of her abstract, often-remarked upon voice – as he hears her discussing the disembodied nature of the soul (more below). Once he falls in love with her, however, Angel seems to undergo a “moment of vision,” able to see the spiritual quality of Tess’s being which she herself feels. Hardy quickly undermines this view by describing how:

It was then… that she impressed him most deeply. She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman—the whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names, half-teasingly—which she did not like because she did not understand them.
“Call me Tess,” she would say askance; and he did.
Then it would grow lighter, and her features would become simply feminine. (T 146)

Angel, inexperienced in love, makes Tess into the “typical form” with comparisons to mythical heroines; crucially, however, these allusions are neither prophetical nor revelatory. Instead, they obscure the individual Tess, placing her on the same flawed pedestal on which she places him.

The extent to which the subjective eye constructs what it sees becomes clear in the turning point of the novel, when Tess confesses her history to Angel. Adorned with the new

\[106\] Bullen, p. 192.
\[107\] Hardy’s title for his series of poems, published in 1917.
diamonds from his family, Tess sits “in this red-coaled glow, which fell on his face and hand, and on hers” while a “large shadow of her shape rose upon the wall and ceiling” (T 243-4). The red motif of the novel – seen in every scene as her hair ribbon, “the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake’s” (T 187), and elsewhere – radiates outward from Tess. The scene becomes a literary equivalent to Whistler’s *Harmony in Red: Lamplight* (1886) [Appendix ix], which Hardy had seen in London and which had prompted his remark that for Impressionists, “their principle is, as I understand it, that what you carry away from a scene is the true feature to grasp; or in other words, what appeals to your own individual eye and heart in particular amid much that does not appeal, and which you therefore omit to record.” The light of Tess’s fireside confession follows this principle of subjective vision, ushering in “Phase the Fifth: The Woman Pays” as Angel turns on her with new eyes:

> But the complexion even of external things seemed to suffer transmutation as her announcement progressed. The fire in the grate looked impish—demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly, as if it too did not care. The light from the water-bottle was merely engaged in a chromatic problem. All material objects around announced their irresponsibility with terrible iteration. And yet nothing had changed since the moments when he had been kissing her; or rather, nothing in the substance of things. But the essence of things had changed. (T 247)

Here, the entire room becomes an externalized portrait of Angel’s inner turmoil. The scene, which on the surface reiterates the internal “metamorphosis” of Dorothea’s realization about Casaubon, turns the moment on its head, giving Angel’s skewed vision – his double standard for Tess’s “crime” – the catastrophic power of reshaping the outside world in his anger. Rather than letting in the clear light of day, Angel (momentarily rechristened “Clare”) takes up the “irrelevant act of stirring the fire” (T 247), the “deceptive, even demonic, alternative to the light

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108 Bullen, p. 204.
Tess feels caught between Angel’s misapplication of Christian doctrine – his declaration that “Forgiveness does not apply in the case!” (T 248) – and her own instinctual knowledge that “It is in your own mind what you are angry at, Angel; it is not in me” (T 251).

Though Tess realizes her status as a fallen body in the eyes of her Christian neighbors, she does simultaneously consider her true self as a disembodied soul, the specter of which Angel occasionally glimpses in certain light. Earlier, after the death of her child, Tess becomes a part of the landscape she traverses, so that, “At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. Rather they became a part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were” (T 97). Unlike the bodies of Nature which surrounded the woodlanders, Tess feels “of a piece with the element she moved in,” beholding the external world with the same distance as she beholds her physical self. When discussing superstitions at Talbothays dairy, Tess responds with candour:

“I don’t—know about ghosts,” she was saying. “But I do know that our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when we are alive…. A very easy way to feel ‘em go,” continued Tess, “is to lie on the grass at night, and look straight up at some big bright star; and by fixing your mind upon it you will suddenly find that you are hundreds and hundreds o’ miles away from your body, which you don’t seem to want at all.” (T 135-6)

Tess allows herself a momentary fugue – reminiscent of Hardy’s original “Body and Soul” title – as she separates her confined body from her radiant soul.

While scholars have been attentive to the way Hardy’s landscape was influenced by J.M.W. Turner’s late paintings (beginning with those of Venice from the 1830s onward), the effect on Hardy’s literary portraiture has gone virtually undiscussed. For Tess – a novel which so clearly recognizes the divide between its heroine’s true status as a “pure woman” and the physical reality of her bodily impurity – the principle of Turner’s aesthetic which informs his

\(^{111}\) See for example Yeazell, pp. 70-1; Smart, p. 275; Bullen, p. 192.
pictures of Venice holds true for *Tess*: the ability of the light of the imagination to shine on the spirit of an object despite being technically impossible. Turner’s achievement, in Hardy’s eyes, was “to produce by a false thing the effect of a true,”\(^\text{112}\) which became for the novelist an accurate description of the purpose of art. Tess, who sees the world as little more then “psychological phenomena” is seeing with a purely aesthetic eye, and not an objective (“true”) one. Coming from the dissecting vision of *The Woodlanders*, *Tess* offers a more radical refusal of the single perspective, playing out a tragedy in which the inability to see through convention is fatal.

In the final scene of the novel, Tess does leave her body behind, her presence marked by two separate objects: Liza-Lu and the black flag. Looking down at the prison alongside Angel is Liza-Lu, Tess’s sister through whom Angel can have another Tess “when we are spirits… as if death had not divided us” (\(T\) 416). As Hardy no doubt intended, this alter ego – the second Tess whom she hopes Angel will “bring her up for [his] own self” (\(T\) 416) – reincarnates Tess from her younger days, before her body’s fall.\(^\text{113}\) Yet Tess’s claim that her sister “had all the best of me without the bad of me” (\(T\) 416) has been undermined by the entire text which came before, setting up Angel, Alec, and the general condemning culture as complicit in Tess’s “bad” moments. Tess’s Christ-like ability to forgive even to the last, and to leave some hope for Angel in her second self, marks her as the true “good” character. Left behind are the expelled pair, recalling both an innocent, almost childlike, Adam and Eve as much as the narrator’s comparison to Giotto’s “Two Apostles” (\(T\) 419). Having witnessed much of Tess’s story including the

\(^{112}\) Hardy, *Early Life*: pp. 283-4.

\(^{113}\) In the original manuscript, Liza-Lu was called Tess, while Tess was originally named Sue, adding another layer to the dual-identity of the sisters (Moore 222).
baptism of her baby Sorrow, Liza-Lu does become a “spiritualized image of Tess” as though in continuation of her spirit.

Separated from the spirit which seems to enter her “budding” sister, Tess’s body is replaced by the “black flag” which rises and “continue[s] to wave silently” from the tower of her execution (T 420). While certainly the black flag is accurate in terms of British executions, Hardy is subtly alluding to one aspect of his Venetian trip which no scholar has previously commented upon. As discussed above, during Hardy’s holiday in Venice and the visit to the Doge’s Palace, Hardy became transfixed by the ornate frieze of the first seventy-six doges and the bells of the church. Notably, however, there are only seventy-five portraits; one, the portrait of Marin Falier (doge from 1354-5) is painted over. Falier is infamous in Venice for his attempt while doge to stage a coup and have himself named prince, a crime for which he was beheaded in 1355. In 1365, the Grand Council voted to have Falier’s portrait painted out of the frieze, replaced with the statement of his execution upon a black flag [Appendix x]. The notion that one’s portrait, one’s place in a long line of history, can be erased and replaced with the single marker of one’s crime, clearly took hold of Hardy and emerged in Tess. By comparing Tess to this beheaded leader (beheadings were outlawed in England in 1870), Hardy creates a portrait which undermines the sense of how “Justice’ was done” to Tess, who suffered under a “sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature” (T 298).

Everything about the scene – the view from the hill, the light on the city except the “blot” of the prison tower – speaks again of Turner’s “light as modified by objects” which had so fascinated Hardy during and after his trip to Venice [Appendix x]. Hardy, who spent much of his

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114 According to Chambers’s Encyclopaedia: A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge (1901), the black flag had to be “hoisted at the moment of execution conspicuously above the prison, and remain displayed for an hour, while the bell of the prison or parish church tolls for fifteen minutes before and fifteen minutes after” (Chambers 495).
115 Hardy, Early Life: p. 283 (Hardy’s emphasis).
trip to Venice remembering Byron, would have read Byron’s (highly romanticized) tragic opera about the fallen “traitor” (staged during his lifetime and the center of theatrical scandal) including its concluding scene in which Falier is seized by the authorities and pardons his unfaithful wife, who is left to hear his offstage beheading. Not only, then, is Tess’s death a reworking of a Byronic tragedy, but part of that Venetian spirit Hardy brought back in 1887.

Hardy closes the novel on the floating image of Tess’s execution, apotheosizing her in her absence. More than any of the previous novels, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* utterly condemns the society which it depicts. Natural beauty, especially human, is invisible to the modern eye in *Tess*, and it is this blindness which results in the deaths of potential St. Theraces. The scales, both spatial and temporal, of *Tess* make the importance of any single human life minute, yet, as Gillian Beer has said, “Hardy’s texts pay homage to human scale by ceasing as the hero or heroine dies. The single life span is no longer an absolute but polemical. That is one formal expression of his humanism. It opposes evolutionary meliorism or pessimism by making the single generation carry the freight of signification.” The natural world which would once have allowed Tess to pursue happiness with Angel has been framed, confined by institutions of church and state, drawing deceptive lines about “crimes” of society where Tess, by rights, has not erred at all. Her immense power of passion is, even more than Dorothea’s, destroyed by modern life. Particularly for women, *Tess* concludes, the ability to be resilient depends more on society’s willingness to punish or absolve than the individual’s ability to adapt. Rather than Keats’s Romantic “bright star,” modern life exists, as Tess tells her small brother Aby on the ill-fated trip which begins her family’s misfortune, on “a blighted one” (*T* 37).

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116 Hardy, pp. 252, 255.
118 Beer, p. 223.
VI. CONCLUSION: “A Counterfeit Presentment” (Again)

“Nowadays people know the price of everything, and the value of nothing.”
--*The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-1)

In an 1858 issue of Dickens’s journal *Household Words*, an anonymous short story chronicled the difficulties of a paparazzi-hounded literary celebrity, Edgar Sweetwort. The piece, entitled “A Counterfeit Presentment,” tells of the “portrait mania” sweeping Britain and the menacing men who demand the author’s portrait. In the end, an unyielding studio employee explains that his order of “two thousand copies of your likeness for home consumption, and fifteen hundred for exportation” can either be filled with the photograph of a notorious scoundrel or of Sweetwort himself. Photography had become a booming industry by the late 1850s, so that every household wanted to collect images of celebrities. Yet such “real” likenesses were, as the story satirizes, largely “counterfeit,” satisfying consumer demand rather than providing art to the masses.

The question of what to value pervades all four novels I have discussed. Turning from the competitive marriage market of *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke learns to appraise the world aesthetically and declares in her acceptance of Will Ladislaw, “I will learn what everything costs” (*Mm* 762). Gwendolen Harleth, appearing in the first scene of *Daniel Deronda* at the roulette table, fails to evaluate the depravity of her husband Grandcourt and ultimately discovers, upon his death, she has inherited almost nothing. Grace Melbury, whose father continually reminds her what her finishing school “cost” him, marries into a higher class than her woodlander neighbors, and departs with Fitzpiers taking their cosmopolitan wealth out of Little Hintock. Tess Durbeyfield, whose worth, like the Biblical passage of the good wife cited by

Angel’s mother, should be “far above rubies” (T 282),120 is plagued by her dual status as “peasant” girl and “noble” descendant. Throughout the novels, the increasingly tragic tone comes from a failure to understand aesthetic, rather than explicit, value. Ultimately, as scholar Jeff Nunokawa argues, “the problem with desire is a failure at the bottom line: simply put, love is a bad bargain; the return that it offers is no match for the investment it requires. More exactly, the problem with desire […] is a failure to consider the price.”121

These four novels bridge the years between the “Counterfeit Presentment” of Dickens and the aesthetic of l’art pour l’art epitomized in Wilde’s Picture of Dorian Gray (1890-1). Portraits in the final years of the century move away from the status-symbols epitomized by the eighteenth-century works of Reynolds and Gainsborough, toward roles as independent and increasingly non-mimetic works of art. As investments, people – as works of art – must be valued not for their surface price, but their inner, moral value.

As we have seen, the treatment of literary portraits changes over the course of these four novels. In Middlemarch, portraits functioned as lessons in reading aesthetic language. The markers of bodies provided Dorothea with the opportunity to glimpse underlying character, while simultaneously stressing the importance of appreciating individuals aesthetically. In Daniel Deronda, bodies appeared in photographic and impressionistic portraits, the embodiments of both past and future. Eliot concluded her later novel with indications in the failure of portraits and, more fundamentally, the impulse to create and read others as supposedly revelatory images. Hardy’s Woodlanders extended the partiality of subjective vision to the dissected bodies and

120 Proverbs 31:10. Interestingly, the Clares read an abridged version of the King James proverb, skipping over the eleventh and twelfth lines: “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. / She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.” Hardy, with his thorough Biblical knowledge, no doubt intended the omission ironically.
permeable frames of his literary portraits. Finally, in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, the radiant nature of Tess herself transcends her bodily appearance, while the inheritance of her portrait-bound ancestresses recalls the cold doges Hardy found in Venice. The value of history and origins becomes increasingly suspect as Eliot and Hardy negotiate the inheritances visible on portraits.

These are by no means the only portraits in the works of Eliot or Hardy. In their earliest works – Eliot’s *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and Hardy’s *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) – both authors included silhouetted figures who need to be fleshed out to be understood by their fellow characters. In particular, portraits reveal and obscure in Eliot’s Reform novel, *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), as the central lady, Mrs. Transome, attempts to ignore history while staying true to the image of her younger self. Hardy continues to use notions of heredity, mirroring, and identity throughout his novels and his poetry. Further opportunities for exploring Modernist impulses in both Eliot and Hardy could begin with their negotiations of portraits in those works.

Over the period these novels represent, portraits become the sites of a visible literary shift from apparent objectivity to embraced subjectivity. Depictions of the self – once containable on and within the portrait – become more elusive. The notion of direct legibility of character from portraits is abandoned, while the aesthetic aura of the person becomes paradoxically more apparent. No surprise, then, that Hardy’s final novel, *Jude the Obscure*, shows its ghostly hero haunting the streets of Christminster, his photographic portrait discarded with the rest of his possessions by his estranged wife, Arabella. Successive early twentieth-century works – from Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Gray* and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* through Woolf’s final *Between the Acts* – include vague, abstract portraits to illustrate of the vast incomprehensibility of character. As we have seen, Eliot and Hardy pick up the portrait tradition, with its complex history of representations of the self, in order to question the nature of identity itself.
Appendix of Images

Gerrit Dou, *Young Woman at her Toilet* (1667)
John Smart, *Portrait of an Unknown Woman* (1779)
Raphael, *Sistine Madonna* (1513-4)
Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Portrait of Charlotte and Sarah Carteret-Hardy* (1801)
Ross vi

Sir Anthony van Dyck, *Lady Elizabeth Thimbelby and her Sister* (1637)

Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Bust Portrait of a Young Man with an Inscription* (c.1560)
John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889)
Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Going to the Ball (San Martino)* (1846).

Doge’s Palace, Venice, Portrait of Marin Falier (Removed) (1365)
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