

At Home in Narrative: The Kept Mistress in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*

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Abstract

This essay argues that in her novel *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot offers her kept mistress character a compassionate context, integrates her into the narrative in a meaningful way, and locates her in the domestic space of a middle-class housewife. She thus performs an intervention on levels of both narrative structure and content that challenges conventional Victorian ideology and creates a new narrative for kept mistresses, who had previously been invisible in both nineteenth-century fiction and nonfiction.¹

Keywords: George Eliot, Daniel Deronda, Lydia Glasher, kept mistress, narrative, and domestic space

Introduction: Undocumented Women

British doctor William Acton's *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social & Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils* (1857) and essayist W. R. Greg's *Prostitution: The Great Sin of Great Cities*, (1850, reprinted 1853) proved two of the most popular texts on prostitution, and consequently on women's sexuality, in the mid-nineteenth century.² In their essays, a blend of medical, legal, public health, sociological, literary, and moral approaches, both Acton and Greg use Alexandre Parent du Châtelet's earlier Parisian study as a touchstone, and like du Châtelet, both writers claim that one of the categories of prostitute that *cannot* be quantified by any census is that of the kept mistress.³

Acton defines the kept mistress as a woman "who has in truth, or pretends to have, but one paramour, with whom she, in some cases, resides" (54), and he positions her in contrast to the "common streetwalker," who, because she is visible, can be identified and counted. Kept

¹ I am grateful to Margaret Breen, Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou, and their readers for this opportunity, and for the generosity of Amy Schlag, Katherine Montwieler, Michelle Scatton-Tessier, Marissa Bolin, Susan McCaffray, and the British Women's Writers Association and Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies communities.

² While I would use the term "sex work" to describe this labor today, because I am making distinctions in nineteenth-century definitions, I will rely on nineteenth-century vocabulary. For a synopsis of the scholarly reception of Acton's work, see Shalyn Claggett's "Victorian Pros and Poetry: Science as Literature in William Acton's Prostitution."

³ Parent du Châtelet's study includes a discussion of the contemporary practice of registering prostitutes in the city of Paris, one reason for his emphasis on the census approach, and becomes the model for both Acton's and Greg's studies despite the lack of such registration in London.

mistresses, however, belong in the group that Acton describes as “women who regularly or occasionally abandon themselves, but *in a less open manner*” (15, italics mine). In other words, they exhibited few visible signs of mistresshood. Unlike the streetwalker or a woman who worked in a brothel, kept mistresses would not likely have been in public soliciting or in a recognizable brothel. The problem of finding and counting these women who, like prostitutes, had sex outside of marriage, was made complicated in that kept mistresses were located elsewhere. They were at home.

The status of kept mistress entailed a transactional role in which a sexual relationship was the price for financial stability. Although with the rise of companionate marriage in the nineteenth century, the idea of marriage as an exchange was often considered vulgar, married women in the nineteenth century *were* kept women of sorts. That said, a married woman and her children had legal, financial, and social protection and sanction that a kept mistress did not, although the wife may have had less freedom in some other ways. There were, of course, other transactional relationships for women at this time, for example women who lived with and cared for an ailing relative. Such exchanges were not (usually) sexual in nature, and did not place the woman at risk of the social consequences that a kept mistress faced. The primacy of the extramarital sexual exchange, and the subsequent danger to a woman’s reputation, made kept mistresses’ existences risky. Also undocumented in marriage registers, censuses, and studies like Acton’s and Greg’s, these women experienced an invisibility that rendered them particularly vulnerable in a culture that applied heavy penalties for perceived illegitimacy.

This invisibility of kept women extends to British fiction. Unlike French or Russian novels from the same time period, mid-nineteenth-century British novels tend *not* to feature mistresses in prominent roles. Instead, kept mistresses hover at the margins of popular narratives, often as rumors or in unflattering histories of male characters. This is not the case in the fiction of Wilkie Collins or George Eliot, whose *Daniel Deronda* (1876) is the focus of this essay. While both Collins and Eliot employ similar strategies, particularly in their uses of domestic space, Eliot’s commitment to realism and her sustained integration of a kept mistress character into her contemporary novel underscore the urgency of her portrait.⁴ In Eliot’s novel, Lydia Glasher is a central character; she may technically be a kept mistress, but she looks like a middle-class housewife. Locating Lydia in her home, where studies like Acton’s and Greg’s would not have found her, Eliot recovers the kept mistress from the ideological category of prostitute and makes her, in the words of the novel’s Sir Hugo, an example of one of those ““sort of wives”” (613), dismissed by standard accounts, fictional as well as social. With Lydia, Eliot counters the conventional representations of fallen women, and, as Roxanne Eberle argues about some

⁴ In “The Natural History of German Life,” Eliot argues that an artist’s responsibility to faithfully represent a subject is in fact a moral obligation when depicting those less fortunate. In Collins’ sensation fiction, a kept woman passing as a middle-class housewife, while a deliberate narrative strategy, might also contribute to the horror produced by anonymity and questions of identity.

nineteenth-century women writers, interrupts “the harlot’s progress,” a narrative that follows a downward trajectory through prostitution to death.⁵

In her characterization of Lydia, Eliot casts the body as well as the location of the kept mistress as a site of revision.⁶ In so doing Eliot responded to medical, legal, social, and religious discourses that alternately objectified, erased, overlooked, or vilified the women who lived as wives to men who were not their husbands. Eliot makes explicit that her fictional mistress is not a courtesan, but rather a woman who fell in love and is subject to rigid marriage laws.⁷ No longer portrayed as contaminated or the source of temptation, Eliot’s kept mistress inhabits a domestic setting, and accordingly counters prevailing negative narratives. At a time when a woman who had sex outside of marriage was officially categorized as a prostitute by medical, legal, and social institutions, and ideologically portrayed as a scourge and the opposite of all that a woman should be, Eliot adopted a revolutionary strategy: she presented her kept mistress as a realistic, middle-class wife and mother living in her home.⁸ Furthermore, Lydia herself is agent in her own domesticity. Nicole Reynolds, author of *Building Romanticism: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, writes, “embodied subjects both determine and are determined by architectural spaces and the activities that unfold within, around, and through them” (6). Lydia’s body, presented within the home, makes her the ideal, middle-class woman: wife and mother. Her inhabitation of Gadsmer with her children makes the estate more than just an asset listed in Grandcourt’s will: Lydia makes Gadsmer a home. Ultimately, Lydia’s representation offers a realistic, lived experience of a woman disenfranchised by unforgiving ideologies and practices.

Eliot’s sympathy for Lydia and her situation as a kept mistress, use of narrative allotment, and placement of the mistress character in domestic space result in a new narrative for the kept woman. In this way, Eliot combats what Chanel Craft Tanner calls the invisibility that is not only erasure, but violence (274-5). In terms of otherness, while *Daniel Deronda* is most regularly cited

⁵ Ideologically, a woman who has sex outside of marriage is fallen, and tends to be represented as a prostitute or on her way to inevitably becoming one. Greg writes of this representation: “No language is too savage for these women. They are outcasts, Pariahs, lepers. Their touch, even in the extremity of suffering, is shaken off as if it were pollution and disease” (3). In her pioneering *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, Amanda Anderson notes that while many scholars treat “fallenness” as a somewhat fluid category, few treat it as an issue of “attenuated autonomy and fractured identity.” She places fallenness into a context of agency and selfhood (2-3), and others have since followed her lead and complicated understandings of fallenness. Various scholars have worked on recuperating Victorian prostitutes, both fictional and, in the case of Judith Walkowitz’s work, historical.

⁶ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Augusta Webster, and Eliza Lynn Linton present variations on this relationship in their writing, as well.

⁷ Collins includes a number of women characters who are kept in various arrangements, including Norah Vanstone’s mother in *No Name*, and Sir Percival’s mother and Mrs. Catherick in *The Woman in White*. In many cases, these characters are part of Collins’ larger project revealing the injustices of marriage and inheritance law.

⁸ In real life women such as Lydia were often deemed concubines, the term used in the nineteenth century to indicate cohabitation outside of marriage. Ginger Frost’s excellent *Living in Sin* studies the complexities of concubinage. Because in *Daniel Deronda* Grandcourt no longer lives with Lydia, I am not using Frost’s model here, though it can be applied to other kept mistresses who cohabit. If they did cohabit prior to Colonel Glasher’s death, Lydia and Grandcourt would fall into Frost’s first category of concubinage: those who cohabit because they *cannot* marry. This is also the category that Eliot herself falls into.

for its representation of Judaism and Jewish concerns in an Anglo world, I argue that through the character of Lydia Glasher, Eliot challenges narrative convention in a way that reveals that the legal and social strictures concerned with marriage are constructs disengaged from a compassionate morality.

Compassionate Context

As part of her critique of the legal and social systems that restrict women, Eliot presents Lydia within a context that encourages reader compassion.⁹ Eliot offers a key with which to read Lydia and her situation: the epigraph to the chapter that takes place entirely at Gadsmere, Lydia's home, reads "No penitence and no confessional: / No priest ordains it, yet they're forced to sit / Amid deep ashes of their vanished years" (286). With this self-authored epigraph, Eliot underscores the sacrifice and loneliness of kept mistresses, as well as their dependent state and the potential abuses they might face.

Eliot's is a portrait of a woman trapped by a legal system that offers her no relief from a bad marriage; Lydia's relationship with Grandcourt appears to be her one available method of escape. Lydia is a woman who fell in love while in an abusive relationship with her husband. Her husband did not divorce her because he did not want his private life made public, and he himself was not interested in remarrying (287). Filing for divorce was near-impossible for a woman to do at the time, and thus Lydia began an affair with Grandcourt. Theirs was initially a loving relationship: they lived together for some time (287); he gave her his mother's diamonds "with ardent love" (303); and her understanding based on Grandcourt's own professions were that when her husband passed away, he would marry her (303).

That said, Lydia is no victim. Lydia has neither been seduced, nor is she a courtesan, two stereotypical representations of a kept mistress. Eliot not only affords Lydia agency, but also makes her accountable for her actions. Eliot's is a representation of a mature woman who made choices and has reconciled herself to their consequences. Lydia deeply regrets leaving her first child with her husband; her sorrow both underscores the multidimensionality of her very human character and reminds readers that she is a mother (287). These continued reminders of her maternal qualities serve to render her more like the housewife than the (imagined) prostitute on the street. Lydia's act in approaching Gwendolen, the woman engaged to Grandcourt and one of the protagonists, is not selfish (another quality often applied to a woman who had sex outside of marriage); she asks for Gwendolen's mercy on behalf of her children, not herself. Lydia's present obsession with marriage to Grandcourt is not about her love for him, which she admits has cooled, but about her duty to her children: she is prepared to endure anything in marriage for her children (288). Were Grandcourt to marry Lydia, he would also settle his estate on her son and restore what he had initially promised to their children: financial and social sanction.¹⁰ Lydia is dependent upon

⁹ See Ginger Frost and Jennifer Phegley on nineteenth-century marriage and divorce legislation and reform.

¹⁰ Unlike on the continent, British children did not automatically become legitimate when their parents married, thus the emphasis on Grandcourt's will.

Grandcourt, and Eliot emphasizes this financial arrangement, as well as the gendered double standard: “she was a lost vessel after whom nobody would send out an expedition of search; but Grandcourt was seen in harbor with his colours flying, registered as seaworthy as ever” (287). Amanda Anderson writes that Victorian writers tended to create fallen women characters as “hyperdetermined and disturbingly ‘false’ (painted, melodramatic, histrionic),” thus creating “an effect of greater verisimilitude around the nonfallen” (10). Instead, Eliot presents Lydia as a complex character who acknowledges her situation plainly and admits her own responsibility. Therefore, Eliot renders Lydia not only like the chaste Gwendolen and Mirah, the Jewish woman who will eventually marry Daniel, in that they are all three penned in by the dearth of options for women who are not independently wealthy, but she also makes Lydia realistic for nineteenth-century readers.

Narrative Presence

Although *Daniel Deronda* is usually discussed as the novel with English and Jewish parts, with Gwendolen and Daniel as the protagonists, I argue that the narrative is largely Lydia’s.¹¹ The question of *her* marriage precedes Gwendolen’s; it is her appearance to Gwendolen that inspires the latter’s trip to Leubronn, where readers first meet her. Gwendolen’s major act of wrong (marrying Grandcourt) is against Lydia, and it is this betrayal that plagues Gwendolen, and makes her seek Daniel’s advice and atonement. It is the declaration of Lydia’s son as heir to Grandcourt’s estate that establishes order for Gwendolen, Lydia, and the narrative at the end of the novel. Lydia’s extramarital relationship, and her children’s (il)legitimacies are those against which the marriages and legitimacies of other characters (including Gwendolen’s and Daniel’s) are measured. As a marginalized woman, Lydia is at the periphery of master narratives. Eliot renders her integral, however, and in this way, the character who is seemingly marginal to the Jewish and English plotlines is in fact crucial to both of them, and determines their concerns and functions.

From this perspective, the primary relationship of the novel is not between Gwendolen and Daniel, or Daniel and Mirah, but between Lydia and Gwendolen. Not only does Lydia affect the protagonist’s decision-making process and understanding of the world, but Eliot blurs the lines between legally married woman and mistress. Lydia initially presents herself to Gwendolen as the rightful wife to Grandcourt. Later, in the passage in which Lydia appears before the Grandcourts in a London park, Eliot writes that when confronted by “the dark shadow thus cast on the lot of the woman destitute of acknowledgement by social dignity,” Gwendolen recognizes “*a future that might be her own*” (518, italics mine). When she does marry, Gwendolen feels that she has sold herself to Grandcourt, and thus the marriage renders *her* a fallen woman (573). Eliot makes plain that both Lydia’s and Gwendolen’s relationships with Grandcourt are business arrangements; at least in Lydia’s case, there was once love. The provisions in Grandcourt’s will determine that one

¹¹ While Lydia has received little critical attention, both Oliver Lovesey and Kathleen Slaugh-Sanford connect her to other characters in the novel, and argue that she is crucial in Eliot’s use of female racial otherness to interrogate Englishness (Lovesey 7). Slaugh-Sanford is one of the few scholars who makes Lydia central to her own reading.

“wife” will be banished to Gadsmere, based on whether or not Gwendolen is pregnant with a son, effectively making the two women equals in the same dubious relationship with him. Making the novel’s key relationship one between two women in effect queers the narrative structure, a quality underscored by the fact that the primary business exchange, the transfer of diamonds, is also between Lydia and Gwendolen.

Furthermore, Lydia’s role is echoed in the various other unconventional marriages and reflections of otherness. There are two new, happy marriages in the novel, but both challenge those typically found in nineteenth-century narratives. Daniel and Mirah, whose wedding closes the novel, do not remain in England, but travel East, away from England, and out of the Empire. The happily wedded couple that does remain in England are the heiress Catherine Arrowpoint and her Jewish musician husband, Herr Klesmer. *They* are the new inheritors of English legacy and property. Lastly, there is the queerness of the relationship between Daniel and Mordecai, and the fact that the true marriage, “the marriage of our souls,” at the end of the novel can be theirs (643). This relationship is not only transformative for protagonist Daniel, but, like Lydia, challenges the heterosexual, legal definitions of marriage. Notably, the more conventional English marriage celebrated by one of the protagonists, Gwendolen, is miserable and ends in tragedy.

Eliot is not the first to perform this kind of narrative intervention, whereby a novel’s form and content revise contemporary representations of non-ideal women. Roxanne Eberle, tracing the various narrative interruptions performed by women writers, argues that “a revisionist ‘harlot’s story’ allows women writers to address systemic sexism, moral hypocrisy, and patriarchal privilege” (6). Eberle contends that Romantic writers combat the use of harlot, prostitute, and fallen woman with “well-spoken, self-reflective, and ultimately proactive heroines who invariably assume that their narratives are significant and, furthermore, indicative of a greater social malaise that the text aims to cure” (8). When it comes to later-nineteenth-century narratives, however, “the Victorian ‘fallen’ woman tends to be the object of reformer discourse” (12). I extend Eberle’s “alternative discourse” (7) of sexual transgression specifically to Eliot’s work with the kept mistress, and argue that Eliot’s Lydia is more in keeping with these self-reflective, proactive Romantic women characters than Eberle’s Victorian examples.

Lydia’s visibility and activity go beyond the spectral presences of other kept mistresses in literature. Eliot invests Lydia with independent action and voice: Lydia travels to speak to Gwendolen, insists upon controlling the delivery of Grandcourt’s diamonds to her, and appears independently of Grandcourt in multiple passages. She has a backstory that makes her predicament more understandable for readers, and she is well-integrated into the narrative structure of the novel. Lastly, we see her *in* her home, and hers is the portrait of a middle-class family. Chapter Thirty is set entirely at Gadsmere, the estate occupied by Lydia and her children with Grandcourt, where she lives as a widow. These efforts do what the studies on prostitution cannot: they locate and validate the existences of kept mistresses.

The Kept Mistress in Domestic Space

According to the conventional understanding of the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, Lydia, a fallen woman in a domestic setting, is a public woman in a private space. Historians since Lawrence Stone have complicated this public/private binary. Stone posits that the home itself is a mediation of public and private, and tracks the move towards increasing group and personal privacy. More recently, scholars including Sharon Marcus, Karen Chase, and Michael Levenson, have argued for a more porous, or situational binary, noting, among other things, that each term implies and constructs the other.¹²

Such readings offer nuanced interpretations of the interplay between gender and space; even so Victorianists continue to underscore the intransigence of public/private divide. For example, while finding this more recent scholarship compelling in its revelations of both limits and opportunities, Janet Wolff notes that the reason for the persistent adherence to the public/private binary model might lie in the dangers in abandoning it, “if this implies an equal access that is clearly not, even in the twenty-first century, the reality” (15). Conditions are not yet such that genders are treated equally, so we should still consider how our spaces and systems are gendered. Similarly, Leonore Davidoff suggests that because women in the nineteenth century were rarely the ones defining these spaces and limits, it is still useful to consider them as categories (22).

Lastly, the prevailing negative narrative is that kept mistresses, as women who are sexually active beyond the bounds of marriage, were still associated with both prostitution and the street in the nineteenth century. While he distinguishes between invisible kept mistresses and visible streetwalkers, Acton notes that many of his contemporaries argue that “all illicit intercourse is prostitution” including “the female who, whether for hire or not, voluntarily surrenders her virtue” (7). In her essay on prostitution in the nineteenth century for the British Library, Judith Flanders writes, “More than anything, a woman’s lack of respectability was signaled by her presence in a place of public entertainment” (“Prostitution,” np). A woman whose sexuality made her no longer respectable was associated with public space. The street itself, as described by Marcus in her study of urban space, was associated with contagion, crime, moral depravity, and promiscuity (104-5). Narratively, for Marcus, Acton, and Greg, the lodging house, the representative shorthand for urban dwelling, and its lack of privacy, shared these associations with the street, and was considered one step on the path to the brothel.

So, while the complication of the public/private binary matters, particularly for the (technically) sexually-well-behaved Gwendolen and Mirah, Lydia faces another particular set of ideological circumstances, for which critical attention to the distinctions between the street and the home, the public and the private, is still relevant in considering her representation.¹³ For Victorians,

¹² See Sharon Marcus’ review of this scholarship in her *Apartment Stories* (6-7). Also, in their introduction to *Inside Out*, Teresa Gomez Reus and Aranzazu Usandizaga note the many ways women subvert conventional gendering of space.

¹³ Drawing on Nicole Reynolds’ work on Romantic space, I consider how, within a Victorian context, the location of a public woman in a private space informs her subjectivity.

the street, together with spaces associated with it, was positioned as the antithesis to the middle-class home, the dwelling of ideal wives and mothers. Eliot disrupts this opposition. Lydia is a woman who would ordinarily be considered a public woman, and yet Eliot positions her *inside* her home. Given the gendered spatialized logic of her contemporaries, Eliot's representation is extraordinary.

Eliot places Lydia within the home, and not just any home, but Gadsmere. Gadsmere is described in the first line of Chapter XXX as a "rambling, patchy house, the best part built of grey stone, and red-tiled, a round tower jutting at one of the corners, the mellow darkness of its conical roof surmounted by a weather-cock making an agreeable object either amidst the gleams and greenness of summer or the low-hanging clouds and snowy branches of winter" (286). This building evidently had various additions installed over time; it is an old building with history and legacy, though no uniform aesthetic. Gadsmere may lack the regularity of form prized in London architecture (Marcus 95-7), and the kind of surface-level aesthetic that might appeal to Gwendolen, but it has the character and heritage of a great country house. Later, when Gwendolen inherits the estate, Eliot writes that "Sir Hugo had seen enough of the place to know that it was as comfortable and picturesque a box as any man need desire, providing his desires were circumscribed within a coal area" (651). Sir Hugo tells Mr. Gascoigne, Gwendolen's uncle, "'if one's business lay there, Gadsmere would be a paradise. It makes quite a feature in Scrogg's history of the county, with the little tower and the fine piece of water – the prettiest print in the book'" (651). He also tells Mr. Gascoigne that it is a much "'more important place than Offendene [Gwendolen's family's current dwelling]," and that "'the rooms may not be larger, but the grounds are on a different scale'" (651). Given that grounds are one of three crucial elements of a stately home (Stone 230), Gadsmere should be understood as such, the kind of estate inherited in upper-class families of perceived quality. Lydia has not been installed in a fashionable apartment in the city, where one might find a courtesan, but rather an estate signaling the values held by those with both genteel blood and old money, where one would find a wife.

While the kind of property worthy of an inheritance, Gadsmere is located in remote coal-mining country, and thus in all likelihood in either the northern or western part of England, and far from London. Its location renders the estate less attractive to Gwendolen, and when she inherits it as a punishment (Sir Hugo uses the word "banishment") at the end of the novel, she decides to rent it out, probably to someone connected to the coal industry (613). To those who live elsewhere, the stately home bears the dark stain of mining, manufacture, industry, and, literally, soot. Additionally, Gwendolen, referring to Gadsmere as "purgatorial," likely associates the property with Lydia and Grandcourt, the wrong she has done to Lydia in marrying Grandcourt, and her own humiliation in having these intimate details publicized by Grandcourt's will (651). Although these linkages render the estate unappealing for Gwendolen, the isolation works for Lydia, as it keeps her far from the society that Grandcourt keeps. Furthermore, in this locale she can pass as a widow:

The complete seclusion of the place, which the unattractiveness of the country secured, was exactly to her taste. When she drove her two ponies with a waggonet full of children, there were no gentry in carriages to be met, only men of business

in gigs; at church there were no eyes she cared to avoid, for the curate's wife and the curate himself were either ignorant of anything to her disadvantage, or ignored it: to them she was simply a widow lady, the tenant of Gadsmere [. . .]. (286)

Gadsmere is in a region marked by the effects of a destructive industry, and this landscape facilitates Lydia's anonymity. Eliot's initial description of the location does seem bleak:

the flower-beds were empty, the trees leafless, and the pool blackly shivering, one might have said that the place was somberly in keeping with the black roads and black mounds which seemed to put the district in mourning; —except when the children were playing on the gravel with their dogs for companions. (286)

In November in coal country, Lydia's own children breathe life into the scene (286). The sense of "mourning" described serves to remind readers of the epigraph's ashes that Lydia finds herself in as a mature woman living with the consequences of earlier life decisions, and Slaugh-Sanford points out that Gadsmere's own developing darkness mirrors Lydia's development from a fair young woman to a mature woman with dark features (407). Overall, Eliot's description of the Gadsmere estate and Lydia's own family's effects upon it encourages a sympathetic reading of Lydia.

This is the setting in which Eliot locates Lydia. While Lydia's exterior surroundings are bleak and suggest exile, her interior space is homey. Eliot places Lydia "in the pleasant room where she habitually passed her mornings with her children round her," or, the morning room (290). According to Judith Flanders in *Inside the Victorian Home*, morning rooms were women's rooms: "they were where women who had staff did the organizing of the household: spoke to servants, did their correspondence, kept their accounts—all morning tasks, for the good housekeeper. It was in morning rooms that many women entertained their less formal callers, their close friends, and did sewing and other household tasks" (292). Moira Donald draws attention to the reproductive labor of the private sphere in which women and servants engage in order to produce and reproduce the domestic effect (104); Lydia is not only placed in this private sphere by Eliot, but works to produce this space. In fact, as Flanders writes, a good housekeeper is understood as a good person; a woman's virtue is indeed evident in her home, and this is where readers encounter Lydia modelling various kinds of wifely activity (17-8). This space is determined and produced by Lydia; Gadsmere is no mere building in which to stash a mistress, but a family home, and Lydia herself and her body create this effect.

In this room of women's business, Lydia performs the important tasks of wife and mother. As a mother, Lydia represents the reproductive body, as opposed to the unproductive and thus deviant sexual body, aligned with the prostitute (Bell 41). Lydia does not look sexually deviant, but rather, like a middle-class woman: both maternal and (necessarily) sexual. Her sexuality, however, like the ideal wife and mother's, must be more implied than explicit. While Eliot foregrounds Lydia's maternal qualities and concerns, she also continually reminds readers of her former beauty, and Grandcourt's passion for her.

Lydia's chapter at Gadsmere is a family tableau, with all four children gathered in the morning room:

[The furniture was] littered with the children's toys, books, and garden garments, at which a maternal lady in pastel looked down from the walls with smiling indulgence. The children were all there. The three girls seated round their mother near the window, were miniature portraits of her—dark-eyed, delicate-featured brunettes with a rich bloom on their cheeks, their little nostrils and eyebrows singularly finished as if they were tiny women, the eldest being barely nine. (290)

Their brother plays with “the animals from a Noah's ark,” and “Josephine, the eldest, was having her French lesson; and the others, with their dolls on their laps, sate demurely enough for images of the Madonna” (290). Eliot ties the children to both the Old and New Testaments, for readers who might associate virtue with things biblical. Lydia is teaching her daughter French, a task allotted to mothers, and the fact that she is able to instruct in French reminds readers that she herself has had at least a middle-class woman's education.

In this small passage there are many elements of the maternal: from the painting on the wall, to the daughters described as demure enough to be the Madonna, to Lydia's own actions. Her children, particularly her daughters, are replicas of her. These comparisons—the daughters to the Madonna, the daughters to Lydia—serve to upend the conventional linkage of kept women to aberrant sexuality. Lydia is a mother whose children resemble both her *and* the Anglican ideal of the mother. Thus, the portrait Eliot offers readers of Lydia's household is one of domesticity and virtue. As prostitutes were considered women of excess on multiple levels, it is significant that not even Lydia's children are out of control. Eliot's is not a portrait of monstrous motherhood. Instead, insofar as interiors are connected with moral positions in Eliot's fiction (Logan), Lydia is operating as mistress of this *home*, and its interiors appear as one would expect those of a married, middle-class woman's home to look.

Beginning with the tableau, the Gadsmere chapter emphasizes family time. The family eats together, and as in many families, the parents say only a few things in front of the servants (293). Two of the children actively engage with Grandcourt: he takes Antonia into his lap as she is entranced with his bald head, and promises Henleigh a saddle (294). What makes this family different is that the children do not recognize Grandcourt as their father, but merely “Mamma's friend,” and consequently, the older daughters are a bit shy (294). The disagreement between Lydia and Grandcourt regarding his impending nuptials even contribute to a mood recognizable to nineteenth-century readers: the narrator tells us, “all this mechanism of life had to be gone through with the dreary sense of constraint which is often felt in domestic quarrels of a commoner kind” (293-4). While the specifics of their argument are unusual for a nuclear family, this time together makes them look like the typical Victorian family.

Not only is Lydia located in and producing what looks like the ideal Victorian domestic setting, but the conversation of Grandcourt and Lydia's arrangement is set within this space, and largely in the room where a woman conducts her business. Their relationship *is* domestic business.

Grandcourt is explicit in the financial arrangements he has made and is making for Lydia and their children: ““But you found the money paid into the bank”” (291). When discussing the possibility of his impending marriage to Gwendolen, he tells her, ““—you and the children will be provided for as usual [. . .] It will be better for you. You may go on living here. But I think of by-and-by settling a good sum on you and the children, and you can live where you like. There will be nothing for you to complain of then. Whatever happens, you will feel secure. [. . .] You have never had any reason to fear that I should be illiberal. I don’t care a curse about the money. [. . .] There is no question about leaving the children in beggary”” (292-3). The conversation of their arrangement is discussed plainly in Lydia’s living space. Eliot renders this arrangement part of the everyday affairs of the household, and not the abstraction that prostitution could be in nineteenth-century imagination.

The other part of their domestic business regards the delivery of Grandcourt’s family diamonds to his new bride. This discussion of the diamonds is one of a power negotiation. While readers are never allowed to forget that Grandcourt owns Gadsmere and controls Lydia’s finances, Lydia exerts control over the diamonds, and succeeds in convincing Grandcourt to allow her to arrange for the delivery of the diamonds, literally the “family jewels” and bearing all of the weight of their sexual significance, to Gwendolen herself (294-7). It is a small but important victory for an otherwise disempowered woman.

The chapter at Gadsmere is one about a family in family space, and one of the few times that readers see Grandcourt with his “left-hand family,” or “family under the rose” (649, 274). Externally, Gadsmere, no matter how maternal the interiorscape, is marked by soot. While the soot may work to hide Lydia further, as the building takes on the coloring of its environs, the inescapable dirtiness serves as a symbolic black mark, not on Lydia and her reputation, but on Grandcourt and his. Indeed, Slauch-Sanford links the blackness of Gadsmere to Grandcourt, his “cruelly dark nature,” and argues that it represents his colonization of Lydia (407).¹⁴ In Eliot’s schema, Grandcourt is the morally reprehensible character. Her use of spatial politics not only renders a conventionally stigmatized character literally “closer to home” to the reader, but also places her in a morally decent light.

Conclusion

How does Eliot work with narrative, which, according to Rachel Brownstein and Marilyn Farwell, is invested in the ideal woman and heterosexual marriage, given her own lived experience in which she is excluded by the same ideologies? What is the relationship between the world that persecutes her and the world that she creates? Sir Hugo describes Lydia as ““a sort of wife” to Grandcourt, and it is *this* status with which the novel is concerned (613). Eliot, a writer eventually celebrated as the moral voice of the mid-nineteenth-century novel, strained in her life against the

¹⁴ Slauch-Sanford reads Lydia as aligned with racial others in a nineteenth-century rhetorical context of racial purity, citing Eliot’s descriptions of Lydia’s dark features, as well as her marriage to an Irish officer, and Anglo-Irish baby (401-2).

Victorian constructs of femininity, and addressed them in her contemporary, realistic novel. Eliot paints a picture of a world in which the legal and social strictures have limiting and damaging effects on human experience. In contrast to the assertion that Eliot kept her life and fiction separate (see Rose), *Daniel Deronda* demonstrates that Eliot's lived experience *informed* her realistic fiction. Living in a hostile climate, beyond the bounds of legally sanctified relationships, Eliot created a character who is similarly positioned; is the true heart of the novel; has a presence and voice; and succeeds via the narrative closure. Lydia disrupts nineteenth-century narrative convention.

Eliot's feminist narrative intervention not only recovers a kept mistress character, but also creates a new narrative for and encourages readers to empathize with her. Eliot's location of the kept mistress character in a domestic space challenges a punishing ideology and changes a prescriptive narrative. Eliot places the woman associated with the street in the space of the ideal woman, and makes her look realistic. Indeed, the realism of Lydia's existence as a middle-class woman strikes Gwendolen, who sees her and feels "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'" (128). When confronted with the character Lydia, Gwendolen and readers are encouraged to read her like any other of Eliot's female characters: she is a woman making hard choices. Above all, Lydia inspires readers' empathy.¹⁵ In recognizing that Lydia's humanity subsumes her kept mistress status, readers might be able to also recognize both the abusive men and the external institutions that limit her.

Given Eliot's own experience with exclusion from various legal and social institutions, and her commitment to faithful representation, Lydia's representation matters. In fact, Eliot's narrative disruptions are in accord with her own convictions that she was a wife to George Henry Lewes. In creating a legitimate narrative space for a marginalized woman, Eliot presents her own codes of morality, which have been well documented in her letters and other work, a morality independent of legal, religious, and social laws. Her moral code is based on devotion to other human beings, a commitment to humankind, and yes, duty to family: we know that Eliot herself financially maintained Agnes Lewes' household, even after George Henry Lewes passed away. Eliot invites readers to extend their sympathies to Lydia, a woman living beyond the law.

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¹⁵ In this, Lydia comes to resemble the "engaging narrator" of Victorian literature whom Robyn Warhol discusses.

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