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THE MOTTO TO CHAPTER XXI OF *DANIEL DERONDA*:
A KEY TO ALL GEORGE ELIOT'S MYTHOLOGIES?

I consider it necessary for the purposes of my essay to quote the motto to Chapter XXI of *Daniel Deronda* in full. Despite the lexical crescendoes, the germ of the meaning is a very simple, yet devastating, observation on man's capacity for self-vitiating. But because of its dressing of archaisms, its imitation of biblical wisdoms, its orotundity of changing image, there is developed a complication of the meaning which extends its significance in a way which I hope to show:

It is a common sentence that Knowledge is power, but who hath duly considered or set forth the power of Ignorance? Knowledge slowly builds up what Ignorance in an hour pulls down. Knowledge, through patient and frugal centuries, enlarges discovery and makes record of it; Ignorance, wanting its day's dinner, lights a fire with the record, and gives a flavour to its one roast with the burnt souls of many generations. Knowledge, instructing the sense, refining and multiplying needs, transforms itself into skill and makes life various with a new six days' work; comes Ignorance drunk on the seventh, with a firkin of oil and a match and an easy "Let there not be" – and the many-coloured creation is shrivelled up in blackness. Of a truth, Knowledge is power, but it is a power reined by scruple, having a conscience of what must be and what may be; whereas Ignorance is a blind giant who, let him but wax unbound, would make it a sport to seize the pillars that hold up the long-wrought fabric of human good, and turn all the places of joy dark as a buried Babylon. And looking at life parcel-wise, in the growth of a single lot, who having a practised vision may not see that ignorance of the true bond between events, and false conceit of means whereby sequences may be compelled – like that falsity of eyesight which overlooks the gradations of distance, seeing that which is afar off as if it were within a step or a grasp – precipitates the mistaken soul on destruction?

I should like to remark parenthetically that the phrases "the true bond between events" and "means whereby sequences may be compelled" are related to one of George Eliot's thematic beliefs and

there has been a good deal of intelligent and discerning critical writing on this. I refer, of course, to her proposals concerning "invariability of sequence" and "inexorable law of consequences".¹ These are curiously akin, in an angular way, with Hardy's frequently maligned workings of his Immanent Will and his exceptional "coincidences"; George Eliot's awareness and exploitation, however, of the power of Ignorance,² despite the reference in the motto to "sequences", is a different matter although Ignorance can apparently have, in her narrative distributions, sequential importance. It will be noticed, nevertheless, in the above motto that George Eliot is in fact referring to "that *ignorance* of the true bond ..." and that "*false* conceit of means ..."

I also consider it necessary for the purposes of my essay to accept that this unscribed motto was composed by George Eliot herself. This has been ably established by J.R. Tye.³ It is one of fourteen unscribed mottoes in prose in *Daniel Deronda*, and it is to be discovered also in *Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot* by Alexander Main.⁴ As Tye reasonably argues "it is not conceivable that either of them [George Eliot or G.H. Lewes] would have allowed work not her own to appear under such a title."⁵ Given a reasonable certainty of authorship and noting with interest Tye's division of the mottoes into two groups representing one or other of George Eliot's "epigraphic persona" (roughly, does the sequent chapter illustrate the technical problems in the pre-written motto or is the motto a meditative commentary on the pre-written chapter?), I suggest that in this motto to Chapter XXI George Eliot expresses both fundamentally and magniloquently one of her main anxieties concerning human activity as she interprets it in her fiction. And it seems to be the case also that it is a fortuitous expression.

It is fortuitous in the way that the epigraph has very little application to Chapter XXI but a great deal to the whole novel and to all her other novels; fortuitous, too, in that on this occasion—Ty has noticed that it was written on a separate sheet of paper and not in the space that was left for it at the head of the chapter—it is reasonably arguable that after *Daniel Deronda* and hence her total fictional work were completed, George Eliot composed an epigraph to a single chapter which could serve as an afterword to her works; as though in this extended image, archaic and portentous though it may be, she isolates one of mankind's

alarming debilities which comprises, in her novels, a fundamental apprehension.

The chapter on which the motto so inappropriately rests constitutes a main support of an uncharacteristic structure. In the sequence of narrative chronology it takes up directly from Chapter II at the end of which Gwendolen has left the gambling tables of Leubronn to return home on hearing of the financial disaster of her twice widowed mother, Mrs. Davilow. In the back-dated interval Chapter III to XX develop two major narrative areas: they describe Gwendolen's sexual activity in first luring and then fleeing from Grandcourt on learning of Mrs. Glasher and Grandcourt's bastards—all of which occurs in the year previous to the time of Chapter I; and they describe Deronda's boyhood, his suspicion of his own bastardy (George Eliot, in all her work, introduces the theme of illegitimacy), and his rescuing Mirah from suicide. We then plunge once more into the middle of things with which Chapter I opens, there being now, however, a beginning formulated. Chapter XXI is a directional chapter in which Gwendolen is merely nudged, through the irony of an acquired haughtiness and innate petulance, towards the power and disaster of Ignorance. It presents an interlude of unheroic despair and is low-keyed in its rural ironies: "the wind was turning up the feathers of a cock and two croaking hens which had doubtless parted with their grown-up offspring and did not know what to do with themselves. The railway official also seemed without resources, and his innocent demeanour in observing Gwendolen and her trunks was rendered intolerable by the cast in his eye." This workaday Chanticleer and this squint-eyed ticket-collector point up the ruffled frustration of Miss Harleth and the desolation of her mother—so forlornly given voice in Gwendolen's exclamation of horror at the prospect of a social descent into teaching: "What! be like Miss Graves at Madame Meunier's?" But there is no obvious intimation yet of the blind giant who will tear down the pillars of Offendene.

I hope to indicate later to what extent George Eliot's forces of Ignorance are applied to the person and circumstances of Gwendolen and how this Ignorance is related to a socially cultivated evil, to marriage and high-born men in general and to Grandcourt in particular. In the familiar calamities of Chapter XXI there is a listing of petty

tribulations associated not with a blind giant but rather with a village dwarf. Gwendolen pictures an indigent future abroad ("that large home of ruined reputations" we read in *Felix Holt*) in a community of exiles with their "despised dulness of their ill-plenished lives". She is momentarily daunted by the "sad faces of the four superfluous girls", her dumpy sisters. They are boring and mutely importunate, but the scintillating, ambitious Gwendolen, even at this period "fresh as a newly-dipped swan" cannot free herself from their drabness and mediocre needs any more than she can from the self-pity and lachrymose affection of her dull-witted mother. It is noticeable, even when, later in the novel, drunken Ignorance puts her world in flames with a firkin of oil, that part of the hell of her marriage is attributable to her recognition of family bonds—especially her emotional indebtedness to Mrs. Davilow; and we detect, parenthetically, the ubiquitous pattern of the paramountcy of the trivia of domesticity and of the conglomerate effects of its impact, in all George Eliot's fiction, on what are presumably more serious issues.

The chapter, then, catalogues this kind of social irritation of the rural privileged. There is no possibility of applying to Lord Brackenshaw for permission to stay in Offendene rent-free because they could not afford to heat it or staff it with servants; so they must remove to Sawyer's Cottage—an appalling disgrace. Because Gwendolen cannot abide the thought of its two little parlours and four bedrooms and because she cannot, with her special sense of social place, accommodate herself to school-teaching or governessing, she hits on the wild plan of taking up a career as a professional singer which requires her writing to Herr Klesmer. The chapter ends with that action and with her reflection on her missed opportunities in respect of Grandcourt, roulette and Deronda, in that order, all of which raise spectres of humiliation which have bruised her blind and youthful optimism.

The events and dismay described in Chapter XXI simply do not illustrate, therefore, the massive power of destruction detailed with such elaborate imagery in its motto. There is one minor exception which, with knowledge of the later narrative, constitutes a pointer to a much more degrading emotional and psychological dilemma. On the tedious drive from the railway station Gwendolen is disturbed by thoughts of "the futility in being anything whatever—charming, clever,

resolute ...” In this transitory mood of despair she anticipates something of the horror of her subsequent marriage, of her condemnation, similar to that of James’s Isobel Archer, to be destroyed exquisitely by a fastidious sadist. In the “uneasy barouche” her thoughts wander:

Events might turn out anyhow, and men were hateful. Yes, men were hateful. Those few words were filled out with very vivid memories. But in these last hours, a certain change had come over their meaning. It is one thing to hate stolen goods, and another thing to hate them the more because their being stolen hinders us from making use of them. Gwendolen had begun to be angry with Grandcourt for being what had hindered her from marrying him, angry with him as the cause of her present dreary lot.

Yet even this anger and inexperienced analysis, as uneasy as the barouche she is sitting in, cannot possibly exemplify the motto.

Yet the motto is exemplified by the novel *as a whole*. Before elaborating on this, however, I should like to give some substance, if only through a selection of the most prominent outlines, to the somewhat sweeping claim implicit in my title. In some processes of describing and identifying a characteristic feature of a body of fiction, a feature of constant appearance, of crucial usage and of signal importance when so used, it is defensible and even easy to be sweeping. Dickensian, Jamesian and Hardyian characteristics of this kind can fairly readily be identified, counted, described and valued. I have already mentioned George Eliot’s enchantment with the accumulative importance of domestic trivia, and now I propose to examine, in critical shorthand as it were, the function of the power of Ignorance in the novels preceding *Daniel Deronda*.

In *Adam Bede*, to put the survey in a chronological perspective, a less malevolent Ignorance abounds on the edges of the central turmoil. Mrs. Bede is an earlier, much poorer, much lower-born Mrs. Davilow but is certainly her equal in self-pitying stupidity (something of a minor destructive force of Ignorance may be associated indirectly with the unexpected deaths of their husbands). We find a jovial, almost, Ignorance manifest in the village of Hayslope from tubby Bessy Cranage and her engaging vanity to the oracle Bartle Massey, enunciating his misogyny through the parable of his bitch, Vixen. There are degrees of Ignorance, rarely vicious, occasionally amusing about Seth, the Poysers,

the Rector, Mr. Irwine and his mother (this pair reveal one of George Eliot's early strokes of genius in sexual exposure) and even about that paragon of Methodist charity, Dinah Morris. The Ignorance, though, of the motto in *Daniel Deronda* which wants "its day's dinner, lights a fire with the record [completed by Knowledge] and gives a flavour to its one roast with the burnt souls of many generations ..." belongs to the story of Hetty Sorrel, her generous and carefree promiscuity and the agony and consequence of her pregnancy. It is the ash of Hetty's personality, so mean, so vain, so stupid, so quintessentially human, that flavours so acridly *Adam Bede*. And the Ignorance which destroys her "mistaken soul" operates through the quick lust and gentlemanly repentance of Arthur Donnithorne, through the high-minded artisanry and disciplined sexuality of Adam and through the inhuman meekness of Dinah which, paradoxically, tends both to weaken her own credibility and reinforce Hetty's. Admittedly in their cases there is a qualified personal survival but because of the experiences of Hetty, which comprise at a baser level a familiar Victorian cautionary tale, the whole compass of human fallibility is arraigned. And the disaster and the arraignment are both the ultimate end of an unexpected manifestation of the power of Ignorance in an isolated parish: the commonplace seduction of a village lass—her eager acquiescence evidences the "ignorance of the true bond between events"—must surely be part of "that falsity of eyesight" which precipitates the complete deterioration of a once healthy Hayslopean cell.

The Dodson aunts and uncles in *The Mill on the Floss* are all perverted by a special ignorance the human consequences of which can be delightfully satirical.⁶ (In tracing the continuity of the power of Ignorance in the novels it is necessary, in the process of identification, to disturb and to some extent disregard the complex harmony and integration of the novels' other numerous qualities and powers and I state simply that I am aware of this and them.) The Ignorance manifest in the Dodson aunts, then, is part of the spin-off of a central turbulence situated where the forces of Ignorance effect their greatest damage. On the periphery of the ignorant malevolence are to be discovered the general stupidity of Mr. Tulliver and his obstinacy concerning education and commerce; of Mr. Wakem, nurturing and shielding his bastard son, young Jetsome towards whom "he held only a chiaroscuro parentage:"

of Tom asserting his manliness over a humpback in Red Deeps; of Mrs. Tulliver emulating (with the splendid exception of the occasion when she defiantly takes back Maggie, generally ostracized after her voyage with Stephen) the self-pity of Mrs. Bede and Mrs. Davilow. Maggie Tulliver, however, like Hetty, is at the centre of the turbulence; she is not only physically drowned by a hostile rush of water she is the victim also of a metaphorical angry flood of Ignorance. She has not Hetty's primal simplicity. When she goes to spend a month or two with Lucy Deane at the beginning of Book VI (in many ways Book VI is a novel in itself) she moves, admittedly, into an unfamiliar world of mannered indolence, a world which because of her circumstances is almost as beguiling to her as Arthur's is to Hetty, a world of middle-class affluence, leisured and pampering. Ignorance, her surprising beauty and a set of Hardyian coincidences combine to commit her to be rowed by Stephen on a beautiful July morning on the River Floss; yet, we repeat, she is no simpleton in the sense that Hetty is; her sense of Victorian propriety strictly governs her physical passion. What she is ignorant of, among other things, is the injustice and hostility of Victorian morality which will ignorantly condemn where no Victorian sin has been committed. However innocently, she is insensitive to that "false conceit of means whereby sequences may be compelled".

The signature of emphasis is different in *Silas Marner*. There is inevitably a seduction associated with a force of Ignorance (I am using the word "seduction" throughout in an extended sense, not only in the matter of what Victorians called "carnal Knowledge"; for instance Maggie is "seduced" by Stephan although remaining virginal and Dorothea is "seduced" into marriage by Casaubon and it is not to the point whether their marriage is consummated or not). The seduction in *Silas Marner*, carnal enough we imagine, led to Godfrey Cass's secret marriage, "an ugly story of low passion, delusion and waking from delusion", to Molly—anticipating, in a minor role, Hardy's Arabella—whose highest memories were "those of a barmaid's paradise of pink ribbons and gentlemen's jokes". And the daughter of the marriage is of course Silas's transmutation of golden guineas, Eppie, a living thing to hoard: and because of Molly's death through opium poisoning Godfrey is freed to marry the refined and socially acceptable Nancy Lammeter. In a comparison with the narrative contours of the other novels we

could legitimately anticipate at this point that the powers of Ignorance would work through the barrenness of Godfrey's second marriage, or through Eppie, yet this is not in fact the case. Although "Nancy's deepest wounds had all come from the perception that the absence of children from their hearth was dwelt on in her husband's mind as a privation to which he could not reconcile himself" (Chap. XVII), these are tolerable wounds and privations. Their souls are not roasted. And Eppie's is on the whole simply a charming little folk-tale—the creation here is not shrivelled up in blackness. Yet there are destructive forces of Ignorance at loose in this novel, but they are curiously placed and channelled. They are associated with the blindness of narrow religion and of sexual jealousy and their intensest disturbance lies at the very beginning of the book and not at some later climactic point of classical timing. Silas's history in Lantern Yard before he exiled himself in Raveloe is related bleakly and economically in a few pages. The crucial seduction of this novel is that of Silas's girl Sarah by his best friend William Dane and the crucial injustice that of Silas being cast out from his church; and the full horror of the ignorant force is manifest in this vignette. Where the contours differ in *Silas Marner* is in the fact that the victim, although after years of distortion of personality and of denial of life, ultimately survives. Silas's struggle to a phase of serenity (the emphasis is, as we shall see, entirely different in Romola's case) represents an unusual refraction in George Eliot's vision but nevertheless the power of Ignorance is still terribly influential.

Some weeks before his solemn marriage to Romola, Tito Melema is "married" in 1492 to Tessa, a simple girl from the outskirts of Florence, by the conjuror Maestro Vaiano who "assumed a surpassing sacerdotal solemnity, and went through a mimic ceremony with a liberal expenditure of *lingua furbesca* or thieves' Latin ..." (Chap. XIV). Tessa in her ignorance accepts the marriage as holy and binding and bears Tito's children. In the last chapter of *Romola*—it is now May 1498—Romola witnesses from a window on the north side of the Piazza the burning of the Frate, Girolamo Savonarola:

Romola covered her face, but the hootings that seemed to make the hideous scene still visible could not be shut out. At last her arm was touched, and she heard the words, "He comes". She looked towards the Palace, and could see Savonarola led out in his Dominican garb; could see him standing before the Bishop, and being stripped of the black mantle, the white scapulary and the

long white tunic, till he stood in a close woollen under-tunic, that told of no sacred office, no rank. He had been degraded and cut off from the Church Militant.

The baser part of the multitude delight in degradations, apart from any hatred; it is the satire they best understand. There was a fresh hoot of triumph ... It is easy to believe in the damnable state of a man who stands stripped and degraded. (Chap. LXXII).

The chapel treachery of William Dane in Lantern Yard pales before this magnificently produced spectacular of religious mania and injustice. Romola's story ends (at least, although there is an epilogue, in the matter of Aristotelian wholeness) as the torches kindle the fuel and "she only heard what *he* was hearing—gross jests, taunts, and curses. ... Her face was covered again, and she only knew that Savonarola's voice had passed into eternal silence". Despite Savonarola's hideous death, Romola is the main victim of the power of Ignorance. The shapes of the narrative masses of this novel change under different lights and different pressures both of historical detail, complex and overwrought, and also of fictional creativity; yet we can quite readily perceive, looming about Romola, the monstrosity of Tito's infidelity and of her joyless and sexless marriage to him on one side and the excruciating religiosity and sacrifice of Savonarola (and, to a lesser extent, of her brother) on another. The powers of Ignorance which assail Romola work through her own being (once again a naivete predisposing to a "seduction" into marriage); though of course her husband Tito who, for all his luxuriating in selfishness and profiting from deceit, also suffers continually; and through Savonarola whose uncompromising doctrine and harsh moral persuasion torture Romola's spirit as much as his self-induced martyrdom does. Yet there is a legendary quality about *Romola* which vitiates its credibility. Romola, like Silas, is not destroyed: "there was a placidity in Romola's face", we read in the Epilogue, "which had never belonged to it in youth. It is but once that we can know our worst sorrows, and Romola had known them while life was new". It is a saintly miraculous survival and the forces of Ignorance are ultimately repulsed as though, almost, by a divine ordering of things.

It seems to be accepted by most critics that *Felix Holt* is the least convincing of George Eliot's imaginative writings, and one reason for its unsuccess may be because its fundamental declaration, its basic

cementing of enchantment and frightfulness, do not lie at the centre of the novel. Its title, like that of *Adam Bede*, is the name of a moralizing artisan who has been astonishingly well educated and who is the hero of a romantic love story of which Esther, the adopted daughter of a garrulous minister, is the heroine. The narrative ambience consists mainly of a parliamentary election. But the indicting agony and fascinating core of the novel extend beyond its time (1832) and political setting; the most compelling character, Mrs. Transome, with felicities of tragic centrality and certainty, is technically a minor character, and her story, although tangentially influencing Esther's fortune, is technically a subsidiary story. As we have noticed previously, particularly in *Silas Marner*, the distribution of forces of ignorance coincides with the areas of tellingness. Some effects of the energy of Ignorance are generalized out of the particular where no-one is immediately injured. Mr. Lyon, for instance, in mock-heroic polysyllables, demonstrates to Brother Nuttwood the falsity of attempted choral domination in his church in Malthouse Yard: "For all office, unless it be accompanied by peculiar grace, becomes as it were, a diseased organ; seeking to make itself too much of a centre. Singers, specially so called, are it must be confessed, an anomaly among us who seek to reduce the Church to its primitive simplicity, and to cast away all that may obstruct the direct communion of spirit with spirit" (Chap. XIII). The Reverend Debarry, apprehensive about democracy breaking loose, claims that Dissenting preachers "make the ignorant multitude the judges of the largest question, both political and religious, till we shall soon have no institution left that is not on a level with the comprehension of a huckster or drayman" (Chap. XXIII). Curiously agreeing with him, Felix, when haranguing an election crowd at Duffield declares, "Ignorant power comes in the end to the same thing as wicked power, it makes misery" (Chap. XXX). For all his championship of the working men he considers them too ignorant as yet to take over political power, and it is a point of vindication that, had his story been less romanticized, his own experiences with the drunken mob on election day may well have had fatal consequences for him as well as for the special constable.

The ignorance which manifests itself through politics and religion has of course its own particular relevance and poignancy in this novel. But

the most virulent and hostile form of ignorance is expressed in the circumstances of Mrs. Transome and, as often happens, it is invested with a particularly harsh irony. Although she is married to a near idiot who sires a comparably imbecilic son, Mrs. Transome's main social reassurance is the purity of her Lingon blood, "which has been continually enriched". Yet throughout the novel she is in a state of emotional harassment because of a secret shame, of which the world, at the time of the fiction, is still ignorant. The power of Ignorance destroying Mrs. Transome, however, arises from the fact of her being unaware of the true design and character of the plebeian lawyer Mr. Jermy, with whom, early in her marriage, she has had passionate intercourse. She was ignorant, too, of the severity of moral law and of the retribution which would follow her "seduction". The outcome of her illicit infatuation is Harold, of impure blood and spurious heir to the Transome estates and who, incidentally, through some genetic imitation has brought with him a Turkish concubine on his return from the East. The details of her passion, when young, beautiful and apparently frustrated by her insufficient husband, are inevitably left largely to our imagination, but the sustained penalty for this affair, which leads her to such exclamations as "God was cruel when he made women", constitutes the continuous thread of the novel's suffering and its demonstration of the activity of a consuming Ignorance. This is essentially the binding vitality of *Felix Holt* and it shows Mrs. Transome at the centre of a special viciousness.

The oppression of Ignorance, it would seem in George Eliot's fiction, is such that it pervades and influences the entire human condition but that for certain groups and individuals its falsifying and distorting effects can be disastrous, can turn all the places of joy dark as a buried Babylon, can even hound to the point of death. Of the three deaths described in *Middlemarch* two, those of Casaubon and Featherstone, are apparently from natural causes and the third, that of Raffles, although not actually perpetrated by Bulstrode, is so prompted and manoeuvred by him that it amounts to an act of murder; and it is surely unnecessary to categorize the terror of Ignorance—or the suppression of knowledge—in this case. Even within the charade of Featherstone's acting out his dying, now in melodrama, now in farce, we perceive that the relatives who flock about his bedside and the melodramatic business

of his two wills are shrouded in fogs of Ignorance. Casaubon's death, even more pertinently, following a succession of heart attacks, is hastened because of his unfounded suspicion of Dorothea and his ignorance of her true behaviour and sense of duty to him. But it is not the people who die who suffer most. Unlike any of the preceding novels (and perhaps because it is a novel of many complexities with no one personage isolated as the definitive central character) there is not in *Middlemarch* a sole victim or a chief victim of human crassness. It appears that there is, in George Eliot's writings, some correlative between such victimization and what might be loosely called a tragic hero or heroine. This last appellation, because of this, and because of the fact also of their bearing the brunt of communal ignorance, as well, of course, as of their own, belongs, sometimes incongruously, to Lydgate and Dorothea. Yet again a harsh irony invests Dorothea's situation of acute misery. In her abysmal ignorance of sex and marriage she fastens, with a St. Theresa-like fervour, on the idea of a life with Casaubon, confident that it would lead to an existence of intellectual nobility and idealism. Yet for all her marital suffering, frustration and indignities, Dorothea, like Romola, survives and as a bonus is awarded a dubious second chance through the theatrical passion of Will Ladislaw. There is, however, no second chance for Lydgate whose sexual ignorance, in a matter of ultimate judgement is, for all his callow adventure in Paris with a Provencale actress, as pernicious as that of Dorothea's. (In assessing the damage done to these "finer" personages we ought to remember the complementary suffering, with origins of Ignorance, of Casaubon and Rosamund, both assailed by self-deceiving jealousy and by unrealisable ambition.) *Middlemarch* reveals, among other things in its labyrinthine brilliance, the grievous reduction of the personality of a young doctor and the total destruction of his altruistic goals. It is more dismaying than his dying that he is reduced to a state of moral and spiritual apathy—his medical distinction is to write a paper on gout—and his final surrender as a human being is not incomparable with Bulstrode's although in the latter's case we witness, paradoxically, a moral regeneration at the moment of his acutest shame.

To return then to *Daniel Deronda*. A structural analysis of this novel reveals a juxtaposition of two largely self-sufficient narratives, touching, intermingling at certain points and, indeed, each influencing to some

extent the other. There is no doubt that a conscious grafting of the two fictions is consummated with professional skill. Yet there is evoked in each story its own special mood and atmosphere so that it is with reluctance that the reader surrenders the special rapport he has established when he has to move from one narrative environment or the other. (It is part of George Eliot's method that the narrative switch often occurs most unexpectedly.) One of the narratives is that promulgated by Mordecai (I say Mordecai rather than Deronda but the point is arguable though immaterial so far as this essay is concerned), the Jewish story. It is set mostly in the poorer, less fashionable streets of London, but it is romantically associated with a past of European persecution and a future of militant Zionism. The other, Gwendolen's story, is centred around an improverished—in a special sense—middle-class girl of West Indian descent, self-willed and selfish. Before her marriage and in her sexual ignorance, (a different kind, incidentally, from Dorothea's), she is sure of her charm, of her physical attractiveness and presence, and of her ability to achieve and hold a wealthier and more elevated social rank.

The power of Ignorance works more terribly and viciously through the Gwendolen story than the Mordecai one. There is a resonance of moral tone about the Jewish story which armours it, with something of the parabolic defence of Romola's, against insidious forces although there are some simple and obvious incomprehensions such as Mirah's not knowing of her mother's or brother's fate—a despondency of nescience which brings her to the verge of suicide—and also Deronda's not knowing of his Jewishness. We cannot dismiss these lightly because they belong to the essential warmth and energy of this half of *Daniel Deronda*. But they are vacua of knowledge rather than activating forces of Ignorance, "wanting its day's dinner of burnt souls", and once filled in they tend ultimately to be sources of reinforcement rather than of vitiation and destruction. They do not lead to false conceits, they do not foul sequences.

Gwendolen's case is different, and its irony and sadness is characteristically expressed in the oppositions of her dilemma on the occasion when she learns from a letter that Grandcourt has returned from Leubronn and wishes to call at Offendene:

Gwendolen sank on the settee, clasped her hands, and looked straight before her, not at her mother. She had the expression of one who had been startled by a sound and was listening to know what would come of it. The sudden change of the situation was bewildering. A few minutes before she was looking along an inescapable path of repulsive monotony, with hopeless inward rebellion against the imperious lot which left her no choice: and lo, now, a moment of choice was come. Yet—was it triumph she felt most or terror? Impossible for Gwendolen not to feel some triumph in a tribute to her power at a time when she was first tasting the bitterness of insignificance: again she seemed to be getting a sort of empire over her own life. But how to use it? Here came the terror. Quick, quick, like pictures in a book beaten open with a sense of hurry, came back vividly, yet in fragments, all that she had gone through in relation to Grandcourt—the allurements, the vacillations, the resolve to accede, the final repulsion; the incisive face of that dark-eyed lady with the lovely boy; her own pledge (was it a pledge not to marry him?) the new disbelief in the worth of men and things for which that scene of disclosure had become a symbol. That unalterable experience made a vision at which in the first agitated moment, before tempering reflections could suggest themselves, her native terror shrank. (Chap. XXVI).

This is not the only passage where there are shifts of dread and shining hope; from the depression of anticipated poverty, from a morose awareness of a discarded Lydia Glasher with her lovely boy, from a vague terror of the future (although she has no suspicion yet of the latent evil within her which would lead her to plan the murder of her husband), to a promise of social distinction and expansive grace and affluence. Much has happened from the time of those salad days when she was enchanting the neighbourhood with the dazzle of her beauty and her determined skill at archery and, already, malignancy is exuding from the fissures of Ignorance. Yet the emergence of Mrs. Glasher from the arcane places of human dissembling, Gwendolen's flight from Grandcourt because of this living evidence of falsity and the unprovidential break-up of her family's finances are but intimations of a darker unknown.

In Gwendolen's case, as in all the others, George Eliot's full recognition of the power of Ignorance holds both fine subtleties and tremendous substance. The power diminishes and becomes less attritional towards the periphery of events, yet everything contributes as well as connects. In the motto the macabre sequence of images, derivative presumably from some elemental myth of gigantic vandals and arsonists, lends a weird weight and variety to an intrinsic vision of human disaster. The quite lovable stupidity of Mrs. Tulliver or the

social (as well as physical) blindness of Bardo de' Bardi, Romola's father, for instances, belong to the general condition of human ignorance. But the basic meaning, central to George Eliot's recognition, is summarized at the end of the motto in words largely stripped of Gothic frightfulness: "ignorance of the true bond between events, and false conceit of means whereby sequences may be compelled... precipitates the mistaken soul on destruction". Given the validity of Gwendolen's strangely devoted wish to see her mother removed from the shameful position of a distressed gentlewoman, her real propensity for sorrow, as it is parenthetically elaborated in the foregoing excerpt, lies in "that falsity of eyesight which overlooks the gradations of distance, seeing that which is afar off as if it were within a step or a grasp." Her "seduction" into marriage is the most pathetic and most antagonistically loaded of all George Eliot's seductions. In her ignorance of men, she thinks, in fantasies of wifely domination, that with her physical beauty and verbal wit she can subjugate them to every pretty whim—and we remember, in different circumstances, the early Esther and Felix Holt. In her ignorance of Grandcourt, despite the disconcerting omen of Mrs. Glasher, she thinks that she can overcome him without difficulty so that he will be penalized for the purchase of her body and his arrangement of her, as an expensive ornament, to decorate his frigid drawing-rooms, permeated as they are with a fastidious evil. In her ignorance of Deronda, he seems to her at once a saviour, a gentlemanly Christ, and at the same time a lover-confessor, satisfactory and comprehending. In her ignorance of "hateful" men, despite her "new disbelief in the worth of men", she asks her mother just before her wedding, "Mamma, have men generally children before they are married?" The story of her brief marriage—yet long enough to wreck her as a person—is the story of her increasing disillusion, of the squashing of her spirit, of the erosion of her will for happiness, and it culminates in her demented revelation to Deronda of what happened in the boat off Genoa:

"But yet all the while I felt that I was getting more wicked. And what had been with me so much, came to me just then—what you once said—about dreading to increase my wrong-doing and my remorse—I should hope for nothing then. It was all like a writing of fire within me. Getting wicked was misery—being shut out forever from knowing what you—what better lives were. That had always been coming back to me in the midst of bad

thoughts—it came back to me then—but yet with a despair—a feeling that it was no use—evil wishes were too strong. I remember then letting go the tiller and saying ‘God help me!’ But then I was forced to take it again and go on; and the evil longings, the evil prayers came again and blotted everything else dim, till, in the midst of them—I don’t know how it was—he was turning the sail—there was a gust—he was struck—I know nothing—I only know that I saw my wish outside me”. (Chap. LVI).

Gwendolen’s “confessions” to Deronda in the hotel *Italia* constitute an integral part of her suffering and so does his inability to comfort her, his inability to “utter one word to diminish that sacred aversion to her worst self—that thorn-pressure which must come with the crowning of the sorrowful Better, suffering because of the Worse”. So, like Hetty, Maggie, Silas, Romola, Mrs. Transome and Lydgate, she is the chief victim of the power of Ignorance in the given novel and this is the state to which it has reduced her.

It has been earlier mentioned that there are many other aspects of George Eliot’s fiction, and we must avoid the danger of writing the forces of Ignorance too large. Each novel is an inspirational accomplishment of checks and balances, a fabrication of human activity through selective imagination and observing, and its many qualities are conglomerate. We must remember also that that lamentable disorder of the human scene which she calls the power of Ignorance is not George Eliot’s exclusive copyright and that we can discern it in the works of many other novelists, even if many do not parade and identify it so patently. It does appear, nevertheless, that the circumstances and timing of her writing this lengthy motto indicate, albeit without obvious deliberation, what she sees as one of the insidious powers that work against a common good, and it does further appear that the workings and manifestation of this power are, in different degrees of malevolence, prominently displayed in all her novels.

1. These phrases are to be found in George Eliot’s unsigned review of R.W. Mackay’s *The Progress of the Intellect* in *Westminster Review*, 54 (Jan. 1851), 355. They are also discussed in Ian William Adam, “The themes of isolation and restoration in George Eliot’s fiction”, Diss. London 1960, pp. 96-101.

2. In most cases I have capitalized but just as on one occasion in the motto George Eliot uses lowercase I have done so in a few inevitable instances. Capitalization makes, perhaps, a fractional difference in emphasis.

3. J.R. Tye, "George Eliot's Unscribed Mottoes", *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 22, No. 3 (1967), 235-249.
4. *Wise, Witty and Tender Sayings from the Works of George Eliot*, 8th ed. (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1889), pp. 386-7.
5. Tye, 236.
6. George Eliot, however, had no conscious satirical intention. Haight quotes from a letter to Blackwood in which she comments on *The Times* review of *The Mill on the Floss*: "I am so far from hating the Dodsons myself, that I am rather aghast to find them ticketed with such very ugly adjectives [mean and uninteresting]." Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1968, p. 328.