

## ABSTRACT

### “Books with More in Them”: Reading and Imagination in the Novels of George Eliot

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This thesis examines the connections between reading and the imagination in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*. The ideal imagination, for Eliot, is both sympathetic and reality-infused, which is a result of her continuous attention to sympathy and realism in her fiction and nonfiction. Although Eliot’s characters struggle to implement this ideal imagination, they learn, through their reading and their experiences, how to use their imaginations to connect with others and to live with an awareness of their circumstances. Through the lives of Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, and Daniel Deronda, Eliot encourages reading as a way to extend experience and imagination as a tool to make well-informed, conscientious decisions.

"Books With More In Them": Reading And Imagination  
In The Novels Of George Eliot

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of English

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Master of Arts

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May 2012

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe my thesis committee a large debt of gratitude for their helpful feedback, encouragement, and patience throughout this process. My colleagues in the English department have been overwhelmingly supportive during my years at Baylor, as have my parents, who have encouraged my obsession with reading for as long as I can remember.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

George Eliot, in her 1856 review of Riehl's *The Natural History of German Life*, praises literary realism, writing, "Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (*Selected Critical Writings* 263-64). This statement of Eliot's literary goals introduces three key concepts—realism, experience, and sympathy—that are essential to her artistic philosophy and are repeatedly emphasized in her fiction. These elements are connected not only because they are all crucial components of Eliot's literary worlds, but because they are all needed by the imagination, which only thrives when it properly utilizes realism, experience, and sympathy. In exploring Eliot's views on imagination—what I call her theory of the imagination—we will see exactly what it means for the imagination to have "the power to grow and extend the self" and be "an instrument of personal and social survival" (Hardy 181). Though these ideas are evident throughout her fiction, three of her novels—*The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*—prominently feature the development of the imagination. In these novels, Eliot's theory of the imagination allows us to more fully understand the actions of her characters. While the circumstances of Maggie Tulliver's, Dorothea Brooke's, and Daniel Deronda's lives are quite different, what stays constant is the necessity of an imagination that is both sympathetic and realistic, one that is based on experience—including the experiences that one can only gain through the reading of literature.

Before exploring the connection between reading and the imagination, I will outline Eliot's theory of the imagination and define the terms that will be used in this thesis. Although Eliot does not, in her various writings, explicitly state her own theory of the imagination, we can find suggestions of this two-part theory in her fiction, letters, and critical writings. Two primary ideas encompass the major concepts from the passage quoted earlier: sympathy, which is focused on one's relationship to others, and realism, which requires one to avoid living in false worlds. (Experience also plays an important supporting role, as it is the foundation for the existence and understanding of both elements.)

The primary goal of fiction (and of the imagination), for Eliot, is to create sympathy between disparate individuals. When the imagination is used to create connections, to bring about understandings between two vastly different groups of people, Eliot deems it successful; the part of the imagination that can be called the sympathetic imagination allows people to identify with and understand one another. In an 1876 letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Eliot discusses the Jewish element in *Daniel Deronda*, providing a statement that is emblematic of the goals of her entire literary career: "There is nothing I should care more to do, if it were possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow-men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs" (*Letters* 6: 301). All of Eliot's novels—those set in different cultures and eras, like *Daniel Deronda* and *Romola*, as well as those set in nineteenth-century England—are a result of Eliot's desire to encourage compassion and empathy in her readers. According to Brigid Lowe, sympathy to Eliot "was not just another virtue like pity, not one moral attitude among others; it was

rather the necessary condition of all morality, a fundamental mode of understanding” (112). Sympathy implies “real, personal, human engagement—intellectual give and take” (Lowe 11), and while it can be a difficult skill to learn, it is an essential component of meaningful relationships (such as the one between Daniel Deronda and Mirah Lapidoth). Thus, the sympathetic imagination encourages human connection and involvement, which in turn requires an understanding of what other people are truly like.

Imagination is often associated with fantasy; it is frequently assumed that references to the imagination mean that the “real world” is excluded in favor of impossibilities. But like her position on that other “fabricated” form—fiction—Eliot’s position on imagination has its foundation in her stance on realism and her approach to art, as explained by the narrator of *Adam Bede*. In this well-known passage, the narrator says that art should be a “faithful representing of commonplace things” (180), arguing in favor of realism by telling the readers who favor happiness over truth,

I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outline will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (177)

Like the narrator of *Adam Bede*, Eliot feels compelled to write about what she has observed; similarly, the imagination (as a key part of her creative faculties) also needs to be grounded in reality. Though calling imagination “realistic” might seem contradictory, the idea of a reality-based imagination makes sense when paired with its opposite—when the dangers of using imagination as an escape from reality are seen.

This use of imagination to escape, then, does not fit under the umbrella of a reality-based imagination; instead, this mental process can be defined as fantasy. While

fantasy promotes escaping from problems—ignoring reality in favor of something frivolous or distracting—imagination encourages an active engagement with reality, an engagement that Eliot deems necessary for all who wish to create and participate in good art. In her novels, the characters who use their fantasies to escape their lives and ignore the consequences of their actions are not ultimately successful in their endeavors.

One of Eliot's most complete statements on imagination emphasizes both sympathy and realism. In her last work of fiction, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (a collection of short, reflective essays), the narrator, Theophrastus, contends that using the imagination is different from using fantasy to create false worlds:

I know that there is a common prejudice which regards the habitual confusion of *now* and *then*, of *it was* and *it is*, of *it seemed so* and *I should like it to be so*, as a mark of high imaginative endowment, while the power of precise statement and description is rated lower, as the attitude of an everyday prosaic mind. High imagination is often assigned or claimed as if it were a ready activity in fabricating extravagances such as are presented by fevered dreams. . . (174)

The narrator writes that a “fine” imagination “is always based on a keen vision, a keen consciousness of what *is*, and carries the store of definite knowledge as material for the construction of its inward visions” (176), refuting the idea that imagination is merely used to invent details about a situation when the actual details have not been observed. Eliot painstakingly defends imagination from the accusations that it is mere falsehood; imagination is important precisely because it enhances reality, not because it acts as a shield between a person and the world:

...powerful imagination is not false outward vision, but intense inward representation, and a creative energy constantly fed by susceptibility to the veriest minutiae of experience, which it reproduces and constructs in fresh and fresh wholes; not the habitual confusion of proveable fact with the fictions of fancy and transient inclination, but a breadth of ideal association which informs every material object, every incidental fact with

far-reaching memories and stored residues of passion, bringing into new light the less obvious relations of human existence. (178)

This facet cannot be separated from sympathy, for it is in learning to understand the lives of others that one begins to comprehend what it means to live imaginatively in the world—to live with an ability to recognize the problems of others while simultaneously envisioning potential ways to help them (Maggie Tulliver, for example, comes to this realization, but not until the end of her life, when she attempts to rescue her brother Tom from the flood). Only when one uses both the sympathetic and reality-based components is the imagination employed to its full potential.

These explanations from Eliot's work of the importance of sympathy and realism show how the imagination will be stronger when it includes both of these elements. The imagination should be used to attempt to understand and sympathize with others; similarly, it should be used to engage with reality, to understand more about the world, rather than to escape or distance oneself from the world (which is what happens with fantasy). Throughout Eliot's novels, we see how her characters struggle with one or both of these components, and how these struggles change their lives. It is through the characters' reading (or lack of reading) that the ways in which the imagination is being used (or not being used) are the most obvious. Reading is a tool for understanding the workings of the imagination; imaginative responses to reading can foreshadow how the characters will respond and use their imaginations in other situations. Art—and literature—"amplify experience," as Eliot wrote in her review of Riehl. Experience is, of course, valuable for both of these ideas; without experience, one would not even have the ability to be sympathetic or to understand reality, for there would be no basis for comprehending others' thoughts or lives. Reading provides a way of both understanding

and extending experience—and for some characters, it is the only way they have of gaining experience.

Eliot's characters often find themselves with reading material, and reading, perhaps even more than any other form of art, engages sympathy. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum observes that fiction can be a powerful tool for understanding and interpreting the world. When addressing the question of why our own lives are not sufficient in themselves for philosophical study, Nussbaum writes, "We have never lived enough. Our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial. Literature extends it, making us reflect and feel about what might otherwise be too distant for feeling" (47). Although Nussbaum does not, in this passage, address the concept of sympathy by name, she does mention closely related issues: "[L]iterature is an extension of life not only horizontally, bringing the reader into contact with events or locations or persons or problems he or she has not otherwise met, but also, so to speak, vertically, giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life" (48). Through these "deeper" experiences brought to us by literature, we can (but do not always) learn what it would mean to live in different cultures, times, or circumstances with different families, friends, or neighbors. For such experiences to take place, though, the imagination must be prepared to understand and sympathize with situations foreign to the reader's actual experiences. Reading both teaches and encourages these skills, and it is therefore essential to the development of the imagination, which is in turn essential to life.

Eliot is clearly in favor of both reading and the use of the imagination, but many of her contemporaries had a different perspective. The Victorians were aware of the

increasing popularity and availability of novels, and they believed that novels posed various dangers to the minds and lives of those who read them—particularly young women. Kate Flint’s excellent study *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914* draws on a variety of historical and literary sources in order to ascertain the Victorians’ general consensus on reading. The argument behind the idea that reading was a dangerous activity for women relied on two basic premises: that “she, as woman, was peculiarly susceptible to emotionally provocative material,” and that “certain texts might corrupt her innocent mind, hence diminishing her value as a woman” (Flint 22). These dangers led to the publication of works—from scientific studies to advice manuals—that described how and why reading was dangerous and what should be done about those problematic books that were influencing female minds.

For the Victorians, however, reading had powerful effects on more than just the mind. According to Flint, ideas about the differences between men’s and women’s ways of reading “were inseparably linked to those developments in physiology and psychology which found, demonstrated, and utilized evidence for the intimate interrelations of mind and body. . . . No body was perceived as being more vulnerable to impure mental foods as that of the young woman” (53). No wonder, then, that reading was perceived as a potentially unsafe activity; if simply reading one romance novel could cause physical illness, then such dangers clearly would outweigh any pleasure derived from this reading.

These possible physical dangers, however, were nothing when compared to the hazardous effects of reading on the imagination. It was assumed “that women read uncritically, readily identifying with the central characters in their fictions. Tellingly, novel-reading was warned against because of its capacity to raise false expectations, and

engender dissatisfaction with one's present mode of life" (Flint 74). "Doubleday," the author of an 1859 article called "Books and Their Uses," was concerned that people (both men and women) were not reading with discernment, asking "whether the craving for books may not be a disease, and whether we may not live too little in ourselves, and too much in others" (110). In a recent article, Debra Gattelman noted, "Such commentaries on novel reading, with their emphasis on its apparent 'dangers,' almost despite themselves reveal a heightened awareness of the fertile imagining novel reading stirred" (27). Worries about such "fertile imagining" becoming the means of wish-fulfillment for women's romantic fantasies were common, and this potential danger prompted the authors of advice manuals to publish lists of both recommended and restricted books. While Eliot's novels were frequently recommended, they were also prohibited in certain circumstances; for instance, the depiction of Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* caused some people to forbid the novel in individual homes (Flint 146).

Despite the criticism of Eliot's works, her novels were extremely popular in many circles. Nor was reading itself universally condemned; as Flint notes, literature's capacity for influence can work both positively and negatively (76). Nevertheless, anti-reading beliefs were prevalent enough to create a largely antagonistic attitude toward novels, particularly because of novels' potential impact on the already dangerous imagination. According to Gattelman, "In the mid-nineteenth century, Victorian psychologists . . . were beginning to theorize the unconscious workings of the imagination, which appeared particularly immune to rational control or coaxing" (25). If the imagination were already prone to wandering, fiction could only encourage such risky activities. For nineteenth-century scholars E. S. Dallas and Alexander Bain, the

imagination was “a potentially overpowering faculty,” at least partially because of “its association with unconscious, unprompted mental workings” (Gettelman 37). A lack of understanding of the imagination, coupled with certain misconceptions about emotional and physical responses to reading, caused many Victorians to overreact to the increasing popularity of novels.

It was into this charged atmosphere, in which both reading and imagining were under constant scrutiny, that Eliot’s novels were published. Through her novels and the reading characters in them, Eliot rejects contemporary views by encouraging an interactive mode of reading, one that requires engaging with the literature rather than simply imbibing its precepts. Eliot’s theory of the imagination portrays the imagination as ultimately a positive tool, cementing her place as a dissident in Victorian society.

By the late 1850s, when Eliot was writing her novels, her views on reading and the imagination were not especially close to those of her contemporaries. However, in her early letters we do see some evidence of Victorian influences on her opinions about how reading can help or harm the mind. Writing to her close friend Maria Lewis in 1839, Eliot (who was nineteen-year-old Mary Ann Evans at the time) describes the effects of her extensive childhood reading:

I shall carry to my grave the mental diseases with which [novels] have contaminated me. When I was quite a little child I could not be satisfied with the things around me; I was constantly living in a world of my own creation, and was quite contented to have no companions that I might be left to my own musings and imagine scenes in which I was chief actress. Conceive what a character novels would give to these Utopias. . . . We cannot, at least those who ever read to any purpose at all, we cannot I say help being modified by the ideas that pass through our minds. We hardly wish to lay claim to such elasticity as retains no impress. We are active beings too. We are each one of the *Dramatis personae* in some play on the stage of life—hence our actions have their share in the effects of our reading. (*Letters* 1: 22-23)

Although Mary Ann is being rather dramatic in this letter, her view—that reading, and the unrealistic imaginings it encourages, are dangerous and possibly infectious—shows how much she, as a teenager, was influenced by her surroundings. The young Eliot is at the very least correct in her admission that reading can affect minds, one of the few of these ideas that her older self would still subscribe to.

Ten years later, in 1849, Eliot conveys a more mature version of the same idea, but this time she acknowledges that the reader does have the power to determine whether or not to agree with the words of an author. In a letter to her friend Sara Hennell about George Sand's novel *Jacques*, she writes that despite (or because of) the variety of books she reads, she does not merely assume that everything she reads is true:

I wish you thoroughly to understand that the writers who have most profoundly influenced me—who have rolled away the waters from their bed raised new mountains and spread delicious valleys for me—are not in the least oracles to me. It is just possible that I may not embrace one of their opinions, that I may wish my life to be shaped quite differently from theirs. (*Letters* 1: 277)

Eliot makes a distinction between being influenced by a writer and taking everything an author says to be a valuable insight. If the goal of a literary work is to show the true nature of life, then these pictures of life should also stimulate new thoughts and ideas in each reader.

For this approach to literature to be successful, readers must be active, aware, and engaged; these ideal readers will not only simply *read* the literature but will also *think* about it in an imaginative way. They must place themselves sympathetically in the lives of the characters; they must see the story as not just a story, but as a window into a new world. The ability to do all of these things is a signal of a ready imagination, which,

instead of sheltering the readers from reality, enhances the world by encouraging a deeper understanding of both literature and life. Eliot's ideal audience consists of those who are prepared to read and think imaginatively and actively; in order for her novels to have their full effect, the readers must be open to the potential changes that might result from a particularly powerful work of literature.

In this thesis, I will explore the intersection of reading and the imagination in the lives of some of Eliot's major characters and readers: Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, Gwendolen Harleth, and Daniel Deronda. These characters from *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda* learn in their individual ways how to live fruitfully within the constraints of their circumstances, and this learning process is closely related to how they read and how they employ their imaginations. As I move from examining the short life of Maggie Tulliver to exploring the ambitions of Daniel Deronda, I will notice the progression of the characters, from Maggie's troublesome childhood, through Dorothea's recovery from her unhappy marriage, to Daniel's grand plans for his life with Mirah. This progression shows how each character struggles with integrating imagination and reality, reading and life, and though each is successful in one way or another (however limited), the most complete triumph belongs to the protagonist of Eliot's final novel.

Maggie Tulliver, as a child, is a passionate, imaginative reader, but as she grows up, she allows her circumstances (and Stephen Guest) to overwhelm her, thus temporarily abandoning an imaginative life in favor of the romance and passivity of music. While her imagination takes her into new worlds, they are worlds of fantasy, and it is not until the end of her life that she learns how to integrate imagination with reality. Like Maggie,

Dorothea Brooke wants to live with purpose, but it is her inexperienced imagination that causes her to take an incorrect path, in her marriage to Edward Casaubon. Through this unpleasant experience, as well as her relationship with Will Ladislaw, she learns how to distinguish fiction from reality, which, for her, involves an integration of the knowledge she gains from reading with her desire for an active, meaningful life. Finally, the contrast between Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda demonstrates two potential results of the relationship between reading and the imagination. Gwendolen's utter selfishness precludes her from opening her mind to ideas presented by life or literature, while Daniel's sympathetic nature responds to almost any stimulus, including literature. Their imaginative reading (or lack thereof) can partially explain their actions and their drastically different lives. Gwendolen creates a "reality" that puts herself at the center, but Grandcourt despises her for it and does not allow her to remain in that dream. Daniel, on the other hand, is in control of his fantasies, knowing that creating ways to distance himself from reality will not be helpful to him later in life.

When these characters view imagination as a way to *replace* reality—rather than as a way to enhance it—their decisions become increasingly suspect, and thus the consequences of those decisions are more drastic. For all of these characters, from *The Mill on the Floss* to *Middlemarch* to *Daniel Deronda*, the successes or failures of their actions and lives are directly linked to the successes or failures of their imaginations.

Eliot's desire to engage the sympathetic imagination of her readers suggests not only the realism she hopes to convey through her writing, but also the necessity of an ability to imagine oneself in the place of others, to use the imagination and the realistic portrayal of life through literature to understand more about a different portion of human

experience. Ultimately, fiction will open the minds of its readers to other lives and other experiences, and it is the connection between reading and the imagination that allows these truths to be conveyed. Eliot wants her characters and her readers alike to realize the importance of imaginative reading to the literary world and the rest of society. In order to develop the sympathy necessary to an insightful life, readers must employ their imaginations, just as Maggie, Dorothea, Gwendolen, and Daniel try (and sometimes fail) to do.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “No Dream-World Would Satisfy Her Now”: Maggie’s Struggle with Fantasy and Reality in *The Mill on the Floss*

Eliot’s most autobiographical novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, is also the novel that is most concerned with reading and imagining. Like Eliot, the young Maggie Tulliver is an enthusiastic and energetic reader, eager to engage her imagination in the activity of reading, but she is consistently discouraged from reading and marginalized by her family members because of her commitment to reading. Indeed, as Carla L. Peterson notes, “Maggie’s undirected reading illustrates the kinds of fears Victorian England had concerning the young child who reads in isolation and without adult guidance” (187). Though some adults in the novel may see Maggie’s reading as dangerous, it is the only activity that allows her to develop her imagination and survive in a world that does not support women’s education or critical thinking. She constantly struggles with one element of the ideal imagination or the other—with sympathy or with reality—as she grows up, before finally reaching a brief moment of triumph right before the end of her life. These changes are reflective of her changing approach to literature and her increasing fascination with music “as another, no less important but very different form of ‘reading’” (Peterson 182). Maggie tries to learn how to translate the imaginative skills she begins to develop as a child to parallel imaginative skills appropriate for an adult, ones that allow the imagination to interact with and reflect reality. However, when she transfers her attention from reading to music, she slows the progress of her imagination; while reading stretches her mind, music encourages her to ignore her problems.

In this chapter, I will show how the development of Maggie's imagination is caused by her changing modes of reading both literature and music; her transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by variations in her reading habits and interactions with art. In her attempts to balance the desires of her imagination with the problems of reality, she vacillates between one extreme and the other—between completely indulging the imagination and completely ignoring it—and she ultimately learns that a sympathetic and reality-infused imagination is necessary in order to have meaningful, fulfilling relationships.

In the various critical works about the novel, Maggie's reading habits have not been ignored. Some critics, like Emily Eells, are interested in the parallels between Maggie's reading habits and those of Mary Ann Evans; Eells claims that through Maggie, we are given insight into Eliot's development as an artist. Three works have a particularly large effect on Maggie (and likely Eliot as well): Daniel Defoe's *The History of the Devil*, Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, and Germaine de Staël's *Corinne*. Focusing on these three texts as central to Maggie's reading life, Catherine J. Golden argues for Maggie as a prophetic reader because of the way in which those texts illuminate and foreshadow the events of Maggie's life. Critics have also made convincing arguments about Maggie's role as a female reader, which are particularly relevant to this discussion because of the Victorian controversy surrounding the effects of reading on women. Karen E. Hottle demonstrates how the male-dominated society forces Maggie, as a woman, to read in limiting and ultimately destructive ways because of how she is prevented from choosing her own reading material, while Nancy Cervetti, on the other hand, asserts that the diversity of Maggie's reading allows her to "make decisions

different from those socially prescribed for women” (30). These studies make persuasive claims about the meaning of Maggie’s reading, particularly in their detailed examinations of the books read or mentioned by Maggie (as well as their descriptions of the similarities between the content of some of these books and the trajectory of Maggie’s life). In order to avoid a repetition of such analyses, I will not discuss many of the novel’s allusions to specific works, though an understanding of the works referred to by Eliot is necessary when studying the role of reading in the novel. Rather, my focus is on the attitudes toward reading that are displayed by the characters in the novel (particularly because they are frequently representative of Victorian attitudes, which contrast Eliot’s views), as well as the influence of reading and imagining on the course of Maggie’s life.

Literature is not the only art form that fascinates Maggie; in the latter portion of her life, she forgoes reading in favor of music. And, like literature, music is frequently discussed and alluded to in the novel. It was a similarly significant part of Eliot’s life, and therefore critics have spent a considerable amount of time analyzing the role that music plays in *Mill*, most frequently drawing attention to the specific works and composers mentioned by Eliot. Both Gillian Beer and William J. Sullivan provide helpful studies of the musical allusions in the novel, while Delia da Sousa Correa compares the function of music and memory to the biological and scientific theories of perception prevalent at the time of the novel’s composition. Alisa Clapp-Itnyre, in a class-conscious study, discusses the concept of music as social discourse in Maggie’s life, in which society privileges certain types of music and musicians while marginalizing others. These studies are essential to my reading of the novel; my focus, however, is not solely on music but on its relationship to reading and the imagination, which is an area

yet to be studied. Looking at Maggie's love of both reading and music shows the continuity between her younger and older selves (who, at first glance, appear to be completely different people) and allows me to trace the development of her imagination, which is crucial to the decisions she makes throughout her life.

Like several other works of Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* describes one component of a definition of imagination, one that relates specifically to Maggie's experiences.

Early in the novel, Eliot's narrator meditates on the foundation of imagination, noting its basis in memories fashioned in childhood:

These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows—such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep bladed grass today, might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years, which still live in us and transform our perception into love. (45-46)

In an ideal world, each person's constant perception is half-created by memories of past experiences and the workings of the imagination (which rely on these experiences).

Through this emphasis on memory, Eliot describes another facet of the reality-based imagination outlined in the Introduction. Just as we are products of our experiences, so are our imaginations developed through our experiences, our memories, and our knowledge of reality. This interworking of memory and imagination helps Maggie survive in a world that does not value her imaginative abilities; she is allowed to partially create her experiences and perceptions precisely because she allows her imagination to work alongside her memory and experiences in daily life.

As a child, Maggie relies on her imagination to create worlds that will help her escape from her unpleasant life; in her unhappy moments, she chooses to “fancy it was all different, refashioning her little world into just what she should like it to be. Maggie’s was a troublous life, and this was the form in which she took her opium” (52). While identifying this “refashioning” with opium may appear to diminish its reliability, the narrator temporarily approves of Maggie’s use of imagination to dull the pain of her life, acknowledging that Maggie is still a child who might need a short-term distraction from reality. Using the imagination as an escape is not ideal, nor does it fit with the theory of the imagination that encourages thoughtful engagement with reality; however, the narrator of *Mill* allows some exceptions for Maggie, particularly because she is a child in challenging circumstances. This acceptance of fantasy (on the part of the both the narrator and the readers) is contingent on it being merely temporary; Maggie, as she grows up, must learn to distinguish between fantasy and imagination, fiction and reality.

For the time being, though, Maggie’s imagination is allowed to roam freely. These imaginative tendencies are shown most clearly through her reading because young Maggie is first and foremost a reader; the chapters on Maggie’s childhood are full of references to and descriptions of the variety of books that she reads and the value she places on her reading. Three of these incidents are representative of the development of her imagination and the significance of books to her life: Maggie’s reading of Daniel Defoe’s *The History of the Devil*, her brief conversation about books with Luke, and her visit to the gypsies.

Just as Eliot’s experiences with Victorian society show the contrast between her ideas and the ideas of most Victorians, Maggie’s views of reading differ from those of

her community (which consists primarily of her family but also includes other adults from the village). The adults around her have fears about reading that are typical of the Victorian period, but Maggie, even as a child, tends to do the opposite of her parents' wishes, which is evident in her enjoyment of reading. Mr. Tulliver, though more supportive of Maggie than is Mrs. Tulliver, constantly refers to Maggie as "too 'cute for a woman" (15), wishing that Tom had her intellect because it is more useful (and normal) for boys to be smart; Mrs. Tulliver is small-minded and oblivious to the needs of a girl like Maggie. Even adults outside her family marginalize Maggie because of what she chooses to read. The troublesome nature of Maggie's reading is most clearly seen in her reading of Defoe's *The History of the Devil* in front of Mr. Riley, who is "rather highly educated for an auctioneer and appraiser" (17) and who, to Maggie, represents learning.

In this reading, which demonstrates her capacity for powerful, adventurous reading, Maggie draws on her (limited) experience and on her (still developing) capacity for sympathy, and then she connects what she reads to what she knows of reality. Instead of merely receiving the information presented in the book, Maggie reads creatively, adding her thoughts to the foundational ideas provided by the text; Cervetti notes, "[H]er psyche captures, mixes, and re-forms the events, ideas and characters in an ongoing and dynamic exchange" (38). Pictures are particularly important for this task, which makes *The History of the Devil*, with its many illustrations, well-suited to Maggie's style of reading. Excited by the opportunity to demonstrate her skill to an educated adult, Maggie does not hesitate to tell Mr. Riley her thoughts about the pictures in the book:

"O, I'll tell you what that means. It's a dreadful picture, isn't it? But I can't help looking at it. That old woman in the water's a witch—they've put her in, to find out whether she's a witch or no, and if she swims she's a witch, and if she's drowned—and killed, you know,—she's innocent, and

not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman. But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned? Only, I suppose she'd go to heaven, and God would make it up to her. And this dreadful blacksmith with his arms akimbo, laughing—oh, isn't he ugly?—I'll tell you what he is. He's the devil *really*" (here Maggie's voice became louder and more emphatic) "and not a right blacksmith; for the devil takes the shape of wicked men, and walks about and sets people doing wicked things, and he's oftener in the shape of a bad man than any other, because, you know, if people saw he was the devil, and he roared at 'em, they'd run away, and he couldn't make 'em do what he pleased." (20-21)

This description foreshadows Maggie's own death by drowning, and her identification with the figure of the witch, as noticed by Golden, is especially applicable to her future life: "Even if Maggie misreads Defoe's ideas of gender and devilry, her sympathetic reading of the witch explains her own position as an untraditional woman in her male-dominated society" (84). But more than that, the advanced thinking demonstrated by this type of reading shows precisely how much Maggie's imagination is worth. Maggie makes important judgments about both witch-hunting and the devil through her analysis of the pictures in the book; her imaginative interpretation of these pictures leads her to understand sophisticated concepts about them. It is through books like *The History of the Devil*, *Aesop's Fables*, and *Pilgrim's Progress* that Maggie is able to find an outlet for her otherwise stifled imagination and intellect. Like Dorothea Brooke, Maggie is constantly searching for a way to learn more, to increase her education despite the barriers presented by society, and she finds it through these books.

Maggie shows a great deal of potential with this way of reading, but it is potential that she ultimately struggles to fulfill, partly because her family members and other adults respond to her reading of such books in demoralizing and discouraging ways. Mr. Riley in particular does not recognize the promise Maggie demonstrates with this reading of Defoe. He wants her to "read some prettier book," to which Maggie responds, "I know

the reading in this book isn't pretty—but I like the pictures, and I make stories to the pictures out of my own head, you know" (21). While Mr. Riley's belief that girls have no need to read books that require any sort of critical thinking may be correct in the case of *The History of the Devil* (which is not entirely appropriate for children of either gender), his overall condemnation of Maggie's imaginative reading is detrimental to both her desire to read and her imagination, especially because she views him as an intelligent adult, one who has more credibility because he is not part of her family. Maggie is used to hearing those sentiments from her parents; Mr. Tulliver, who is supportive of Maggie's cleverness to a certain extent, also destroys her confidence by saying, "It is as I thought—the child 'ull learn more mischief nor good wi' the books" (22). During this period, Maggie undergoes a systematic devaluation of her reading—and her imagination—by her family, causing her to similarly grow to disregard the imaginative reading that she had previously enjoyed.

Despite this discouragement, Maggie reveals her innate capacity for sympathy when she tries to include Luke in her reading—only to have him rebuff her. Maggie wants to lend him a book, *Pug's Tour of Europe*, so that he can learn about "the different sorts of people in the world" (33). Luke, however, is not interested in learning about the Dutchmen ("There ben't much good i' knowin' about *them*," he says), focusing his interest on those who are directly involved in his life rather than on people who live far away and therefore are not relevant to his everyday experience. Maggie's response, though ignored by Luke, emphatically defends sympathy: "But they're our fellow-creatures, Luke—we ought to know about our fellow-creatures" (33). For Maggie, books are important because they allow one to learn about other people—people outside the

realm of direct acquaintance, but people nonetheless. Even as a child, Maggie has an understanding (albeit a basic one) of the concept of sympathy; she is beginning to develop her sympathetic imagination, which allows her to care for and learn about people, even those she has not met.

Though Maggie is clearly interested in the welfare of all people, she does not know how to handle situations that force her to put those ideas into practice. She is so young that she cannot yet translate her reading experience to life experience, and so she is not aware of the difference between her fantasies and the reality of the world in which she lives. As she runs away to join the gypsies, she realizes that, despite what she has heard about them, she is not quite sure what to expect. Into this gap come the imaginative possibilities of her past readings:

For poor little Maggie had at once the timidity of an active imagination, and the daring that comes from overmastering impulse. She had rushed into this adventure of seeking her unknown kindred, the gypsies, and now she was in this strange lane she hardly dared look on one side of her, lest she should see the diabolical blacksmith in his leathern apron grinning at her with arms akimbo. (114)

She allows her imaginative thoughts about both the gypsies and the pictures and words of Defoe to combine, forming a fantasy world from her experiences and her reading: “To Maggie, books are real; they give her the information that her growing mind craves as well as the freedom to create and explore her own ideas about herself and the world around her. She does not, however, have the ability to discriminate between fact and fiction, or to question what she reads” (Hottle 37). While on occasion this continuum between fact and fiction is beneficial for Maggie (in prompting her to strengthen her imagination by playing make-believe games or creating stories), the encounter with the gypsies shows the dangers of such thinking.

Though Maggie eventually realizes that she is not completely safe in the gypsies' hands, this brief but formative time teaches her that reality is not the same as the content of books. As she talks to the gypsies, she does not quite recognize that the experience is actually occurring: "'Not any farther,' said Maggie, feeling as if she were saying what she had rehearsed in a dream. 'I'm come to stay with *you*, please'" (115). This dream-like state follows Maggie throughout much of this adventure, and so at first, her visit is lovely and "just like a story: Maggie liked to be called pretty lady and treated in this way" (116). The excitement of becoming part of one of her stories prompts her to discuss her favorite subject—books—with her new acquaintances. In her desire to educate the gypsies and to share the joy that reading brings her, Maggie describes her reading: "I should have liked to bring my books with me, but I came away in a hurry, you know. But I can tell you almost everything there is in my books, I've read them so many times—and that will amuse you. And I can tell you something about Geography too—that's about the world we live in—very useful and interesting. Did you ever hear about Columbus?" (117). Maggie is surprised, though, that the gypsies show no interest in what she has learned from reading books, and their mysterious language and actions force Maggie to recognize that "it was impossible that she should ever be queen of these people, or ever communicate to them amusing and useful knowledge" (118). This incident, in which reality is in direct contrast to her fantasy, discourages Maggie from applying the knowledge she has gained from books to real life because, to her astonishment, there are many people who do not care to learn what books have to teach.

This education in the distinctions between fiction and reality continues as she compares the characters she has seen in books to the actual experiences she has had

during her childhood in St. Ogg's. At first, her hopes for rescue from her increasingly scary situation lie not in reality, but in mythical figures: "If her father would but come by in the gig and take her up! Or even if Jack the Giantkiller or Mr Greatheart or St George who slew the dragon on the half-pennies, would happen to pass that way! But Maggie thought with a sinking heart that these heroes were never seen in the neighbourhood of St Ogg's—nothing very wonderful ever came there" (119). In thinking about her town and its differences from the stories she reads, Maggie acknowledges that such fantastic characters as those mentioned above will not appear in the world that she lives in. In fact, Maggie's rescue happens in a rather prosaic way; she is taken toward her home by one of the gypsies, and, on the road, they happen to see her father, who has no idea what has been happening. He does not swoop in to rescue her or fight the thieving gypsies. In this mundane ending to what purported to be a full-fledged adventure, Maggie begins to learn (whether or not she acknowledges it) that her life will not be as interesting as what she reads in her stories, nor are stories accurate predictors of future events. This is an essential lesson for her; children are quicker to conflate fantasy and reality than are adults, but eventually children must learn the differences between the two. Just as the ideal imagination works with reality, the ideal imaginer knows how to distinguish fiction from reality and acts accordingly, basing his or her decisions on this knowledge of life.

These incidents in Maggie's childhood show how she is simultaneously encouraged internally by her reading and discouraged from it by her family and friends. For Maggie, reading is fraught with consequences, both good and bad; she is starting to learn how to think and how to live, but she is disparaged by her family as a result of her dangerous imaginative reading. Maggie has been, throughout this period, training her

imagination to understand the differences between reality and fantasy, to interpret what she sees. But the problems in her family life, combined with their constant attacks on her reading, cause her to read less, which in turn halts the progress she has been making in learning about fiction and reality. One particular incident that causes Maggie to reflect on the place of literature in her life is when Tom, during an argument, accuses her of being conceited. She then notices how much more unpleasant her world is than the one she reads about:

[E]verybody in the world seemed so hard and unkind to Maggie: there was no indulgence, no fondness, such as she imagined when she fashioned the world afresh in her own thoughts. In books there were people who were always agreeable or tender, and delighted to do things that made one happy, and who did not show their kindness by finding fault. The world outside the books was not a happy one, Maggie felt: it seemed to be a world where people behaved the best to those they did not pretend to love and that did not belong to them. And if life had no love in it, what else was there for Maggie? (247)

Reality—and its difference from what she finds in books—is now much clearer to Maggie. Although there are still several ways in which she could employ books in her life (for instance, as examples of possible ways to respond to her situation), she instead becomes frustrated with the books she typically reads and with fiction in general. Reading is a way of extending experience, as Nussbaum argues, but Maggie right now only sees the differences between reality and fiction, not the way that fiction can increase one's understanding of parts of reality. She has been living in “the triple world of reality, books and waking dreams” (287), but that triple world did not successfully combine those three elements. Now that reality, books, and dreams are more clearly separated, Maggie does not know how to act.

This frustration is increasingly evident as her father's troubles escalate. Reality encroaches on her fantastical worlds, and she does not know how to reconcile the two; those fancies are no longer sufficient because the reality of her circumstances—her father's health, her inability to change any part of her family's situation—is so overwhelming:

Every affection, every delight the poor child had had was like an aching nerve to her. There was no music for her any more—no piano, no harmonised voices, no delicious stringed instruments with their passionate cries of imprisoned spirits sending a strange vibration through her frame. And of all her school life, there was nothing left her now but her little collection of school books, which she turned over with a sickening sense that she knew them all, and they were all barren of comfort. Even at school she had often wished for books with *more* in them: everything she learned there seemed like the ends of long threads that snapped immediately. . . . Sometimes Maggie thought she could have been contented with absorbing fancies: if she could have had all Scott's novels and all Byron's poems!—then perhaps she might have found happiness enough to dull her sensibility to her actual daily life. And yet . . . they were hardly what she wanted. She could make dream-worlds of her own—but no dream-world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life . . . she wanted some key that would enable her to understand and, in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart. If she had been taught “real learning and wisdom, such as great men knew,” she thought she should have held the secrets of life; if she had only books that she might learn for herself what wise men knew! (297-98)

In her search for a way to explain reality, Maggie thinks she needs to turn away from imaginative reading and toward the books that the wise men read, thereby creating a division between two types of books: fiction, which encourages imagination, and nonfiction, which is *real* and will provide intelligence that can actually apply to life. Her belief in this false dichotomy explains her response to Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, which she finds among the books that Bob Jakin has brought her. Now that her earlier reading and studying have proven to be insufficient to tangibly change her new,

troublesome life, Maggie is prepared to listen to a fresh voice, one that will speak to her of practical steps she can take. Her fanciful dream worlds and her readings of fiction—because they have been purely fantasy-based—have been unable to satisfy her as she matures, and so she turns away from herself, looking to the intellects and artistic talents of others in the hope of finding help and comfort.

Both Maggie's reading style and her attitude toward life change upon her discovery of Kempis, and although some elements of this new approach are successful, Maggie ultimately abandons Kempis because his precepts require her to abandon a key part of her personality—her love for art. Maggie's reading of Kempis differs from her earlier reading of Defoe's *The History of the Devil* in several ways, most noticeably in her response to it; instead of creating something new to add to the story, she accepts without question what is written on the page. She becomes a less discerning reader (and is suddenly similar to the readers who worried some nineteenth-century scholars); her recognition of truth in Kempis's words is all that matters: "A strange thrill of awe passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor. . . . [H]ere was insight, and strength, and conquest, to be won by means entirely within her own soul, where a supreme teacher was waiting to be heard" (302). Because her immediate outside world has failed her, she is eager to find a helper in her reading. Maggie is ready for a teacher who will stimulate her thought and life; she is not mentally or emotionally prepared at this moment to be her own guide through the troubles of her current circumstances. Maggie "knew nothing of doctrines and systems—of mysticism or quietism: but this voice out of the far-off middle ages, was the direct communication

of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message" (303). As her youthful desire to know about her fellow creatures indicates, Maggie wants and appreciates connections with the past, with people who had similar concerns to the ones she has now. And this desire, as represented by her encounter with Kempis's book, overpowers her capacity for critical thinking.

The principles in *The Imitation of Christ* do change how Maggie reads, partially because of how she so easily accepts what the writer says and partially because of the attitude toward art espoused in his writings (namely, that it is unnecessary—that self-renunciation is the key to life). Upon discovering *The Imitation of Christ*, she abandons Virgil, Euclid, and Aldrich—"that wrinkled fruit of the tree of knowledge" (305)—in favor of her religious texts, through which she "ardently learn[s] to see all nature and life in the light of her new faith" (306). She has found a way to allow her reading to affect reality, so instead of a mode of reading that relies on illusions and escapism, she now reads Kempis as if she is listening to a teacher. The differences between her earlier readings and her current readings arise from her maturity and her circumstances; she now reads less creatively, but with a focus on the outward life.

This period of Maggie's life is notable because of her attempts at self-renunciation. However, the narrator knows (as does Eliot) that Maggie will not find her everlasting happiness through Kempis's writings, although Maggie believes that all of her self-denying actions will help her find peace and contentment:

With all the hurry of an imagination that could never rest in the present, she sat in the deepening twilight forming plans of self-humiliation and entire devotedness, and in the ardour of first discovery, renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain. She had not perceived—how could she until she had

lived longer?—the inmost truth of the old monk’s outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. (303)

The narrator knows how important life experience is to understanding one’s reading material; without such experience, Maggie is little better than her childhood self who ran away to live with the gypsies. But since Maggie has now eliminated literature from her life, the only way she can accumulate this experience is by simply living—which, of course, takes time. She eventually realizes, through the resumption of her friendship with Philip Wakem, that art is not something that she can abandon, if she wants to live a more complete and fulfilling life.

Philip provides the push Maggie needs to return to her love of literature when, during their meetings in the Red Deeps, he brings her a variety of books to read. She tells Philip that she has “given up books . . . except a very, very few” (317), and the realization that stories like Scott’s *The Pirate* still have the ability to engross her attention scares her; Maggie says that resuming her reading “would make me long to see and know many things—it would make me long for a full life” (318). Philip argues, “Poetry and art and knowledge are sacred and pure,” but Maggie says that she “should want too much” (318). Philip eventually does convince her to read again, and in this transition from asceticism to a reinvigorated imaginative life, Maggie reads a variety of literary works once again, no longer limiting herself to religious texts. Philip becomes her aesthetic educator, reminding her of the necessity for beauty in all of life: “It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we *must* hunger after them. How can we ever be satisfied without them until our feelings are deadened?” (314). Philip “is a live embodiment of the idea that one’s mental life can be one’s salvation” (Kelly 88), and his words and the

example of his life convince Maggie to begin reading again, reminding her of the satisfaction that results from a literature-filled life. But the reading she does now is quite different from the reading she did as a child. She stops reading de Staël's novel *Corinne* in the middle of the story because, as she says, "I'm determined to read no more books where the blond haired women carry away all the happiness" (345). In refusing to finish the book and to discover what actually happens to the characters, Maggie shows how her life experiences have changed her. By choosing not to create an ending that might satisfy her, she accepts the author's version as authoritative; though she disagrees with where she predicts the story to be headed, she no longer cares to do anything about it other than stop reading.

Golden, arguing that Maggie reads this book "overly simplistically and incompletely," questions this new development in Maggie's reading: "How can Maggie, who always wants 'more' from books, keep herself from discovering the fate of her dark-haired fictional sister whose destiny she ultimately shares? . . . Had she finished *Corinne*, Maggie would have gleaned information that might well have helped her to revise her destiny" (88). Though Maggie has no way of knowing her own destiny, Golden makes a key observation—that readers can learn from any and all books they read, whether or not they anticipate it. Maggie's choice in this matter is ultimately a sign of her impending submissiveness and attitude toward reading, which is seen in her conversations with Philip about the characters in the novel. When Philip speculates about Maggie taking love away from her blond cousin Lucy, hinting that Maggie herself might be able to reverse the course set by the individuals in *Corinne*, Maggie is upset: "'Philip, that is not pretty of you, to apply my nonsense to anything real,' said Maggie, looking hurt" (345).

Young Maggie would never have said such a thing; as a child, Maggie was more interested in making reality fit into her fictional world, rather than forcing fiction into her small portion of reality. She wanted to create a new world through her “nonsense,” and of what importance was it if it could *not* apply to anything real? Maggie fortunately has outgrown this escapism, but she also has apparently learned nothing from her reading of Kempis, in which she focused on applying his principles to her life. She struggles with applying the same philosophy to fiction as she does to non-fiction, not realizing that growing up does not require a complete abandonment of all of the stories she once held dear. This is a natural development, to be sure (who among us has not thought at one time or another that we had outgrown stories?), but Maggie does not give herself the opportunity to return to this love of fiction through continued reading.

Maggie’s marginalization of reading provides space for music to enter her life in a more tangible way. While music does not have a major role in the early parts of the novel, it appears occasionally and is described in a way that shows Maggie’s interest in and love for it; in the third volume, her affection for music becomes the focus of both the development of the characters and the movement of the narrative. This love is encouraged by Philip, but more crucially it is developed, promoted, and almost abused by Stephen Guest. The contrast between how Philip and Stephen interact with music around Maggie exaggerates their differences, according to Correa, who writes, “Philip’s singing intensifies Maggie’s sense of integration with her past. Musical communion with Stephen disrupts the musical associations which help bind her conscious sense of identity” (551). This symbiotic relationship between music and identity begins to explain the seemingly uncharacteristic decisions made by Maggie later in the novel. Maggie’s

love for music is shown through her emotional responses to the music she hears—both instrumental and vocal music. She treats music as a way to escape her problems, which in turn causes an undue passivity to overcome her. Literature, as we have seen, has the potential for creating sympathetic connections and influencing reality—but music, for Maggie, is only a form of escape. As music brings Maggie and Stephen closer together, both music and Stephen separate Maggie from herself—from her past, her identity, and her imagination—creating a passive Maggie. This development culminates in the river scene, when Maggie temporarily allows herself to be drawn along by Stephen and the river rather than deciding for herself what needs to be done.

Maggie’s troubling immersion in music begins not long into her time with Lucy and Stephen. She is intrigued not only by the novelty of having a man attracted to her, but also by the power of his music; the concept of a romantic, mysterious suitor appeals to her longing for fantasy, speaking of a world outside the realm of possibility for her:

[T]hese apparently trivial causes had the effect of rousing and exalting her imagination in a way that was mysterious to herself. It was not that she thought distinctly of Mr Stephen Guest or dwelt on the indications that he looked at her with admiration; it was rather that she felt the half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight, made up of vague, mingled images from all the poetry and romance she had ever read, or had ever woven in her dreamy reveries. . . . No prayer, no striving now would bring back that negative peace: the battle of her life, it seemed, was not to be decided in that short and easy way—by perfect renunciation at the very threshold of her youth. The music was vibrating in her still—Purcell’s music with its wild passion and fancy— and she could not stay in the recollection of that bare lonely past. (400-401)

It is the “music vibrating in her still” that causes her to remain attracted to and fascinated by Stephen and his charms. In a similar way to how she used her reading when she was younger, Maggie desires to use music as an escape from the demands of her life: “I think I should have no other mortal wants, if I could always have plenty of music. It seems to

infuse strength into my limbs and ideas into my brain. Life seems to go on without effort, when I am filled with music. At other times one is conscious of carrying a weight” (401). This effortless life is comfortable and easy, and while she can remain in this musically grounded existence with Lucy, Stephen, and Philip, there is no need for her to use her imagination to explore other worlds or even think about the one she lives in. Maggie’s attraction to music is described by Gillian Beer: “Music is thus alluring and dangerous at once. It expresses the slackening of will, the willingness to yield to another’s play upon the senses. But it also gives voice to the power of a world beyond the narrow life within which Maggie is bound” (88). While music *can* be a way of sympathetically connecting with another world, Maggie uses music simply to escape her own world. Even her friends appear to engage more fully with the music they create; Philip, for instance, “not quite unintentionally” sings a song “which might be an indirect expression to Maggie of what he could not prevail on himself to say to her directly” (435). For Stephen, Lucy, and Philip, “the semantic content of the words sung far outweighs the purely oral qualities of the music” (Peterson 198), but for Maggie, music is primarily about the uncontrolled physical and emotional responses it evokes. Although the others’ focus on the text is as reductive as Maggie’s attention only to the sounds, it does seem to require more participation and creativity than Maggie shows when she merely lets the music wash over her.

While the majority of Maggie’s interactions with music involve only listening to it, there are a few occasions in which she produces music; notably, these occur only when she is alone, not when her friends are present:

It was pleasant, too . . . to sit down at the piano alone, and find that the old fitness between her fingers and the keys remained and revived, like a

sympathetic kinship not to be worn out by separation—to get the tunes she had heard the evening before and repeat them again and again until she had found a way of producing them so as to make them a more pregnant, passionate language to her. The mere concord of octaves was a delight to Maggie, and she would often take up a book of Studies rather than any melody, that she might taste more keenly by abstraction the more primitive sensation of intervals. Not that her enjoyment of music was of the kind that indicates a great specific talent: it was rather that her sensibility to the supreme excitement of music was only one form of that passionate sensibility which belonged to her whole nature and made her faults and virtues all merge in each other. (417-18)

For Maggie, music is fundamentally passionate, which is partly why it leads to a passionate relationship with Stephen. Conspicuously, she does not create any unique music, like she had created stories; she is more interested in reproducing what she has heard—in an attempt to replicate sensations—than in creating something new. Along with this lack of creativity and imagination, the narrator even acknowledges that Maggie loses her desire for thought; she becomes used to the life of a young lady, which involves spending time with Stephen and Lucy and relaxing into an existence surrounded by music: “Under the charm of her new pleasures, Maggie herself was ceasing to think, with her eager prefiguring imagination, of her future lot, and her anxiety about her first interview with Philip was losing its predominance: perhaps, unconsciously to herself, she was not sorry that the interview had been deferred” (418). In this instance, Philip represents the return of her past (and a need to focus on the future); Maggie is content to think not of the future or past, but to live in the present, allowing her “eager prefiguring imagination” to languish while she enjoys a comfortable existence.

While Maggie’s new, strange life as a pampered, leisurely young lady is partially responsible for this lack of foresight, another part of the reason why Maggie is so content to live only in the present is her passion for Stephen’s singing. Her attempts to hide

Stephen's influence over her inevitably fail when he begins to sing; she loses her control over her thoughts and no longer has the ability to act in the way she knows is right:

[A]ll her intentions were lost in the vague state of emotion produced by the inspiring duet—emotion that seemed to make her at once strong and weak, strong for all enjoyment, weak for all resistance. When the strain passed into the minor she half started from her seat with the sudden thrill of that change. Poor Maggie! She looked very beautiful when her soul was being played on in this way by the inexorable power of sound. (434)

Though Maggie clearly enjoys music, the passage places a greater emphasis on her lack of agency: she is “weak for all resistance,” her soul is “being played on,” and the power of sound is “inexorable.” Stephen knows precisely how to influence her, and he successfully causes her to become accustomed to her passivity without allowing her to notice the change. Beryl Gray argues that Stephen's “most irresistible attraction—one that he consciously exploits—is his rich, deep voice, through which he establishes an increasing influence over her; and, the greater his influence, the more he tries to persuade her to forsake her sense of what is right and take what she desires” (15). Stephen uses the almost hypnotic effects of music and his voice to create a Maggie who will respond to his wishes in the way that he desires. Music does not encourage her imaginative powers; she does not use it to form a sympathetic connection with anyone or to provide ideas about how to approach her future. Instead, music causes her to fall into simple patterns of listening and enjoying, instead of interacting with and thinking critically about what she hears. Like literature, when put in undiscerning hands, music can be treated in a way that will only manipulate the listener. While music does have the power to engage and stimulate the imagination (Eliot's own experiences can attest to this), Maggie, unlike Eliot, focuses solely on her physical and emotional responses to what she hears.

This explanation for Maggie's passivity and escapism in turn provides an explanation for her seemingly uncharacteristic compliance to Stephen's desires in the scene on the river. Like her enjoyment of music, which makes her "weak for all resistance," Stephen forces her to yield simply because of his magnetic attraction—his personality and his passion for her. By this phase of their relationship, Maggie's mind has become accustomed to passive acquiescence to outside influences, and Stephen in particular serves as a "stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will" (484). Even after realizing that she and Stephen have made an irrevocable error, Maggie is still not prepared to take action; although she accuses Stephen of tricking her, she softens after he becomes upset, giving in once again to his plan of traveling to the next town: "[T]here was an unspeakable charm in being told what to do, and having everything decided for her. . . . Maggie was hardly conscious of having said or done anything decisive. All yielding is attended with a less vivid consciousness than resistance—it is the partial sleep of thought—it is the submergence of our own personality by another" (487). Maggie's personality has temporarily been consumed by Stephen's, and so has her mind, in a way that is reminiscent of her reactions to his singing.

While Maggie's submissiveness is what causes her to give in to Stephen's wishes, her decisions in the novel's seventh book are a result of her newly recovered active and sympathetic nature. After waking up on the boat with Stephen and realizing what has happened, Maggie undergoes a sort of transformation, which is prompted by the severity of her situation. She knows she must leave Stephen, and although she does not tell him so right away, he fears that something has changed, becoming "more and more uneasy as

the day advanced, under the sense that Maggie had entirely lost her passiveness” (493). And she *has* “lost her passiveness,” relying now on the strength of memory and affection to remind her of her duty to her family, Lucy, and Philip. Maggie’s revived decisiveness gives her the strength to tell Stephen exactly how she feels: “It has never been my will to marry you—if you were to win consent from the momentary triumph of my feeling for you, you would not have my whole soul” (497). She wants and needs to return to St. Ogg’s—alone. Stephen objects, telling her, “How can you go back without marrying me? You don’t know what will be said, dearest. You see nothing as it really is” (499). Maggie’s faith in her family and her town is clear in her response to his accusation: “Yes, I do. But they will believe me—I will confess everything—Lucy will believe me—she will forgive you. And—and—O, *some* good will come by clinging to the right. Dear—dear Stephen—let me go!—don’t drag me into deeper remorse. My whole soul has never consented—it does not consent now” (499). Here Maggie’s once again active spirit is at odds with her knowledge of human nature. She knows she can no longer be passive, and so she desperately hopes that holding on to her principles will lead her to salvation.

It is in this moment that her slowly increasing capacity for sympathy is revived. She has been overwhelmed by Stephen and his love for her, so much so that she has forgotten her obligations to her family and to Philip; she has been almost entirely selfish instead of sympathetic. Part of the reason that she fails to accurately predict the harsh reactions of the townspeople is because she is too concerned with the reactions of those she has hurt the most—namely, Lucy and Philip: “Maggie, all this while, was too entirely filled with a more agonising anxiety, to spend any thought on the view that was being taken of her conduct by the world of St Ogg’s: anxiety about Stephen – Lucy – Philip –

beat on her poor heart in a hard, driving, ceaseless storm of mingled love, remorse, and pity” (511-12). This anxiety plays out through the rest of her short life, which is dedicated to mending the precious relationships that have been damaged by her dalliance with Stephen. When Maggie is tempted to return to Stephen, she only has to think of the pain she has caused, which in turn causes her pain; after she reads Philip’s final letter to her, she cries out repeatedly, “O God is there any happiness in love that could make me forget *their* pain?” (524). The answer, ultimately, is no; she has to live with the guilt resulting from her fatal passiveness, and she is not given a chance to more completely redeem herself because of the abrupt arrival of the flood.

Maggie’s return to activity is sudden and complete. During the rest of her life, she does not allow herself to be overcome by any person or group of people; she sticks to her principles, despite how painful that determination may be. This change is shown clearly in the novel’s conclusion, which has been quite troubling to readers and critics alike over the years. But if the final turning point in Maggie’s life returns her to action, to sympathy, to memory, and to relationships, then her (attempted) rescue of and reconciliation with Tom is the chief triumph of her short life. Instead of being pulled along by the tide, like she is with Stephen, she directs the boat to where it needs to go—to her home, to her brother. She has become the selfless, sympathetic Maggie that Eliot always wanted her to be. She cannot create dream-worlds that will free her from the too real presence of rising water, of a deadly flood, so she does not try to; instead, she clings to the one real thing she has left to her at this moment: her brother. Though they were not always together in life, they are together in death: “[B]rother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted—living through again in one supreme moment, the days

when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together” (542). Though a post-death reconciliation may be little comfort to Maggie, it does impart a sense of peace to the readers, that the turbulent brother-sister relationship has reached a fitting conclusion.

In 1859, a year before the publication of *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot wrote to her friend Charles Bray, “[T]he only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures” (*Letters* 3: 111). It is only when readers use their imaginations to understand the situations of others—to develop a capacity for sympathy—that art will have its full and proper effect. Maggie uses music as an escape from reality just when she should be focusing on reality—just when her imagination is at its most crucial stage of development. By pushing reading and imagining aside, Maggie loses track of who she is and who she wants to be, thus falling prey to the charms of Stephen. The closing section of the novel features the triumph of her more complete self—of the sympathetic connection she has always had with Lucy and Philip, of her renewed awareness of reality. This victory demonstrates how challenging it can be to remain consistently conscious of life’s problems without simply attempting to escape from them. Although many readers had hoped that Maggie would be able to live a longer, more peaceful life, her struggles are a reminder of the trials of life and of the value of relationships with both friends and family.

Much of *The Mill on the Floss* is unquestionably autobiographical, but Maggie’s life obviously reaches a different conclusion than the life of Mary Ann Evans. One of the

most significant distinction is that Mary Ann did not stop reading imaginatively and did not give up on the sympathetic and reality-based imagination. Instead, she continued her active reading and began writing, inventing new worlds, exercising her imagination—and she created a persona (George Eliot) for herself that would allow her to send her words, characters, and stories into the world so that she could have a tangible impact on her fellow-men. Maggie Tulliver may have struggled to continue providing power to her imagination, but George Eliot did not. The might of Eliot's imagination can be seen in her later novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, both of which feature a similarly strong emphasis on the connection between reading and the imagination.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Life of Beneficent Activity: Dorothea's Triumph in *Middlemarch*

While Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke have very different personalities, experiences, and desires, they struggle with similar issues when it comes to integrating their reading with reality. Dorothea has always wanted to have a tangible effect on the people around her, so she appears to be the ideal candidate for the sympathetic and reality-infused imagination that Maggie finally achieves and that Eliot desires for her characters. However, like Maggie, Dorothea's inexperience and naïveté affect her decision-making, causing her to take one particularly drastic step—marrying Edward Casaubon—that creates a number of problems for her; ultimately, though, her brief marriage teaches her the importance of life experience and of avoiding fantasies that can cause harmful delusions.

From the moment we are introduced to Dorothea, we see that she has a clear capacity for sympathy and that she wants to help other people. Her sympathetic imagination—which will allow her to invest herself in the situations of others—is ready for action. Like Maggie, Dorothea values her fellow-creatures, but she has trouble putting these sympathetic tendencies into practice; her lack of experience precludes her from acknowledging the practical challenges that might prevent her from reaching her goals (one of which is building cottages for the villagers).

Each of Dorothea's primary relationships—with Casaubon and later with Will Ladislaw—represents one aspect of her aspirations; Casaubon, as a scholar, encourages Dorothea's hopes for study and knowledge, while Will, as an artist and later a politician,

represents Dorothea's desire to have a substantial effect on her community. Ultimately, Dorothea discovers that these two goals are not mutually exclusive, but that knowledge and action need to be used together if they are to be successful. Throughout the novel, Dorothea learns how to combine her growing catalogue of experience with her goals for her town and herself, finally balancing the sympathetic component of the imagination with the part of the imagination that finds its inspiration not in fantasy, but in reality.

Before examining Dorothea's experiences, however, I will briefly review the critical conversation about the novel in order to provide a background for this reading. Then, to show the contrast between Dorothea and the other women in *Middlemarch*, I will examine Rosamond Vincy's (rather unvaried) reading history. Dorothea is the focus of the majority of this chapter (as she is in the novel), but although she does undergo a crucial learning process, she does not become the ideal reader; that title belongs to Mary Garth, who has a great appreciation for and understanding of the role of fiction.

Critics have much to say about *Middlemarch*; neither the importance of scholarship in the novel nor the significance of imagination has gone unnoticed, though most often each theme is addressed separately. In his examination of intellectuality in the novel, Alan Shelston accurately observes that "almost all of the characters are engaged in either reading or failing to read, or in writing or failing to write, and it is by what it is that they read or write, or fail to read or write, that they are invariably judged" (21). Though learning is important to several of the characters, it can be a dangerous obsession, Shelston argues: "[I]ntellectual aspiration . . . can become an instrument of self-isolation, and even of self-destruction" (22). Casaubon is the most obvious example of such

isolation; however, Dorothea's need for a balanced life helps her to remain free from the temptation of becoming obsessed with research.

The characteristics that prompted Dorothea to marry Casaubon, including her ardent nature and her desire for knowledge, have persuaded critics to frequently discuss Dorothea and her motives. While many critics are sympathetic to Dorothea's goals, some argue that she is not nearly as admirable as is generally thought, claiming that it is not especially dignified to seek accolades for oneself. Bernard Paris argues that Dorothea is not so much noble as she is starved for attention; he writes that Dorothea "embarks on a search for glory, in an attempt to actualize an idealized image of herself as an extraordinary person who will make a great difference to the world. This project is bound to fail, not only because of the meanness of opportunity but also because of the grandiosity of Dorothea's objectives" (32). Nina Auerbach also finds Dorothea to be a troubling character, questioning her commitment to learning: Dorothea "is wealthy enough to covet the trappings of learning without actually studying" and "is sufficiently immune from poverty to seek out the poor for the good of her own soul, rather than enduring poverty as Maggie does" (92). Noticing that there are frequent "pictures of Dorothea dreaming over a book" (92) instead of actually reading, Auerbach argues, like Paris, that Dorothea is more interested in appearances and attention than in legitimately learning or taking action. These critics correctly note that learning is important, in one way or another, to Dorothea; however, in an attempt to create an alternative reading of the novel, Paris and Auerbach seem to attribute motives to Dorothea that she does not possess. Dorothea's early goals may be grand and impractical, but they are a function not

of her selfishness but of her inexperienced imagination that is completely disconnected from reality.

Indeed, critics have observed that, in the novel, imagination is as important as learning, especially to the character of Dorothea. Deborah Heller Roazen, in an examination of the Wordsworthian elements in the novel, notes that Dorothea is constantly “seeking to use her imagination in a characteristically Wordsworthian manner, that is, to illuminate and transform what others might consider the prosaic details of common life; even her hopeful plans for one-room tenant cottages are seen through the transfiguring poetry of her ‘ardent’ imagination” (415). While Roazen claims that Dorothea’s imagination is, finally, successful, Lee Edwards posits that the novel ultimately condemns “imaginative energy” because of Dorothea’s isolation and inability to live an effective life without marrying. Timothy Peltason, in turn, shows how imagination needs to be connected to experience; Dorothea’s imagination “is indissolubly linked to her hunger for wide experience and is thus the necessary instrument of her moral education” (36). Occasionally, Dorothea tries to use her imagination to replace experience, but she is more successful when she uses it to reflect on her experiences. While the necessity of imagination to Dorothea’s life has been established in these and other articles, critics are ambivalent about both the definition of imagination and the effectiveness of Dorothea’s imagination in particular. One way to clarify these inconsistencies and provide a systematic way to view this issue is to demonstrate how the way that Dorothea imagines is a sign of her attitudes toward scholarship, knowledge, and reading that have been addressed by other critics.

While Dorothea's defining feature is her ardent nature, Rosamond Vincy's deepest desire is to marry a wealthy man and have a house full of beautiful possessions. Dorothea's imagination is stimulated by the thought of a noble and active life, but Rosamond's hopes for the future are based on what she has read in romances:

Strangers, whether wrecked and clinging to a raft, or duly escorted and accompanied by portmanteaus, have always had a circumstantial fascination for the virgin mind, against which native merit has urged itself in vain. And a stranger was absolutely necessary to Rosamond's social romance, which had always turned on a lover and bridegroom who was not a Middlemarcher, and who had no connections at all like her own: of late, indeed, the construction seemed to demand that he should somehow be related to a baronet. Now that she and the stranger had met, reality proved much more moving than anticipation, and Rosamond could not doubt that this was the great epoch of her life. (109)

Rosamond believes that Lydgate will fulfill all of her desires merely because he is a stranger; a stranger fits into the narrative she has created for herself, based on the stories she read as a girl. Her selfish imagination focuses only on her own needs, not even deigning to fully flesh out the character of this stranger that will come to rescue her: "In Rosamond's romance it was not necessary to imagine much about the inward life of the hero, or of his serious business in the world: of course, he had a profession and was clever, as well as sufficiently handsome" (156). The books that Rosamond chooses to read determine how her imagination will operate—namely, only in the channels established by the plots of the fiction she has read. Such limits prevent her from fully understanding any other person, including Lydgate, and through her unhappy marriage, she discovers that "to attempt to live one's life according to fictional criteria is to follow a dangerous path" (Flint 263-64). Like a young Maggie Tulliver, Rosamond is not aware of the boundaries between fiction and reality, and this ignorance decreases her ability to read in a beneficial and healthy way. When she creates worlds that she would like to live

in without acknowledging the constraints of the world she *does* live in, she illustrates the hazards of living in a fantasy.

Both Dorothea and Rosamond read for a particular purpose rather than for pleasure, but Rosamond's purpose has very little to do with the actual content of the books she reads; her goal is simply to add reading to her list of accomplishments. She "never showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date" (252). In keeping with her need to only have "becoming" knowledge, she "found time also to read the best novels, and even the second-best, and she knew much poetry by heart. Her favourite poem was 'Lalla Rookh'" (157). Rosamond uses reading to attract suitors who deem it necessary for women to have a proper knowledge of certain works of contemporary literature, and she does not mind those expectations, instead choosing to accept and fulfill them.

Such superficial reading encourages Rosamond to have a self-centered imagination, and consequently she is quite shocked when the reality of her relationship with Will is forced upon her. To give her unsatisfactory married life some color, she had "constructed a little romance which was to vary the flatness of her life: Will Ladislaw was always to be a bachelor and live near her, always to be at her command, and have an understood though never fully expressed passion for her, which would be sending out lambent flames every now and then in interesting scenes" (709). Unfortunately for Rosamond, her imagined romance is nowhere near the truth, and because "she had been little used to imagining other people's states of mind except as a material cut into shape

by her own wishes” (731), she is greatly astonished when she discovers that she does not possess as much power as she thought she did. After Will vents his anger at her, Rosamond “was almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be waking into some new terrible existence” (732); “her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness” (734). Rosamond has been brought into an awareness that all of life is not like romances or novels, and it is through this painful experience that she begins to develop a sympathetic imagination—something she showed no signs of having earlier in her life. The first unselfish action she takes is telling Dorothea the truth about her relationship with Will; she “had delivered her soul under impulses which she had not known before” (750). The shock of being told that she is not the center of the universe, combined with Dorothea’s kindness, provides Rosamond with an example of what it is like to empathize with others, to possess a sympathetic imagination. This experience does not make Rosamond a perfect woman, by any means, but it does force her perception of the world to include more than just herself, at least temporarily.

While Rosamond relies on a particular type of fiction for her flawed approach to life, Dorothea rarely, if ever, reads fiction; she instead reads religious and historical texts, which is why Casaubon’s scholarship and life appeal to her. Despite Rosamond and Dorothea’s differences, they have a similar lack of life experience, which leads them astray. However, while Rosamond is fundamentally selfish, Dorothea is striving to live an outward, selfless life.

Dorothea is young, idealistic, and ambitious. Although she has very little life experience to draw upon, she wants to put all of her energies into doing something great,

and her reading reflects this goal. She is much more interested in books that might enrich her spiritually than in fictional works, and so she has read and memorized passages of seventeenth-century religious texts by Pascal and Jeremy Taylor. Her aspirations are admirable, but the narrator is quick to acknowledge that she does make decisions quickly, especially if she thinks that such decisions will help her find a way to achieve her goals: “Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects” (8). Her rashness appears most clearly when she takes immediate advantage of what she perceives as the best opportunity of her young life: the proposal of marriage by Edward Casaubon.

With this knowledge about Dorothea’s reading up to the time when she meets Casaubon, and an awareness of the lack of balance between her desire to explore the life of the mind and her actual life experience, we can then understand how attractive Casaubon must be to her. These attractions begin and end with Casaubon’s access to the educated world. To Dorothea, Casaubon is “the most interesting man she had ever seen” because of the goals of his life: “To reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the highest purposes of truth—what a work to be in any way present at, to assist in, though only as a lamp-holder!” (17). Casaubon can, according to Dorothea, “understand the higher inward life” and “illuminate principle with the widest knowledge” (21), and Dorothea is fascinated by the potential of a relationship with him, unable to predict that their relationship will be more similar to that of a student and teacher than to that of a wife and husband. She so deeply wants to do something meaningful, and, to her, it seems

that the easiest (if not the only) way for that to happen is for her to marry someone who can become her tutor:

The thing which seemed to her best, she wanted to justify by the completest knowledge; and not to live in a pretended admission of rules which were never acted on. Into this soul-hunger as yet all her youthful passion was poured; the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path. (26-27)

However, the power of this dream encourages her to remain separated from reality. She creates an imaginary future life for herself and Casaubon, thinking about how studious and happy their days will be:

It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great work. There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Everyday-things with us would mean the greatest things. It would be like marrying Pascal. I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by. And then I should know what to do, when I got older: I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here—now—in England. (27)

The extreme idealism of these thoughts is almost jarring, and Dorothea is clearly headed for a fall, just as her conception of Casaubon, who “was all she had at first imagined him to be” (30), is based not on reality but on the fantasy she has created for herself. Part of the process of growing up is learning to distinguish fiction from reality (as demonstrated through Maggie Tulliver’s childhood struggles), and Dorothea has not yet learned to separate her fantasies from the actual, material evidence of what kind of man Casaubon is.

This problem with fantasy replacing reality is demonstrated in how Dorothea and Casaubon misunderstand each other’s values and motives. Dorothea views marriage as a “state of higher duties” (38), and so it becomes the equivalent of a religion to her, with Casaubon acting as savior: “Dorothea’s faith supplied all that Mr Casaubon’s words

seemed to leave unsaid: what believer sees a disturbing omission or infelicity? The text, whether of prophet or of poet, expands for whatever we can put into it, and even his bad grammar is sublime” (46). Dorothea’s tendency to imaginatively adorn those she loves with greater qualities causes her to assume that Casaubon agrees with her in all crucial areas of thought; so does she hope that he will make the ideal husband for her. However, by his own admission, Casaubon “feed[s] too much on the inward sources” and “live[s] too much with the dead” (16); even Mr. Brooke, who is not known for his penetrating insight, tells Dorothea that Casaubon “is a little buried in books, you know” (36). But those descriptions do not fit with the picture Dorothea’s imagination has created, so she ignores the signs that should be warning her that the real man is quite different from the one she has been envisioning.

Dorothea’s goals for herself—not all of which involve helping her future husband with his work—are in conflict with Casaubon’s objectives for their relationship.

Dorothea hopes to gain knowledge for herself, in reading and learning for her own benefit as well as his:

Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly. As it was, she constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance: how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for the glory? . . . And she had not reached that point of renunciation at which she would have been satisfied with having a wise husband: she wished, poor child, to be wise herself. (59)

Casaubon would have little patience for this idea of Dorothea being wise herself; instead, his attitude toward her place in his life can be seen through a glimpse of the room that will be hers in Casaubon’s house. Everything in her room is feminine and delicate, colored in a “faded blue,” and a “light book-case contained duodecimo volumes of polite

literature in calf” (69). A woman’s role is to read “polite literature,” and a woman’s space in a man’s house (and world) signifies that role. Dorothea, of course, does not realize the implication of this seemingly minor detail as she looks around her soon-to-be home, but this sign of Casaubon’s attitude toward women, and particularly toward the place of his wife, makes clear his expectation that Dorothea will worship him because of his wisdom. This contrast between Dorothea’s self-imposed goals for the relationship and Casaubon’s implied statement of her place in his life (and home) shows how the expectations they have created for each other have been based almost entirely in fantasy instead of in reality.

Dorothea only becomes aware of these problems after her marriage; she had longed for something “by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent; and since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more learned than Mr Casaubon?” (80). But this vision disappears when the tedium of Casaubon’s project is revealed, when she discovers that the work he is doing has been done before and that there is no perceptible reason for their effort. During this period, what Dorothea once viewed “as Casaubon’s vast ‘lake’ of knowledge is revealed to be a mirage” (Golden 127). These realizations cause Dorothea to reevaluate her marriage and her place in the community. The narrow focus of Casaubon’s research discourages her; there suddenly appears to be a disconnect between knowledge found in libraries and knowledge that can be used to help people in a tangible way. Michael Wheeler notes, “Whereas Casaubon cites sources in order to close off areas of human activity, Dorothea wants to draw on sources for intellectual or moral

guidance on ways of living and for justification for putting some theory into practice” (92); she wants to live imaginatively and actively, but Casaubon’s restrictions will not allow her to accomplish that goal. While Casaubon lives for himself and his legacy, Dorothea desires to live an outward life.

The insular nature of Dorothea’s marriage prompts her to endeavor to be part of the outside world in more substantial ways than she has been in the past. She thanks Mrs. Cadwallader for “calling [her] out of the library,” out of Casaubon’s territory, so that she can see something of the lives of those around her (306), and she later tells Will, “I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and I have too much already” (368). Now that her marriage has proven to be a disappointment, she can focus her energies on those around her, rather than on herself, and hope for some satisfaction that way. She can no longer find hope or delight in her favorite books, which range from Herodotus to Pascal to Keble (once again, books with historical or religious focus). While she is trapped with Casaubon, Dorothea needs and longs for more than what books can give her:

It was another or rather a fuller sort of companionship that poor Dorothea was hungering for. . . . she longed for objects who could be dear to her, and to whom she could be dear. She longed for work which would be directly beneficent like the sunshine and the rain, and now it appeared that she was to live more and more in a virtual tomb, where there was the apparatus of a ghastly labour producing what would never see the light. . . . Books were of no use. Thinking was of no use. (446)

Like Maggie, Dorothea has reached a moment when everything seems hopeless, when the comfort she used to find in books is no longer sufficient. Dorothea realizes that she has been living in a fantasy world, and—at least for a moment—is inclined to abandon books and thinking, which have always been her preferred remedy for her troubles. Casaubon’s

view of knowledge has reminded Dorothea that she does not want books to be the sole focus of her life, nor does she want to abandon them. She needs to be free to use her imagination in a way that will affect reality—so she can build the cottages that she dreamt of—and that will also include the knowledge she can gain from books.

Casaubon's death provides the impetus Dorothea needs to change her approach to reading and life. She begins to realize that she is no longer bound to him or his goals: "[T]he morning gazed calmly into the library, shining on the rows of note-books as it shines on the weary waste planted with huge stones, the mute memorial of a forgotten faith" (506). Instead of remaining faithful to her fallen god, Dorothea moves forward, into the world and away from the rows of Casaubon's books and notebooks that have held her back.

Now that she is once again set on taking action, she can return to her capacity for sympathy. She has her first real chance to take beneficent action when she chooses to help Lydgate by hearing his story, paying his debt to Bulstrode, and speaking to Rosamond on his behalf. Though Dorothea's friends are skeptical of her faith in Lydgate, she stands firm, saying, "What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?" (691). Dorothea's capacity for sympathy—her ability to imagine herself in the situation of others—is finally leading her to positive action, to making a difference in the world in which she lives. This belief in the necessity of helping one another becomes Dorothea's mantra during the last part of the novel, as she strives to make up for the time she has lost during her brief marriage.

Her new passion comes to the forefront when she finally realizes that she does have a place in a fuller life, the life that she has desired all along but has not known how

to reach. She has been focused on her inward self for too long, but the life that she now ponders is one that may include—but is not limited to—what she can read in Casaubon’s books or what she can be taught by older men who have spent their lives sequestered in libraries:

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (741)

This realization, as simple as it may seem, is groundbreaking for Dorothea; it signifies her movement from an insular life to a life of action and hope, which is completed during her and Will’s mutual confession of love. Like the ideal imaginer described in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Dorothea begins to notice all of the details of the world around her, and she associates these details with her life in how she establishes a way to act that will allow her to use her knowledge and recent experiences. Despite her determination not to remain focused on herself, Dorothea is not planning to completely abandon reading or scholarship. Instead, she has reached an understanding of knowledge that will allow her to utilize it in her newly active life.

This potential for a refocused life is explained in a scene near the end of the novel. After her conversation with Rosamond, in which Rosamond admits that Will loves Dorothea, Dorothea is restless, unable to focus on anything she attempts to study. To calm her mind, she has returned to learning, to the books in the library—but, in a

significant change, she is now free to study the specific areas that will have practical consequences for her life:

She sat down in the library before her particular little heap of books on political economy and kindred matters, out of which she was trying to get light as to the best way of spending money so as not to injure one's neighbors, or—what comes to the same thing—so as to do them the most good. Here was a weighty subject which, if she could but lay hold of it, would certainly keep her mind steady. Unhappily her mind slipped off it for a whole hour; and at the end she found herself reading sentences twice over with an intense consciousness of many things, but not of any one thing contained in the text. This was hopeless. (756)

After abandoning this task, she attempts to study the geography of Asia Minor, “in which her slackness had often been rebuked by Mr Casaubon” (756), but soon enough she is interrupted by Miss Noble, who announces that Will Ladislaw would like to see her. Dorothea forgets about studying geography and turns her attention to Will, meeting him in the library even though it is “where her husband’s prohibition seemed to dwell” (757). Dorothea is symbolically retaking the library and therefore the sphere of knowledge; she turns away from the life she had with Casaubon, toward a life in which she and Will can integrate certain aspects of practical knowledge, particularly those that will help her do good for her neighbors.

Though Will is possibly not her equal in spirit, he at least shares her desire to live a life of action, as is shown by his occupation as a politician and her vocation as his helper: “No life would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion, and she had now a life filled also with a beneficent activity which she had not the doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself” (782). Dorothea has finally realized what it is that she actually wants in a husband; the husband that her imagination created for her—a wise, educated, older man—did not satisfy her actual

needs in the way that she thought he would. It is only upon falling in love with Will (and gaining life experience) that she understands what it is she needs to fulfill her life:

“Dorothea could have liked nothing better, since wrongs existed, than that her husband should be in the thick of a struggle against them, and that she should give him wifely help” (783). Dorothea has come to understand “the dangers of a passive and merely receptive role” in marriage, and with Will, she “learns to see herself as a moral equal in marriage, rather than as a dutiful subordinate” (Sutphin 360). For Dorothea, “wifely help” does mean being a “moral equal,” not a “dutiful subordinate,” because she knows (or at least hopes) that Will does want a wife, and not a student.

The ending of *Middlemarch*, particularly Dorothea’s marriage to Will, has frequently been described as a tragic ending for a woman who began the novel with dreams and desires not typical of women in her era. But Dorothea is not meant to live a life on her own, despite the objections of her friends, who

thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done—not even Sir James Chettam, who went no further than the negative prescription that she ought not to have married Will Ladislaw. (783)

Dorothea has found a perfect companion in Will; she can contribute to his success in a tangible way, while also enjoying the love that her first marriage lacked. This relationship, according to Roazen, provides Dorothea with a way to understand the world:

Her marriage to Will Ladislaw, however much it has failed to satisfy many readers, has thus a particular thematic fitness, for it is Will who articulates the function of imagination as creative, unifying vision when Dorothea is suffering her first shock at the menacing fragmentariness of experience, and it is he who finally provides her with an opportunity, however limited by her sex and era, to apply her own sympathetic and ardent imagination to the real struggles of the world. (425)

Now that she can use her imagination to influence the “real struggles of the world” (such as problems in her own community), Dorothea is prepared to find a new place for books in her life; they will serve as supplements and supports for the beneficent actions she will take as her life continues. She will enact the inclinations of her sympathetic and reality-infused imagination by using the information she can find in such books.

By the end of the novel, Dorothea’s approach to reading has become much more effective than it was earlier; now she can use her sympathetic and reality-based imagination to influence her actions as well as her attitude toward knowledge. She has filled the chasm she created between reading and life. However, Dorothea’s lack of interest in fiction makes her a perhaps less-than-ideal reader. It is Mary Garth who shows the potential of fiction reading as a way to extend experience; Mary knows that fiction should not simply be an escape or a completely disconnected form of reading, but that it is a way to inform and enhance one’s life.

Though Mary’s story is a minor one in the novel, her occasional interjections about reading provide a powerful contrast to the experiences of Dorothea and Rosamond. When talking with Fred Vincy about the possibility of a woman falling in love with a man she has always known, Mary says,

I must go back on my experience. There is Juliet—she seems an example of what you say. But then Ophelia had probably known Hamlet a long while; and Brenda Troil—she had known Mordaunt Merton ever since they were children; but then he seems to have been an estimable young man; and Minna was still more deeply in love with Cleveland, who was a stranger. Waverley was new to Flora MacIvor; but then she did not fall in love with him. And there are Olivia and Sophia Primrose, and Corinne—they may be said to have fallen in love with new men. Altogether, my experience is rather mixed. (129-30)

Although Mary is clearly joking with Fred (as she often does), it is telling that she equates the literature she has read to her “experience.” It is not possible for all girls to have a particularly wide variety of experiences as they grow up, so they use novels and plays to learn about the options available to them. Mary would subscribe to Nussbaum’s views, in which literature is an “extension of life” (48). Literature is not something to be ignored or thought of as a mere recreational activity; it brings readers into contact with more ideas and people than they can possibly meet on their own.

The range of literature that Mary mentions, too, is indicative of her nature; she moves from Shakespeare to Walter Scott to Oliver Goldsmith to Germaine de Staël, demonstrating that she has read plays and novels of various types and therefore has more “experience” than Rosamond or even Dorothea to fall back on, for Rosamond relies solely on romance, and Dorothea on historical and religious texts. Mary’s ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy while still appreciating the insight that literature has to offer makes her an ideal reader, as well as an ideal imaginer; she is not buried in books (“I have little time for reading,” she tells Mr. Trumbull [239]), but instead is satisfied with the workings of her mind: “Yet she liked her thoughts: a vigorous young mind not overbalanced by passion, finds a good in making acquaintance with life, and watches its own powers with interest. Mary had plenty of merriment within” (295). Mary is even given the opportunity to write and publish a book, a chance that is not afforded to many of Eliot’s characters. She moves beyond reading and now creates her own worlds through her writing, demonstrating the incredible potential of an imaginative mind.

Eliot, in discussing the reviews of *Middlemarch* being published in England, described her desire for an ideal reader, one who could understand the impulses that prompted the writing of the novel: “What one’s soul thirsts for is the word which is the refle[ction] of one’s own aim and delight in writing—the word which shows that what one meant has been perfectly seized, that the emotion which stirred one in writing is repeated in the mind of the reader” (*Letters* 5: 374). Eliot hopes to create a sympathetic relationship between herself and her reader, along with a connection between the characters in her novels and her readers. Her realism is “a means for promoting human sympathy through the informing power of the imagination” (Deegan 26); by writing realistically, she can create real human connections that are strengthened through the use of the readers’ imaginations. In the same way, Dorothea, Rosamond, and Mary learn how to use their imaginations both sympathetically and realistically. After Casaubon dies and frees Dorothea from her intellectual captivity, she allows her imagination and her reading to work together to create the life she has always desired—a life of beneficent activity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Envisioning Reality in *Daniel Deronda*

While several of the main characters in *Middlemarch* are frequently seen reading, *Daniel Deronda* features people whose actions are seemingly dictated more by external events than by what they read. The characters who read most frequently are the Meyrick sisters, whose comments (inspired by the romances and dramas they have read) about the mysterious Mirah, the handsome Daniel, and the heroic Hans provide comic relief in the midst of a rather weighty novel. Yet these girls have such a small role in the novel that their reading is almost an afterthought. The characters whose stories we are most interested in—namely, Daniel and Gwendolen—are readers, on occasion, but not in the same way as we have seen in *The Mill on the Floss* or *Middlemarch*. Reading has been central to the growth of a child (*Mill*); it has provided a backdrop for the disillusionment of a young woman (*Middlemarch*); and now, as we look at Eliot's last novel, we will see another different—but related—way in which reading affects the lives of characters. For the participants in the story of *Daniel Deronda*, reading is not the sole driving force behind the novel's movement; rather, it acts as a lens through which we can view the changes that the characters undergo.

Forest Pyle notes, "Imagination compels the characters of Eliot's novels—male as well as female—to engage the world, to read, to judge, to act; and the same imagination is inseparable from the compulsions that cause these characters to misread, to misjudge, to err" (9). In *Daniel Deronda*, we see both the positive and negative aspects of the imagination at work in the characters of Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda.

Gwendolen's inherently selfish imagination and Daniel's inherently sympathetic imagination are both changed and developed through their reading, studying, and conversations with each other, leading to the realization that the imagination can have a concrete effect on the world. While Gwendolen's actions demonstrate the dangers of an untrained imagination that relies only on inaccurate perceptions of the world, Daniel's life shows the advantages and disadvantages of possessing an excessively sympathetic soul. Despite their differences, both characters need the knowledge gained from reading to understand each other and themselves. This chapter will explore the relationship between Daniel and Gwendolen as a means of understanding Eliot's views on imagination in this, her final novel. Though Daniel's interactions with Mirah and Mordecai are no less crucial to the novel's plot and to his decisions, it is through Gwendolen that Daniel comes to understand his imagination and the role that reading does and should play in his life. Eliot's theory of imagination becomes even clearer in this novel, in which characters are using their imaginations to envision more extreme events than we have previously seen—including the murder of a husband and the arrival of an unknown prophet who will save the Jewish people. We see once again that imagination cannot rightly exist without reference to reality, without being grounded in some sense of what is possible. This type of imagination is developed through life experience—which, ideally, includes reading.

The distinctive plot and structure of *Daniel Deronda* have provoked much critical commentary during the years since the novel's publication; particularly telling are the parallels between nineteenth-century and twenty-first-century responses. In what has become a typical reaction, many contemporary reviewers, noticing a disconnect between

the two primary strands of the plot, appreciate the sections concerning Gwendolen but are less satisfied with the characters of Daniel, Mordecai, and Mirah. Henry James's entertaining commentary on the novel, written in the form of a conversation between three readers with differing perspectives, presents the prevailing sentiments; one speaker calls Gwendolen a "masterpiece" while saying that, next to Gwendolen and Grandcourt, "Deronda, Mordecai, and Mirah are hardly more than shadows" (qtd. in Carroll 422). The high standards that had been set for Eliot by her earlier novels were not exactly met in *Daniel Deronda*, partially because of this failure to bring several of the main characters to life. This critique has continued to the present day, in which determining the relative effectiveness of the Deronda/Mordecai segments and the Deronda/Gwendolen segments is still proving problematic to readers. For Deirdre David, "The novel is fatally, if seductively, split, for Eliot is unable to reconcile her fine study in psychological and social realism with the strange, difficult, and sometimes virtually unreadable Deronda narrative of Jewish identity" (135). Such judgments are valid, to a certain extent; the extensive explorations of Jewish history sometimes seem out of place and unexpected to those who have read Eliot's other novels. But in revisiting and contemplating the novel, there is much to be gained. Similarities to themes in Eliot's other works arise, and the characters' depths are more evident. This many-layered novel provides a multitude of areas for critics to explore, and they have certainly examined a range of issues related to the novel.

While much of the criticism of *Daniel Deronda* focuses on the issues raised by Eliot's inclusion of the Jewish element of the story, scholars have also studied the novel's musicians, particularly Julius Klesmer and Mirah Lapidoth, in attempts to discover the

role of art. According to Barry V. Qualls, the novel “avows that all art, whether of words or colors or sounds, distances and distorts reality: all becomes romantic to some degree” (204). Qualls’s argument is somewhat too sweeping, for the novel does include some examples of good, lifelike art, but there are certain works of literature referenced by the characters that do fail to represent reality accurately. Through these works and the characters’ reactions to them, the necessity of an imagination that will correctly judge literature and apply it to life becomes clear.

Deronda’s sympathetic imagination has also attracted attention because of Eliot’s lifelong focus on encouraging sympathy in her readers. For some critics, his sympathy (which is frequently mentioned by the narrator) is less effective than one might initially think. Bernard Paris notices the contradictions between the rhetoric and the mimesis in the novel; what the narrator tells readers to believe about Daniel is not always what actually happens in the story (184). Focusing more specifically on sympathy, Audrey Jaffe argues that the “scenes of sympathy” in the novel, particularly Daniel’s interactions with his mother and with Gwendolen, show that his attempts to advise those people with whom he ostensibly sympathizes are awkward and ineffective (143). For Jaffe, the term “sympathy” in *Daniel Deronda* has multiple meanings; it is “the name for an attenuation of self described both as a virtue—the result of travel and a Cambridge education—and as a malaise for which a dose of strong feeling provides the cure” (154). Although Daniel’s sympathy is certainly a difficulty in the novel, particularly in how it affects his relationship with his protégée Gwendolen, I argue that, by the end of the novel, Daniel discovers a more balanced way to use his faculty for sympathy, while also successfully teaching Gwendolen the importance of the sympathetic imagination.

Though imagination takes center stage in much of the criticism, reading in the novel has not been ignored. Tony E. Jackson's essay on the realism of *Daniel Deronda* includes an analysis of the role of reading; Jackson argues that in this novel, literature is "a determinative cause in human consciousness. Literary allusions to drama, romance, poetry and fiction are ubiquitous. Nearly all the characters are well-read and actively use their reading as a source for metaphor. . . . Literary experience and interpretive ability are directly associated with a character's kind of reading of other people" (232). Literature, music, and the visual arts become a means for characters to assess each other, as well as for readers to assess the merit of the characters. The connection between the imagination—particularly the sympathetic imagination—and characters' reading habits has been neglected, however, in favor of studies that examine issues that are unique to *Daniel Deronda* and do not appear in Eliot's other works. Continuing this examination of one of Eliot's favorite topics—the faculty of the sympathetic and reality-based imagination—will increase our understanding of Daniel and Gwendolen while demonstrating similarities between this, Eliot's last novel, and her earlier fiction.

Gwendolen Harleth is not one of Eliot's typical readers; in fact, there are few instances in the novel in which we actually see Gwendolen reading. However, the reading she has done in the past is frequently discussed, both by the narrator and by characters like Mrs. Davilow. These early descriptions of Gwendolen's reading partially explain her extreme selfishness; she has not yet read anything that will encourage her to empathize with anyone else (this lack of empathy is obvious in her relationship with her younger sisters, who are merely nuisances to Gwendolen). The narrator provides limited references to specific works or authors, but we do learn that Gwendolen is satisfied with

her education: “In the schoolroom her quick mind had taken readily that strong starch of unexplained rules and disconnected facts which saves ignorance from any painful sense of limpness; and what remained of all things knowable, she was conscious of being sufficiently acquainted with through novels, plays, and poems” (34). Unsurprisingly, Gwendolen does not yet see the need for a wider education, and her mother seems to agree with this assessment. Mrs. Davilow comments, after one of Gwendolen’s sarcastic remarks, “Don’t talk in that way, child, for heaven’s sake! You do read such books—they give you such ideas of everything. I declare when your aunt and I were your age we knew nothing about wickedness. I think it was better so” (86). According to her mother, Gwendolen’s reading has been of the dangerous variety; Mrs. Davilow believes that uncontrolled reading can have a negative effect on young people, and this belief speaks to the perceived power of reading in Victorian society. For women like Mrs. Davilow, it appears that ignorance, rather than too much knowledge, is preferred. Gwendolen, for her part, does not seem to mind the idea of limited reading; at the moment, she is unaware of the possibility of gaining wisdom through literature.

Like Rosamond Vincy, Gwendolen frequently uses reading to act as one of her many accomplishments or to serve as a conversation starter. The latter purpose is reflected in the most extensive conversation Gwendolen has about books, which is with Mrs. Arrowpoint. Much of what Gwendolen says during this scene is not to be taken seriously; she is merely trying to make conversation and ingratiate herself with Mrs. Arrowpoint by discussing the elder woman’s authorship. Though Gwendolen is sarcastic, as is her wont, there are moments in which it appears that she might actually be telling the truth. For instance, she tells Mrs. Arrowpoint, “I have been looking into all the

books in the library at Offendene, but there is nothing readable. The leaves all stick together and smell musty. I wish I could write books to amuse myself, as you can! How delightful it must be to write books after one's own taste instead of reading other people's! Home-made books must be so nice" (39). These offhand comments betray Gwendolen's selfishness, which extends even to the books she chooses to read and how she talks about reading. Gwendolen continues, in an attempt to prevent Mrs. Arrowpoint from detecting her derisive attitude, "But I always want to know more than there is in the books" (40), a declaration that is quite similar to the words of young Maggie Tulliver. However, while Maggie sincerely wants more from her books, Gwendolen quickly regrets her statement; she has implied an interest in Mrs. Arrowpoint's writing that she does not actually feel. Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke read in earnest, but at this stage of Gwendolen's life, reading is merely another topic for witty conversation, not something to be taken seriously. After Mrs. Arrowpoint explains how she is going to correct everything that has been wrongly stated about the poet Tasso's life, Gwendolen tells her, "Imagination is often truer than fact," seemingly agreeing with Mrs. Arrowpoint's desire to blur the reality of the poet's life. But the narrator comments that Gwendolen "could no more have explained these glib words than if they had been Coptic or Etruscan" (40). Perhaps, despite Gwendolen's mocking tone, there is some truth to her words; while it may not be possible for imagination to be "truer" than fact, it is the case—even for Gwendolen—that imagination is just as valuable as fact, if not more so. Imagination (particularly the sympathetic imagination) can allow for an understanding of others, as well as an understanding of ideas that cannot be accurately represented by a list

of facts; nevertheless, imagination always needs something to work with, something that will spark its curiosity—and in an ideal situation, for Eliot, that mental material *is* fact.

Indeed, Gwendolen's imagination is capable of interacting with what she has learned. However, in an attempt to maintain control over those around her, she usually does not give in to such imaginative thoughts:

Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself. The little astronomy taught her at school used sometimes to set her imagination at work in a way that made her tremble; but always when some one joined her she recovered her indifference to the vastness in which she seemed an exile; she found again her usual world in which her will was of some avail, and the religious nomenclature belonging to this world was no more identified for her with those uneasy impressions of awe than her uncle's surplices seen out of use at the rectory. With human ears and eyes about her, she had always hitherto recovered her confidence, and felt the possibility of winning empire. (57)

The mere thought of being powerless in an uncaring world is terrifying to Gwendolen, who expects and demands to be in charge of everything in her kingdom. Later in her life, she will have to face these fears, but for now, she is allowed to maintain the illusion of power in her little world.

Gwendolen's desire for control and her self-centered belief that the world exists only for her pleasure are products of the workings of her selfish imagination. Almost everything that Gwendolen does in the first section of the novel is for her benefit and her benefit only; while her sympathetic imagination will begin to develop later in the novel, she is currently under the impression that she can control everyone around her because of her poise and beauty. The most memorable representation of Gwendolen's fascination with herself comes in the second chapter of the novel, when, "for lack of anything else to do she sat gazing at her image" in the mirror:

Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forward and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm. How could she believe in sorrow? If it attacked her, she felt the force to crush it, to defy it, or run away from it, as she had done already. Anything seemed more possible than that she could go on bearing miseries, great or small. (14)

She loves the image of herself almost as much as she loves being adored, and it does not make sense to her that someone of her charms, talent, and beauty would have to suffer in the same way that less important people suffer. Gwendolen has “taken for granted that she knew what was admirable and that she herself was admired” (7). Such arrogance cannot last forever, and it does not take long for Gwendolen’s fall to come.

Henleigh Grandcourt provides the push that Gwendolen needs in order to come into contact with a more realistic world. Her interactions with Grandcourt take her aback; she cannot banter with him as she does with others, nor is she prepared to deal with the challenges he presents, for she has never before come into contact with anyone like him. Her first conversation with Grandcourt sets the tone for their relationship; this conversation is presented with a series of parenthetical comments, describing Gwendolen’s thoughts during the silences before Grandcourt responds. John Blackwood admired this passage in the novel, writing about “that wicked witch Gwendolen” in a letter to Eliot, “Her running mental reflections after each few words she has said to Grandcourt are like what passes through the mind after each move at a game, and as far as I know a new device in reporting a conversation. A cautious speaker will here learn that his pauses may also give his interlocutor an advantage” (*Letters* 6: 182-83). This narrative technique gives the reader insight into Gwendolen’s thought process as she attempts to understand what might be happening in Grandcourt’s mind; she is actually interested in trying to comprehend his ideas and motives, which is unusual for her, and

she draws on her imagination to help her with this task. Although their conversation is not especially long, Gwendolen has time (during the aforementioned pauses) to ponder Grandcourt's potential as a husband, as well as to consider how she might be perceived as a potential wife. The final parenthetical thought shows her drawing on her reading experience in an attempt to predict possible courses of action for Grandcourt: "Pause, wherein Gwendolen was thinking that men had been known to choose some one else than the woman they most admired, and recalled several experiences of that kind in novels" (100).

Although Gwendolen hopes to find help in her reading, her continued encounters with Grandcourt do not relate to anything she has read thus far, making her past reading of no practical help to her. She imagines that he will be a perfect husband and will be satisfied to be under her control; nevertheless, "with all her perspicacity, and all the reading which seemed to her mamma dangerously instructive, her judgment was consciously a little at fault before Grandcourt" (121). Gwendolen is indeed unprepared for the events that follow, particularly for her encounter with Mrs. Glasher. This news, the first personal tragedy of Gwendolen's life, shocks her: "Gwendolen, watching Mrs Glasher's face while she spoke, felt a sort of terror: it was as if some ghastly vision had come to her in a dream and said, 'I am a woman's life'" (137). This realization begins the process of Gwendolen developing a more sympathetic imagination, acknowledging that her own problems pale in comparison to the troubles of someone like Lydia Glasher. The narrator once again notes that Gwendolen's reading has not been particularly beneficial; her "uncontrolled reading, though consisting chiefly in what are called pictures of life, had somehow not prepared her for this encounter with reality" (140).

Reading about a particular experience is quite different from actually living through that experience; therefore, our expectations of what Gwendolen could gain from her reading should be tempered. The combination of reading and experience is much more potent than each element is on its own.

The partial awakening of Gwendolen's sympathetic imagination, which results from her encounter with Mrs. Glasher, is seen most clearly when she wonders for the first time what her mother's future will be like:

And then with an entirely new movement of her imagination, she saw her mother getting quite old and white, and herself no longer young but faded, and their two faces meeting still with memory and love, and she knowing what was in her mother's mind—"Poor Gwen too is sad and faded now"—and then for the first time she sobbed, not in anger but with a sort of tender misery. (269)

Gwendolen soon realizes that marrying Grandcourt might allow her to support her mother, and while she is aware that "she was not going to marry solely for her mamma's sake" (287), the mere existence of a somewhat altruistic motive is a substantial step in the right direction for Gwendolen. However, in attempting to help her family, she knows that she is harming another woman—Mrs. Glasher—to whom she had made a promise (that she would not marry Grandcourt). Gwendolen's sympathetic impulses have been aroused, but she has not yet devised a way to act that will satisfy all of the people who have demands upon her. If Gwendolen wanted her choice in this situation to benefit the most people—both her family and Mrs. Glasher—she would become a governess. However, Gwendolen is still, at heart, a selfish woman, and so the career of a governess is outside the realm of possibility for her.

Gwendolen justifies her marriage to Grandcourt by saying that it will help her mother, which it does, but Gwendolen suffers deeply from the experience. It is not long

before Grandcourt has taken complete control over Gwendolen, and she begins to see the need for changing her attitude toward life. Her imagination awakens while she is under his power; it is one of the only ways she can feel as if she has some freedom. But in creating these fantasies, she is moving away from the ideal use of the imagination as described by Eliot, eventually allowing her dreams to take control of her mind.

Gwendolen's thoughts give an extreme appearance to every action of Grandcourt's, and her mind struggles to cope with this new reality that conflicts with her desires. During this time, her imagination becomes more active—and more troublesome—because Grandcourt's control extends over so much of her life:

Already, in seven short weeks, which seemed half her life, her husband had gained a mastery which she could no more resist than she could have resisted the benumbing effect from the touch of a torpedo. Gwendolen's will had seemed imperious in its small girlish sway; but it was the will of a creature with a large discourse of imaginative fears: a shadow would have been enough to relax its hold. And she had found a will like that of a crab or a boa-constrictor which goes on pinching or crushing without alarm at thunder. (394)

Though Gwendolen has always believed in her power over people, it does not take much for her to be intimidated by her new husband because of these “imaginative fears.” More specifically, when Grandcourt forces Gwendolen to wear the diamonds that Mrs. Glasher had sent, Gwendolen can visualize her husband draining the life from her physically, not just mentally: “That white hand of his which was touching his whisker was capable, she fancied, of clinging round her neck and threatening to throttle her; for her fear of him, mingling with the vague foreboding of some retributive calamity which hung about her life, had reached a superstitious point. . . . She fancied that his eyes showed a delight in torturing her” (397-98).

Soon enough, these fears transform into more treacherous impulses toward this man who “could not indeed fully imagine how things affected Gwendolen: he had no imagination of anything in her but what affected the gratification of his own will” (516). Grandcourt’s consciousness “is only rooted in his own ‘exorbitant egoism’ and nothing larger than itself,” and so it “becomes static” (Fragoso 33), preventing him from completely understanding the depths of feeling in his wife. Like Gwendolen, Grandcourt is self-centered, but his selfishness is much more malicious than Gwendolen’s—and he shows no signs of changing his ideas. Gwendolen sees no palatable way out of her situation; she hopes that Grandcourt might die, but it does not seem probable:

The power of tyranny in him seemed a power of living in the presence of any wish that he should die. The thought that his death was the only possible deliverance for her was one with the thought that deliverance would never come—the double deliverance from the injury with which other beings might reproach her and from the yoke she had brought on her own neck. No! she foresaw him always living, and her own life dominated by him; the “always” of her young experience not stretching beyond the few immediate years that seemed immeasurably long with her passionate weariness. The thought of his dying would not subsist: it turned as with a dream-change into the terror that she should die with his throttling fingers on her neck avenging that thought. Fantasies moved within her like ghosts, making no break in her more acknowledged consciousness and finding no obstruction in it: dark rays doing their work invisibly in the broad light. (564)

As Gwendolen becomes more dependent on her inward life and on her own inner strength, she struggles to control her imagination; its dramatic movements only cause her more distress, increasing her desire to talk with Daniel in the hope that he can save her from herself. To escape from her increasingly tragic life, Gwendolen seeks refuge in the realm of fantasy, but she is not mature or experienced enough to be able to trust what her imagination tells her. She has not developed her imagination, so it reverts, like a child’s

would, to the world of fantasy; like young Maggie Tulliver, she uses her capacity for creating images and scenarios as a way to avoid her problems.

The culmination of Gwendolen's troubles with her imagination occurs directly prior to Grandcourt's death. When Gwendolen and Grandcourt go out in the boat, Gwendolen is already feeling vulnerable because her plans to see Daniel have been frustrated, and in this defenseless state, she is afraid that the impulses of her imagination will cause her to act in a way that she should not. Gwendolen

felt her imagination obstinately at work. She was not afraid of any outward dangers—she was afraid of her own wishes, which were taking shapes possible and impossible, like a cloud of demon-faces. . . . As she sat guiding the tiller under her husband's eyes, doing just what he told her, the strife within her seemed like her own effort to escape from herself. She clung to the thought of Deronda: she persuaded herself that he would not go away while she was there—he knew that she needed help. The sense that he was there would save her from acting out the evil within. And yet quick, quick, came images, plans of evil that would come again and seize her in the night, like furies preparing the deed that they would straightway avenge. (635)

Although Gwendolen does not act on these desires, she feels responsible for Grandcourt's death; she has thought so many times about killing him that it feels to her as if she did. In fact, as she tells Daniel, "I did kill him in my thoughts" (647). Gwendolen has almost become powerless to control her mental life, her thoughts, her imagination, and she relies almost exclusively on Daniel for help and accountability. Her subjection to the whims of her fantasy shows the potential dangers of imagination, when it cannot or is not controlled; as we have seen, Gwendolen's early reading has not prepared her for such tests of her imaginative fortitude. Because her imagination and reading, at present, are not grounded in reality, she has no means of envisioning a safe way out of her torturous marriage. She has read with the expectation that novels and romances will tell her

exactly what steps she needs to follow to fix her problems, similar to how she asks Daniel to give her a list of specific actions to take that will improve her life. Partially because of this misunderstanding of what it means to read and understand literature, Gwendolen is unprepared to tackle life's problems. For many people, the imagination is stimulated (and even trained) by reading, but Gwendolen's has not been trained because of her misappropriation of the stories and knowledge contained in the books she has read.

Gwendolen knows that her life has suddenly become difficult, but she has no idea how to handle these challenges by herself; throughout her engagement and marriage to Grandcourt, Gwendolen has sought advice from Daniel, who has become her spiritual counselor. The realization that she has spent her life being completely and utterly selfish is rather shocking, and in turning to Daniel for help, she finds a man who is capable of helping her because of his considerable capacity for sympathy. By relying on Daniel, Gwendolen attempts to live an externally focused life. However, it is tough for her to retrain her mind so quickly, and we ultimately learn that Gwendolen will need more than a single counselor to completely change her predisposition to behave selfishly and thoughtlessly.

Gwendolen's fascination with Daniel dates from their first meeting; from that moment, she believes that Daniel has some unexplainable influence over her. She focuses her thoughts on him constantly, ignoring other men and thinking, "of what use in the world was their admiration while she had an uneasy sense that there was some standard in Deronda's mind which measured her into littleness?" (389). She cannot know for sure that Deronda has been judging her in that way, but the mere thought of his censure bothers her constantly; she exaggerates her importance to him because of how

important he has become to her. From the beginning, he did not treat her as she was accustomed to being treated—as if she were a queen and above reproach—and that difference encourages her fascination with him: “It had been Gwendolen’s habit to think of the persons around her as stale books, too familiar to be interesting. Deronda had lit up her attention with a sense of novelty: not by words only, but by imagined facts, his influence had entered into the current of that self-suspicion and self-blame which awakens a new consciousness” (400). Gwendolen’s untamed, self-centered imagination enjoys this new object on which to focus its attention, and, like Dorothea imagining a Casaubon that fulfills her expectations, so does Gwendolen envision a Deronda that fits her limited understanding of him.

Deronda succeeds in making Gwendolen aware of the fact that her imagination is selfish rather than sympathetic, but he also awakens her desire for change—both in herself and in the world. She admits to him, “I have never thought much of any one’s feelings, except my mother’s. I have not been fond of people. —But what can I do? . . . I seem to see all that can be—and I am tired and sick of it. And the world is all confusion to me. . . . But what is the good of trying to know more, unless life were worth more?” (420). Daniel tells her, “[L]ife *would* be worth more to you: some real knowledge would give you an interest in the world beyond the small drama of personal desires. It is the curse of your life—forgive me—of so many lives, that all passion is spent in that narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it” (421). Daniel, he of the sympathetic nature and imagination, encourages Gwendolen to expand her interest in life beyond her immediate experience, hoping that an awareness of the largeness of the world will make her own troubles appear less significant. Unfortunately, Gwendolen’s

mind is still in training; instead of expanding her thoughts to the many people in her life, she focuses her energies and creative thoughts on Deronda himself, transforming him into an arbiter of justice. Gwendolen “had learned to see all her acts through the impression they would make on Deronda: whatever relief might come to her, she could not sever it from the judgment of her that would be created in his mind” (627). In this way, Daniel becomes her idol and her god, the judge of morality and of action.

After receiving this advice from Daniel, Gwendolen does not see him for some time, though he remains at the forefront of her thoughts. She wonders what he would have her do in order to gain this “real knowledge” that is beyond her personal interests; she still does not know how to fill her time according to what Daniel would suggest:

She wondered what books he would tell her to take up to her own room, and recalled the famous writers that she had either not looked into or had found the most unreadable, with a half-smiling wish that she could mischievously ask Deronda if they were not the books called “medicine for the mind.” Then she repented of her sauciness, and when she was safe from observation carried up a miscellaneous selection—Descartes, Bacon, Locke, Butler, Burke, Guizot—knowing, as a clever young lady of education, that these authors were ornaments of mankind, feeling sure that Deronda had read them, and hoping that by dipping into them all in succession, with her rapid understanding she might get a point of view nearer to his level. But it was astonishing how little time she found for these vast mental excursions. Constantly she had to be on the scene as Mrs Grandcourt. . . . (508-509)

Gwendolen’s naïve assumption that she could “dip into” works by such eminent philosophers speaks to the shallowness of her previous experiences with reading. Surely, had she done any legitimate reading earlier in her life, she would have realized that smuggling a stack of books by well-known scholars to her room would not automatically give her the knowledge that she (or, rather, Deronda) desires. At first, it seems admirable that she is attempting such reading—but we are not told if she even opens the books after

taking them from the library. Gwendolen struggles to live rightly on her own, endeavoring to survive in her new situation by extrapolating detailed instructions from Daniel's far more general advice. However, because her education and experience have been so limited, she does not or cannot read works that, were she able to take time to understand them, might help her—texts that might stand in Deronda's place.

Had Daniel been constantly with Gwendolen during this time, he could have told her that her approach to those books of philosophy was faulty. But Daniel has his own life, apart from Gwendolen, in which he is not the source of wisdom but the seeker of it. As he searches for the truth of his past, Daniel's sympathetic imagination—the faculty that causes him to care for Gwendolen—becomes crucial to changing the course of his life. While a large part of his extreme capacity for sympathy arises from his disposition, Daniel increases this facility through his reading, which extends from his early reading with his tutor to his later studies with Mordecai. Daniel's quest throughout the novel is to discover the truth about his identity, his family, and his past, and his imagination and his reading constantly influence that task—usually for the better.

According to the narrator, even as a young boy Deronda had a highly sympathetic disposition, which was encouraged and developed by his wide-ranging and frequent reading. It is this reading that first introduces Daniel to the search for his parentage and identity, which will become his lifelong quest:

Having read Shakespeare as well as a great deal of history, he could have talked with the wisdom of a bookish child about men who were born out of wedlock and were held unfortunate in consequence, being under disadvantages which required them to be a sort of heroes if they were to work themselves up to an equal standing with their legally born brothers. But he had never brought such knowledge into any association with his own lot, which had been too easy for him ever to think about it—until this moment when there had darted into his mind with the magic of quick

comparison, the possibility that here was the secret of his own birth, and that the man whom he called uncle was really his father. (152)

With this new idea in mind, Daniel's imagination focuses on the mystery of his lineage instead of "the imaginary world in his books" (152), which is where he had previously directed his mind. In most children, imagination can be quite powerful and overwhelming, and it is no different for Daniel; these new ideas "took possession of him with the force of fact for the first time told, and left him no immediate power for the reflection that he might be trembling at a fiction of his own" (152). The possibility that presents itself—that Sir Hugo is his father—fits into what he has been reading, into the narrative he has created for his life—and so he does not realize yet that there is a chance it is not true. Jackson notes that Daniel misuses the texts he has read by incorrectly applying them to his own life, which "contrasts with Daniel's general reading ability. For Daniel remains qualitatively above or superior to Gwendolen as a reader/knower. . . . [H]e has the ability Gwendolen conspicuously lacks, the ability to read un-narcissistically, to read events and characters in terms of their own being, rather than as reflections of his own desires" (233). Like Maggie Tulliver, young Daniel reads without distinguishing between reality and fiction, which is typical of children. Jackson's assessment, while accurate, should acknowledge that Daniel is a child at this point in the novel; we cannot expect him to, at this moment, be the intelligent reader he later becomes. As he grows up, Daniel will more consistently be this superior reader, remembering that he should temper his expectations in accordance with reality, rather than carelessly letting his fantasies take over. But more frequently mentioned than the books that Daniel reads in subsequent years is his sympathetic imagination, which,

combined with his background in reading, begins to bring him toward an understanding of his past.

In Daniel's time at school, we first see the influence of his excessive sympathy on others: "Daniel had the stamp of rarity in a subdued fervour of sympathy, an activity of imagination on behalf of others, which did not show itself effusively, but was continually seen in acts of considerateness that struck his companions as moral eccentricity" (162). This focus on caring for people connects to his "meditative yearning after wide knowledge" (162) and his "heightening discontent with the wearing futility and enfeebling strain of a demand for excessive retention and dexterity without any insight into the principles which form the vital connections of knowledge" (164). Daniel has no interest in becoming a traditional scholar or in spending more time with the university approach to knowledge, which separates pieces of information from their real-life applications. His sympathetic nature encourages him to take effective action in the world, which is something he cannot do while he is behind the walls of a university.

Daniel's thirst for action is partially sated when he saves Mirah from drowning herself, and in a significant moment, his imagination connects her to the mystery of his parentage: "The agitating impression this forsaken girl was making on him stirred a fibre that lay close to his deepest interest in the fates of women—'perhaps my mother was like this one'" (174-75). Mirah's situation deeply affects him, not only because of his capacity for sympathy but also because of the reminders of his own situation. His imagination creates a connection between Mirah, his mother, and himself that may or may not actually exist, and in this way, both his sympathy and his imagination contribute to his developing relationship with Mirah:

He sat up half the night, living again through the moments since he had first discerned Mirah on the river-brink, with the fresh and fresh vividness which belongs to emotive memory. When he took up a book to try and dull this urgency of inward vision, the printed words were no more than a network through which he saw and heard everything as clearly as before—saw not only the actual events of two hours, but possibilities of what had been and what might be which those events were enough to feed with the warm blood of passionate hope and fear. Something in his own experience caused Mirah’s search after her mother to lay hold with peculiar force on his imagination. (189-90)

We see clearly the influence and power of Daniel’s imagination as well as his sympathy, which are generally beneficial to both him and others. However, his “many-sided sympathy” has its problems; it “threaten[s] to hinder any persistent course of action” (335) because he involuntarily places himself in the situation of each person involved:

His imagination had so wrought itself to the habit of seeing things as they probably appeared to others, that a strong partisanship, unless it were against an immediate oppression, had become an insincerity for him. His plenteous, flexible sympathy had ended by falling into one current with that reflective analysis which tends to neutralize sympathy. (335-36)

His overactive sympathetic nature presents a challenge—to take action for himself—that Daniel begins to overcome when he meets Mordecai. Through Mordecai, Daniel discovers the significance of his past, his role in the present, and his calling for the future.

Appropriately enough, Deronda and Mordecai first meet in a secondhand bookstore, where Daniel finds “that wonderful bit of autobiography, the life of the Polish Jew, Salomon Maimon” (356). This meeting signals the beginning of a relationship that is built on the sharing of knowledge, through oral means as well as written. Though Daniel, like Dorothea Brooke, desires an active, energetic existence, by no means does he want to give up the contemplative life; the ideas and plans presented by Mordecai tempt Daniel’s mind and imagination. They particularly appeal to what the narrator calls his “romantic” side: “That young energy and spirit of adventure which have helped to create

the world-wide legends of youthful heroes going to seek the hidden tokens of their birth and its inheritance of tasks, gave him a certain quivering interest in the bare possibility that he was entering on a like track—all the more because the track was one of thought as well as action” (479). After learning that Daniel is a Jew, Mordecai and Daniel spend much of their time studying together, working through the papers that Daniel has been given by his grandfather’s friend, along with what Mordecai has written. Daniel has fulfilled Mordecai’s vision of a young, ardent Jew who will be a leader of the displaced Jewish people. Mordecai speaks in the language of visions, of unknown and unseen worlds. Though Daniel is initially skeptical of the truth of Mordecai’s words, he comes to appreciate his mentor’s rhetoric, dreams, and experience—and, ultimately, the language of the visionary is transferred to Deronda as he begins to use his imagination to envision an active future life for himself, Mirah, and the Jewish people. Perhaps the working out of this idea of the “visionary” in the lives of Mordecai and Daniel is the highest level of the ideal sympathetic, reality-grounded imagination. Only after learning to understand others as well as the role of the imagination in the world can someone accurately envision a successful future. In *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot writes,

Certainly the seer, whether prophet, philosopher, scientific discoverer, or poet, may happen to be rather mad: his powers may have been used up, like Don Quixote’s, in their visionary or theoretic constructions, so that the reports of common sense fail to affect him, or the continuous strain of excitement may have robbed his mind of its elasticity. It is hard for our frail mortality to carry the burthen of greatness with steady gait and full alacrity of perception. But he is the strongest seer who can support the stress of creative energy and yet keep that sanity of expectation which consists in distinguishing, as Dante does, between the *cose che son vere* [things that are true] outside the individual mind, and the *non falsi errori* [no false errors] which are the revelations of true imaginative power. (178-79)

This description might well apply to Daniel Deronda, who, as we shall see, is Eliot's ideal character in almost every sense.

Before he can take his rightful place with Mordecai and Mirah, however, Daniel has to complete his identity-discovering journey. Daniel's meeting with his mother affects him strongly, both in his emotional reactions and in his subsequent choices. Earlier, we saw how young Daniel's imagination responded to the possibility that Sir Hugo might be his father; now Daniel, as an adult, finally has something tangible to fuel his thoughts about his mother, in the form of the letter requesting him to travel to Genoa. However, Daniel purposely keeps his mind from settling too firmly on a desired outcome, particularly because the consequences of such longings have troubled him in the past: "Deronda could not hinder his imagination from taking a quick flight over what seemed possibilities, but he refused to contemplate any one of them as more likely than another, lest he should be nursing it into a dominant desire or repugnance, instead of simply preparing himself with resolve to meet the fact bravely, whatever it might turn out to be" (542). In using his imagination to understand possible realities—and in using as a basis for this limited imagining a note that is actually from his mother, rather than treating literature as an instruction manual for his own life—Daniel begins to move toward Eliot's ideal of the imaginer.

As it turns out, the truth in this situation is quite similar to what Daniel would have desired, had he let his imagination run wild. The knowledge that he is, in fact, a Jew seems to reinforce the decisions he has already made, and the connection with his past strengthens the yearning of his imagination toward Mordecai and Mirah. Upon revealing his secret to them, Daniel says, "Since I began to read and know, I have always

longed for some ideal task, in which I might feel myself the heart and brain of a multitude—some social captainship, which would come to me as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize. You have raised the image of such a task for me—to bind our race together in spite of heresy” (698). All of this time, his imagination has been dedicated toward identifying with others and finding a commission that will allow him to use his highly capable sympathetic imagination to help others. His mentorship of Gwendolen has begun to prepare him for such an assignment as the one he is now undertaking, in that it has required him to understand her but also to lead and teach her in a certain way.

Although Gwendolen is surprised and hurt by the revelation that her one friend is leaving her, Deronda’s departure is a necessary part of her development because it finally forces her to understand that the world includes more than what is directly relevant to her daily existence. Gwendolen “was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving” (748). Like Rosamond Vincy, Gwendolen is stunned by the loss of a man who she thought would always be available to her. Her imagination is finally learning to include other people in its workings. There have been hints of this tendency earlier in her experiences, but now, without the presence of the one person she trusted, she will be forced to rely once again on herself and her own thoughts. The reader may wonder how Gwendolen will learn to live successfully without Deronda; perhaps she will keep him with her by repeating his words of advice as if they are from some sacred text. Though she is disheartened, she does send a letter to Daniel and Mirah on their

wedding day, writing, “You must not grieve any more for me. It is better—it shall be better with me because I have known you” (754). Gwendolen has learned that she cannot realistically demand that the lives of others revolve around her. For some readers, the ending of Gwendolen’s story is frustrating because her counselor abandons her, but Sutphin discerns hope even in Gwendolen’s sense of loss; the freedom Gwendolen has achieved “is a result of circumstances rather than of her own choosing, but because she has struggled against moral passivity and developed a clearer sense of responsibility, we can believe that she will make the most of her opportunities to continue to grow” (360-61). Her experiences with Daniel’s sympathetic imagination have taught her about a more rewarding mode of living. Like Daniel, Gwendolen has found her calling, which is simply to live a life free from selfishness, one that would make her mentor proud.

As has been discussed, one of Eliot’s primary goals for her novels was to increase the reader’s capacity for sympathy, and the ideal reader will achieve this goal. Daniel Deronda is Eliot’s ideal reader as well as her ideal imaginer; he has a large capacity for sympathy and uses this sympathy to impart wisdom to others, but at the same time, he does not get bogged down in the life of the mind, nor is he buried in books. He uses his imagination to envision the possibilities for change in the world, leading him to take a dramatic action at the end of the novel in accepting the charge of leading the Jewish people. Though it takes much of his life to reach this point, Daniel eventually acquires a balance between a sympathetic imagination and an imagination that envisions and encompasses an active life for the imaginer.

Eliot, in her enthusiasm about realism, occasionally inserts defenses of her philosophy into her novels, the most famous one being in *Adam Bede*, her first novel. In

her final novel, she reiterates the need for literature that does not ignore reality, but rather, engages it:

Here undoubtedly lies the chief poetic energy:—in the force of imagination that pierces or exalts the solid fact, instead of floating among cloud-pictures. To glory in a prophetic vision of knowledge covering the earth, is an easier exercise of believing imagination than to see its beginning in newspaper placards, staring at you from the bridge beyond the corn-fields; and it might well happen to most of us dainty people that we were in the thick of the battle of Armageddon without being aware of anything more than the annoyance of a little explosive smoke and struggling on the ground immediately about us. (352)

While imagination and fact are sometimes at odds, the true artist will be able to see the connection between them—and so will the ideal reader. This reader knows that just as imagination relies on fact to exist, so does fact need to be interpreted through imagination. Through their individual and shared experiences, Gwendolen and Daniel discover that imagination must be grounded in reality in order to effectively cause change. When imagination is influenced by beneficial reading, it can cause innumerable transformations in individual lives and in society as a whole.

### *Conclusion*

Eliot described the connection between reality and the imagination to John Blackwood while she was writing *Romola*, and Blackwood wrote to his wife, “I never heard anything so good as her distinction between what is called the real and the imaginative. It amounted to this, That you could not have the former without the latter and greater quality. Any real observation of life and character must be limited, and the imagination must fill in and give life to the picture” (*Letters* 3: 427). As an author of fiction, Eliot’s primary goal was to expand the minds of her readers so that they could

enter into a sympathetic understanding with people outside of their acquaintance. She was able to achieve this goal because of her clear understanding of what it takes to write a novel that is realistic but also imaginative; the imagination cannot exist without reality, nor can reality truly exist without the exercise of the imagination. Eliot's characters slowly learn—from themselves and each other—that reading is essential to the existence of an imagination that is both sympathetic and realistic; reading expands their experiences and allows them to observe the lives of others. It is through the experiences of these characters—through their failures and their successes, their wasted reading and their effective reading—that readers of Eliot's novels are themselves encouraged to continue reading. By residing temporarily in the worlds that Eliot has envisioned, we are able to return to our own lives with a better understanding of what it means to be a fellow-creature of someone like Maggie Tulliver. We have discovered that, if we allow our imaginations to interact with her novels, Eliot's books are surely books with *more* in them.

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