



**Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro**

Centro de Educação e Humanidades

Instituto de Letras

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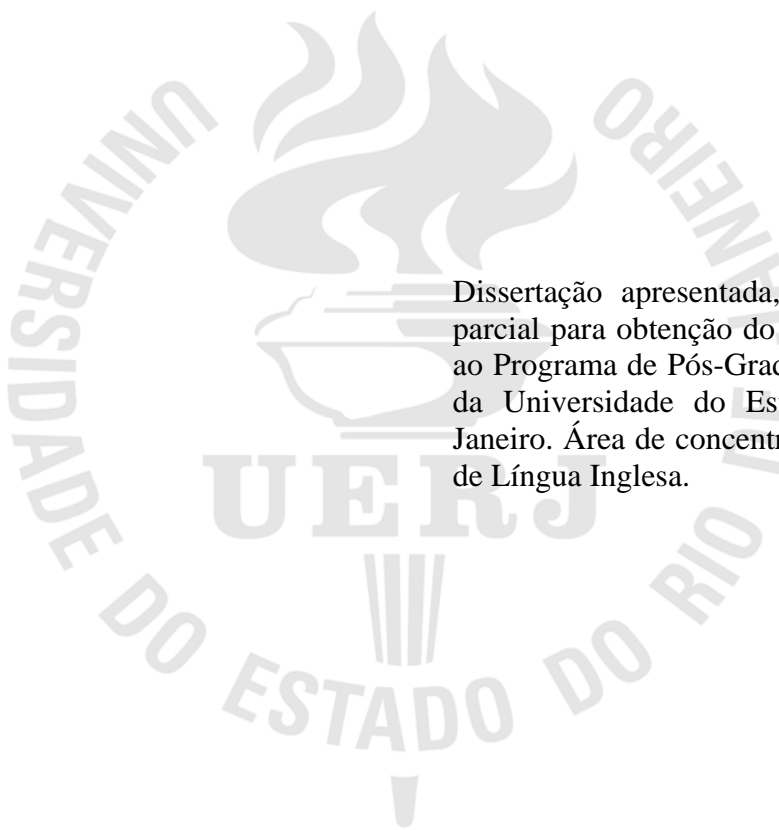
**Sentimental education: a study of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda**

Rio de Janeiro

2006

Carolina Miceli de Araujo

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof<sup>ta</sup>. Dra. Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros

Rio de Janeiro

2006

CATALOGAÇÃO NA FONTE  
UERJ/REDE SIRIUS/CEHB

E42 Araujo, Carolina Miceli de.  
Sentimental education: a study of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda  
/ Carolina Miceli de Araujo. – 2006.  
94 f.

Orientadora: Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros.  
Dissertação (mestrado) – Universidade do Estado do Rio de  
Janeiro, Instituto de Letras.

1. Eliot, George, 1819-1880 - Crítica e interpretação - Teses. 2.  
Eliot, George, 1819-1880. Daniel Deronda - Teses. I. Medeiros,  
Fernanda Teixeira de. II. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.  
Instituto de Letras. III. Título.

CDU 820-95

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dissertação desde que citada a fonte

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Assinatura

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Data

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Aprovada em 29 de março de 2006.

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Rio de Janeiro

2006

To my mother.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all the professors at the Instituto de Letras at UERJ who taught graduate units during these two years of the master's programme. Their classes, even though some courses were not directly related to my subject matter, raised discussions that were valuable assets for developing and thinking through the questions that shaped this dissertation. I would also like to thank my peers for the discussions and debates during these classes that also contributed to further develop the questions presented here. I would also like to thank the professors who constitute the examining board, Lucia de la Roque and Ana Lucia Henriques, from UERJ, and Paulo Henriques Britto, from PUC-Rio, for accepting to take part in it.

I must give very special thanks to my advisor Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros, whose rigorous and always generous supervision of my work was extremely important for its completion. Fernanda's thorough analysis of the many many versions of my chapters helped me delineate clearly the questions I wished to discuss and give an appropriate overall shape for this work. Also, in this process, Fernanda suggested many paths for the development of the work that certainly rendered very interesting questions. For all that I am extremely thankful.

I owe a general thanks to the History, Letters and Philosophy departments of PUC-Rio. On a more specific note I wish to thank Marcelo Gantus Jasmin for letting me sit in his mandatory unit for the history master's programme at PUC. It introduced me to the thinking of Tocqueville, which helped me in the conclusion of this work. I thank the Philosophy department for the unit I took there with Katia Muricy as an enrolled student and which counted credits towards the completion of the master's programme. I should also thank Karl Erik Schollhammer, who was my PIBIC advisor, and Paulo Henriques Britto, who was my professor during my years as an undergraduate student at PUC. Since I am speaking of UERJ and PUC I will close my institutional thanks with a very special mention to Luiz Costa Lima, who actually recommended George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* to me and whose great classes dispense with any extra praise of their excellence.

I would like to thank my mother, Silvana Miceli de Araujo, for her enthusiastic support during the couple of years I was involved with the master's programme. I owe a great deal of thanks to my father, Ricardo Benzaquen de Araujo, who carefully and patiently read the many versions of this work and suggested a great deal of sophisticated bibliography that introduced to me an enormous variety of very interesting issues and matters. Some of these

issues found their way into the dissertation and helped me shape its questions. Also, our many discussions about Daniel and Gwendolen and the questions this very unusual ‘couple’ raised showed his delicate but always attentive way of dealing with intellectual questions, which was inspiring for seeing this work through.

Since this work gradually turned to look at the development of a friendship, I must thank my close friends twice. I would have thanked them anyway but since I ended up discussing a conception of friendship, I thank Maíra Ferreira de Noronha, Maria Viveiros Peixoto, Luiza Larangeira da Silva Mello, Felipe Ellena Ferreira, Gabriel Mesquita Madalena, Cecília Brazil, Glenn Street and my sister Alice Miceli de Araujo not only for their continuous friendly support but also for their presences in my life, which made the subject of friendship so interesting to me.

My sister Lili read the different versions of the work and discussed its questions with me in a way that called my attention to unusual but very interesting points I would not have noticed otherwise. My passionate conversations with Felipe were a great motivation and helped me formulate some questions presented in the work. Last but not least, I owe great and very special thanks to Luiza, who read and discussed over and over with me each and every question presented in this work. Our conversations over endless coffees, drinks at Seu Martin, or late at night at Baixo Leblon were truly vital for the directions I chose to take in the work.

## RESUMO

ARAUJO, Carolina Miceli de. *Sentimental education: a study of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda*. 2006. 94 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2006.

A dissertação analisa Daniel Deronda, de George Eliot, identificando o conceito de maleabilidade como idéia chave para o entendimento dos ideais morais do romance. Discussão do papel desempenhado pelo conceito de maleabilidade no processo de transição da infância para a idade adulta e na apreensão específica da amizade apresentados no romance.

Palavras-chave: Maleabilidade. Crescimento. Inglaterra.



## **ABSTRACT**

A study of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* identifying the concept of malleability as the key idea for understanding the moral ideals in the novel. Discussion of the role malleability plays in the process of transition from childhood to adulthood and in the specific view of friendship presented in the novel.

Keywords: Malleability. Growing. England.

## SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION

I read George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* about a year before applying for the master's programme at UERJ. I had to prepare a mini project to get in but I had just a vague idea of what I wanted to study. I knew I was interested in an interdisciplinary approach joining literature and history of ideas but no specific authors came to mind. I discussed it with my friends and family over and over and then one night I was talking to my father about it again and he asked me to tell him what had been the last book I had read and truly loved. *Daniel Deronda* came to my mind instantly.

All I needed to do then, he said, was stop and consider why I had liked it so much, what had actually caught my attention in it, since, in the intellectual world of humanities in general and of literature studies in particular "*we must get beyond the unexamined pleasure with which we read in childhood and be prepared to say why and how it is that pleasure comes to us from stories*"<sup>1</sup> to quote Lionel Trilling in his considerations about the intense popularity gained by a course he taught on Jane Austen's work.

What grasped my attention to Eliot's novel in the first place was something that I found peculiar in it in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century English fiction. The novel's epicentre is a relationship between a woman, Gwendolen Harleth and a man, Daniel Deronda, which is not of a standard romantic nature. They get romantically and officially involved with other characters through the course of the plot; they do not see much of each other either, they

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<sup>1</sup> TRILLING, Lionel, "Why we read Jane Austen", In *The Last Decade*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983, p.208.

meet sporadically at dinner parties, at a new years' ball, at hunting days, but the bond they develop is, nonetheless, at the centre of the novel. The choices Eliot made in presenting how this particular relationship is developed and the impact and presence it has on Gwendolen's and Daniel's lives produced an interesting, unusual result.

I eventually considered it as an interesting work to study since there were many questions that could be raised in connection with the peculiarities that had arrested my attention at first. The nature of the relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen and the time in their lives when it develops were questions that I could explore in an intellectual sense and hopefully provide a reading of the novel that dealt with them.

Daniel and Gwendolen's friendship is at the centre of the novel, as I have just said, but it takes place at a specific time in their lives. *Daniel Deronda* is also a novel about coming of age; Daniel and Gwendolen's friendship develops in a time of transition from childhood to adulthood, but not the physical change; they are already, at the beginning of the novel, young adults. They go through an inner qualitative change, shaped not exclusively but to a large extent, in their relationship, which brings them into adulthood.

Daniel and Gwendolen's bond has no definite form, it has a plastic quality that allows it to grow and change through their intermittent encounters. The plasticity that seemed to express itself so strongly in the development of their relationship suggested an idea that came to be the central working concept of my dissertation, which is the idea of malleability. The malleability expressed in Daniel and Gwendolen's bond, I later came to realize, was neither exclusive of it nor an isolated feature in the novel. Actually, it permeates many

aspects of *Daniel Deronda* such as its plot, theme, character design and even its ideology. As a result, malleability became, through the course of my work, a key concept for analysing the novel.

As a matter of fact, malleability, as will be discussed in the dissertation, is a typical characteristic of *Daniel Deronda* among Eliot's novels. It expresses itself even in the larger picture of the English society of the time that is presented in the novel. The English society Eliot depicts in it, unlike what happens in many of her previous works, is a "moving" society in a larger world in which things change at a faster speed and people come and go more easily. I would like to ask here, solely as a suggestion, if the malleable picture of the English society presented in the novel would, to some extent, still provide a possible key in which to interpret England nowadays. It seems to me that the picture of a certain type of subjectivity that will emerge from the interpretation of the novel through the idea of malleability could still play an important role, if one keeps in mind the distance in time and space, in a contemporary notion of Englishness.

In the majority of her novels, Eliot is concerned with producing a picture of English provincial society. In her previous works there is an attempt at producing a static picture of English provincial life, and there can be a static picture because the society she is interested in depicting is relatively stable, and set in an anterior time to her own. This is the case of both *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*, which are set around thirty years before Eliot wrote them. *Middlemarch* is considered to be her greatest achievement in the portrayal of English country living of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Middlemarch* is a made-up provincial town, representing all the affairs and questions of a provincial town in England.

In *Daniel Deronda*, which is Eliot's last novel, there is a change of subject if one takes into consideration her earlier works. She was not so thoroughly concerned with displaying an immobile picture of English country life but with writing a cosmopolitan, urban novel, dealing with a great variety of characters from different backgrounds and cultures, as Gordon S. Haight noticed in his biography of Eliot<sup>2</sup>. In order to grasp the vital role of the malleability expressed both in form and content in *Daniel Deronda*, it is important to remember that this is Eliot's only novel of contemporary life. In it Eliot is not glancing at, nor revisiting the past and making an overall comment about what has already happened. She is writing about the present, about what is going on around her. It will, consequently, contain a much more flexible picture of English society, more plastic, fluid; its characters are not so restrained by a narrow scope of action, they are not "finished".

Her previous works retell and reinterpret a variety of situations that bear a degree of resemblance with actual historical situations. In them, thorough and detailed pictures of societies of the past emerge but these are static pictures. In *Daniel Deronda*, the characters are dealing with a variety of changes happening at a much faster speed. What is presented is not an immobile picture but a moving scene; it is never an *a posteriori* examination of something already done. On the other hand, it is a highly moral novel, inasmuch as it is concerned with the shaping of a specific type of individuality in which the fashioning of skills of adaptation and malleability play a key role, as will be explored.

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<sup>2</sup> HAIGHT, Gordon S. *George Eliot – A Biography*: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968

How could malleability in *Daniel Deronda*, in the sense that is being presented here, be accounted for then? As I have said before, this is the central question I will explore in the course of this work. What I will identify as a malleable quality will permeate the two following chapters and the discussion in the conclusion of the dissertation, exploring different aspects and applications of the concept in each of them.

The first chapter opens with a presentation of the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary scene where Eliot belonged followed by a close reading of the novel. The presentation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century scene for female writers will link Eliot to Jane Austen, which will set Austen's novel of manners as a predecessor to Eliot's novels. The introductory discussion of malleability in *Daniel Deronda* will spring from the initial comparison between the two novelists and will pervade the close reading of the novel in the second half of the chapter with its discussion of Gwendolen's process of growth.

Malleability will also play a key role in the expansion of the questions raised in the previous close reading of the novel on a more theoretical level in the second chapter. In the first part of the chapter the malleability I will have identified in the novel, which will have emerged in the close reading of the first chapter, will be interpreted and broadened in the light of Greenblatt's concept of improvisation<sup>3</sup>. In the second half of the chapter I will look at the role malleability plays in a discussion of the view of friendship presented in the novel.

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<sup>3</sup>GREENBLATT, Stephen. "The Improvisation of Power", In *Renaissance self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*: Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

The concept of malleability, as it will have been presented and discussed throughout the dissertation, cannot be taken as an eccentric characteristic of Eliot in her last novel and can be related to a larger picture of 19<sup>th</sup> century England. The conclusion will deal with malleability characterized as an essential English trait in an effort to link the novel to the broader questions and values of a specific image of England at that time.



## Chapter 1

### What Gwendolen Learns

In this chapter I will present a thorough analysis of *Daniel Deronda* from which should emerge the main questions I will be discussing in a more conceptual light in the following chapter. At this instance my main concern is to produce a reading of the novel from which these questions will come into view organically and culminate in the presentation of the notion of malleability. In *Daniel Deronda*, malleability is an idea, which manifests itself on a formal level as well as in its theme and moral concerns.

In order to discuss the strong presence of the idea of malleability in the novel it will be important to set a general picture of the scene of 19<sup>th</sup> century female writers in England and of Eliot's place in it. After looking at Eliot within the context of her time I will briefly summarize the plot's main lines before moving on to the actual discussion since there will be mention of specific situations in the plot throughout the chapter which will be of vital importance for the elucidation of the issues and questions I will be raising and presenting. Throughout the analysis, where further elucidation regarding the plot beyond what was briefly described in the summary is needed, I will retell some more of the story.

The connection between Austen and Eliot, which will have appeared in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary scene, will resurface in and open the actual analysis. The comparison

between the two novelists will be important for shaping an understanding of the type of novel Eliot wrote. I will look at the works of critics such as Lionel Trilling<sup>4</sup> and Ian Watt<sup>5</sup> that address the central questions of style and characterization of the novel of manners, which Watt defines as a genre starting with Austen. Looking at the comparison between Austen and Eliot I will suggest that although Eliot did not write novels of manners she can indeed be understood as a successor of Austen especially in the means she employs for characterization and narration.

The comparison between the two novelists will lead the way to an opening discussion of the role played by the concept of malleability, which will have been defined as a specificity of *Daniel Deronda*, in the moral questions raised by the novel. I do not mean to suggest that Austen was Eliot's sole predecessor. Eliot's other intellectual and literary sources and origins will not be debated here. For the present analysis her connection with Austen is what will interest us, since it will be vital for discussing the idea of malleability and its implications in the novel.

In the second part of the chapter, in order to deal more closely with the questions raised by the concept of malleability I will look at Gwendolen's coming-of-age process and what she actually learns through it. Something that helped me understand how malleability acquires a moral dimension in *Daniel Deronda* was Martha Nussbaum's thinking on Henry James' *The Golden Bowl*<sup>6</sup>. The way in which Nussbaum analyses James' protagonist Maggie

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<sup>4</sup> TRILLING, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*: Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> WATT, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel – Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*: London: Penguin Books, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> NUSSBAUM, Martha C. "Flawed Crystals" and "Finely Aware and Richly Responsible". In *Love's Knowledge – Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Verver provided me with important tools for observing Gwendolen. Consequently, the second half of the chapter will present, to some extent, an analysis of Gwendolen's process of growth in a comparative perspective to my reading of Nussbaum's interpretation of Maggie's coming-of-age process. The comparison will play an instrumental role in the analysis, and thus I will return to Gwendolen's process of growth in the light of my appropriation of some of Nussbaum's ideas.

When I come back to Gwendolen I will discuss more closely her qualitative process of growth into adulthood and the role played by the concept of malleability in it. My main interest in this part of the chapter is to look at how the transition from childhood to adulthood is dealt with in the novel by following Gwendolen's coming-of-age process. She goes through a largely qualitative, inner change that tells us she has become an adult. I will investigate the concepts and morals involved in her growing up process, which are, to a large extent, coined and developed through the bond she establishes with Daniel. I will present the way in which this coming of age is portrayed in the novel, the values that are at stake in this process and the moral questions that arise from it.

The action in *Daniel Deronda* takes around two years from beginning to end. Daniel and Gwendolen meet a dozen times during this period. Through these meetings they develop a bond that shapes their adult understanding of the world. In the next chapter I will discuss at more depth the quality of their bond understanding it as a friendship that stands on some specific concepts. Gwendolen's process of becoming an adult is intertwined with the relationship she coins with Daniel since it will have a coming-of-age impact on both of them.

1.

Elaine Showalter<sup>7</sup>, while presenting a picture of the English literary scene for women in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, suggests a valuable identification on a social but also literary level between George Eliot's character and work and Jane Austen's. This suggestion, despite springing from a feminist examination of the period, which is not the viewpoint I am dealing with, is important for setting the grounds on which the following analysis will be developed.

According to Showalter, female writers in 19<sup>th</sup> century England were in need of female role models, both real and fictional. A proper heroine, for women writers and readers, should be able to combine strength and intelligence with feminine qualities such as modesty, a sense of duty and beauty. Female writers and the fictional heroines they had created became so important for other female writers and readers because they acted a link among these women, there was a possibility of actual exchange between them through reading and writing since there was no public space for women in mid 19th century. Unlike men, women did not go to university; there were not many public spaces in which they could meet.

Women were meant to lead private lives, which made it difficult for the emerging number of women writers and readers to socialize. As a result, "*most women of this generation depended upon literature and the circulating library to provide the sense of connectedness – fictional heroines had to take the places of sisters and friends*"<sup>8</sup>. Through the course of

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<sup>7</sup> SHOWALTER, Elaine. "Feminine Heroines". In: *A Literature of Their Own – British Women novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. London: Virago, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> SHOWALTER, Elaine. op. cit., p. 101.

the century an increasing number of women were writing and women constituted an expanding portion of the reading market. These women consequently looked for role models through literature not only in other women writers and their characters but also in their predecessors.

Jane Austen and George Sand represented the two opposite lines that female writers of the time could follow. Many, such as the Brontë sisters, saw Jane Austen as the embodiment of female literary constraint, whereas Sand stood for the female rebels, for womanhood freed from restraint. Austen stood for an intellectual, cultivated, witty and above all restrained style. In Victorian times, says Showalter, it was very difficult to conceive that one woman writer could embody the qualities of the two opposite lines and female writers were thus classified into one or the other category.

The Sand line, which the Brontë sisters followed, was the line of romantic heroines, of a sisterhood of female suffering, of heroines who struggled and sobbed, who allowed for sexual or supernatural forces in their lives, who were driven mad by the intensity of their desires or instincts. It was an intense style in writing. The Austen line, which would soon incorporate Eliot as the Sand line incorporated the Brontës, characterized a much more detached, ironic, carefully designed and highly cultivated style. Not only was Eliot herself highly cultivated, but she was also regarded as being very well read, an intelligent woman. Eliot's biographer quotes many letters of friends who were astonished at her knowledge of philosophy, of different languages, of the ancient tradition and texts.

George Eliot and the Brontë sisters were officially incorporated into the two lines that soon became the Sand-Brontë line in opposition to the Austen-Eliot line. Eliot, however, did not take upon herself the task of standing as a role model for younger writers. Eliot isolated herself from her peers, setting herself apart from what Showalter named as the sisterhood of female writers, younger writers who looked at either Charlotte Brontë or George Eliot as role models. Other younger writers resented Eliot for not openly supporting them and for being reserved. According to Showalter it was not until later on, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with Virginia Woolf, who redefined the role of the female writer and reconciled the two opposite ends of the Sand-Brontë style, with the Austen-Eliot style, that George Eliot came to be regarded in more positive light by other female writers.

The restraint that the younger writers following the Sand-Brontë line attributed to the Austen-Eliot line is not a feature standing on its own but rather a sign of a specific type of literature concerned with the discussion of certain moral questions, which are complex. The freer style of the Brontë sisters and their followers, with its strong fantastical and sexual connotations was not concerned with a similar set of questions, nor intended to have a similar pedagogical moral purpose.

What was characterized as restraint by the followers of the Sand-Brontë line in the Austen-Eliot line was an expressive concern with the matter of how people should act and interact with one another. The latter was not concerned with freewheeling of emotions like the former was, but with questions of how to relate to others in society, with the social and moral resonance of one's actions. The genre of the novel of manners, which is ultimately

defined by Austen's novels, springs from this line of writing concerned with moral questions.

2.

Bearing this picture in mind for the upcoming analysis, I will summarize the events of *Daniel Deronda's* plot that will be relevant for the discussion being presented in this chapter. I will stick to the order in which they appear in the novel but will only describe in more detail those events and scenes that will be crucial for the analysis that will follow. Consequently, since the analysis will look at Gwendolen's steps in the novel, so will the summary. I believe that a summary will help the reader re-build the plot line that will lead to the raising of the questions and issues I will be dealing with.

Along the two years that cover the plot of *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen becomes an adult. The novel opens when Daniel and Gwendolen see each other for the first time at a roulette table in a casino in France, and ends when they must part with each other. Gwendolen, in the beginning, is a spoiled selfish girl. Her first encounter with some limitation to the boundless world of her wishes is an intervention of Daniel in her life. They are travelling abroad and have only seen each other once at the casino and have not been introduced. Without knowing much about her yet, he buys back a necklace she has pawned and sends it back to her telling her not to behave so inappropriately in the future. This event will set the tone for the relationship they will develop throughout the novel.

Gwendolen had pawned her necklace to raise money to go back home because her family had suddenly lost their money. She entertains the idea of becoming a professional singer but

Herr Klesmer, a German music teacher, talks her out of it saying that she lacks training and skills to make a living out of singing. She ends up marrying a wealthy gentleman, Grandcourt, in order to escape the fate of becoming a governess. She had previously discarded the idea of marrying this man because she had promised to his former mistress, Mrs. Glasher, that she would not interfere with her interests since Mrs. Glasher had children with Grandcourt.

Finding out that Grandcourt has unlawful children, losing the family fortune, having her pawned necklace returned by Daniel, hearing from Herr Klesmer that she could not be a professional singer, entreating a future as a governess and then accepting Grandcourt's proposal of marriage, all these shocks clashing with her self-indulgent wishes make Gwendolen feel very ignorant of life and incapable of coping with it. On top of that, in her married life, she feels coerced and imprisoned by her husband and gradually starts to hold Daniel as an entity of moral goodness that will guide her through her new reality. In the course of their sparse meetings she wants him to tell her literally how to be better.

After less than a year of marriage, Grandcourt drowns when he and Gwendolen are yachting on the coast of Genoa. Gwendolen blames herself for not being able to save her husband and for secretly wishing that he would die. Daniel is at Genoa at the time for meeting his unknown mother, who he finds out is a former great singer who turned her back on her Orthodox Jewish family. She had sent Daniel away to England to be raised by friends in order to keep him away from Judaism and give him an English gentlemanly education. Daniel arranges things for Gwendolen, who is in shock. Daniel and Gwendolen will meet again in England a couple of times. Daniel consciously sees that Gwendolen



relies on him and that he is the only person in whom she has confided. Gwendolen has neither clear consciousness of her attachment to Deronda, nor any idea about his life apart from his role in her life.

Daniel is glad to find out about his Jewish origins. He had saved a poor Jewish girl from plunging in despair, Mirah Lapidoth. He trusts her to friends and helps her in her search for her family. She had had professional training in singing and acting and Daniel helps her to make a living out of it. They find her brother, Mordecai, who is a Jewish scholar, and Daniel progressively gets more involved with him and Mirah. He feels that these events have prepared him for finding out about his origins and finally asks Mirah to marry him. Daniel has a final meeting with Gwendolen to tell her that he is going to get married and go away to Palestine. Gwendolen finally understands that Daniel has a whole life apart from her own. Daniel and Mirah get married and Gwendolen sends a letter to Daniel on his wedding day thanking him for helping her through an intense period of her life.

3.

These constitute the main facts in the novel, which will be relevant for the upcoming analysis. Let us now turn to the Austen-Eliot identification mentioned above, to start looking at *Daniel Deronda* through the expansion Eliot operated on the genre of the novel of manners. Austen was indeed a predecessor to Eliot as Showalter pointed out. Eliot, following the footsteps of Austen, presented a detached, often ironic point of view in her novels. Also, there are similarities on a thematic level between the two writers since Eliot's literature is concerned with the propriety of behaviour. However, the world of Austen's novels is considerably smaller than that of Eliot's, especially in *Daniel Deronda*.

In *Daniel Deronda*'s world social and public events have a resonance in its characters' lives. Their individual and social actions are displayed in relation to their larger social, even political implications. For instance, Gwendolen gets married and the calls and responsibilities of being a wife in the terms she chose to take that commitment upon herself are an important question in the development of the novel; Daniel's marriage to Mirah at the end of the novel also has clear social and political implications; in taking her as a wife and ultimately moving to Palestine he is officially and socially becoming a Jew.

The larger social implications of relationships play no role in Austen's novels. In the novel of manners, which is a genre that started with Austen, its characters are presented as social beings, in their relationships with each other. The social characterization of Austen's characters is based on a concern with the moral question of how one should act in society. This is a central question in Eliot's novels too, although the consequences of social characterization will have larger and more significant social and political implications in it. In short, Eliot owes a lot to the novel of manners but she considerably expanded the genre in writing a novel such as *Daniel Deronda*, in which the changing social and political background of the time played a decisive role in the development of the plot.

I will now take a closer look at what I am calling social characterization in Austen and in Eliot. In Austen's world there is no exhaustive brooding over a character's individual strengths or weaknesses, as Lionel Trilling pointed out in *Sincerity and Authenticity*. The characters' consciousnesses are examined over and over again but always in their relationship to others. They change on a gradual basis, and constantly reassess their

previous judgments of others' actions and manners. In the novel of manners, virtues and vices are not as fixed as in the ancient tradition; they are developed through a course of time, which allows for its characters gradual processes of change and growth. In this genre characters have a history. Their historicity accounts for who they are and, since they go on living through the course of the plot, who they are is a process of continual transformation.

This type of characterization results in characters that are much more pliable, round. They are, each one of them, stories being told in a course of time and these stories interact and mingle with each other. There is plenty of room for change and transformation; there is a variableness that would have been unconceivable in the ancient tradition as Trilling pointed out. For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen has the character of Elizabeth Bennett state the idea of people's qualities being shaped through progressive states of mind in the course of time. In a conversation, at the beginning of the novel, Darcy has just said that there is no variety of people to be examined in the country and Elizabeth answers that quantity should not be a problem because "*people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them for ever.*"<sup>9</sup>

Characters' historicity is a decisive factor for the variableness expressed in Elizabeth Bennett's words. It is ultimately what allows them the possibility of growth through time. Historicity will also play a structural role in the building of Eliot's characters. Daniel and Gwendolen are characters with historicity. They can alter; they are constantly changing in their interaction with the world around them. In this interaction their lives, through the

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<sup>9</sup> AUSTEN, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. p.43.

course of time defined by the period that the novel covers, constitute stories. Daniel and Gwendolen are conceived as stories. What the readers know of Gwendolen and Daniel is their stories stretching for the period of roughly two years.

Gwendolen's and Daniel's moral struggles and questions relate to the shaping of an ability to deal with their stories in their interaction with others. As a result, historicity plays a vital role in the unravelling of the plot, since it follows the way Daniel and Gwendolen change through time. The novel covers the history of their relationship, meaning the period of time in which their stories mingle with each other, in which they change together. Their changeability, however, is not only an effect of their being conceived as stories. There is an intentional pedagogical purpose in Eliot as well as in Austen in building characters that can change, for if they are allowed the mobility to change, they can also learn. They learn with their trajectories, with their stories that come together and then grow apart as will be discussed later on.

Characters conceived as stories interact with each other; their stories cross each other at many instances. It is important to stress here the link between what I am calling historicity and temporality. The many junctions, comings together and growings apart, the events taking place in parallel time to each other, are only possible because these stories are being told in a course of time. For instance, in *Daniel Deronda*, not only Daniel and Gwendolen's stories mingle, but also there are the many comings and goings of the other characters around them. Their relationships to the other characters affect the development of their relationship.

Gwendolen and Daniel are at an intersection of many stories, stories that belong to other characters. Consequently they can only meet intermittently through the plot since they have roles to play in the other stories around them. For instance, after Grandcourt and Gwendolen are married, he makes it progressively more difficult for her to meet Daniel. Daniel's help to Mirah calls him away from the world where he has grown up, which is Gwendolen's world. His later involvement with Mirah's brother calls him even further away from Gwendolen's world and into the world of Judaism.

The following quotation is a good example of how Daniel and Gwendolen, at the point when they meet, are already stories going on in different directions, which involve each of them with other characters and other calls. In the quote below, Sir Hugo Mallinger, who is Daniel's foster father, is talking to him about Gwendolen and her expected engagement to Grandcourt. Father and son do not know much yet about Gwendolen. The affair of Daniel's returning the pawned necklace has already taken place but he has not officially met her yet:

'You won't run after the pretty gambler, then?' Said Sir Hugo, putting down his glasses.

'Decidedly not'

This answer was perfectly truthful; nevertheless it had passed through Deronda's mind that under other circumstances he should have given way to the interest this girl had raised in him, and try to know more of her. But his history had given him a strong bias in another direction. He felt himself in no sense free.<sup>10</sup>

In this passage Sir Hugo is joking about the possibility of Daniel and Gwendolen getting romantically involved but Daniel had already rescued Mirah before meeting Gwendolen, and Grandcourt was already courting Gwendolen when Daniel and Gwendolen see each other for the first time at the roulette table. This is not a possibility for Daniel and

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<sup>10</sup> ELIOT, George. *Daniel Deronda*: New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. p.138.

Gwendolen since they live parallel existences, they are both publicly and socially, before they meet, engaged with other people, other stories, in other places at the same time. This is what the narrator observes towards the end of the quotation with the comment that Daniel did not feel free to pursue his interest in Gwendolen.

Eliot's presentation of these stories in their connections with each other is coordinated by means of a specific use of narration that is also an expansion of the narrative devices of the novel of manners. The staging of these stories through Eliot's specific narrative devices is a combination that will allow room for the malleability I announced as *Daniel Deronda's* specificity. According to Ian Watt in *The Rise of the novel*, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century writers were confronted with a new question: how to conciliate the two divergent needs of the novel. The two needs could be defined as the internal and the external approaches to characterization. The former could be described as the development of the characters' inner self and the latter as the development of characters in their social connections, in social interaction.

The duality between inner and outer world had already become a central question for Austen's predecessors, such as Sterne and Defoe. According to Watt, novelists of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards addressed this duality in many different ways. Jane Austen reconciled the apparently divergent ends of this duality through the use of a commenting narrator. The commenting narrator not only narrates the events of the plot, but also evaluates what is being presented. As a result, the commenting narrator is freer to adopt either a more detached attitude from the plot or to get closer to it:

It is here that Jane Austen's technical genius manifests itself. She dispensed with the participating narrator, whether as the author of a memoir, as in Defoe, or as a letter writer as in Richardson, probably because both of these roles make freedom to comment and evaluate more difficult to arrange; instead she told her stories after Fielding's manner, as a confessed author. Jane Austen variant of the commenting narrator, however, was so much more discreet, that it did not substantially affect the authenticity of her narrative. Her analysis of her characters and their states of mind, and her ironical juxtapositions of motive and situation, are as pointed as anything in Fielding, but they do not seem to come from an intrusive author but rather from some august and impersonal spirit of social and psychological understanding.<sup>11</sup>

Eliot's narrator in *Daniel Deronda* also acts as 'some august and impersonal spirit of social and psychological understanding'. Eliot's use of the device adds a great degree of malleability to the structure of the plot of the novel. The commenting narrator moves more fluidly between its characters' consciousnesses and events. For instance, in the following quotation although the narrator closely follows Gwendolen's consciousness it analyses it from an ironic, detached point of view. The use of irony emphasizes the narrow scope of Gwendolen's ideas. The narrator presents a naïve and mistakenly self-confident Gwendolen:

But now – did she know exactly what was the state of the case with regard to Mrs. Glasher and her children? She had given a sort of promise, 'I will not interfere with your wishes.' But would another woman, who married Grandcourt be in fact the decisive obstacle to her wishes, or be doing her and her boys any real injury? Might it not be just as well, nay better, that Grandcourt should marry? For what could not a woman do, when she was married, if she knew how to assert herself? Here all was constructive imagination. Gwendolen had about as accurate a conception of marriage – that is to say, of the mutual influences, demands, duties of man and woman in a state of matrimony – as she had of magnetic currents and the law of storms.<sup>12</sup>

Through the unfolding of the plot, irony is often a tool used by the narrator in describing Gwendolen's dispositions, in order to stress how ill-equipped to judge the world around her she is. The stress emphasizes that she is detached from those around her. Later in the novel,

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<sup>11</sup> Watt, op.cit., p.337-8.

<sup>12</sup> Eliot, op.cit., p. 252.

with Gwendolen gradually growing more aware of her situation, as I will later analyse in this chapter, the narrator will cease to treat her through an ironic light. The narrating voice slowly follows Gwendolen's dramatic and deep grasping of consciousness. When Gwendolen ultimately gains depth of perception into what is going on around her, when she is no longer detached, the narrating voice follows her consciousness without ironic remarks. There is no further need for the narrator to place itself far and above her newly enlarged consciousness.

The use of a commenting narrator allows for this type of formal flexibility in the actual arranging of the storytelling as it can detach itself from the characters or closely follow their consciousnesses according to the development of the plot. It orchestrates in a flexible way a great number of characters that are, in their turn, fashioning an ability to be flexible. The combination of character's historicity with a commenting narrator constitutes the formal mechanism that generates characters' malleability.

But Eliot's commenting narrator moves in a much larger world than that of Austen's. The world of the novel of manners, unlike the greater world of *Daniel Deronda*, is a microcosm. In Austen's novels, the incidents in a closed world and the characters' reaction to them gain clear exemplary value. The picture of life presented in the novel of manners is generalized to suit a moral and pedagogical purpose. The picture of life presented in *Daniel Deronda* also bears a pedagogical purpose but it is a purpose concerned with a much a larger world. The fashioning of an ability to see and live in a wider world will actually constitute the moral core of *Daniel Deronda*.



Gwendolen and Daniel live already in a cosmopolitan world and through the development of the plot they gradually learn how to come and go about in it. They must learn how to be malleable, how to adapt in a world that is in motion, constantly shifting. Malleability is, in a way, a requirement for living in the wide world the novel presents. For this end it is significant that *Daniel Deronda* is the only of Eliot's novels that is set in a contemporary time to its author. It is, in many ways, an examination of her time, of its new speed and fluidity. The cosmopolitanism of the novel presents the readers with a picture of England that is mobile, flexible in its connections with the rest of the world, allowing room for the transformations and intensification of industrial progress:

The English society depicted in her earlier novels was relatively stable; change in class or in rank is rare. In the forty years since the reform bill life had changed radically. The railway had penetrated to the remotest regions; the telegraph provided them instant communication; the Suez canal had shrunken the globe. Men moved around it at speed undreamt of, amassing riches at home and abroad. The Lehmans and Benzons in the steel industry were examples within George Eliot's view. *Daniel Deronda*, her only novel of contemporary life, reflects these changes. As Henry James said, it 'is full of the world'. It shows not only the stately halls of Brackenshaw castle and Topping Abbey, the drawing rooms in Park Lane and Grovesnor square, but touches the international scene as well – Frankfurt, Hamburg, Mainz, Vienna, Prague, Genoa, Trieste, St. Petersburg, Beirut, Palestine, even New York, where Mirah lived for a time. Its social rank is equally wide. Aristocrats mingle with parvenus; adventurers make vast fortunes and lose them.<sup>13</sup>

As Haight points out the world Eliot lived in and chose to depict in *Daniel Deronda* is drastically different from the England of a couple of decades earlier. The speed of industrial transformation and progress put everything in motion, including people. The world in which people could come and go grew a thousand miles in a blink, with the telegraph, the Suez Canal and other transformations as the quote reads. As James put it, *Daniel Deronda* is indeed full of the world. The far-reaching transformations of

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<sup>13</sup> Haight, op. cit., p. 458.

industrialism enlarged the scope in which people could move and act. *Daniel Deronda* is precisely, on a formal but thematic level as well a novel presenting a pedagogical concern with the learning of how to live in such a world.

Daniel and Gwendolen are in motion in a world that is constantly shifting. Gwendolen, unlike other female protagonists of Eliot's, is given an open ending; she is left with the ability she has fashioned through her historicity. Daniel and Gwendolen's interviews throughout the novel are concerned with the question of propriety, and of how Gwendolen feels she has lacked it in past situations and how she should act from that point on. But the concern with morality results by no means in an unchanging picture of that society; actually, since it is a fluid picture that is presented, its characters' behaviours are open to discussion, there are moral choices arising. Gwendolen's and Daniel's identities are consequently not closed; they develop into their adult selves through their relationship with each other, which is in its turn, as I will discuss at more depth in the following chapter, a malleable bond in itself.

Gwendolen, who gradually develops from a spoiled child into a responsible adult, and Daniel, who gradually embraces his Jewish heritage, fashion for themselves flexible subjectivities. As in the case of Jane Austen's literature, here, vices and virtues are not fixed qualities either but also developed through a period of time. Gwendolen's moral and emotional growth has something to do with the fashioning of an ability to be flexible. As a result, the achievement of adulthood is related to learning how to manage this ability, which will ultimately define who Daniel and Gwendolen come to be and how they relate to people and situations around them.

In short, *Daniel Deronda*'s characters exist in a world that presents them to numerous challenges and situations that will require adaptation. The novel's specificity is that the question of malleability affects not only the way its characters are conceived; it is not purely a stylistic device of Eliot to produce round characters. It actually constitutes its central moral question: the fashioning of an ability to adapt. In the world where these characters live the learning of how to be flexible is of extreme moral significance. In *Daniel Deronda*, malleability overflows the formal boundaries of characterization on to a thematic level; the fashioning of an ability to change becomes a value in itself.

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I will now look more closely at Gwendolen's process of growth taking into account that malleability is turned into a moral value in *Daniel Deronda* and that Gwendolen's coming of age is defined by the fashioning of an ability to be flexible in a world that is presented, in its turn, as moving at an extraordinary speed. But what is actually, for Gwendolen the fashioning of the ability to be flexible? I will in the course of the analysis deal specifically with this question.

I will deal with this question by resorting to concepts arising from Nussbaum's reading of the character of Maggie in Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* which corresponds to the idea of trajectory from innocence to knowledge and to the notion that one's coming-of-age process is connected with an ability to improvise. This discussion will lead the way to producing a reading of Gwendolen's process of growth in which the concept of malleability has a tangible place.

According to Nussbaum, Maggie, at the beginning of *The Golden Bowl*, lives a rather sheltered existence. The road that will lead her towards adulthood is that of a trajectory from innocence to knowledge. The artificially maintained flawlessness of her world cracks when she is confronted by a specific fact. She learns something that is profoundly disturbing to her about those immediately around her, namely, that her husband, the Prince Amerigo, who is an Italian aristocrat, is having an affair with her father's wife, Charlotte, who happens to be a friend of hers. Her gradual learning to deal with the facts she is confronted with through the course of the plot will take her from childhood to adulthood. *The Golden Bowl* will interest us at this instance as a tale of Maggie's development of a moral, adult life that will require the ability to improvise.

At the beginning of the novel, Maggie's most striking traits of personality are her aspiration to perfection, to living a perfect, flawless life, and her intense love for her father. These two features are intimately linked and deeply rooted in Maggie's character for they have allowed her to preserve her childlike innocence. Until she is confronted with her husband's infidelity, she had always chosen to be safe, not to risk or sacrifice anything or anyone. This is what it means to be innocent for Maggie. She wants to be perfect in a world that she sees as perfect, with no cracks.

Maggie, in her innocence, is blind to all around her but her father; she fails to see her husband and his affair with Charlotte altogether. Maggie's artificial paradise is actually quite frail and it falls eventually, at one point in the plot, she cannot deny anymore her husband's infidelity with her father's wife. This fall and Maggie's introduction to living in

a flawed world is what marks the beginning of the second half of her trajectory, in which she struggles in order to preserve her purity in a world that she can no longer see as perfect. Her awareness of the affair at a first moment does not produce a “*way of living with imperfection but a new way of getting to perfection*”<sup>14</sup>.

Maggie still wants a perfect life, even if it has to be lived in an imperfect world. However, keeping her innocence in such a world will also prove to be a failed project. The new flawed world she now sees brings with it the necessity to choose between trying to save her marriage on one hand, and sparing her father the pain of finding out about the affair, on the other hand. She must take a stand, which makes it impossible for her to remain innocent. Maggie had never had to commit herself in this sense before.

Maggie, until the very ending of the novel, is still practising this new fashion she has coined for herself of remaining pure and innocent. In the final scene she realizes that this ideal is also failing, that all bowls will always be cracked. She understands that she cannot keep it all. She finally sees that accepting and choosing new commitments does indeed mean breaking old ones. Choosing and sacrificing mean that she will have to be aware of what her choices entail. Namely, she slowly realizes that to keep her husband she will hurt her father’s wife, who is her friend.

Maggie finally chooses her husband and her marriage. Adulthood, in this novel, is identified with the ability to make choices of this type. Choosing well is as important as

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<sup>14</sup> NUSSBAUM, Martha C. *Love’s Knowledge – Essays on Philosophy and Literature*: New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. p. 134.

recognizing moments of choice such as the one that presents itself to Maggie at the end of the novel, in a way that she can no longer avoid it. But what is actually needed for recognizing such moments? Growing up is connected with the notion of improvisation. Recognizing moments of choice is directly linked to living in the world and to the ability to improvise, to respond to situations as they arise, as Nussbaum suggests in the following quotation:

Well, how do we know? When are we to pursue this ideal and when to let it go? How much is a deep love worth, and under what circumstances is it worth a blinding? What boundaries are we to draw? What priorities can we fix? That I take it, are the little girl's questions, resurfacing now, again, at yet another level – as they will resurface so long as the nature of little girls is still the same. She wants to be told ahead of time exactly what's right and when. She wants to know exactly how much she loves this person, and exactly what choices it entails. To counter her insistent demand, James repeatedly, in the second half of the novel, holds up to us a different picture: that of an actress who finds, suddenly, that her script is not written in advance and that she must 'quite heroically' improvise her role. 'Preparation and practice had come but a short way; her part opened out, and she invented from moment to moment what to say and to do'. The final understanding to which his criticism of little girls transports us is that this is what adult deliberation is and should be. And there's no safety in that, no safety at all.<sup>15</sup>

The fashioning of an ability to judge from moment to moment in the sense described by Nussbaum is deeply connected to the idea of improvisation. As the quotation reads, the ability to improvise one's own role, like an actor without a script is what allows the possibility of taking a stand in the world. The process of coming to terms with the ability to improvise will also represent the core of Gwendolen's adventures towards adulthood. The identification of the adult life with the coining of an ability to improvise will be crucial for understanding Gwendolen's process of growth, since improvisation is a notion rooted in the idea of malleability.

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<sup>15</sup> Nussbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

The ability to improvise is an important tool for the shaping of a malleable subjectivity, which is at the heart of the moral ideals presented in *Daniel Deronda*. As suggested, the idea of a trajectory or journey from innocence to knowledge and the idea that growing up requires the tool of improvisation constitute the conceptual ground I will employ to interpret Gwendolen. She walks the path from a starting innocence to an acquired ability to improvise in a novel in which the shaping of such malleable skills defines adult life and is of extreme moral significance, as said above.

When *Daniel Deronda* opens, Gwendolen has lived a sheltered existence up to that moment. However, whereas Maggie can only see beauty and perfection in those around her, Gwendolen can only see herself. She lacks sight and when first confronted with hardships in her life she feels unable to deal with them because they stand as an undeniable instance of the world outside herself. She cannot deal with hardships not because they would require her to take an active stand in choosing and sacrificing, which is Maggie's case, but because she has no picture of either a perfect or a flawed world, no idealisms. She simply does not see the world outside herself.

At the beginning of the novel, Gwendolen's innocence is her failure to see the world. She is shut out, disconnected from those around her, and she has lived, up to the moment when she is confronted with her family's loss of fortune, in the world of her wishes. Not unlike Maggie, Gwendolen at this moment is confronted with the world, with things over which she has no control. Unlike Maggie, though, it does not lead her to see the flaws in a world she thought perfect, but actually to recognize the existence of such a world. The loss of fortune will lead the way to a whole string of shocks with the outer world.

As reported above, after the loss of fortune Gwendolen considers the idea of becoming an actress or singer in order to earn enough to support her family, and in doing so escaping the fate of becoming a governess, which is horrifying to her. Her conversation with Herr Klesmer on this subject is particularly difficult for her to grasp at first. He tells her, for the first time in her life, that she is not capable of doing something she thought she would be so easily wonderful at. He tells her quite objectively that this is something she could not do well, that she would be treated like any other aspiring artist and would be very unlikely to succeed in an artistic career. This is actually the first time she realizes that outside the sheltered life she has led she is to be treated like everyone else, and that she lacks skills beyond her amateur training in singing and acting. In the following quotation, Klesmer has already left and Gwendolen is trying to make sense of the things he has said to her:

For the first time since her consciousness began, she was having a vision of herself on the common level, and had lost the innate sense that there were reasons why she should not be slighted, elbowed, jostled - treated like a passenger with a third class ticket, in spite of private objections on her own part. (...) Every word that Klesmer had said seemed to have been branded, as most words are which bring with them a new set of impressions and make an epoch for us. Only a few hours before, the dawning smile of self-contentment rested on her lips as she vaguely imagined a future suited to her wishes: it seemed but the affair of a year or so for her to become the most approved Juliet of the time; or, if Klesmer encouraged her idea of being a singer, to proceed by more gradual steps to her place in the opera, while she won money and applause by occasional performances. Why not? At home, at school, among acquaintances, she had been used to have her conscious superiority admitted; and she had moved in a society where everything, from low arithmetic to high art, is of the amateur kind politely supposed to fall short of perfection only because gentlemen and ladies are not obliged to do more than they like.<sup>16</sup>

This conversation with Klesmer constitutes another shock of awareness, another confrontation with the world. She bargains with her own ideas of propriety and allows

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<sup>16</sup> Eliot, *op. cit.* p. 223-4.



herself to accept Grandcourt's proposal of marriage, which she had already decided to refuse when her family still had money. The fact that he had had a relationship with Mrs. Glasher that had produced illegitimate children, which she had previously considered as a very strong reason to refuse him, fades to the background in the light of her new situation. Here there is another parallel to be drawn between the two characters: like Maggie, Gwendolen can now see the world, but while Maggie wanted to keep leading a perfect life in a flawed world, Gwendolen still wanted to believe that she would flow as easily as she had always done and for that end she bargained with her own morals.

She reshuffles the new elements in her life in order to best suit her, namely, if Klesmer has told her she cannot do this particular thing she has envisioned as a way out of hardships she can still accept a proposal of marriage she previously rejected in her mind when her circumstances were different. She tries to keep everything from falling apart and above all, tries to preserve her own self in a similar place to where she had always been. She tries to bargain with a world that is shifting. Gwendolen is, at this moment in the novel when she is already poor and ready to accept Grandcourt's proposal, still the same inexperienced, self-indulgent girl. Even though she is being confronted with the world, her views and understanding of what marriage will be like, like everything else in her life that has not yet had a direct significance in her own existence, is a vague and diffuse creation of her imagination. As the quotation below reads she thinks she will easily manipulate her husband:

It was striking, that in the hold of this argument of her doing no wrong to Mrs Glasher had taken in her mind, her repugnance to the idea of Grandcourt's past had sunk into a subordinate feeling. The terror she had felt in the night watches of overstepping the

border of wickedness by doing what she had at first felt to be wrong, had dulled any emotions about his conduct. She was thinking of him, whatever he might be, as a man over whom she would have indefinite power; and her loving him having never been a question with her, any agreeableness he had was so much gain. Poor Gwendolen had no awe of unimaginable forces in the state of matrimony, but regarded it altogether as a matter of management, in which she would know how to act. In relation to Grandcourt's past she encouraged new doubts whether he were likely to have differed much from other men; and she had devised little schemes for learning what was expected from men in general.<sup>17</sup>

Although Gwendolen may, at the point where she is making these considerations, recognize a world that does not suit perfectly her own wishes, she is still thinking of herself as someone entitled to be at the centre of things. As I have just mentioned, the loss of money, Klesmer's words, finding out about Grandcourt's past, all this shocks her but does not drive her actually to see her place in her new situation. Rather than dealing with these shocks, which would require her to actually acknowledge her own limitations and the existence of a world outside herself, she rearranges things, as I have just mentioned, in order to allow herself to remain the same self-centred girl. Rearranging the pieces of her puzzle requires her to notice, to some degree, the world around her but that does not change her inner self much.

Maggie and Gwendolen go through similar stages in their coming-of-age processes. In the beginning, they are children that have no knowledge of a world beyond the sheltered lives they have led so far. They are confronted with facts and situations that call them to recognize a larger world. They see to some extent their new reality but choose at first not to actually live in their new enlarged worlds, which would require them to see their own

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<sup>17</sup> Eliot, op. cit., p.265.

limitations, such as Gwendolen's lack of professional training and skills to be an artist that would ultimately lead her to accept a position as a governess if she had not got married.

But Gwendolen gets married. As just said, she begins to see the world but she cannot handle it at first. She does what she can, which is to get married, to remain at a similar position to the one she knew in her life. At this instance Gwendolen is capable of some flexibility, she bargains with herself, makes her own story appear not so awful to her own consciousness. But this first degree of flexibility, brought about by these shocks with the world, will at first rather than connect her to it, actually drive her away from it and into the world of her own wishes in which she will easily manipulate her husband to do as she pleases besides taking care of his illegitimate children and providing for her own mother and sisters. Gwendolen has no idea of the otherness her husband will represent in her life, of his own wishes that will limit and hinder her own.

Gwendolen's fantasy world will fall with the reality of her marriage. Gwendolen feels coerced by Grandcourt's aggressive hampering of her own wishes and she quickly realizes she is unable to manipulate him in any way. She will always feel his otherness not as a link to a world outside her own but as a hostile coercion of herself. Gwendolen's coming-of-age process, which will ultimately require her to see and live in the world, will actually flourish in the relationship she establishes with Daniel. Gwendolen's intermittent encounters with Daniel will gradually develop into a specific bond between them. Daniel will be for her a link to the world, an encounter with otherness that is not imposing on her. He represents to her, from the moment they meet, a type of external boundary, a limit, to the borderless world she lives in.

Gwendolen's trajectory from innocence to knowledge, as discussed before, has clear stages. At a first moment she tries to remain innocent even though she is facing new knowledge about the world. The relationship she establishes with Daniel will actually teach her about dealing actively with the world, with what she knows about it. In Gwendolen's case, the friendship she coins with Daniel is of vital importance for the second stage of her trajectory towards adulthood. Daniel teaches her how to recognize the world and that she must deal with it rather than fabricate a narrative to suit her own needs. But how is the dynamics between them actually established? How are they drawn to each other in a way that culminates in such a relationship? Lets us now take a closer look at the development of their bond.

In the opening sequence when they see each other for the first time at the Casino in Leubronn, Daniel's actual presence and examination of her gambling have a strange and powerful effect over her. From the beginning Daniel will be a striking presence in Gwendolen's life, a presence that cannot be ignored or turned into something that suits her immediate needs. Gwendolen's first encounter with Daniel is fascinating and at the same time repulsive to her. As regards Daniel, what he perceives as the strangeness of her graceful figure in the gambling room captures his undivided attention. At this first meeting, they see in each other the necessary degree of otherness to arouse attraction. Daniel is disturbed by what he sees as something out of tune in Gwendolen's gambling. But it is precisely the oddness of the situation of a girl out of place that captures his attention:

But in the course of that survey her eyes met Deronda's, and instead of averting them, as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested – how long? The darting sense that he was measuring her, and looking down on her as inferior, that he was of a different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict. It did not bring the blood to her cheeks, but sent it away from her lips. She controlled herself by the help of an inward defiance, and without other sign of emotion than this lip-paleness turned to her play. (...) Many were now watching her, but the sole observation she was conscious of was Deronda's, who, though she never looked towards him, she was sure had not moved away. (...) And in five seconds Gwendolen turned from the table, but turned resolutely with her face towards Deronda and looked at him. There was a smile of irony in his eyes as their glances met; but it was at least better that he should have kept his attention fixed on her than that he should have disregarded her as one of an insect swarm who had no individual physiognomy.<sup>18</sup>

Gwendolen feels judged by Daniel's stare. His judging of her gambling places him outside the world of her experience, as if he were looking and evaluating it with detachment, from a distance. She sees him in a way she has never seen any man before, or even anyone else. She is conscious of his look and attracted to it because for the first time she recognizes someone else's look. Not that Gwendolen had been ignorant of other men's admiration for her, but she regarded them as a compliment to her own splendour. For instance, the situation in the casino is very different from the one when, before her meeting Grandcourt and Daniel, Gwendolen's cousin Rex Gascoigne falls in love with her and asks her to marry him. She is startled by this proposal and strongly refuses him:

'Pray don't make love to me, I hate it.' She looked at him fiercely. Rex turned pale and was silent, but could not take his eyes off her, and the impetus was not yet exhausted that made hers dart death at him. It was all a sudden, new experience to her. The day before she had been quite aware that her cousin was in love with her – she did not mind how much, so that he said nothing about it; and if any one had asked her why she was objected to love-making speeches, she would have said laughingly, 'Oh, I am tired of them all in the books.' But now the life of passion had begun negatively in her. She felt passionately averse to this volunteered love.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 5-7.

<sup>19</sup> Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

When discussing this episode with her mother, Gwendolen clearly tells her that she feels utterly incapable of caring for people. This incident with Rex could not be farther away from the situation we find her in the opening sequence of the book when she sees Daniel. Gwendolen does not want her cousin nor any of her other suitors because she is unable to see them, they only interest her as blank mirrors reflecting her very own splendour; she cannot, therefore, have any desire for them. Also, soon after Rex's lovemaking speech the narrator tells us that she cares for the admiration men feel for her but not for the men themselves:

In the ladies' dining room it was evident that Gwendolen was not a general favourite with her own sex; there were no begins of intimacy between her and other girls, and in conversation they rather noticed what she said than spoke to her in free exchange. Perhaps it was that she was not much interested in them, and when left alone in their company had a sense of empty benches. Mrs Vulcany once remarked that Miss Harleth was too fond of the gentlemen; but we know that she was not in the least fond of them – she was only fond of their homage – and women did not give her homage.<sup>20</sup>

Also, with Grandcourt, Gwendolen does not see him as a man who wants her as a woman at first. She takes him as a passport to a grand life and away from a dull future as a governess. I am stressing the opposition between the other men in Gwendolen's life and Daniel because she, from the very beginning sees him as an instance of otherness. The relationship they develop and what it teaches her will spring from the distance that is always kept between them as will be discussed later on.

The question of how, from the very beginning, Daniel and Gwendolen feel attracted to each other and of how the attraction comes about is important for this discussion because the

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<sup>20</sup> Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

specificity of this novel is that Eliot devises an alternative path to the expected romantic love that usually, like in so many other novels of the time, would unite characters who, at the beginning of the plot, look at each other in such a way. In *Daniel Deronda* such attraction is given a very different development and outcome. Not only will their relationship teach them to be flexible, to improvise in the world, it is also in itself a malleable bond, one that could not be recognized by any official definition such as marriage, which recognizes romantic love.

Daniel, at the beginning of the novel, is someone alien to Gwendolen's world. A respectable family has raised him but his origins are mysterious, he is a stranger who has received a gentleman's education. From Gwendolen's point of view Daniel is someone without a history, not from that world. Gwendolen's life is crossed by Daniel's apparitions as much as his is by hers, but he enters her life occupying no definite place in that society, he is not her husband, he is not family, he is not anyone else's husband or family either. The connection they establish has to be, consequently, of a private nature; it has no definite form.

Through the unfolding of the plot, however, Daniel is progressively building a history for himself that will ultimately take him away from Gwendolen since it will give him a social role in a very different world. The relationship he establishes with Gwendolen is of a very different nature from the one he establishes with his fiancée Mirah. Mirah comes to occupy the place of wife because for Daniel she is a link to a Jewish identity he is trying to build while he restores the history of his origins. His love for her, which can be sealed in the

social institution of marriage, reinforces the choices he makes for himself regarding his identity.

The relationship he establishes with Mirah is of vital social significance for his active shaping of an identity and a history for himself. Marriage is not only sealing his and his bride's love for each other, it is reinforcing the social significance of the choices he is making. Daniel never regards Gwendolen as a woman he could be romantically involved with. She gradually comes to represent for him, in a social and public sphere, everything he is letting go of in order to fulfill the calls of the Jewish identity he chooses to adopt. In her turn, Gwendolen never stops to consider the nature of her feelings for him or whether he could make her a good husband. The presence they have in each other's lives is of a strictly private nature that cannot be socialized.

Neither Daniel nor Gwendolen chooses to cross the distance between themselves in order to regard the other one as a potential spouse. The distance they keep between them is an important factor for the development of their friendship, as will be discussed in the following chapter. On the other hand, the relationship with no definite form they develop is asymmetrical: the distance between them allows Gwendolen to regard him as an entity of moral rightness above and outside her world. When they first meet she is pawning her necklace, and Daniel sends it back to her. When he returns it to her he sets the tone for how their relationship will develop. Gwendolen will, throughout the novel, always turn to him for pointing the right path towards moral goodness.



Gwendolen turns Daniel into a link to a world she progressively feels less capable of managing. He is outside her world and to some extent because of that she regards him as her moral advisor. In one of their intense conversations she is telling him that she feels remorseful, that she has gained from Mrs Glasher's losses and that she does not know how to amend herself. She wants him to tell her how to be better. He tells her quite literally that she should look outside the sphere of her own troubles, look at the world, try to care about other things besides her own desires:

‘Then tell me what better I can do,’ said Gwendolen, insistently.

‘Many things. Look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care about what is best in thought and in action – something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot.

For an instant or two Gwendolen was mute. Then again moving her brow from the glass, she said –

‘You mean that I am selfish and ignorant.’

He met her fixed look in silence before he answered firmly –

‘You will not go on being selfish and ignorant’.<sup>21</sup>

Gwendolen cultivates a childlike confidence in Daniel's goodness in order to hold him as her moral advisor in a larger world. To that end, Gwendolen cannot recognize or see Daniel's life apart from his role in her own. She has glimpses of his life but she will only be able to see it properly in the end. For instance, at some point Grandcourt and Gwendolen argue about Daniel. Grandcourt infers that Daniel is romantically involved with Mirah and says that it is indecent of him to go about praising her and recommending her to everybody. Gwendolen refuses to believe in it, but this argument with her husband makes her see for the first time that she actually cultivated a blind faith in Daniel's goodness and purity.

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<sup>21</sup> Eliot, *op. cit.*, p.383.

Her blind faith in him was only possible, she realizes, because she actually knew very little about his life. But even in realizing this she is still determined to hold on to her faith in him. She decides to go and see Mirah with the excuse to ask her to sing at a party at her house but she actually wants Mirah to confirm her faith in Daniel's goodness. With a child's helplessness she asks Mirah if she thinks that Daniel is truly good and Mirah answers that she does. Gwendolen does not even mind the lack of propriety of her sudden visit to Mirah so relieved she is with what Mirah has said to her. This event shows how Gwendolen actually goes at pains to keep Daniel at the place she has coined for him in her life.

Just as Maggie only realises she must choose and sacrifice at the end of *The Golden Bowl*, Gwendolen, up to the ending of the novel, has not yet conceived that Daniel might have a life besides being in the world to advise her. Daniel plays a dialectic role in her life. She regards him as her moral and spiritual advisor leading her into an adult life, a better life, free from her own petty childish feelings, and at the same time she makes him her last link to that life as she leaves the burden of choice regarding her own life entirely up to him. She has started to live, just like Maggie after the crack in her perfect world, still reluctant to let go entirely of her childish ways and embracing her adult responsibilities.

When Daniel finally tells her he is getting married and going away to devote his life to the creation of a Jewish state, she initially cannot understand that he can get married. Although it had crossed her mind that he might actually exist and have other concerns when she was not there, it was only a fleeting thought. And she fought any real threat on her blind faith in him as intensely as she could, like in the argument with her husband and later visit to Mirah. Gwendolen had failed to notice his struggles until this moment and this final

awareness is what shocks her the most. In the following quotation Daniel meets Gwendolen to say goodbye and tell her the reasons of his going away:

She turned away her eyes again and sat thinking. Slowly the colour died out of face and neck, and she was as pale as before – with that almost withered paleness which is seen after a painful flush. At last she said, without turning towards him – in a low, measured voice, as if she were only thinking aloud in preparation for future speech –

‘But *can* you marry?’

‘Yes,’ said Deronda also in a low voice. ‘I am going to marry.’

At first there was no change in Gwendolen’s attitude: she only began to tremble visibly, then she looked before her with dilated eyes, as at something lying in front of her, till she stretched her arms out straight, and cried with a smothered voice –

‘I said I should be forsaken. I have been a cruel woman. And I am forsaken.’<sup>22</sup>

Like Maggie, Gwendolen, at first, arranges for herself what Nussbaum called a new way of being innocent by refusing to acknowledge her own limitations. She has found a new way of rearranging things to better suit the need of an enlarged, unsafe and imperfect world. Gwendolen is not fully confronted with the claims of adult living until the final understanding that Daniel is leaving. Gwendolen finally grasps the impact Daniel has had in her life and understands he is choosing something else, something that does not leave any room for her.

She understands she will have to take responsibility for her own life. She will be able, by living and learning, to judge when to “be finely aware and richly responsible” to quote Nussbaum’s words, and when to sacrifice just like Daniel has just sacrificed their relationship. The novel actually ends with hope for Gwendolen, with a promise that she will gain the necessary degree of vision to live actively in the world. Gwendolen’s final

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<sup>22</sup> Eliot, *op. cit.*, p. 690.

awareness of the responsibility she must bear regarding her own life, and of the role Daniel has played in it are well expressed in the letter she sends to him on his wedding day:

*“Do not think sorrowfully of me on your wedding day. I have remembered your words – that I may live to be one of the best of women, who makes others glad that they were born. I do not yet see how that can be, but you know better than I. If it ever comes true it will be because you helped me. I only thought of myself and I made you grieve. It hurts me now to think of your grief. You must not grieve any more for me. It is better – it shall be better with me because I have known you.*

Gwendolen Grandcourt.”<sup>23</sup>

Gwendolen’s final and ultimate awareness only takes place when she can finally and truly see Daniel as an equal fellow human, who is accountable to the same sort of responsibilities. Gwendolen finally sees Daniel as someone in his own journey and as a man who is making choices for his own life that have nothing to do with her and which will take him away from her. When Gwendolen is capable of seeing Daniel’s life apart from his presence in her own, she is ready to accept responsibility for her own life.

Through the unfolding of the plot of *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen and Daniel seem to be going to opposite directions, living in very different worlds and yet they will play key roles in each other’s lives. Gwendolen ultimately finds, through her relationship with Daniel, that it is impossible not to take action in the world. As has just been argued, Gwendolen’s process of growth occurs mainly through the friendship she coins with Daniel even though her final independence from him is what ultimately seals the beginning of her adulthood.

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<sup>23</sup> Eliot, op. cit. p., 694-5.

The character of Daniel has a clear function in Gwendolen's trajectory. He stands as an embodiment not only of difference but also of specific moral values that constitute the core of the novel's questions. These moral principles refer to the fashioning of a flexible subjectivity that defines responsible and independent adulthood. As mentioned above, the novel ends with a promise that Gwendolen will live responsibly from that moment on, which is what she says in the letter she sends to Daniel on his wedding day.

Gwendolen's trajectory, or, in other words, her coming-of-age process is an affair of widening the dimensions of her existence in the world. She goes from being a disconnected and selfish child to becoming an adult woman in tune with the demands of a larger world. When Daniel leaves, Gwendolen realizes that she will have to take her own steps, take action in her own life. In taking an active role in her own life she is able, through improvisation, as in James' metaphor, she will be able to judge from moment to moment what to do, say and choose.

This is what gradually becoming an adult means in Gwendolen's coming-of-age process. It is important to stress the vital role played by the notion of improvisation in the picture of adult subjectivity presented in *Daniel Deronda*. The idea of malleability crosses the various dimensions of the novel. Improvisation leads to the fashioning of a flexible self, one that can recognize and adapt to the demands of a world that is, in its turn, presented as vast and fluid. Gwendolen learns how to see the world, and in seeing it, how to live in it, how to improvise from moment to moment.

The picture of adulthood presented in the novel that requires improvisation of this type can only be achieved through the fashioning of a malleable self. Malleability through improvisation is what Gwendolen finally learns in her process of growth. The concept of malleability also defines the nature of her friendship with Daniel. In the course of the following chapter I will discuss at more depth what type of subjectivity is that presented in the novel that requires improvisation, as well as the malleability expressed in Daniel and Gwendolen's bond.

## Chapter 2

## Improvisation and Deliberation

But the coercion is often stronger on the one who takes the reverence. Those who trust us educate us. And perhaps in that ideal consecration of Gwendolen's, some education was being prepared for Deronda.  
*George Eliot in Daniel Deronda*

In the previous chapter I presented a close reading of the novel in order to show how the process of becoming an adult is identified with the fashioning of an ability to see the world and improvise in it. In this chapter I will suggest a possible key in which to understand this identification. In order to do that I will borrow some of Stephen Greenblatt's ideas for interpreting the dawning subjectivity of the characters in Shakespeare's *Othello*<sup>24</sup>. Before going into the actual analysis I will quickly recapitulate the concepts that emerged in the close reading of the novel in the previous chapter.

After that, I will temporarily move away from the novel in order to present Greenblatt's concepts of empathy, improvisation and narrative self-fashioning in his analysis of *Othello*. I will then go back to the novel in the light of these concepts, which will provide a key to interpret the process of becoming an adult in *Daniel Deronda* as I have presented it in the

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<sup>24</sup> GREENBLATT, Stephen. "The Improvisation of Power". In *Renaissance self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

preceding chapter. Also in this light, I will return to some of the concepts that were dealt with in the first chapter, such as character's historicity and characters shaped as pliable stories. These were presented in the first chapter as concepts dealing with the novel's form and with Eliot's characterization. I will return to them, however, in an effort to show that the malleability they convey is also a moral concern in the plot of the novel, being in the core of the identification of the process of growth with the fashioning of an ability to improvise.

I will then concentrate on the specific bond that Gwendolen establishes with Daniel. Gwendolen's process of growth starts before her meeting Daniel. Her first confrontation with reality comes with meeting Mrs. Glasher and then in the loss of her family fortune. But as I have stated before, the novel opens with their meeting and closes when they must part with each other. Gwendolen's process of seeing and living in the actual world is guided by the trust she builds in Daniel. I will look at the impact Gwendolen's relationship with Daniel has on her process of becoming an adult in the light of the concepts devised by Greenblatt.

Greenblatt's concepts applied to the actual friendship will lead the way to an actual discussion of the friendship featuring in the novel. Through the course of this work I have called attention to the central role malleability plays in nearly every instance of *Daniel Deronda* and the different shapes and resonance it acquires throughout the novel. From the novel's form, in its connection to the form of the novel of manners, to its content and moral preoccupations, malleability stands as the main concept holding the whole edifice together. It is a key element in Gwendolen's coming-of-age-process, which is intertwined with the



relationship she develops with Daniel. Gwendolen and Daniel's friendship is, in its turn, a malleable bond. Bearing in mind the central role malleability plays in the novel, I will, in conclusion, look at *Daniel Deronda* as a novel that tells the story of a friendship.

1.

I will now recapitulate the main ideas presented in the preceding close reading that led to the identification of the specificity of Gwendolen's process of growth. In George Eliot's novel, Gwendolen is only ready to live as an adult and embrace responsibilities in the very ending when she sees Daniel as someone who is separate from her. The novel has an open ending for Gwendolen and actually a closed one for Daniel. Gwendolen is ready to face living wisely and responsibly but the novel ends before any actual action on her part, away from Daniel, takes place. More than any literal action on her part, the fashioning of an ability to see and live in the world is the subject matter of the novel. As mentioned in the end of the preceding chapter, the novel ends with a promise of responsible action, a promise that is expressed in Gwendolen's final letter to Daniel.

*Daniel Deronda* and *The Golden Bowl*, Henry James' novel that has been discussed in comparison to Eliot's, have similar dramatic curves: both girls, Maggie and Gwendolen, go through progressive shocks of awareness. After the first one, there is a first recognition of the world around them but they try to rearrange its new elements and their new knowledge about them in order to preserve themselves. At a first moment, Maggie must keep her blind idealism and Gwendolen her self-centredness and egotism.

The knowledge Maggie acquires of the world is gradually unwrapped before her eyes. The knowledge Gwendolen acquires is not gradually unwrapped before her; it is built in her relationship with Daniel. He is the first ‘other’ person in her life, the first one who calls on her to look outside herself. Through their relationship Gwendolen comes to see the world around her. What she learns in the end constitute the actual skills and tools that will be required of someone seeing and living in the world as an adult.

Gwendolen’s relationship with Daniel will take her beyond a first recognition of a world that is larger than her childish fantasies in which her wishes ruled. Daniel will show her that she must take action in this world; that she must learn how to cope and that choosing and deliberating is a huge part of taking an active role in it. Gwendolen, prior to her “fall”, had never chosen anything, she could indulge in every wish she had. Through their relationship, Daniel shows her that in order to live actively she must interact with what is actually going on around her. But what instruments are required for seeing and living in the world? And why is the fashioning of an ability to improvise vital for an active adult subjectivity as it is presented in the novel? I will now deal with these questions and suggest a path of interpretation based on the concepts Stephen Greenblatt designed for looking at the emerging Western subjectivity expressed in Shakespeare’s *Othello*.

As I have just reiterated, there is a specific understanding being presented, in *Daniel Deronda*, of what constitutes Gwendolen’s growth into adulthood. I will now look at what ideas and concepts are holding this specific understanding together. *Daniel Deronda* tells a story of a qualitative change in Gwendolen, she goes through a very particular grasp of consciousness. As presented in the previous chapter with the help of Nussbaum’s concepts,

Gwendolen's process of growth could be summarized in the fashioning of an ability to see and live in the world, while being able to deal with different situations as they arise. In other words, there is a very strong emphasis on what I may call a type of improvisation as it appears in James's metaphor of an actress on stage who is suddenly without a script. The ability to improvise in an unexpected situation is vital for deliberating and living actively in the world.

Improvisation is one of those vital instruments necessary for adult living. But what is being defined as improvisation in the sense that appears in the novel? Greenblatt's ideas about Renaissance subjectivity and the genesis of improvisation as a trait of an individual character will help us better understand what the ideals supporting Gwendolen's journey into adulthood are. He argues that an acquired sense of improvisation is essential to the shaping of the self in Western societies in general from Renaissance onwards.

It may seem a little far-fetched to bring a work about Renaissance literature into a discussion about Gwendolen's process of growth, but I do believe that a closer look at Greenblatt's analysis of the genesis of improvisation as a trait of an individual character may help us better understand what are the ideals supporting Gwendolen's journey into adulthood. According to his argument, this mobility through improvisation began to be fashioned with the first European encounters with otherness, when the Europeans came to the new world.

In order to analyse this process of mobility Greenblatt borrows Daniel Lerner's concept of empathy, which the sociologist defines as the capacity to see oneself in someone else's

situation. While Lerner sees empathy as a positive trait in the development of individual identity in Western societies, a generous, broadening movement towards others, Greenblatt will show that although it is indeed a broadening step requiring a leap of abstraction, empathy will be at the very basis of Western organization, turned into a tool for improvisation as a mode of behaviour towards others. Consequently, empathy will not necessarily always be generous, and it will never be uninterested, becoming a structural device for relating to others.

The ability to see oneself in another self's situation requires a great leap of abstraction: one must recognize the difference between oneself and the other but also be able to identify with similar traits in this otherness. This is the first tool that is required for improvising in a new unknown situation; it is the basic instrument for recognition, for reading a new situation and dealing with its new elements. According to Greenblatt, the relationship the Spanish established with the natives is a good illustration of improvisation through empathy.

Peter Martyr's tale of the natives who were deceived by Spanish explorers is a good example of this tension. The natives were led by the Spanish to believe they were being taken to paradise when they were actually being taken to mines to work as slaves. Empathy was the key element allowing the Spanish this level of manipulation over the Indians. By means of empathy the Spanish were able to recognize a set of Indian beliefs somewhat similar to their own, in which there was an entity that could be identified with the notion of a Christian heaven. Because they could relate to the Indians' reality they were able to,

through their improvisational skills, make the natives believe that their paradise was a boat ride away and take them to the mines.

What will interest us in Martyr's tale is that this type of improvisation, therefore, allows for the transformation of the other's reality into a fiction. The natives' "sacred and true history" is turned into fiction for the benefit of the Spanish that have seen a degree of similarity between their 'narrative' and the narrative of the Indians. In order to improvise with the natives' beliefs the Spanish developed a degree of empathy towards these beliefs that allowed them the possibility to recognise them and, in this situation, manipulate them. Empathetic skills must deal with narratives, with stories. The native's beliefs were turned into a story that the Spanish could identify their own stories with. Since the Spanish explorers were capable of empathy, they could deal with an unexpected situation, such as finding natives on the new land; they were able to improvise.

I will now take a closer look at improvisation as a vital tool for self-fashioning. It is important to bear in mind that Greenblatt, in devising these concepts, is dealing with the improvisation of power; consequently, he is interested in investigating how improvisation can be employed as a manipulative tool, as a tool of power over others such as in the example of the Spanish over the Indians. I will later in the chapter, when I return to Gwendolen, argue how improvisation becomes such an important device for the shaping of the self that not only power over others but nearly every instance in life will require a degree of improvisation to be dealt with.

I have presented so far the concept of empathy that leads to the concept of improvisation. In *Othello* these two concepts will come together because of the emerging subjectivity of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that implies narrative self-fashioning. Narrative self-fashioning is the operation of conceiving oneself as a story being told in a course of time. This is what allows for recognition of others, or empathy; one can recognize to some degree other stories around one's own and consequently one is able to improvise, or retell not only their own but the other narratives around their own.

In *Othello*, Iago is able to manipulate the other characters around him through all the empathetic mechanisms of improvisation. The abstract leap required for this process allows for the transformation of the truth of others into a narrative, a story that, as all stories, may be rearranged. This is basically what Iago does; he rearranges the narratives of the characters around him to better suit his goals. Othello does not need physical evidence that his wife has been unfaithful: the "untrue" narrative Iago produces is so skilfully designed that it actually replaces, in Othello's mind, the actual narrative in progress.

Iago can only manipulate Othello and Desdemona in such a way because he sees them as narratives. Othello and Desdemona are the stories they tell of themselves, although they are not aware of it. At the beginning of the play Othello tells a story of how he came to the service of Desdemona's father and Desdemona tells a story of her falling in love with Othello. Iago's power rests in the realization that the selves around him are presented as stories.

Iago's sensitivity has a mobile, plastic quality. He has the ability to improvise with the stories of others because he sees them as stories. This is a great novelty for the 16<sup>th</sup> century and fundamentally different from medieval times, when people's places and relationships were fixed in tradition. Narrative self-fashioning is what allows for this great mobility expressed in the rearranging and reorganization of the self through improvisation; narratives are not fixed, they can be rearranged and even manipulated to look different and suit specific purposes which is what Iago takes advantage of.

Othello's position in the play is very fragile since he is literally out of place. He is a moor who has become a Christian. Since he is not from that world and is reminded of his condition throughout the play his Christian beliefs and habits must be within very stiff lines, stiffer than the other "real" Christians, to reassure his fragile position in a world so clearly not his own. Desdemona's father openly states that he is undeserving of his daughter because of his origins and Othello feels undeserving of his wife. Iago's genius rests in his extraordinary ability to see Othello's fragile narrative of himself and to profit from it. Iago also sees Desdemona's intense sexual love for her husband. In having a mobile sensitivity that allows him to see and recognize what is going on around him, he has everything he needs to manufacture a narrative of deception and betrayal that will dispense with any physical proof that it actually happened.

Othello's rigid Christian habits and beliefs due to his fragile position in that world, and the incommensurability of Desdemona's desire for her husband are the elements Iago skilfully plays with. Iago clashes one against the other engendering in the tragic outcome of the play. Othello cannot allow for any disruptive element in his Christian life and Iago has him

believe that Desdemona's desire is disruptive. Desdemona's father had already planted the seed of distrust in Othello when he said that she had been disloyal to her father so she could easily be disloyal to her husband. Because Iago sees all this empathetically, he has the power to make Othello believe that Desdemona is disloyal. In the sequence of Desdemona's murder the love that is, in the end, the cause of her death, is actually expressed in husband and wife's final conversation:

DESDEMONA And yet I fear you, for you're fatal then  
 When your eyes roll so. Why I should fear I know not,  
 Since guiltiness I know not, but yet I feel I fear.  
 OTHELLO Think on thy sins.  
 DESDEMONA They are loves I bear to you.  
 OTHELLO Ay, and for that thou diest.<sup>25</sup>

Desdemona's love for her husband is ultimately what kills her since Iago rearranges the elements of Othello and Desdemona's love story. Iago hardly introduces any new element to what is already there. Cassio is merely a pawn at hand; someone else, equally attractive, could have easily replaced him. The beauty of Shakespeare's writing is that it is, in its turn, a dawning malleable enterprise because all the elements of the narratives that may be rearranged are displayed; everything is said. Othello, without knowing it, tells his wife the actual reason for her dying.

This account of 16<sup>th</sup> century's emerging subjectivity expressed in Shakespeare's *Othello* will be a key element for going back to *Daniel Deronda* and Gwendolen. It is important to bear in mind the idea of narrative self-fashioning, the subjectivity that began to be coined in

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<sup>25</sup> SHAKESPEARE, William. "Othello". In *The Complete Works*: New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. p. 849.



modern times in which one sees oneself as a story being told in a course of time. Consequently, there is greater room for mobility, narrative selves are much more malleable. Empathy is the tool that allows for the recognition and identification of other narratives. Once one is a narrative self who is capable of empathy, one can improvise in a new, unknown situation.

As presented in the previous chapter, the fashioning of an ability to improvise in the world defines the entrance into adult life in *Daniel Deronda*. Gwendolen's final awareness, expressed in her letter to Daniel on the occasion of his wedding, is that she must take her own steps in a world that is continuously shifting. The will and power she must coin to take action in her own life requires her to improvise. When she is finally able to do so, in the ending of the novel, her adulthood begins. The ability to improvise puts her in a place in which she can deal with unexpected situations in the world. She finally realizes that she can do without a script, without Daniel telling her what to do.

Ultimately, one sees that Gwendolen is capable of empathy; she has learned how to improvise. Her relationship with Daniel teaches her about empathy, shows her the necessity to see the world and live actively and responsibly in it, responding to new, unexpected situations and judgment calls as they arise. Gwendolen learns about a world that requires malleability through improvisational skills in her relationship with Daniel, but what does their relationship say about the type of adult subjectivity that is presented as morally desirable in the novel? In order to address this question let us take a look at the role the shaping of improvisational skills plays in Gwendolen's life.

Improvisation empowers Gwendolen with mobile skills. For instance, even in a practical circumstance, she escapes the humiliation her husband had intended for her after his death. She escapes through an internal device: what Grandcourt meant to humiliate her does not work anymore because by then she is able to improvise. Grandcourt had meant to sentence her to a life destitute of the rank to which he had raised her if she had not had any children on the occasion of his death, which was the case. He makes Mrs. Glasher's son his heir and leaves him all of his fortune. He leaves Gwendolen some money and the house at Gadsmere that had been Mrs. Glasher's home.

Gwendolen does not take his will as a final sentence, she weighs the elements in her new widowed condition and decides to let the house at Gadsmere and keep Offendene for herself, her mother and sisters. She escapes the outcast place Grandcourt had determined for her because she is not tied to a stiff role in that society. Grandcourt's disposition in his will does not condemn her. It does not work because she is able to tell her own story. In the picture of responsible adulthood presented in the novel the ability to improvise is the skill required living in the world, but improvisation is an effect of narrative self-fashioning. Improvisation of this sort is only possible if the self is organized as a story. The degree of malleability brought about by narrative self-fashioning allows Daniel to tell Gwendolen that she might see and use her experience as she chooses, as a beginning and not an ending, a start and not something that has stained her for good:

‘This sorrow which has cut down to the root, has come to you while you are so young – try to think of it as not spoiling your life, but as a preparation for it. Let it be a preparation – ‘ Any one overhearing his tones would have thought he was entreating for his own happiness. ‘See, you have been saved from the worst evils that might have come from your marriage, which you feel was wrong. You have had a vision of injurious, selfish action – a vision of possible degradation, think that a severe angel, seeing you

along the road of error, grasped you by the wrist, and showed you the horror of the life you must avoid. And it has come to you in your spring-time. Think of it as a preparation. You can, you will, be among the best of women, such as make others glad that they were born.<sup>26</sup>

Even though her final awareness and independence from Daniel only come in the very ending, Gwendolen's interviews with Daniel have this improvisational character, they teach her how to turn things her way and deliberate accordingly, how to tell her own story in a responsible fashion. In this novel the fashioning of improvisational skills is connected to the ability to deliberate and live in the world. Daniel's speech shows Gwendolen that she has the power to use and see her experience as she chooses. He literally tells her she has the power to narrate her own self.

Although improvisation is not in itself good or bad, as was previously discussed, it is nonetheless a valuable tool for the subjectivity that starts to delineate itself in modern times. It is important to stress that improvisation, understood as a basic tool for living in the modern world, might lead to manipulation, which is the case of Iago in *Othello* and of the Spanish in the new world, but also to responsible adulthood, as presented in the novel. As was mentioned before, it is not only power over others that must be improvised. There is a certain type of wisdom in improvisation, vital for developing a plastic sensitivity in the organization and telling of a narrative self, which is crucial for the process of becoming an adult presented in *Daniel Deronda*.

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<sup>26</sup> Eliot, op. cit., p.659.

Through malleability via improvisation Gwendolen is freed from the trap that had been intended for her. Gwendolen's successful coming of age is extraordinarily liberating, she is free in a way Othello and Desdemona could never have been. Their lacking mobile sensitivity is ultimately their tragedy. Even though Othello and Desdemona are narrative selves, they are not aware of it. Shakespearian tragic characters have a degree of mobility that allows Desdemona to fall in love with a moor, or Juliet and Romeo to fall for each other, for instance. However, his tragic heroes and heroines lack an ability to adapt to circumstances<sup>27</sup>.

Shakespeare captured the modern narrative subjectivity in its bloom. His tragic heroes are hybrid: They have a stiff quality that can be translated into an inability to improvise, although they exercise their blooming subjectivity through rejection of the medieval social order, their intense and passionate statement of their individuality is also their doom. They cannot have a place in their society; such is the case of Othello and Desdemona and the lovers in *Romeo and Juliet*. Their love crosses the boundaries of the medieval social order on an individual but not on a social level. They lack vision, the connection to the world. They are not agents in the telling of their own stories because they are not fully aware of them. They affirm their subjectivity through choices that make them stand out in a world of social determination but they cannot fashion any skills to deal with that world.

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<sup>27</sup> This is the conception of Shakespearian tragic heroes presented by Thomas Greene in his essay about the modern self in Renaissance Literature. GREENE, Thomas. "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature". In P. Demetz, T. Greene and L. Nelson Jr., *The Disciplines of Criticism*: New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1968.

Gwendolen is, in the end, finally aware of the active role she must play in the arranging and telling of her story. She is, at the moment she sends Daniel her thank-you letter, no longer the spoiled child who indulged every caprice and who was disconnected from every one around her. What Daniel tells her in the above quoted fragment from the novel is empowering in the sense that it places her as the agent in the telling of her own story. It shows her that through the coining of a mobile sensitivity, which will allow her to see the world empathetically and improvise in it, she will not be reduced or stained by what has already happened in her life. She is not trapped or defined by her past; through conscious narrative self-fashioning she will be able to dispose of the elements of her past and deliberate about her future.

Gwendolen's journey into adulthood is embedded in the conception of narrative self-fashioning. The mobile skills she fashions are the result of finally being able to recognize not only her own narrative but also other narratives around her. Gwendolen sees Daniel's story and at the moment she sees it she understands it as separate from her own narrative and is finally ready to part with him. She can see him because she is finally capable of empathy, she sees that he is facing the same set of questions and is accountable to a similar set of responsibilities. And in order to identify with him she has to be conscious of her own narrative and of the characters in it. She is only capable of empathy of this sort when she becomes an active element in the arranging and telling of her own narrative.

2.

Up to now I have looked at Gwendolen's process of growth and how it is unmistakably linked to the coining of a flexible self capable of empathy and consequently, improvisation.

In Eliot's novel Gwendolen's growth occurs mainly through the relationship she establishes with Daniel, their relationship has a shaping power over their lives, especially over Gwendolen's. The nature of their connection is a peculiar one: Eliot presents a man and a woman who become friends, but what does it mean to be friends in the context of this novel? What does it involve? What is at stake in their bond?

If one turns one's eyes to the actual relationship Daniel and Gwendolen establish with each other one will notice that improvisation will also be at the core of the development of their friendship. Gwendolen's final step in her coming-of-age process is defined by her recognition of her own narrative self and ultimately by the recognition of the narrative that is Daniel through empathy. In consciously embracing her own narrative she can take an active role in her world. She has fashioned for herself, through the mechanisms I have discussed in the first part of this chapter, an adult subjectivity that is malleable. In the light of the current discussion, some ideas I dealt with in the first chapter will help us recognize the specificity of *Daniel Deronda* as novel concerned with the notion of malleability in general, and the role played by this notion in the friendship presented in the novel in particular.

These ideas dealt basically with the notion that the characters in the novel of manners have a history, and consequently exist through a period of time that covers the plot of the novel. They can alter; they are not fixed as the characters in the ancient tradition. They are conceived, on a formal level, as stories. Who they are and what they do are not elements arranged in advance but the product of the experiences they go through in the course of the

plot. The characters, in the novel of manners and onwards, have a much more pliable form, a plasticity that is very distinctive of their characterization.

As I have suggested, the specificity of *Daniel Deronda* is that in it, malleability is not only in its form and style but also in its theme, in the actual moral ideals that emerge through the course of the plot. Malleability on a formal level was discussed in the previous chapter with the combination of a commenting narrator with character's historicity. When I talk of malleability on a thematic level I mean the picture presented in *Daniel Deronda* of a mobile subjectivity fashioned through the mechanisms of conscious narrative self-fashioning, improvisation and to some degree empathy, as the ability to recognize other narratives.

The nature of Gwendolen and Daniel's bond remains private, it is never turned into a relationship that could have social recognition or relevance. The bond they develop does not hold recognized social roles for them, unlike Daniel's bond to Mirah or Gwendolen's bond to Grandcourt. In both cases, their marriages define them in the social sphere. Gwendolen has a great increase in rank and wealth and is designated a higher role in her world for it, as the wife of a wealthy gentleman. Daniel connects himself through marriage to the social world of Judaism, which he is gradually embracing in his process of building an identity of social significance. But the malleability expressed in their bond is not solely the result of the private nature of their relationship.

Malleability is, in this sense, at the core of the novel's moral ideals: the fashioning of a malleable adult subjectivity is morally desirable. Gwendolen and Daniel fashion such a subjectivity mostly through their relationship. Eliot's choice of placing their friendship at

the centre of the novel expresses the vital importance of malleability in the moral concerns of the novel. But the malleability in Gwendolen and Daniel's bond is progressively built. Let us now look at the development of their friendship.

Daniel and Gwendolen look at each other with a lot of curiosity in their first encounters. Daniel dwells on the strangeness of such a girl at a roulette table and Gwendolen feels coerced by his staring at her, which is an entirely new feeling to her. She had never really been intimidated by anyone because she had not seen anyone properly until that moment. This is the opening of the novel; a regular romantic relationship could have followed with all its obstacles, separations, encounters and ultimately social recognition as presented in the previous chapter.

What follows though, is never socially defined. Their relationship, which has no definite form, will gradually come to embody the notion of malleability. There are no social rules and consequently no social significance for it. What they will mean to each other will necessarily remain deeply rooted in their subjectivity. Malleability, as I have been arguing, is not only a feature of the novel's form. It also stands as a moral ideal in Gwendolen's process of growth, but it is also at the core of the relationship that is the centre of the novel and which defines Gwendolen's shaping of a malleable subjectivity.

Empathy will play a progressively larger role in the development of their private bond; their relationship relies at first on the empathy Daniel develops towards Gwendolen's moral struggles. Gwendolen depends on him for judgment but ultimately her shaping of an ability to see him empathetically is what seals the beginning of her adult life. Empathy that leads



to the ability to improvise is never uninterested but not necessarily manipulative as it appears in Greenblatt's examples. Recapitulating, *Daniel Deronda* is a novel concerned with the building of a very specific type of subjectivity based on the moral ideals on which Gwendolen's process of growth stands. These ideals are those of malleability and adaptation, requiring the tool of improvisation.

Gwendolen's adult self emerging from this process is a narrative self. She can adapt and develop a mobile sensitivity because, unlike Shakespearian tragic heroes, she plays an active role in the arranging and telling of her own story. Daniel's part in her process of growth is that of calling her into playing an active role in her own narrative of herself. In doing so she connects herself to her world and to the other narratives around her. She can move in it without any script in advance, such as Daniel's hand to guide her. This is the picture of responsible and adult subjectivity that is suggested in *Daniel Deronda*.

This is the trail of Daniel and Gwendolen's relationship through the course of the plot. But what is exactly the role played by their friendship in her coming of age processes? How is it that their private bond enables them not only to see each other but also to live and take action in their worlds? Daniel has a huge impact on Gwendolen's life but what about the role she plays in his? Some general implications of these questions have already been glanced at but I will return to them specifically at this instance, which will culminate in the discussion of friendship as a malleable bond as it appears in the novel.

Friendship as a concept of moral value has its roots in the ancient Greek notion of *philia*. Aristotle devised many different types of friendships but the one that was considered to be

the truest type was what he called the friendship of virtue. It was the type of bond that could only exist between people of virtue. People could only be true friends in virtue. In this sense friendship required identification between the two friends, friends worked as mirrors of each other's virtues. The actual friendship was not to be taken as a means to get to virtue but it was actually an expression of the perfection of virtuous men:

Friendship here (in Aristotle) is grounded essentially in one's relation to one's self and is therefore only derivatively about one's relations to others. Consequently, while it is conceivable that a base person could admire the goodness in another that person could not enter into a character friendship with the other due to the absence of a settled relationship with himself. What is missing from all the lesser relationships is the connection that exists between friendship and moral excellence – a connection that is made through the relationship one has with oneself.<sup>28</sup>

The point that will interest us here is the connection between friendship and moral excellence expressed in the quotation above. Virtue, or moral excellence, comes first; one can only be a virtuous friend to someone equally virtuous if one is such a friend to one's own self. Friends work here as other selves, equal in virtue, and their friendship is, as I have just said, an expression of their virtue. There is no crack here between the private and the public sphere of life. Friendship is an expression of the leading of a virtuous life in every instance of living. The classical outlook on friendship establishes a grounding connection between friendship and virtue.

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<sup>28</sup> GRISWOLD, Charles L. Jr. and Douglas J. Den Uyl. "Adam Smith on Friendship and Love" In *Review of Metaphysics* 49. 1996, p.613.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century will be the time for friendship of interests in courtly life.<sup>29</sup> Schematically speaking, people become “friends” with each other to be in each other’s good will, to exchange favours. For instance, a baronet would become friends with a prince in order to rise socially. These are not friends in virtue but one could say that this type of friendship is still very much ruled by the classical ideal of friendship since the absence of virtue is what shapes these “lesser” relationships if one looks at them from the classical point of view<sup>30</sup>.

In these friendships of court one can already recognize a type of improvisation through empathy which leads to manipulation, not so unlike the manipulation of the Spanish over the Indians albeit on a much more sophisticated level. The relationships among noblemen were ruled by a set of norms of politeness and propriety that defined people’s places in court. The entangled game of court relations required a great deal of improvisation and empathy of its players in order to advance, or in other words, climb up socially in court.

The great moralists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish Enlightenment, such as David Hume and Adam Smith, produced a response to these 18<sup>th</sup> century friendships of interest carrying out a restoration of the concept of friendship of virtue but in private affairs, totally divorced from the public sphere of life. Adam Smith’s *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* features an understanding of friendship deeply rooted in the Aristotelian notion of virtue but with a

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<sup>29</sup> SILVER, Allan. “Friendship in Commercial Society: Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Modern Sociology” In *American Journal of Sociology*: Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

<sup>30</sup> Silver carried out an analysis of friendship in commercial society from the classic standpoint and consequently concluded that these friendships are still ruled by the ideal of virtue, which is the point that will interest us in his analysis. However, it seems that the author himself judges the 18<sup>th</sup> century friendships he analyses from that ideal of virtue, consequently reaching the conclusion that these were lesser relationships. We have no room for this discussion here but I would like to note that probably larger and more complicated tensions and entanglements actually ruled the friendships in 18<sup>th</sup> century life of court, that could not be merely reduced to friendships in which the classical ideal of virtue is absent.

modern preoccupation regarding social cooperation rather than the Aristotelian concern with self-perfection.

Smith devises in his study of the moral sentiments a basic difference between man's love of praise and the desire to be praiseworthy. Wanting to be worthy of praise, not necessarily getting praised, is what motivates man towards virtue and will be a key element in the bonds they form between themselves. For Smith also, friendship can only occur among men of virtue but in 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, the achievement of virtue stands on different grounds than those of the ancient type of virtue. Men who are praiseworthy may be true friends with each other but in order to recognize the other's worthiness one must approve of one's own conduct. Here like in Aristotle, friends act as equivalent selves in whom one can mirror one's own worthiness.

The idea of self-approbation links Smith's account of friendship to virtue but a question remains: how is that that praiseworthiness may be recognized so that a bond of friendship could be established? In order for a friendship to flourish a great degree of spectatorship is necessary. Friends are spectators of each other's conducts, which is supposed to be worthy of praise. Here, Smith formulates a great difference between friendship on the one hand, and not only romantic love but also all the other passions, on the other hand. Romantic and/or erotic love and the other passions actually annihilate any distance between one and one's object of affection:

In sum, in physical lust the actors shut themselves off from the sympathetic understanding of spectators; in romantic love actors cease to be spectators of one another; in zealous religious love of God, the actors identify themselves with their

beloved and lose perspective on their own selves; in philosophical love, the actors lose perspective on self and others. In each case, love and spectatorship, or in different terms, the attachment of love and the detachment of vision, are severed from each other. This whole spectrum of love is therefore hostile, on Smith's account, to healthy or 'respectable' love – that is, to love which incorporates spectating.<sup>31</sup>

Smith places friendship morally above love and passion. I will not enter here into this type of consideration, although it is important to remember the key role played by praiseworthiness in Smith's understanding of friendship and the distance, or in Smith's words, the degree of spectatorship, required to render this worthiness recognizable. Besides, it is important to bear in mind the fundamental difference Smith draws between friendship and love and the annihilation of spectatorship in passionate love.

The shaping difference devised by Smith between the two "sentiments" and the distance required for friendship will be important elements to return to Daniel and Gwendolen and discuss how their relationship suits the ideal of malleability that is presented in the novel. There is a two-way process in the friendship Daniel and Gwendolen establish and consolidate through the course of the novel but it does not mean that it is a symmetrical process. They have an impact on each other's lives but they are physically and socially distant from each other as argued in the previous chapter. This given distance will actually be actively incorporated in the development of their bond.

Gwendolen is, at the beginning of the novel, in many ways an aristocrat; she lives in a world of being, rather than in a world of doing, meaning that she is an ornament and a token of her aristocratic world. Her amateur activities such as singing and playing the piano only have value when she is taken as an adornment of that society. One of her first

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<sup>31</sup> GRISWOLD, *op. cit.*, p.632.

confrontations with a world of doing is her conversation with Herr Klesmer, which is a sort of wake-up call for her. The transition from a world of being to a world of doing is the ground on which her coming of age takes place. Doing, for Gwendolen, will consist in the promise of being an agent of her own life, which is the ending of the novel as was discussed earlier on in this chapter.

Daniel is someone out of place in this aristocratic world; he does not fit in. He was never part of the ornamentation of a life of being. While he remains in this world his position in it is always ambiguous. He is an outsider of mysterious origins brought up by an English gentleman. At the end of the novel he leaves this world where he never belonged to an actual place where he is to have a definite social role to play. He embraces a world of doing even in the literal sense of the word, he engages himself in the building of a Jewish state in Palestine. His connection with the social world of Judaism actually begins a long time before his confirmation of his Jewish origin, specially through the relationship he establishes with Mordecai, which prepares him for his ultimate renunciation of the world where Gwendolen belongs.

Gwendolen and Daniel are a long way from each other in the social sphere. The distance between them is never reduced. They never forge ways of crossing this distance. Recalling Smith's theory of friendship, their bond gradually incorporates spectatorship; Daniel watches her life from a distance and when Gwendolen can finally acknowledge that he also has a life of his own, she grasps the size of the distance between them. Daniel is outside that world of aristocratic values, a world of being, even though he was raised in it. Daniel can only watch Gwendolen from a distance, and he starts to do so from the very beginning

when he returns her the necklace she has pawned. The strangeness caused by the tension of their first meetings is gradually replaced with a bond that acknowledges and incorporates the distance between them. He intervenes in her life without taking part in it; she takes him as an entity above and beyond judgment that will tell her how to act and, as a consequence, cannot take part in his life either.

The bond Daniel and Gwendolen gradually build cannot be turned into love. Daniel marries someone who is nearly in every instance what Gwendolen is not. Mirah is a Jew, and someone who comes from a world of doing, she has had to work to earn her living and precisely as a professional singer, she is in the opposite end of the life Gwendolen has led. Mirah represents for Daniel official social recognition in the world of Judaism. Their union through the social and public bond of marriage merges them into one social being. As just presented with Smith, the merging of souls in romantic love wipes out the distance between them. Lovers, like Daniel and Mirah, cannot be spectators of each other.

Daniel and Gwendolen's bond takes the form of a friendship because it incorporates spectatorship even though Gwendolen can only be a spectator of Daniel in the very ending. They are always at a distance from each other; they are even distant from each other in space. The physical distance between them grows with their divergent social calls and they never have a continuous relationship. But what is it they come to see in each other from a distance? The point here is not to recognize each other's worthiness or moral excellence through a certain degree of spectatorship so that they could be friends in virtue as in Smith's renewal of the classic model of friendship.

So, I will ask again, what is at stake in their bond? Going back to the epigraph of the chapter, they learn with each other. Their friendship is not an expression of their virtue as in Smith's model. As I have been discussing, their processes of growth are intertwined with their relationship. What they see in each other teaches them how to live and take action in their worlds. Even though their bond incorporates a great deal of spectatorship, it is not in the direction of recognizing their virtues. Virtue as a closed and final product is not the point here; they do not and could not identify with each other in virtue. There is an unquestionable pedagogical value in the relationship they build; they learn how to live through the distance between them, through their differences. They come to represent to each other the limits of their separate worlds, but how is it that they come to stand as such boundaries for each other?

Daniel and Gwendolen cultivate each other<sup>32</sup>. The distance between them does not drive them to the challenge of crossing it and merging themselves in a romantic unity; the distance is never reduced. Rather they stand as opposite boundaries for each other. They are, in this sense, each other's borders. Gwendolen teaches Daniel with her dependence on

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<sup>32</sup> The idea of cultivation in this discussion is being employed according to Georg Simmel's understanding of culture. His concept of cultivation is to be understood as an analogy between men's intervention upon nature with men's intervention upon men through culture. In his example, a wild pear tree grows less and bears less sweet and a smaller number of pears than a pear tree that has been cultivated. The natural structural potential that is latent in the wild tree realizes itself through culture in the cultivated tree. With men's intervention upon men through culture a similar process to that of the cultivated pear tree takes place. Men can cultivate each other. Through the interaction with culture men's potentialities may flourish but not every development of men's potentialities can be taken as culture. All the developments of men that do not require an interaction with something or someone that is external to them cannot be included in this understanding of culture. Simmel's concept of culture requires an external object; it is rooted in the interaction between a self and an object outside of that self. Culture exists in the interaction of subject and object. SIMMEL, Georg. "Subjective Culture". In: *On Individuality and Social Forms*: Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971.



him about a world that he finally dismisses as his own. Daniel, more obviously, teaches Gwendolen about seeing the world and living in it.

Even in a literal sense, he tells her on more than one occasion that the path out of moral decadence would be for her to take an active interest in things outside herself. And she takes it, to begin with, literally too and tries to read books she would never have read in her former life and to take a general interest in the things in the world. Soon enough, however, the narrator tells us Gwendolen's process of seeing the world around her is actually being carried through less literally in the relationship she is building with Daniel. Because they stand as each other's borders they empower each other with depth of vision. To keep it in Smith's terms, they build an attachment of vision, which leads to a detachment of love. The development of their bond does not lead them into a romantic path but into a path of mutual education and cultivation.

The novel ends with promises for both Gwendolen and Daniel. A more abstract promise for Gwendolen - that she will from that moment on see the world around her and while seeing it she will be able to make her own calls - and a more concrete one for Daniel; the promise of the building of a new world. They educate each other. There is indeed a pedagogical project supporting the picture of the friendship that is presented in this novel and that is the idea that we learn with our friends. The otherness that friends represent and the distance between them and us take us beyond the limitations of ourselves. Friends, understood in this fashion, stand as a link to the world outside ourselves.

The distance Daniel and Gwendolen always keep from each other gives them a vision of their separate worlds. At the end of the novel, Gwendolen can only identify with Daniel's choices because she finally recognizes their distance. Empathy requires an encounter with otherness; one must see the other's narrative in order to identify one's own narrative with it. This is an operation that rules all relationships that incorporate spectatorship. It might lead to manipulation, as in *Othello*, or to the recognizing of an equal degree of virtue, as in Smith's theory of friendship. In all cases empathy and spectatorship go hand in hand, and, in the case of *Daniel Deronda*, they lead to a friendship that teaches both Daniel and Gwendolen how to live and improvise in a world that is moving at an extraordinary speed.

Daniel and Gwendolen choose not to merge into a bond of passion that would annihilate the distance between them, which is of vital importance for the boundaries they come to represent to each other. Their relationship is, in its turn a malleable affair: its shape is not socially and publicly defined or corroborated, it is developed through the hold they gradually have over each other's imaginations. At first they feel attracted to each other but cannot take each other as potential mates because they would not fit each other's social needs in their different worlds. The distance that is there between them from the beginning will eventually be transformed into an active engine of their relationship. To end with Smith's words, their love incorporates spectating, and in doing so it acts as an undeniable encounter with otherness that gives them a connection to worlds outside their own.

## 3 CONCLUSION

## England Can Swim

Às vezes me distraio a pensar que povo salvaria, podendo, se a humanidade se devesse reduzir a uma só. Minha hesitação seria entre a França e a Inglaterra – aliás, sei bem que no começo do século quem eliminasse a Alemanha do movimento das idéias, da poesia, da arte, eliminaria o que ele teve de melhor. Entre e a França e a Inglaterra, porém, fico sempre incerto. O meu dever seria, talvez, socorrer a França. “Se Madame Récamier e eu estivéssemos a nos afogar, qual de nós duas o senhor salvaria?”, perguntou uma vez Madame de Staël ao seu amigo Talleyrand. “Oh! Madame, vous savez nager.” A Inglaterra, também, sabe nadar.

*Joaquim Nabuco* in **Minha Formação**

Through the course of this work I have discussed the central role malleability plays in *Daniel Deronda* and the different instances in which it is to be found: From the novel’s form to its theme and moral preoccupations. It is a key element in Gwendolen’s coming-of-age-process with its ideal of improvisation in the sense Greenblatt attributes to the word. Gwendolen’s coming of age, in its turn, is intertwined with her friendship with Daniel, which is, in itself, a malleable relationship. Moreover, *Daniel Deronda* presents a cosmopolitan England in connection with Europe, America and Palestine. Daniel’s mother is Italian and Jewish, the novel opens with Gwendolen playing roulette in France, Mirah has lived in New York, and Daniel and Mirah ultimately move to Palestine to take part in the building of a Jewish State. The cosmopolitanism of the novel goes along with the expressive malleability above-mentioned, it presents an image of England in motion.

But what are the origins of malleability? I will as a conclusion suggest a path for dealing with this question by overflowing the literary boundaries of the novel. Malleability can actually be found in another domain of discourse defining as general an aspect as Englishness. In order to show that *Daniel Deronda*'s specificities are not characteristics that show up isolated in the novel I will deal with works of social, historical and political thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The England Eliot presents in *Daniel Deronda*, her questions of style, choices of subject and moral concerns can be identified with some of the concerns and questions of other 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers who wrote about England. I do not mean to reduce Eliot to her context in time and space but I believe that it is not possible to detach her writing, especially in *Daniel Deronda*, from it. Actually, rather than reducing it, analysing how such a work of fiction has connections with, and resemblances to, works of other fields of knowledge enlarges the scope in which works of fiction may be read and interpreted.

In order to complete this analysis of *Daniel Deronda* I would like to comment on two 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers who looked at the engine of English social and political forces: Alexis de Tocqueville in *L'Ancien Regime et la Revolution*<sup>33</sup> and Joaquim Nabuco in his memoirs, *Minha Formação*<sup>34</sup>. Tocqueville's book is a comparative analysis of the situation in France during the revolution and the situation in England during the same period. The opposition he identifies between the two nations helps him analyse the causes and consequences of the

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<sup>33</sup> TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis de. *O Antigo Regime e a Revolução*: Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1979.

<sup>34</sup> NABUCO, Joaquim. *Minha Formação*: Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 1999.

French revolution. Nabuco's book of memoirs has some chapters dedicated to England in which he produces a reading of it identifying a set of English characteristics, which will prove to be valuable for investigating the origins of malleability as it expresses itself in the novel.

Tocqueville's writings about France and England are a well-known reference in the studies of the French revolution and of 19<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe in general. In his interpretation of England he also isolates a set of qualities that he identifies as being essentially English. I will suggest that these qualities, which are very similar to the ones devised by Nabuco, are at the core of the novel and permeate not only Eliot's choice of theme and subject, but also their development, her style and characterisation as well. Joaquim Nabuco is a sophisticated Brazilian thinker of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who developed a strong liaison with England during his life and produced a specific image of England in *Minha Formação*.

Eliot could not have had consciously in mind the qualities and characteristics these two thinkers attribute to England. I will be suggesting that as a writer from that time and place, she is concerned in her work in general and especially in *Daniel Deronda* with the elaboration of questions that deal with historical and social characteristics. In studying an author and a novel distant in time and space it is always a valuable exercise to build an image of the society where they came from since that society's codes of behaviour, propriety and concerns, although may seem fairly similar to ours at times, are not directly accessible to us.

Malleability, defined as an ability to adapt to circumstances and reinterpret traditions rather than discard them, is a trait identified by both Nabuco and Tocqueville in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. It is in this sense of malleability as an opposed attitude to stiff rejection of tradition that these two authors paint a picture of an anti-revolutionary England. Historically, however, England had its revolutions, such as the bourgeois revolution in the 17<sup>th</sup> century - in which Parliament sentenced the king to death - followed by the 11-year republic of Cromwell and later in the century there was also the Glorious Revolution of 1688. I am not concerned at this instance, however, with the actual history of English revolutions but with the image of England presented by the two authors.

The interpretation of malleability as essentially English is at the core of Tocqueville's views of English society. In *L'Ancient Regime et la Revolution* he develops a comparative analysis of the English in opposition to the French. The French reject tradition and start anew, whereas the English embrace new ways that fit into their aristocratic tradition, which mingles with new elements. England, in the sense that Tocqueville conceived of it, is a country in which it is difficult to imagine a revolution at that time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. English social and political systems are much more pliable than the French, they can bend to suit modern needs without giving up older ones. English tradition can be revisited, rather than discarded, unlike what happens in France.

Tocqueville supplies many examples of the pliability of English traditions and institutions such as the aristocracy mingling with inferior classes. The changes in language through time also provide good examples of English powers of adaptation: the term *gentleman*, which originally used to designate *nobleman* is being employed, already at the time

Tocqueville is writing, to designate all citizens. He explains how the English aristocracy takes the burden of taxes on their class, rather than impose them on the other classes; there is always a sense that the classes must manage to live together. England develops a great degree of flexibility in order to avoid open confrontation between classes.

Nabuco will actually develop some of the directions Tocqueville announces in his comparative analysis of England. In his memoirs he devotes five chapters to the examination of England. The nature of the aristocracy in England that allows for their adaptation to the current events of the time is what Nabuco examines to some extent in these chapters. In this discussion I am dealing with the second and tenth chapters of his memoirs. The former is about the influence that the thought of Bagehot<sup>35</sup> had on Nabuco's political principles such as his support of monarchic ideals and his eulogy of the English monarchy; the latter presents a discussion of the city of London as embodying in a symbolic way these ideals.

The reading of Bagehot's eulogy of constitutional monarchy leads Nabuco to choose it as the most efficient form of government. He considers it as the most effective choice largely due to its strong ceremonial features. He argues that people live the fiction of absolutism, which provides a sense of stability, but the actual ruling is on the hands of the House of Commons, carried out by men from the people. For Nabuco, this is a type of symbolic illusion that provides a sense of safety and steadiness but allows for the actual mobility required for smooth political ruling that avoids confrontation:

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<sup>35</sup> Bagehot was one of the most important English publicists of the 19th century. He wrote an extremely popular work at the time, which summarized the principles of the "Ancestral Constitution".

Devo outras idéias a Bagehot. Antes de o ler, eu tinha o preconceito democrático contra a hereditariedade, o princípio dinástico e a influência dinástica. Foi esse democrata que me fez compreender como o que ele chamou as partes imponentes da constituição inglesa, ‘as que produzem e conservam o respeito das populações’, são tão importantes quanto as eficientes, ‘as que dão à obra o movimento e a direção’. Frases como essa gravam-se no pensamento: ‘Uma segunda e raríssima condição de governo efetivo é a calma do espírito nacional, isto é, essa disposição de espírito que permite atravessar, sem perder o equilíbrio, todas as agitações necessárias que as peripécias dos acontecimentos encerram.’<sup>36</sup>

It is not my interest here to discuss actual politics or either the social rightness or faultiness of this type of ruling such as Nabuco describes it. In reading this quotation I want to call attention to the values that emerge: malleability is at the heart of the English constitutional monarchy for it reconciles two divergent needs of the English society through flexible skills. The division between, and coexistence of, an imposing institution, monarchy, and an effective one, parliament, show how malleability is rooted in the core of English political institutions, according to Nabuco’s reading of Bagehot. As the end of the quotation above reads, the calmness credited to England can be identified with an ability to adapt to circumstances, which requires a great degree of flexibility.

The imposing calmness of London is actually the subject of the tenth chapter. The question of scale, of the immensity of the city, its parks and churches all contribute to a sense of solidness, of rooted institutions that have physical symbols scattered throughout the city. London’s size has to do with space as well as with time. Its huge institutions were steady and rooted enough not to be wiped away by time. Solid and rooted do not imply rigid at all,

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<sup>36</sup> NABUCO, op. cit., p. 35-6.



on the contrary, they remain because they can alter and conciliate, like in the case of political institutions conciliating imposing needs with effective ones. Nabuco loves London for its calmness in this sense; London is relief, freedom from constraint of stiff rules, comfort, and anonymity.

One can lose one's self in its vastness and still feel a sense of belonging. Nabuco's monarchic ideal of freedom is entrenched in this calmness. Imposing and effective needs go hand in hand producing a picture that has enough room to welcome and absorb changes without discarding tradition. As Tocqueville put it, English aristocratic traditions are constantly revisited. Stiff and suffocating rules like the ones of the *ancien regime* in France ended up being fully discarded; malleable ones like the English can bend quietly to accommodate new needs without altering the tradition that, in keeping with its imperial steadiness, provides a sense of safety.

What interests us in Tocqueville's and Nabuco's interpretations of English social and political institutions is the actual flexibility required for achieving the goal of gliding smoothly through the needs and calls of ruling. The division between imposing and effective institutions will culminate in the separation of tradition, which is imposing, from the actual ruling of the country, which is effective. The two instances can exist together without generating practical contradictions. Malleability avoids contradictions and open confrontations. It is rooted in the English character of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and will be required in nearly every instance of English living as the two thinkers describe it.

I have presented a picture of 19<sup>th</sup> century England in which malleability is a value of structural organization of an English way of life. As discussed through the course of this dissertation the value of malleability acquires a central role in *Daniel Deronda* since it is a novel concerned with the questions of its own time, as previously discussed. Malleability is significant in the form of the novel and in Eliot's style and choices of theme and subject, finding a resonance in every aspect of the novel, from its form, to moral values arising from the plot.

Daniel is, in the beginning of the novel, an English gentleman. His relationship with Mirah and her family, especially her brother Mordecai, who is a Jewish scholar, sets the ground for his later discovery of his own Jewish heritage and his full embracing of it. Daniel is in motion; he is not restrained by his upbringing to a static role in that society. An English gentleman becomes a Jew; Gwendolen, a spoiled girl becomes a grown-up woman with the ability to see around her and deliberate for herself. Daniel and Gwendolen are English in the sense that they are mobile.

We have seen how Eliot's novel has one of its sources in the novel of manners. As presented in the first chapter, the formal malleability of *Daniel Deronda* expresses itself in the mechanisms of character historicity and a commenting narrator. *Daniel Deronda*'s characters are devised as stories that are told in a course of time. This provides them with greater room for malleability since they have a plastic, pliable quality and the possibility of change. Daniel's and Gwendolen's stories come together and then grow apart making the beginning and the ending of the novel. Their stories mingle with each other through the

orchestration of the commenting narrator. The commenting narrator is much more mobile and consequently flows more freely through the characters' consciousness.

The malleability expressed through the mechanisms of character historicity and commenting narrator crosses the boundaries of form and overflows to the thematic questions and moral concerns of the novel, as I have been arguing. The formal instance of characters shaped as pliable stories will find a resonance in the actual moral support of the coming of age process as is presented in the novel. Malleability becomes an actual organizational device of the self, which is a crucial element for Gwendolen's process of growth as was presented with Nussbaum's and Greenblatt's ideas in the preceding chapter.

Gwendolen's coming of age is complete when she is, at the end of the novel, an active element in the arranging and telling of her own story. Through the comparison between Maggie, from James' *The Golden Bowl*, and Gwendolen, I looked at the stages of Gwendolen's coming of age which was defined by the process of coming to terms with the fashioning of an ability to improvise and be flexible in a world that, in its turn, is presented in the novel as vast and fluid.

The idea that growing is connected with an ability to improvise led to a discussion of the notion of improvisation presented in the novel. Greenblatt's interpretation of the dawning modern subjectivity expressed in Shakespeare's *Othello* provided me with the concepts of narrative self-fashioning, empathy and improvisation which I employed to interpret the ability to improvise as a value for the picture of adult subjectivity presented in the novel. The malleability expressed through improvisation in this sense is the key element for the

type of subjectivity that outlines itself as morally desirable in *Daniel Deronda*. Besides that, it also rules the relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen.

It is meaningful that such a friendship should be at the centre of a novel so morally preoccupied with malleability. In the discussion about friendship I presented how the distance that is always kept between Daniel and Gwendolen becomes an active element of their relationship and enables them to learn through the cultivation they perform in each other. Their relationship is of a pedagogic nature. Through their friendship they undergo a sentimental education, an education of the senses, since they grow progressively more aware of the world around them, specially Gwendolen, but also an education in feeling.

They educate themselves in their love for each other, which, in incorporating spectatorship plays an educational role in their lives. Such pedagogical love is saturated with the moral ideal of malleability. Finally, there is indeed a moral regime of malleability put through in the novel. It may seem a paradox to talk of the morals of malleability. Malleability denotes a plastic quality, one that seems to be incompatible with the building of a static moral framework. However, the morals of malleability presented in *Daniel Deronda* and which are also a key element in the images of England produced by Nabuco and Tocqueville, tell of the beginnings of an essentially contemporary type of subjectivity, one that will deal with a moving framework to accommodate the needs of a world where value and meaning will no longer reside in objects and institutions but in the relationships between subjects and objects.

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