

Daniel Deronda as Tragi-Comedy

Catherine Brown

Daniel Deronda's sixth chapter opens with an epigraph taken from Bernard le Bouyer de Fontenelle's popularisation of Copernican astronomy, *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes*.¹ The pupil responds to her teacher: 'Croyez-vous m'avoir humiliée pour m'avoir appris que la terre tourne autour du soleil? Je vous jure que je ne m'en estime pas moins'.² This quotation appears soon after Klesmer's mortifying criticism of Gwendolen's slender musical talent. Fontenelle's work as a whole, however, has an obvious application to Gwendolen's relationship with Daniel. *Entretiens* describes five evenings of conversation between the Countess and the narrator as they walk in the moonlit grounds of a château. The narrator develops the conceit that the moon may be inhabited, but that communication between earthlings and moon people is not yet possible: 'were the distance but inconsiderable, and the two Planets almost contiguous, it would be still impossible to pass from the Air of the one, into the Air of the other', these being as different as air and water.³ He nonetheless imagines that, one day, such contact may be possible. In *Daniel Deronda* the Gentile characters other than the Meyricks never meet its Jewish characters other than Daniel and Mirah. Mordecai and Gwendolen spend a few minutes of the narrative's two years in adjoining rooms, but she shows no interest in his existence; nor does he ever necessarily learn of hers. Daniel's intervention neither makes more likely nor averts her marriage or its termination. His own movements are marginally determined by each of these events, but his marriage and vocation are unaffected by them. Of the novel's seventy chapters, twenty-seven concern Daniel to the exclusion of Gwendolen.

The reader is therefore impelled to seek connection at the level of meaning, which may not so easily be determined as absent. William Empson made a number of suggestions as to the types of meaning which parallel actions can generate: ironies may be created between stories; one story may play out the dangers inherent in another; character traits found in one person may be split between characters in a process of ‘decomposition’ for the purposes of analysis; an audience’s scepticism at a serious action may be pre-empted by its parody; the range of human life, or of a single situation experienced by different characters, may be suggested; or a single phenomenon may be universalised, as by *King Lear*’s subplot.⁴ The implication of the last may be that there is nothing new under the sun: as Taube writes about *Vanity Fair*, ‘The contrasts [...] create a sense of the limited possibilities of human existence’.⁵ The relations of stories’ meanings have their own, second order, meaning: Peter Garrett describes the meanings of Victorian ‘multiplot’ novels including *Daniel Deronda* as ‘dialogical’ in Bakhtin’s sense, since their ‘form’ is ‘neither single- nor multiple-focus but incorporates both, and it is the interaction and tension between these structural principles which produces some of their most important and distinctive effects’.⁶

Neither Empson nor Garrett makes much of the distinction between two and more than two stories. Empson is chiefly concerned with double plots; Garrett concentrates on the binary opposition of the monologic and dialogic, the latter produced by any multiplication of stories (he gives *Wuthering Heights* as a good example of a ‘multiplot’ novel, because ‘its formal compression permits a more concise analysis’).⁷ However, such double-plotted novels as *Daniel Deronda* may be contrasted both with such mono-plotted novels as *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, and with such multi-plotted novels as *Middlemarch*. Its two stories are clearly distinguishable

as such, whereas *Middlemarch*'s central stories are more various. Five stories are better able than two to create the single world of time and space which forms a consistent basis for comparison, by severally guaranteeing what Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth terms 'a single vanishing point of perspective': 'Just as in realist pictures implied perspectives are infinite, so in historical narrative a number of possible and potentially infinite perspectives support the construction of a common medium'.⁸ Alternatively, five different vanishing points may be less apprehensible as such, and therefore less disorientating to the reader, than two. Five stories which are not connected by a single theme or argument are nonetheless likely to be connected by multiple strands of meaning in what the narrator of *Middlemarch* would call a web. Two stories, by contrast, may be isolated: Henry James 'had a mortal horror of two stories, two pictures, in one. The reason of this was the clearest - my subject was immediately, under that disadvantage, so cheated of its indispensable centre as to become of no more use for expressing a main intention than a wheel without a hub is of use for moving a cart'.⁹ *Daniel Deronda* raises the question posed by Henry James of *The Newcomes*, *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, and *War and Peace*: 'what do such large loose baggy monsters [...] artistically mean?'.¹⁰

George Eliot herself insisted that her novel's stories were connected. In October 1876 she expressed impatience with 'readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there'.¹¹ Since the mid-1970s the majority of critics have stressed the coherence of *Daniel Deronda*, although not all have considered it to be immediately apparent; Adrian Poole has uncovered 'Hidden Affinities' in *Daniel Deronda* in these pages.¹² However, earlier Barbara Hardy had criticised the New Critical propensity for demanding - and finding - coherence in multi-plotted novels:

‘We insist that the large loose baggy monster has unity, has symbolic concentration, has patterns of imagery and a thematic construction of character, and in the result the baggy monster is processed by our New Criticism into something strikingly like the original Jamesian streamlined beast’.¹³ The majority of critics since the mid-1870s have identified a deficiency of connection between the two stories. Since the mid-1970s many of these have found intended or unintended significance in this deficiency (although the line between significant disconnection, and connection, is blurred).¹⁴ Those who have emphasised the meaningful connections between the novels’ stories have either found no struggle to exist between them for the power of contextualising or explaining the other - or else have found such a struggle to be resolved in favour of Daniel’s story (for example Garrett, who finds that by the end of *Daniel Deronda* ‘the structural dialogue appears to be resolved’).¹⁵ Many of the critics who have emphasised a deficiency of connection have considered Gwendolen’s story to at least partly resist contextualisation by Daniel’s. On the other hand, for many non-Jewish readers the heroine’s story has held so much more interest than the hero’s that no power struggle has been apparent. However, a wide range of criteria for assessing importance accords the two stories sufficiently equal importance to render any deficiencies of connection between them problematic. Dryden had a politicised distrust of such parity: when ‘two Axions’ are ‘equally labour’d and driven on by the Writer’ then there is ‘no longer one play, but two: not but that there may be many actions in a Play [...] but they must be all subservient to the great one, which our language happily expresses in the name of under-plots [...] Co-ordination in a Play is as dangerous and unnatural as in a state’.¹⁶ *Daniel Deronda* takes risks in this respect; the more so since the hero’s and heroine’s stories diverge towards success and disaster respectively.

Eliot had denounced narrative eschatology in her 1855 defence of the ‘Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*’:

Just as far from being really moral is the so-called moral dénouement, in which rewards and punishments are distributed according to those notions of justice on which the novel-writer would have recommended that the world should be governed if he had been consulted at the creation. The emotion of satisfaction which a reader feels when the villain of the book dies of some hideous disease, or is crushed by a railway train, is no more essentially moral than the satisfaction which used to be felt in whipping culprits at the cart-tail.¹⁷

Daniel Deronda both invites and frustrates interpretation in terms of a moral dénouement, and fails fully to acknowledge the resultant tension. The suffering with which Gwendolen’s egotism is punished accords imperfectly with notions of justice which the novel itself suggests. This misalignment may be explored through René Girard’s concept of the ‘scapegoat’. In his 1986 book *Le bouc émissaire* he analysed those victims of persecution who are punished for the sins of a group.¹⁸ He made a distinction between those who are presented as victims *in* a text, and those who are victims *of* the text itself. For example, *Le bouc émissaire* contains scapegoats *within* its text, since it clearly describes them as such. It also quotes texts which enforce a ‘scapegoat mechanism’ against its victims - for example, the transcript of a seventeenth century witch trial, which describes those found guilty as witches.¹⁹ In certain respects Gwendolen is a scapegoat *of* her text – *Daniel Deronda*.

This is partly connected to the literary genres which are suggested by her and Daniel's stories respectively: tragedy and comedy. Not every scapegoat, in Girard's sense of the term, is a tragic figure; nor is every tragic hero necessarily a victim of persecution. However, the denial of a character's tragic status *by* a text may be involved in the text's persecution of that character. A comedy which runs alongside a story of persecution may offer solutions to the victim who is suffering. On the other hand, a character's suffering may seem the greater (including to her- or himself) by coinciding with another character's happiness. In addition, the two occurrences may be causally related - either intrinsically, or because of an author's desire to create an ethical contrast.

Shortly before writing *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot was reading or rereading Greek tragedy. Gwendolen bears its marks. These marks, however, do not in themselves mean that the text endorses her as tragic; until their operations in the texts are understood, 'We recognise the alphabet; we are not sure of the language' (*DD*, p. 91). Gwendolen hubristically aspires beyond the conditions of her society, her position as a woman within it, and her life in particular, via mastery in marriage. Her reduction from middling estate by the turn of the international roulette wheel which bankrupts Grapnell & Co. provokes her *hamartia*. On the night of accepting Grandcourt, she experiences a semi-conscious premonition of *anagnorisis* in 'the first onslaught of dread after her irrevocable decision', informed by her horrified memory of Lydia Glasher (*DD*, p. 262). On her wedding night, her *peripeteia* begins with the arrival of a letter from Mrs Glasher, which is likened to the 'Furies' (*DD*, p. 303). Thereafter her *anagnorisis* develops slowly into ethical consciousness. She bears her situation with an affected 'proud cold quietude' (*DD*, p. 348). Her catastrophe confirms omens such as the sudden revelation of a picture of a drowned face, and Gwendolen's

comment to her mother that ‘all the great poetic criminals’ were ‘women!’ (*DD*, p. 44). Following Greek convention, the death of the protagonist, Grandcourt, is kept off the narrative stage - first to be seen by anonymous witnesses at the Genoese quayside, and later to be described by Gwendolen.

However, her society furnishes no chorus. It is comic in the banal sense denounced by Mirah when she describes hearing Christians’ irreverent laughter: ‘the world seemed like a hell to me. Is this world and all the life upon it only like a farce or a vaudeville, where you find no great meanings? Why then are there tragedies and grand operas, where men do difficult things?’ (*DD*, p. 184). The terms ‘comedy’ and ‘comic’ are used throughout *Daniel Deronda* synonymously with Mirah’s ‘farce or a vaudeville’, as for example in Mrs Arrowpoint’s reaction to Catherine’s announcement of her engagement to Klesmer: ‘It is a comedy you have got up, Catherine. Else you are mad’ (*DD*, p. 209). Even those members of her society who criticise this society for its lack of seriousness, are trivial by the standards of Mordecai or Daniel: Mrs Vulcany, preferring a supernatural to a materialist explanation for the opening of the panel door in the theatricals, professes to find Gascoigne ‘a little too worldly for her taste’ (*DD*, p. 50). This banal comedy is directly implicated in her sufferings, for example by Gascoigne’s refusal to take seriously the rumours he hears concerning Grandcourt’s illegitimate family.

Gwendolen, then, is denied tragic status by a society which itself is represented as trivial and culpable. However, the novel also undermines her tragic status, in a manner which sometimes sits uneasily with its criticism of society. Eliot wrote to Blackwood in November 1875 that ‘It will perhaps be a little comfort to you to know that poor Gwen is spiritually saved, but “so as by fire”’ (*EL*, vi, 188). Paul tells the Corinthians:

if any man build upon this foundation [of Christ] gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet *so as by fire*.²⁰

By the end of the novel Gwendolen resembles *Romola's* burnt Savonarola almost as much as she resembles the 'spiritually saved' Romola. Paul's theology makes no accommodation for tragedy. One implication of the Pauline passage is that Grandcourt serves as Gwendolen's 'fire', in effect punishing her for accepting him, and acting in concert with Daniel to effect her partial ethical redemption. The personal stature on which her potential tragic status relies is limited. Certainly, she exceeds the standards of her society in her consciousness of guilt, but since this society is banally comic, her superiority reaches merely a realistic rather than a high mimetic standard (in Auerbach's senses of these terms). Some of the meta-aesthetic references to tragedy in her story are interpretable with reference to her traumatised character; for example, the 'Furies' operate on her 'hysterical' tendency (*DD*, p. 303). Relative to the novel's other characters, she suffers conspicuously for her faults. Mrs Glasher is a submerged Anna Karenina, who has abandoned her husband and child for a younger, rich, and glamorous man, yet who lives quietly in Gadsmere without encountering the disapproval of the curate and his wife.²¹ She is a 'Medusa-apparition' in Gwendolen's perception only; she is treated with sympathy by the narrator, and is accorded a

fortune for her son by the narrative (*DD*, p. 517). Such uneven treatment of transgressors is one indication of scapegoating by a text. Another such indication pertains to agency; as Heyns comments: ‘Creating Gwendolen as a representative of her society and then according her the duty to aspire beyond that society, Eliot in effect asks of her to reach beyond the limits of her own definition’.²² She has, in Bernard Williams’s sense, bad ‘moral luck’, for which she is held to account.²³ Girard argues that scapegoats often belong to a group which is susceptible to persecution.²⁴ Gwendolen, in Eliot’s *oeuvre*, is vulnerable by virtue of her sex. Gwendolen’s sufferings recall those of Eliot’s other flawed heroines, including Janet, Hettie, Maggie, Romola, and Fedalma. Heyns notes that Eliot’s Puritanism is directed particularly at female charm, wit and vanity, and that ‘Whereas Bess [in *Adam Bede*] is brought to her terrified repentance through Dinah’s exemplum, Eliot’s other women are subjugated by the novelist’s own plot’.²⁵ Ermarth, writing on the dualism which she considers to be endemic to social novels, considers that ‘In the case of gender distinctions particularly, the division is so extreme that it threatens the very existence of the common medium, historical time’.²⁶ In *Daniel Deronda* the common medium which is threatened is ethical.

Nonetheless, the marks of tragedy listed above remain. When Daniel finds Mirah on the brink of the Thames, ‘His mind glanced over the girl-tragedies that are going on in the world, hidden, unheeded, as if they were but tragedies of the copse or hedgerow, where the helpless drag wounded wings forsakenly’ (*DD*, p. 160).

Gwendolen’s is not a girl-tragedy; she is too complex for such a classification. The marks of tragedy both accord to Gwendolen a hypothetical tragic status, and stress the extent of her failure to attain it. In so doing they both augment and measure the extent to which she is the victim of her text.

Daniel does not condemn Gwendolen as much as does the narrative as a whole, or as much as he condemns her society, which tends both to produce and overlook Grandcourt's kind of guilt ("What right had he to marry this girl?" said Deronda, with disgust') (*DD*, p. 371). In his conversations with her he acts more as a pragmatic spiritual doctor than as a confessor, encouraging her sense of guilt in so far as he thinks that it can be turned to a positive end. He also interprets her as tragic, finding her to have undergone 'a tragic transformation', whilst Mirah feels that 'genuine grand ladies' such as Gwendolen 'impressed her vaguely as coming out of some unknown drama, in which their parts perhaps got more tragic as they went on' (*DD*, pp. 656, 478). She and Daniel afford Gwendolen some of that recognition of her tragic aspect, which her own society denies.

In terms of personal responsibility for the heroine's sufferings, Edith Simcox (writing to Eliot in October 1879) was 'more struck by the pathos of Gwendolen's rejection than by the healing power of Daniel's virtuous conduct and counsel' (*EL*, ix, 275). Gwendolen opens and enters the novel as the object of Daniel's benevolence, but departs from and almost closes it in a letter which equivocates as to whether he has rendered her any help whatsoever: 'It is better - it shall be better with me because I have known you'. This is no advance on her claim of almost a year before: 'It may be - it shall be better with me because I have known you' (*DD*, pp. 695, 389). His potential future effect upon her in her living 'to be one of the best of women' is left in doubt (*DD*, p. 694). Daniel's attempts to alleviate the effects of her actual and metaphorical gambling losses humiliate her, give Grandcourt occasion to punish her, sharpen her sense of guilt beyond what might lead to her spiritual health, and both awaken and disappoint her love. When they part, Gwendolen is left in chastity and misery, and Daniel in the opposite. After the end of her letter to Daniel on his

wedding day, the novel's next paragraph begins: 'The preparations for the departure of all three to the East began at once'. Although this is immediately followed by the ostensible reason for their departure ('for Deronda could not deny Ezra's wish'), the effect as we read this passage is that after Gwendolen's letter has been read, the preparations for departure *therefore* begin immediately (DD, p. 695). Daniel is aware of the contrast of his own fate with Gwendolen's, even without the benefit of Hans's reproach: 'do you want her to wear weeds for you all her life - burn herself in perpetual suttee while you are alive and merry?' (DD, pp. 685-86). James's fictional critic Constantius suggests that the effect is intentional: 'Her finding Deronda pre-engaged to go to the East and stir up the race-feeling of the Jews strikes me as a wonderfully happy invention. The irony of the situation, for poor Gwendolen, is almost grotesque, and it makes one wonder whether the whole heavy structure of the Jewish question was not built up by the author for the express purpose of giving its proper force to this particular stroke'.²⁷ Certainly the narrative is *aware* of the irony, since it stresses the desirability, and therefore also the failures, of rendering help to the distressed. *Daniel Deronda's* irony can either be interpreted as increasing the extent to which Gwendolen is a scapegoat of her text - or else as sufficiently pointed as to reduce it. That is, evidence for scapegoating may be 'iridescent'. This is an important term for Eliot; the narrator of *Daniel Deronda* refers to 'the iridescence of [Gwendolen's] character - the play of various, nay, contrary tendencies' (DD, p. 33). The iridescence referred to here entails that different perspectives afford views of different aspects of the same subject ('a moment is wide enough for the loyal and mean desire'). In my own usage, however, the same aspect of a single subject must be judged differently when viewed from different interpretative perspectives. It is a

function of the complexity of *Daniel Deronda* that no single perspective presents itself as adequate.

However, the titles of the novel's books involve hidden censorious or cruel ironies which tend more decisively to work against Gwendolen - insofar as they are noticed. *Daniel Deronda* makes its successful protagonist metonymic of the whole. The gap between its title and its epigraph coincides with the novel's fault-line, since the latter (beginning 'Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul') is of no direct relevance to the Jewish plot (apart from to Alcharisi). Those of the books' titles which do acknowledge Gwendolen are either directly critical of her ('The Spoiled Child'), or else elevate the ironies which work against her at the level of plot, into the novel's formal structure. In 'Meeting Streams' Gwendolen meets Grandcourt, and Daniel meets Mirah, ensuring that Gwendolen and Daniel's streams will not merge. The demure diction of 'Maidens Choosing' misrepresents Gwendolen's passive acceptance of Grandcourt, and has no application to Mirah's contrasting history of vigorous, maidenhood-preserving choice. 'Gwendolen Gets Her Choice' again overstates the free will involved in her acceptance of Grandcourt, and points to her resultant loss of choice. 'Fruit and Seed' contrasts Grandcourt's seed which dies fruitlessly in Gwendolen with the new beneficiaries of his past fecundity, and the anticipated fecundity of Daniel and Mirah.

Under-acknowledged irony exists also in the fact that the resemblances, inversions, and parallels which connect Daniel's and Gwendolen's stories are not interpretable in ethical terms. Both characters are ignorant about a parent, but only Daniel is eventually enlightened; they are simultaneously in a Leubronn gambling hall after simultaneously meeting their future spouses in England, but only Gwendolen is fleeing from hers; they lack a focus for their energy, but only Daniel finds one;

Gwendolen unsuccessfully aspires to the masculine role of dominance within marriage, whereas Daniel successfully plays a feminine, nurturing role to Mirah; in Genoa Gwendolen loses her husband whilst Daniel finds his mother, with the result that she loses her potential husband whereas he gains his wife. The overarching irony is that, in Leavis's phrase, 'Gwendolen *has* no Zionism'. The implications of this fact are stressed by Mordecai's repetition of 'because' in: 'ideas, beloved ideas, came to me, because I was a Jew. They were a trust to fulfil, because I was a Jew. They were an inspiration, because I was a Jew' (*DD*, p. 425-26).²⁸

Several factors disrupt the Jewish-Gentile dichotomy in *Daniel Deronda*, but none of them decisively. The Meyricks are virtuous, happy, idealised, and Gentile. However, theirs is an exceptional, foreign (French-Scottish) Gentile household, which forms a kind of anti-chamber to the novel's Jewish world. It is not fully part of the latter because of the limited physical and spiritual scale of its parlour and inhabitants (Mrs Meyrick has some of Lady Mallinger's narrowness). Rather, it is an enclave of peace and virtue reminiscent of such Dickensian parlours as that of *Oliver Twist*'s Maylies, in which a starving, hunted child is also given refuge. The strikingly virtuous Gentile who belongs to Gwendolen's own society is Rex, who is incapable of understanding and moving Gwendolen as Daniel can since he lacks the wise and vocal seriousness which she apparently yearns for. Only if her redemption 'so as by fire' has cured her of this need is a future match between herself and Rex possible.

The ethnic exclusivity of Judaism is tempered by several features of its presentation; in particular its combination of elements of the particular and the universal. Mordecai considers that 'the divine Unity embraced as its consequence the ultimate unity of mankind', and that the *Shemah* gives 'a binding theory to the human race' (*DD*, p. 628). Nonetheless, the *Shemah* remains a mark of separateness. For

Mordecai 'In the multitudes of the ignorant on three continents who observe our rites and make the confession of the divine Unity, the soul of Judaism is not dead' (*DD*, p. 454). Mordecai is so absorbed in his statement of this opinion to Mirah that he fails to notice her misery. Had he done so, and enquired the reason for it (jealousy of Gwendolen), he might for the first time have been made aware of Gwendolen's existence; as it is, an exposition of the *Shemah* keeps him in ignorance. The exclusivity of Judaism is more strongly undermined by the fact that such moments of prosaic theological exposition are rare. The novel is less concerned with Jewish doctrine, tradition, or history, than with interest or lack of interest in these things. In the debate in the *Hand and Banner* Mordecai is primarily concerned with the spiritual development of peoples, which in the Jewish case coincides with a religion, but in the case of the other nationalist movement mentioned in the novel - the *Risorgimento* - does not. Where the presentation of Mordecai's relation to religion differs most sharply from that of the Reverend Tryan, Dinah, Savonarola, Pastor Lyon, or the Reverend Farebrother is in the importance of its aesthetic dimension. Mordecai expresses himself in English or Hebrew poetry; Daniel, according to Barbara Hardy, imagines a vocation 'which attempts a synthesis of the artistic and the social imagination'.²⁹ At the end of the novel, art stands in place of scripture when *Samson Agonistes* is quoted rather than the *Shemah*, 'which for long generations has been on the lips of the dying Israelite' (*DD*, p. 695). This substitution of Christian art based on the Old Testament, for the Jewish scripture itself, is indicative of the way in which Mordecai's thought applies to Gwendolen through the mediation of art. Klesmer is Mordecai's counterpart in the novel's Gentile society, preaching art to her directly; it is significantly left unclear, as though this were unimportant, to what degree he is a Jew. However, Carroll rightly says that the distance between Gwendolen's life and

Daniel's is 'not more extreme, in truth, than the contrast between life's limits and conditions as dimly guessed by Gwendolen and its unconditioned boundlessness through Art as felt by Klesmer'.³⁰ The Gentile Hans is an alternative, talented artistic figure whose facetiousness, however, contrasts with Klesmer's seriousness, and whose negligible understanding of Gwendolen prevents him from constituting a source of alternative value for her. She can no more acquire artistic talent than Judaism, and this is a further condition for her suffering.

Daniel is a voluntary exile from Gwendolen's society and a migrant to the society of the Jews - a 'pastoral' located in urban slums, or a Jewish 'moon' from which the 'Eclipse of the Earth' of Gentile society can be viewed.³¹ Indeed, the moon is prominently associated with Daniel. Mirah enters Daniel's life under the light of the rising moon. At the New Year's Eve party Daniel invites Gwendolen and Grandcourt to see 'the finest possible moonlight on the stone pillars and carving, and shadows waving across it in the wind'; Grandcourt tells Gwendolen that 'Deronda will take you' (*DD*, p. 381). As he waits to see his mother, Daniel watches the moon sinking every night over Genoa, whilst Gwendolen 'watched through the evening lights to the sinking of the moon with less of awed loneliness than was habitual to her - nay, with a vague impression that in this mighty frame of things there might be some preparation of rescue for her'. An hour before Daniel actually appears to her, she wakes from 'a strangely-mixed dream in which she felt herself escaping over the Mont Cenis, and wondering to find it warmer even in the moonlight on the snow, till suddenly she met Deronda, who told her to go back' (*DD*, p. 579).

Mirah - and Ortega y Gasset - define the tragic and the comic in terms very similar to those in which the novel's Jewish world is the former, and its Gentile world the latter. According to Ortega y Gasset, in tragedy 'The noble heroic fiction rises

above the inertia of reality through the greatest exertions; it lives by aspiration. The future is its witness'; the comic world, however, is 'drawn back and frozen in the present', 'undermining the aspiration of someone to be different in the future, by contrasting that vision with what they currently *are*'.³² Gillian Beer notes that '*Daniel Deronda* is a novel haunted by the future'; Daniel's story reaches towards the future and vindicates precisely such aspiration.³³ Ortega y Gasset argues that 'the novel' itself is 'a tragicomedy' in which 'The upper level [...] is a tragedy, from which the muse descends, following the tragic as it falls into comedy', but he concedes that 'The tragic element, of course, may expand a great deal and even vie in scope and importance with the comic matter of the novel. All degrees and oscillations are possible here'.³⁴ In *Daniel Deronda* the tragic not only vies with, but is given a rhetorical victory over, the comic; Gwendolen's society is the victim of satire from which Daniel's is relatively immune.

The differences between these societies may also be expressed in terms of the Hellenism and Hebraism adumbrated by Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* shortly before the novel was written. Terry Eagleton's argument that the 'fruitlessly Hellenistic' Daniel receives 'the essential corrective' of Hebraism from the Jewish world is correct.³⁵ Daniel is impelled into constructive action by Mordecai, whose vision is not one of 'sweetness and light', and by Kalonymos, who represents the most strictly Hebraic side of Judaism.³⁶ However, Arnold associates Hebraism no more with modern Judaism than with Christianity, and advocates the improvement of contemporary, unreflecting, Hebraic, English society by Hellenic reflectiveness. Gascoigne, Sir Hugo, and Bult are *Daniel Deronda*'s laxly Hebraic Philistines, whereas the widely cultured Mordecai, Daniel, and Mirah represent the best not only of Hebraism but also of Hellenism - which, like them, is associated with modern

Germany (Mordecai 'went to Hamburg to study, and afterwards to Göttingen') (*DD*, p. 426).

Daniel's Hellenic-Hebraic, tragic-idealist Jewish world involves a complex mixture of genres. The Jewish people itself is presented as a tragic protagonist: in the extract from Zunz's *Die Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*, which appears as the epigraph to Chapter 42, Jewish history is described as a 'National Tragedy lasting for fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and the actors were also the heroes' (*DD*, p. 441). However, Jewish Messianism and, potentially, Zionism, are projected to redeem this tragedy sooner or later as a comedy. Modern Italy's example to Zionism is unconsciously adduced by Mirah in her rendition of Leopardi's 'Ode to Italy', which begins with recitative, followed by 'a mournful melody, a rhythmic plaint. After this came a climax of devout triumph' (*DD*, p. 414). This resembles tragicomedy as defined by Guarini in his *Compendio della Poesia Tragicomica*, in which the tragedy is arrested by means of 'a credible miracle' in the fifth act (as in *The Winter's Tale*), but on an epic national and historic scale.³⁷ The tragedy which is redeemed is 'social tragedy' ('a civilisation destroyed or destroying itself', in Raymond Williams's definition) rather than 'personal tragedy' ('men and women suffering and destroyed in their closest relationships'), but it is reduplicated at the level of 'closest relationships'.³⁸ The genre of Daniel's part of the novel is further complicated by his aspects as a hero of romance in rescuing Mirah ('Prince Camaralzaman'), and as a hero of romantic comedy in marrying her, as well as by the Cohens' low-mimetic comedy (*DD*, p. 156). The effect of the last might be that of tragicomedy as conceived by Plautus and Sidney, in which tragic and low comic action are interspersed, were not the Cohens themselves evidence of the tragedy, and embraced by the comedy, of the national tragicomedy.

Gwendolen's hypothetical tragedy has little resonance with any of these genres. Garrett considers that Daniel's story, in contrast to Gwendolen's, 'unfolds not as a sequence of choices and consequences but as a process of discovery, of prophecy and fulfilment, where meaning is determined by a remote, mysterious origin and a remote, beckoning goal'.³⁹ Gwendolen's story also fulfils omens, but, unlike the successful prophecies in Daniel's story, these are not recognised by the characters themselves. Gwendolen's parallels with the two prominent women of Daniel's world work to her disadvantage. Mirah's mistreatment by a villainous man has no relation to her own fault, and is connected with her national tragedy, since Jewish actresses are vulnerable to exploitation. Gwendolen is the victim of a moribund Gentile society of which the decline is neither mourned nor presented as tragic. This is due partly to its own faults (for example its Philistine prejudices against Jews and Caribs), and partly to its lack of gravity.⁴⁰ Alcharisi, on the other hand, deliberately puts herself beyond the pale of the Jewish tragicomedy. Like Gwendolen, she has a muted tragedy which stems from her attempt to exceed the bounds of her life, of which only Daniel is aware. She has, however, a far greater understanding of her situation. Gwendolen's ideas of becoming a discoverer of 'the North-West Passage or the source of the Nile' or, indeed, a tragic singer and actress, are girlish parodies of Alcharisi's ambition to become 'the greatest lyric actress of Europe' (*DD*, p. 113). Alcharisi's ability to act tragic parts extends also to her life, since 'experience immediately passed into drama, and she acted her own emotions' (*DD*, p. 539). Both Alcharisi's and Gwendolen's stories fit uneasily with the genres of their own and the other's worlds, but the former diminishes the latter by its greater stature.

The generic distinction of the novels' stories is reinforced by other disjunctions. Whereas Gwendolen's society is established at the beginning of the

novel, Daniel's Jewish society appears to be created as Daniel discovers it over the course of the novel, giving it a further aspect of inaccessibility to Gwendolen. Each story has a characteristic narrative voice: that of a dryly witty Gentile who is knowledgeable about Judaism and sharply critical of Gentiles, and that of an earnest person identified by Doyle in the comment 'Daniel and the narrator have the same styles'.⁴¹ The former observes: 'We English are a miscellaneous people', and the latter: 'the velvet canopy never covered a more goodly bride and bridegroom, to whom their people might more wisely wish offspring' (*DD*, pp. 85, 693). The Gentiles tend to be more thickly described: Gwendolen's history before her trip to Leubronn is presented as a series of episodes, whereas Daniel's before his trip is given in a more continuous line of character description. The Gentiles are more physically substantial. Admittedly, Mordecai's body is present in its pain, and Mirah's is frequently present in small-scale, pictorial descriptions. However, the Jews have less physical volition than the Gentiles: Gwendolen and Grandcourt have 'physical antipathies', and match each other respectively in revulsion from sex, and sexual sadism, whereas Daniel's attraction to Gwendolen is weaker than his observers suppose, and his attraction to Mirah is hardly mentioned (*DD*, p. 101). Only in the Gentile story are animals (horses, dogs, and prawns) present in reality, rather than being used exclusively as similes, as they are in the Jewish story. Some of those features which connect the worlds have less the aspect of *de facto* commonality than of signifying connectedness. Gambling, with studied parallelism, ruins Grapnell & Co., Gwendolen, and Lapidoth; jewels lie scattered across both stories. Beer notes that 'parallel narratives are fleetingly condensed through allusion to opera, myth, legend, politics'; however, the fact of condensation is palpable.⁴² Newton argues that the novel is 'something akin to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*' in which, as in *Waverley*, a

romance narrative is grafted on to historical material and absorbed within it.⁴³ The epigraph to Book VI, taken from Aristotle's *Poetics*, rationalises this absorption: 'This, too, is probable, according to that saying of Agathon: "It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen"' (DD, p. 434). However, such absorption as occurs, and such meta-aesthetic bridges as exist, fail entirely to eliminate the reader's sense of the generic distinction of the stories. Gwendolen and the novel do not have the optimism of Fontenelle's narrator that in the future communication may be possible between the earth and moon.⁴⁴

Gwendolen, then, is rendered a victim in relation to Daniel's world in that her own is discontinuous with his, and she is excluded from the ethnic and aesthetic categories correspondent to the novel's ideals. In addition, her downfall throws his success into relief. As Empson remarks: 'This power of suggestions is the strength of the double plot; once you take the two parts to correspond, any character [...] seems to cause what he corresponds to'.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Eliot is not one of Girard's wholly 'naïve persecutors [...] *unaware of what they are doing*' who 'do not suspect that by writing their accounts they are arming posterity against them'.⁴⁶ The narrative's awareness of its contradictions is apparent in the ambivalent personal relations of Gwendolen and Daniel. Her modest degree but problematic type of attraction for him analogises the partial resistance of her story to ethical contextualisation. In the Leubronn gambling hall their power relations are ambiguous: Daniel, the narrator, and the reader, attempt to judge Gwendolen for three pages before she first sees him, during which time her mind is closed to the reader, whereas Daniel's is open. Gwendolen enquires, Juliet-like, about the identity of Daniel near the door, but has neither spoken to nor kissed him.⁴⁷ Daniel, and the novel named for him, are partly conscious of his limited ability to help Gwendolen, and of his implication in her pain.

Tragicomedy has been variously theorised and defined since Plautus coined the term to apply to *Amphitryon*, and since Sidney introduced it to the English language in 1581. The kind of tragicomedy discovered in *Daniel Deronda* is neither Plautian nor Guarinian, but an imperfect version of Miss Prism's definition of fiction, in which 'the good [end] happily and the bad unhappily'.⁴⁸ 'Tragi-comedy' makes an imperfectly satisfactory suggestion that its protagonists' respective disasters and successes are justified. This imperfection is partly acknowledged. It is one of the 'problems' of such 'problem comedies' as *The Merchant of Venice*, where an ethical disjunction separates the vanquished Shylock from the Venetian Christians. Unlike the Venetian Christians, however, the hero of *Daniel Deronda* is only slightly (and differently) involved in the novel's injustice.

In the Meyricks' parlour hangs a collection of engravings which, like *Daniel Deronda* itself, are 'there through the medium of a little black and white'. 'The Tragic Muse' hangs with other Classical, Christian, and secular icons, which are named in apparently random order:

the Virgin soaring amid her cherubic escort; grand Melancholia with her solemn universe; the Prophets and Sibyls; the School of Athens; the Last Supper; mystic groups where far-off ages made one moment; grave Holbein and Rembrandt heads; the Tragic Muse; last-century children at their musings or their play; Italian poets (*DD*, p. 179).

These are described as 'a glorious silent cloud of witnesses', and are apparently harmonious. Their silence, however, might be considered to resemble that of Leubronn's gambling table, with its 'striking admission of human equality' in what

Carroll describes as ‘a parody of [the] divine unity’ (*DD*, p. 4).⁴⁹ If the ‘silent witnesses’ were to be conjured into animation on the stage of the Meyricks’ parlour wall, then the apparent harmony with which they coexist would disintegrate. The Virgin would glide off the stage with her cherubic escort and return wearing a tephillin.⁵⁰ She would join hands with one of the grave Holbein figures and with the Prophet, whose other hand would be held by grand Melancholia, now much happier. The Tragic Muse would grasp the hand of one of the playing girls, but would be invisible to all of the characters including herself. The two groups would face each other, whilst the girl’s former companions would continue to play. The Holbein figure would reach out his free hand to the girl, who would stretch out her own in answer, but they would not be able to take hold.

Dr. Catherine Brown

St. Hilda’s College Oxford

NOTES

¹ *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes* was written in 1686; Eliot owned a Paris 1866 French edition which she marginally marked in pencil, and from which she quoted.

² George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* [*DD*], ed. Graham Handley (Oxford, 1984), p. 42.

³ Bernard le Bouyer de Fontenelle, *A Plurality of Worlds*, trans. John Glanvill (1929), p. 70. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

⁴ William Empson, 'Double Plots: Heroic and Pastoral in the Main Plot and Sub-Plot', in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1950), pp. 27-88 (pp. 36, 66, 28-30, 29, 54).

⁵ Quoted in Peter K. Garrett, *The Victorian Multiplot Novel: Studies in Dialogical Form* (1980), p. 114.

⁶ Garrett, p. 8.

⁷ Garrett, p. 18.

⁸ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *The English Novel in History 1840-1895* (1997), pp. 71, 76. By 'historical narrative' she refers to fiction of approximately the period 1850-85.

⁹ Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, ed. R.P. Blackmur (1962), pp. 83-84.

¹⁰ James, p. 84.

¹¹ *The George Eliot Letters (1871-1881)* [EL], ed. Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols. (1954-1978), vi, 290.

¹² See R.E. Francillon quoted in David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (1971), p. 391; Garrett, p. 222; Adrian Poole, 'Hidden Affinities in *Daniel Deronda*', *Essays in Criticism*, 33:4 (1983), 294-311; Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Science* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 175-200; K.M. Newton, 'Revisions of Scott, Austen and Dickens in *Daniel Deronda*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 35 (2005), 241-66.

¹³ Barbara Hardy, 'Form and Freedom: Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*', in *The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel*, 2nd edn (1971), p. 7.

¹⁴ See Henry James, '*Daniel Deronda: A Conversation, 1876*', in *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Morris Shapira (repr. 1964), pp. 32-48 (p. 46); F.R. Leavis, *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays*, ed. G. Singh (Cambridge, 1986), p. 68; Harold Fische, '*Daniel Deronda or Gwendolen Harleth?*', *Nineteenth Century*

Fiction, 19:4 (1965), 345-56; Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London and New York, 1978), p. 122; Ermarth, pp. 159, 165; David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 279-86.

¹⁵ Garrett, p. 221.

¹⁶ Dryden uses 'co-ordination' in the sense first recorded by the OED for 1643, of positioning on an equal level. John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesie: An Essay*, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford, 1964), pp. 78-79.

¹⁷ *George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford, 1992), p. 130.

¹⁸ René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, 1986), pp. 15-17.

¹⁹ Girard, p. 30.

²⁰ I Corinthians 3. 11-15.

²¹ *Anna Karenina* is precisely contemporary with *Daniel Deronda*, and Tolstoy had read, admired, and been influenced by Eliot's earlier works.

²² Michiel Heyns, *Expulsion and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: The Scapegoat in English Realist Fiction* (Oxford, 1994), p. 171.

²³ Bernard Williams, 'Moral Luck', in *Moral Luck*, ed. Daniel Statman (New York, 1993), pp. 35-56 (p. 41).

²⁴ Girard, p. 17.

²⁵ Heyns, pp. 30-34, 151.

²⁶ Ermarth, p. 169.

²⁷ *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism*, p. 46.

²⁸ F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (1948), p. 84.

²⁹ Barbara Hardy, *Particularities: Readings in George Eliot* (1982), p. 201.

³⁰ Carroll, *The Critical Heritage*, pp. 392-93.

³¹ Fontenelle's narrator hypothesises the existence of a lunar population to whom at certain moments 'we [earthlings] are then in the Wayn', and who may have a greater understanding of 'us' than the reverse is the case. Fontenelle, p. 45.

³² Michael McKeon, ed., *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* (2000), p. 290.

³³ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983), p. 181.

³⁴ McKeon, p. 291.

³⁵ Eagleton, p. 122.

³⁶ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy with Friendship's Garland and Some Literary Essays*, vol. v of *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* (Michigan, 1965), p. 90.

³⁷ David L. Hirst, *Tragicomedy* (1984), p. 20.

³⁸ Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (1966), p. 121.

³⁹ Garrett, p. 168.

⁴⁰ The narrator notes tartly that the reputation of Christians among Caribs for thieving is not without justification. DD, p. 176.

⁴¹ Mary Ellen Doyle, *The Sympathetic Response: George Eliot's Fictional Rhetoric* (New Jersey, 1981), p. 161.

⁴² Gillian Beer, *George Eliot* (Sussex, 1986), p. 215.

⁴³ Newton, p. 245.

⁴⁴ Fontenelle, p. 60.

⁴⁵ Empson, p. 34.

⁴⁶ Girard, p. 8. Heyns unequivocally considers Eliot to be a 'naïve persecutor' of Gwendolen. Heyns, p. 180.

⁴⁷ Juliet asks her Nurse the identity of several men at the door of the Capulets' ball-room in order to discover that of Romeo. *Romeo and Juliet*, I. 5. 126-32.

⁴⁸ Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, ed. Michael Patrick Gillespie (2006), p. 26.

⁴⁹ Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 279.

⁵⁰ A tephillin is a black leather box worn on the forehead or upper arm, containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with passages of Scripture.