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SELF VS. SOCIETY: THE ESSENTIAL ANTAGONISM BETWEEN SOCIETY AND
THE INDIVIDUAL IN *ADAM BEDE*, *THE MILL ON THE FLOSS*, AND *DANIEL
DERONDA*

by
Meredith Leigh Wilson

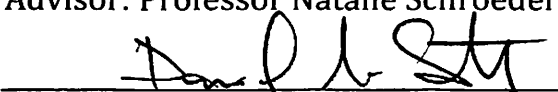
A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

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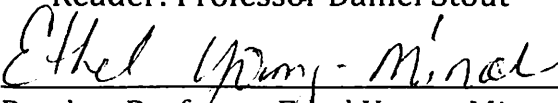
Approved by



Advisor: Professor Natalie Schroeder



Reader: Professor Daniel Stout



Reader: Professor Ethel Young-Minor

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ABSTRACT

MEREDITH LEIGH WILSON: Self vs. Society: The Essential Antagonism between Society and the Individual in *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Daniel Deronda*
(Under the direction of Natalie Schroeder)

This study focuses on the conflicts between society and the individual in three of George Eliot's works: *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Daniel Deronda*. This work analyzes the relationship between the individual and his or her society within these novels and uses its findings to illustrate the mechanism and goal of social evolution as it is depicted in these three works. Research was conducted by reading several primary and secondary texts. The primary texts included the three novels discussed, as well as many of Eliot's non-fiction essays and Herbert Spencer's essay *The Social Organism*, in order to place the novels within a larger discussion of the theory of social organicism. Secondary literary criticisms of George Eliot's works were also consulted in order to place this study within the current discussion of social organicism as well as the individual's place in society in George Eliot's works. The research suggests that in these three novels George Eliot depicts social evolution as giving rise to the organic society in Herbert Spencer's sense as opposed to J. G. Herder's sense. This study argues that in *Adam Bede* there is a fundamental and necessary conflict between society and the individual, that in *The Mill on the Floss* this conflict is revealed to be the very mechanism by which societies evolve, and that in *Daniel Deronda* George Eliot suggests that a Spenserian organicism, in which the needs of the individual are valued above those of the society, is the final goal of this social evolution.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I “FLOW HERE BUT FLOW NOT THERE”: THE DIVISIVE NATURE OF THE SOCIAL RELIGION OF HAYSLOPE IN <i>ADAM BEDE</i>	6
CHAPTER II “IT IS ENOUGH THAT THY HEART NEEDS IT”: THE NEEDS OF SELF VS THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY IN <i>THE MILL ON THE FLOSS</i>	22
CHAPTER III “AND THE WORLD WILL GAIN AS ISRAEL GAINS”: THE HOMOGENOUS SOCIETY AS A MEANS TO AN END IN <i>DANIEL DERONDA</i>	43
CONCLUSION.....	63
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	67

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AB</i>	<i>Adam Bede</i>
“Antigone”	“The Antigone and Its Moral”
<i>DD</i>	<i>Daniel Deronda</i>
<i>MF</i>	<i>The Mill on the Floss</i>

Introduction

In *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist*, K. M. Newton describes the society within George Eliot's novels as evolving "from organic societies in Herder's sense towards social organism in Spencer's sense; that is, from societies with a high degree of corporate consciousness based on a shared culture and traditions to societies in which there are conflicts of interest, relativism of values, and atomistic individualism" (81). In his argument, Newton focuses on the need for homogeneity in a community in order to foster individuals' personal and spiritual growth. He interprets the conflicts present in *Adam Bede*, and more generally throughout Eliot's fiction, as arising from a loss of unity within society as a result of modernity. In particular, he claims that Dinah Morris's "enthusiastic religion" is a product of the individualism of industrialized Snowfield and for that reason is irrelevant in the more homogeneous, rural Hayslope (86-87). Newton argues that the religion of Hayslope, where "going to church is a community ceremony," is a unifying force in society, and therefore encourages, rather than hinders, the spiritual growth of the individual (87). He even concludes that, for the largely homogeneous society of Hayslope, the complication in the relationship between Arthur Donnithorne and Hetty Sorrel lies not in its perceived immorality but in its being an "offence against this shared community spirit" (89).

However, This view that the societal tensions within George Eliot's fiction are solely, or at least mostly, due to a lack of shared creed and custom as a result of

industrialization misses the more elementary antagonism between the individual and society present in Eliot's works. I will argue that the individual and society, as portrayed in Eliot's fiction, are necessarily at odds with one another. David R. Carroll puts forth this idea when he states that, at least in her later fiction, George Eliot depicts "a whole world in which society is seen as Nemesis pursuing and punishing those individuals who refuse its claims" (140). I will take this idea of society as essentially "Nemesis," and argue that it is an idea at the center of Eliot's early fiction as well as her late, in contrast to Carroll's discussion of it as "the central theme of the last three novels" and "most strikingly in *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda*" (125). I will argue that in George Eliot's works, the homogeneous society is first depicted as "Nemesis" in *Adam Bede*, and later as a mechanism by which society is capable of evolving from the organic society in Herder's sense, in which the demands of the society trump those of the individual, to the organic society in Spencer's sense, in which the individual is not required to sacrifice his or her personal desires to the good of the collective.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will argue that the homogeneous society is first presented, in *Adam Bede*, as an institution that constrains its own subjects in impossible social expectations that result in a loss of individual freedom and spirituality. First I will challenge Newton's assertions that Hayslope is a sort of Eden. Instead I will argue that Hayslope society is contrived, rather than organic, and that it therefore forces unnatural restraints upon the individual. In particular, I will oppose Newton's claim that the largely social form of Anglicanism practiced in Hayslope is a unifying force in the society. I will argue that the secular religion of Hayslope does not allow a place for authentic spirituality in its citizens, and in doing so represses the true identity of Dinah Morris as

well as engineers the conditions that result in Hetty Sorrel's demise. Finally, I will examine how Dinah's choosing between Seth Bede, who represents the spiritual world, and his brother Adam, how represents the physical world, dramatizes the conflict between the spiritual and the secular in Hayslope society. I will examine how Dinah's marriage to Adam results in the loss of her spiritual sovereignty. I will conclude that *Adam Bede* ultimately questions whether society has the right to demand the sacrifice of the individual for the good of the whole.

In the next chapter I will examine how this conflict between the individual and society is heightened in *The Mill on the Floss*, as seen in Maggie and Tom Tulliver's deaths. However, I will contend that their deaths also serve to foreshadow what George Eliot saw as the inevitable progression of future societies away from homogeneity toward multiplicity. I will contend that St. Ogg's society does possess a strong and continuous cultural heritage, but that it has lost an understanding of the organic processes that have created its beliefs and traditions. I will argue that the Floss is a physical representation of the organic process by which societies develop, and will relate this tactic to Herbert Spencer's comparing the evolution of species to the evolution of societies. After establishing this reading of the Floss, I will challenge Gillian Beer's claim that Maggie's drowning precludes the discussion of her society's role in her death. Instead I will argue that Maggie and Tom's drowning in the Floss dramatizes what George Eliot saw as the necessary mechanism of social change: the "struggle between elemental tendencies and established law by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs" ("Antigone" 264). I will then examine the polarizations in St. Ogg's society between the male and the female, the secular and the

spiritual, and the doctrines of free will and determinism. I will contend that Maggie and Tom's death reconciles these contradictions and therefore, instead of failing to comment upon St. Ogg's society, dramatizes the process by which social upheaval caused by the homogeneous society can engineer social change.

In the final chapter, I will argue that in *Daniel Deronda* George Eliot depicts the homogeneous society as useful only as a medium in which to cultivate the personal identity and universal sympathy of the individual. To make this point, I will argue that the Judaism of Mirah Lapidoth and Mordecai, which is held up as a standard of the desired national spirit, has a universal aspect to it that challenges the idea that Eliot regarded distinct, culturally homogeneous nations as the ultimate goal of social evolution. I will draw a parallel between the importance of a universal sympathy in this Judaism and in the character of Daniel Deronda. I will also contend that at times this Judaism is even portrayed as the enemy of organic social development, as seen in its oppression of the desires of the Princess Leonora Halm-Eberstein. I will also challenge the characterization of the Princess as the pure egotist by drawing parallels between her character and those of Hetty Sorrel, Maggie Tulliver, Daniel Deronda, and Gwendolen Harleth. Lastly I will examine the character of Gwendolen Harleth. I will argue that Gwendolen is harmed rather than nurtured by her social medium. I will then examine how her ability to develop empathy without a strong cultural identity dramatizes Eliot's idea of the apex of social evolution: the development of the individual, through the medium of society, to the point where he or she may exist independently of a social medium.

In this thesis, I will strive to offer a view of the individual's relationship with society in Eliot's fiction that differs from that proposed by K. M. Newton. I will reject Newton's idea that Eliot proposed homogeneity as a way to mitigate social strife. In its place I will offer the suggestion that Eliot's fiction endorses a model society that much more resembles Spencer's social organism, in which, "the corporate life must here be subservient to the lives of the parts, instead of the lives of the parts being subservient to the corporate life" (Newton 81). I will conclude that George Eliot only valued the homogeneous society to the point that it was useful in engendering this version of the social organism

Chapter I

“Flow here, but flow not there”: The Divisive Nature of the Social Religion of Hayslope in *Adam Bede*

K. M. Newton states that Dinah Morris’s “form of religion, with its emphasis on the private consciousness of the individual, on his sense of guilt and sin, is suited to conditions in industrialised towns, but. . . is alien to a community like Hayslope, in which life is still to a large extent corporate” and therefore holds that Dinah’s spirituality is rendered ineffective solely because it is irrelevant within the social religion of Hayslope (87). Newton uses this argument to support his claim that society has an innate “need for . . . a common culture and a sense of corporate consciousness” (79). In Newton’s formulation of the society of Hayslope in *Adam Bede*, there is no inherent discord between society and the individual. Newton focuses on George Eliot’s “acceptance of social relativism” to argue that the individual’s place in society is merely a question of his or her relevancy to its particular cultural climate (79). Dinah Morris therefore remains removed from the society of Hayslope for no other reason than that the “corporate consciousness” she brings with her from Snowfield is different from that of Hayslope (Newton 79). This interpretation, however, misses the more fundamental struggle between the claims of the individual and the claims of society in George Eliot’s fiction. David Carroll speaks of this conflict in relation to George Eliot’s *Romola*: “Man is a part of the social organism, but he is also a self-determining individual in contact with other self-determining individuals, and in *Romola* we have the suggestion that these

two roles may be incompatible” (125). I propose rejecting Newton’s view of the relationship between the individual and society in *Adam Bede* and taking instead the model Carroll lays down for George Eliot’s later fiction. I will argue that Dinah’s spirituality is rejected, not because it is irrelevant, but because the social, high secular religion of Hayslope provides no place for individual spirituality. I will also take issue with Newton’s claim that the citizens of Hayslope object to the relationship between Hetty Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne’s because of its asocial nature rather than its perceived immorality. I will argue instead that Hetty’s fate is the result of the polarization of the secular and the spiritual within the religion of Hayslope and therefore supports the idea that an elemental conflict between individual and society rests at the heart of *Adam Bede*.

The error in Newton’s depiction of Dinah’s place in the society of Hayslope lies both in his representation of Hayslope and his characterization of Dinah. He presents Hayslope as a sort of Eden, arguing that “the religious quality of life in these villages is present in the image of ‘green pastures’ and ‘still waters’” of which Dinah speaks during her first meeting with Mr. Irwine (Newton 88). Neil Roberts too describes Loamshire, the county in which Hayslope is situated, as “a kind of Eden” (64). He writes, “*Adam Bede* is not really a sociological novel. It is a schematic moral drama in which sociological interest is subordinate and for the most part fragmentary. . . the social order of Hayslope is threatened not by historical necessity but by sin” (67). It is true that Hayslope is a representation of Eden, ““a good land, wherein they eat bread without scarcity”” (*AB* 133-134). It is not, however, Eden intact. Hayslope is not a flawless paradise, unsullied until Arthur’s seduction of Hetty; the seeds of catastrophe have

already been sewn, as can be seen in the images of gardens that in one function link Hayslope to the Garden of Eden. Arthur's seduction of Hetty occurs not in a virgin wilderness but a counterfeit one. It is "just the sort of wood most haunted by the nymphs" and "not a grove with measured grass or rolled gravel for you to tread upon," but it only seems untamed (175). It is enclosed by a "tall narrow gate," and its paths, "which look as if they were made by the freewill of the trees," only have the appearance of a wilderness; they were planned and set down by man (174-175).

Likewise, Mrs. Poyser's garden, where Adam first begins to fall into the mistake of believing Hetty is in love with him, is a place that only appears natural. There "the very rose trees. . . looked as if they grew wild" (264). However, these roses, "almost all of them of the streaked pink-and-white kind," have been planted by man, supposedly at the time of "the union of the houses of York and Lancaster," a detail which further links them to the contrivances of human society (264). Adam is careful to pick "a compact Provence rose" as opposed to one of its "flaunting scentless neighbors" (264). He chooses that which does not deceive; he ignores the flashier, scentless roses. The fact that key events in Hetty and Adam's personal tragedies occur in seemingly natural settings manipulated by man, along with Adam's preference for the Provence rose over its more ostentatious fellows, shows a certain mistrust of the artificial; the design of nature is preferred over the contrivance of man. Mr. Irwine internally expresses this sentiment upon his first meeting with Dinah. About her preaching, he thinks to himself, "He must be a miserable prig who would act the pedagogue here: one might as well go and lecture the trees for growing in their own shape" (136). He disapproves of any attempt by society to say to Dinah, "Flow here, but flow not there" (136).

The natural imagery in *Adam Bede* therefore does not create an Eden that is to be, as Newton would have it, interpreted as a social ideal or, as would Roberts, stifle any sociological commentary in favor of a discussion on morality and sin. Hayslope as Eden, not pristine but manipulated by man, suggests a something imperfect in the social mechanics of *Adam Bede*. By examining Dinah and Hetty's fates along with Dinah's relationships with Seth and Adam, one begins to see that George Eliot questions, rather advocates, the homogenous, social religion of Hayslope.

In Newton's depiction of Dinah Morris, her exclusion from Hayslope society is simply a result of the irrelevancy of her intensely personal form of Christianity in the communal, pastoral setting of Loamshire. He sees her as nothing more than a religious zealot and, at least as far the inhabitants of Hayslope are concerned, an ineffectual preacher. I, however, have chosen to adopt Gillian Beer's representation of Dinah as the "Methodist Preacher, mill worker" who "makes connections, traverses distances" and is "the only person in the book who can travel freely, and without disastrous consequences" (62-63). Dinah, identified by Lisbeth Bede as both workingwoman and angel, represents a true mixing of the spiritual and the secular in a way that, as Beer suggests, enhances her personal liberty, but that also excludes her from Hayslope society, in which true spirituality cannot be reconciled with the shallow, communal religion of the Anglican Church.

Newton ignores those moments in *Adam Bede* that hint that something of the truly divine lies within Dinah Morris. When Lisbeth Bede first hears Dinah's voice she questions if it "could be her sister's spirit come back to her from the dead" and also likens Dinah's face to that of an angel (153-154). It is not until Lisbeth sees Dinah's

work-worn hands that she is able to place Dinah within the physical world, exclaiming, ““Why, ye’re a workin’ woman!”” (154). Newton views Dinah solely within the context of her practical function in the society of Hayslope. From this perspective she is certainly nothing more than a novelty and, at times, an inconvenience to the people of that place, a figure indulgently dismissed as one among ““the pretty women preachin’ ”” (65).

However, Lisbeth’s reaction shows that this is not the villagers’ only way of casting Dinah Morris. Even after learning that Dinah is a mill worker Lisbeth still thinks that she has ““a’most the face o’ one as is a-sittin’ on the grave i’ Adam’s new Bible”” (154).

The traveler’s impression of Dinah’s preaching also belies Newton’s claim that Dinah’s message can only inspire within the correct social context, the mills at Snowfield or some other industrial town. The traveler, an “elderly horseman,” is, as his age and mode of transport suggest, more a representative of the old-world order of Hayslope than the modern industrialism of Snowfield (59). He also expresses a satirical skepticism towards the Methodists in general and female preachers in particular, asking Mr. Casson, ““And what does your parson say, I wonder, to a young woman preaching just under his nose?”” (59). He is not, however, insensible to Dinah’s message. Rather he is struck by the “charm of Dinah’s mellow treble tones” and finds that “the quiet depth of conviction with which she spoke seemed in itself an evidence for the truth of her message” (71).

Even Mr. Irwine, the vicar of Hayslope, whose encouraging the “social aspect of religion” Newton cites as proof that Dinah’s personal form of Christianity is not applicable to the people of Hayslope, is struck by something of the divine in Dinah’s person and manner (87). As aforementioned, while speaking to Dinah about her preaching, Mr. Irwine observes, ““He must be a miserable prig who would act the

pedagogue here: one might as well go and lecture the trees for growing in their own shape” (136). He is clearly struck by Dinah and impressed by the genuineness and the naturalness of her calling to preach. Mr. Irwine does not dismiss Dinah as a zealot and an eccentric; he sees a spirituality within her as natural as the trees, not a mere construct of the industrialism of Snowfield.

However, no matter what impression Dinah’s spirituality leaves upon the inhabitants of Hayslope, there is no proper place for her in their society. Lisbeth, though awed by Dinah, is suspicious of her Methodism, expressing the wish that ““it ‘ud happen wear out on her wi’ marryin’ ”” (544). Hayslope has no place for Dinah the Methodist, the preacher-woman. Mrs. Poyser, Dinah’s aunt, makes this perfectly clear. She chastises Dinah for having notions ““about religion more nor what’s i’ the Catechism and the Prayer-book. . . and the Bible too for that matter,”” adding, ““Else why shouldn’t them as know best what’s in the Bible – the parsons and people as have got nothing to do but learn it – do the same as you do?”” (122). She sees Dinah’s behavior as asocial, likening her to ““the birds o’ th’ air”” and telling her, ““If everybody was to do like you, the world must come to a standstill”” (121-122). Certainly there is some truth to what Mrs. Poyser says about Dinah’s spirituality, but the secularism preferred by the social religion of Hayslope does not facilitate the hybridization of the worldly and the spiritual within the individual. There is a clear line drawn between the spiritual and the everyday in Hayslope, as can be seen in Lisbeth’s chastising Adam for wearing his best coat on a weekday: ““What dost mean by turnin’ worki’ day into Sunday a-that ‘n?”” (260). This gives new meaning to Lisbeth’s earlier surprise at discovering that Dinah, whose voice and face remind Lisbeth of spirits and angels, is after all a workingwoman. In Lisbeth’s

mind, Dinah must be either a concrete, practical extension of society or a purely divine being. There is no place for Dinah's brand of spirituality in the useful citizen of Hayslope. This polarization of the spiritual and the secular proves to be a destructive force in the town, as can be seen in the fate of Hetty Sorrel.

According to Newton's characterization of the church's role as a unifying force within Hayslope, it is not in transgressing against its doctrines that Arthur and Hetty err against the society but in conducting their affair in secret and undermining the "shared community spirit":

If one takes account of the organic community life of Hayslope, reinforced by such ceremonies, then one can argue that the greatest offence in Arthur's clandestine affair with Hetty is that it subverts the order and the values of the community. Their relationship is conducted in secret, ignoring the traditions and customs of courtship in Hayslope. . . In Hayslope, life is corporate and shared, and all important transactions are open. A secret relationship like that between Arthur and Hetty is an offence against this shared community spirit. (89).

In this depiction of Hetty's affair with Arthur, society is the victim, the object of Hetty and Arthur's attack on the shared customs of a truly organic society. However, this illustration of the situation ignores the role that this same organic society, precisely due to the homogeneous, social religion that Newton identifies as a unifying force, plays in the disastrous consequences of the affair. Hetty has participated in the social religion of Hayslope. However, she has not internalized any of its doctrines or precepts. She does not care to know "what was meant by the pictures in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' or in the

old folio Bible that Marty and Tommy always plagued her about on a Sunday” (187).

However outwardly she cuts a fine figure as the pretty maiden going to church:

If ever a girl looked as if she had been made of roses, that was Hetty in her Sunday hat and frock. For her hat was trimmed with pink, and her frock had pink spots sprinkled on a white ground. There was nothing but pink and white about her, except in her dark hair and her eyes and her little buckled shoes. (231)

Her appearance suggests that she fulfills every expectation of a pious and chaste young girl. Even Mrs. Poyser, who believes Hetty’s “‘heart’s as hard as a pibble,’” cannot, when she sees Hetty in her Sunday clothes, “keep from smiling, as any mortal is inclined to do at the sight of pretty round things” (201 and 231). Those around Hetty attribute to her all the expectations they have for a pretty girl who outwardly participates in social custom; they build about her a “false air of innocence” (128). The incongruity between Hetty’s appearance and her actions would not signify, and in fact would probably support Newton’s argument, if the society of Hayslope did not insist that she uphold the teachings of a religious establishment that, in its raising of custom over substance, has come to play a nearly secular social role in the culture. However, this is not the case.

Hetty’s greatest fear after delivering her child is not how she shall care for it herself and not even some dimly realized punishment, but simply of the censure she will encounter at home if the truth is ever known. She resolves to “wander out of sight, and drown herself where her body would never be found” (429). She almost comes to the decision to tell Dinah, but is ultimately unwilling to face the public shame that would necessarily follow: “The soft voice, the pitying eyes, would have drawn her. But afterwards the other people must know, and she could no more rush on that shame than

she could rush on death” (435). This imagined ostracism is later realized against Arthur and the Poyseres when Hetty’s crime of murdering her newborn child is discovered. Mr. Poyser calls Arthur ““a man as has brought shame on respectable folks... as it’s much if he can stay I’ this country any more nor we can”” (460). Mr. Poyser’s father likewise laments that ““they’ll cast it up to the little un, as isn’t four ‘ear old, some day – they’ll cast it up t’ her as she’d a cousin tried at the ‘sizes for murder”” (460). The very nature of Hetty’s crime, and not its arising in consequence of a clandestine affair, shames her relatives. And this sort of societal censure, this necessity to fulfill certain norms of correct behavior, is the very homogeneity that leads to Hetty’s murdering her child. There is no malice in Hetty’s crime, no violence, and in fact no intent to kill. Hetty simply longs to return home, as she tells Dinah when she confesses to her in prison:

And the thought came into my mind that I might get rid of it, and go home again . . . I longed so for it, Dinah – I longed so to be safe at home. . . And all of a sudden I saw a hole under the nut-tree, like a little grave. . . I’d lay the baby there, and cover it with the grass and the chips. I couldn’t kill it any other way. . . I thought perhaps somebody ‘ud come and take care of it, and then it wouldn’t die.
(499)

Hetty is driven to her crime, the crime that so disrupts the peaceful tempo of life in Hayslope, because of the fear instilled into her by a society that clings to an empty religion, a “community ceremony” that requires the individual to internalize a specific moral code even as it considers any “emphasis on the private consciousness of the individual” as “alien” (Newton 87). Hayslope society asks that Hetty obey certain codes of morality without requiring that she develop any internal feelings that support these

codes. In this view of the scenario, society is cast as “Nemesis” rather than as victim. While it is true that Hetty’s crime rends the society of Hayslope, it is also true that the homogeneous system of beliefs that Newton claims George Eliot promotes as a remedy for the woes of modern society engineers the circumstances that drive her to the murder of her child.

Newton also claims that the marriage of Dinah to Adam is proof of Hayslope’s recovery after “the ritual-like casting out of the two offenders” (Newton 89). He states, “The corporate identity of Hayslope is reinforced by everyone’s involvement in the marriage of Adam and Dinah” (89). However, the marriage ceremony is not without blemish, and eight years later the consequences of Hetty and Arthur’s affair are still felt in Hayslope. Even as a bridegroom, Adam experiences a “tinge of sadness in his deep joy” (578). Eight years later, his reconciliation with Arthur is colored with the same pain. Arthur’s “‘colour’s changed, and he looks sadly” (582). After so many years, it is still clear that “‘there’s a sort of wrong that can never be made up for” (584). The novel may end with a pleasant picture of life in Hayslope, with Dinah inviting Adam to “‘come in. . . and rest,” but the shadow of Hetty’s unfortunate end has not left them. Dinah mourns, “‘The death of the poor wanderer, when she was coming back to us, has been sorrow upon sorrow” (582). This final scene does depict the continuity of life and society in Hayslope, but not without lamenting the destruction of one of its inhabitants. George Eliot, rather than championing such a traditional and rigid society, seems to question its tendency to sacrifice the individual for the sake of its own survival, to force the individual life into subservience to the corporate life.

Dinah's relationship with Seth and Adam Bede dramatizes the conflict between the individual's spiritual and secular identities in Hayslope society. Each of the three has a biblical namesake that, when examined in conjunction, delineate the polarization between the spiritual and the secular and the impossibility of a reconciliation of the two within the individual. Adam's namesake the first man created by God in the Christian Bible. *Adam* is also the Hebrew for man, and may be related to *adamah*, the Hebrew for ground (New International Version, Gen. 2: 7, footnote ^d7). Like his namesake who is made "from the dust of the ground" and placed in "the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it," Adam is a simple and capable man whose purpose lies in his work (Gen. 2: 7, 15). He is a carpenter, an occupation which itself calls up biblical imagery, whose personal virtues are "practical intelligence and moral rectitude" (Roberts 69). He is a physical realization of "workingday sacredness" and "the better and more progressive elements of humanity" (Dentith 43, 49). Adam's world, his being, and his reverence for God, are bound up and expressed within his reverence for work, as he makes clear while speaking to Seth in Jonathan Burge's workshop:

"But what does the Bible say? Why, it says as God put his sperrit into the workman as built the tabernacle, to make him do all the carved work and things as wanted a nice hand. And this is my way o' looking at it: there's the sperrit o' God in all things and all times – weekday as well as Sunday – and i' the great works and inventions, and i' the figuring and the mechanics." (53)

For Adam, the tangible, physical world holds precedent over the spiritual. As he tells Seth, "'there's such a thing as being over-speritall; we must have something beside Gospel i' the world'" (53).

As Adam serves as a representative of the physical world, the “workingday sacredness,” his brother Seth serves as a representative for the spiritual (Dentith 43). In Genesis, Seth’s birth occurs after Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden and is therefore removed from his father’s world in which man is harmoniously and divinely linked to his labor. Adam was first placed in the Garden of Eden, where God appointed him the caretaker of a paradise in which “streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground” and “the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Gen 2: 6-9). When Adam sins against God, he is cast from this paradise and his labor is cursed, no longer woven together with the divine:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground,

since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.

(Gen. 3: 17-19)

Seth’s birth also comes after his brother Cain has built the first city. Seth therefore lives in a world in which physical labor is no longer the only means of living; within a city, man need not toil with his own hands to get sustenance. Furthermore, Seth, unlike his father and brothers before him, is not defined by his occupation. Adam is formed by God to tend the Garden of Eden. The first description of his first two sons, Cain and Abel, concerns their work: “Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil” (Gen. 4: 2). Genesis does not, however, give Seth’s occupation. He is given to Adam “in place of

Abel, since Cain killed him” (Gen. 4: 25). His purpose in life is therefore a spiritual one: in replacing one brother, he becomes the redeemer of the other’s debt. The account of Seth’s birth is also followed by a curious detail: “At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord” (Gen 4: 26). With the growing physical divide between man and God, Seth’s birth seems to announce the beginning of a new era; Seth has now entered a world in which man must seek God apart from his place and purpose in the world. ““Seth Bede, the Methody,”” embodies this need of man to seek God outside of the physical world (*AB* 51). His spirituality often leads him to ignore the day-to-day, for which Lisbeth scolds him:

“Ay, thee ‘t allays ready enough at prayin’, but I donna see as thee gets much wi’ thy prayin’. Thee wotna get double earnins o’ this side Yule. Th’ Methodies ‘ll niver make thee half the man thy brother is, for all they’re a-makin’ a preacher on thee.” (89)

Seth’s embodiment of the spiritual contrasted to Adam’s embodiment of the practical allows Dinah’s relationship with them to symbolize the conflict between these two forces within the individual.

For Seth Bede, Dinah is untouchable, the woman of God who is ““too good and holy for any man”” (77). To Seth she is just as much the outsider that she is to Mrs. Poyser, but for different reasons. Seth sees Dinah as exalted above him in her spirituality; Mrs. Poyser only sees her as an inconvenient anomaly: the unmarried niece with no proper home or family to give her a place in society. Even so, Seth’s perception of Dinah, though more flattering, also keeps her always at arms length. It cannot integrate her into Hayslope’s religious and spiritual classifications. Adam Bede, on the

other hand, is able to bring Dinah into the secular world. His manner of perceiving Dinah, in fact the very act of his *seeing* her pulls her out of her spiritual world into the physical:

Dinah, for the first time in her life, felt a painful self-consciousness; there was something in the dark and penetrating glance of this strong man so different from the mildness and timidity of his brother Seth. A faint blush came, which deepened as she wondered at it. (162)

Dinah's eventual marriage to Adam actually creates for her a place in the society of Hayslope, truly integrating her into the physical world. As aforementioned, Newton claims that Adam and Dinah's marriage signifies the return of cultural unity to Hayslope. He uses this argument to support his claim that in *Adam Bede* George Eliot proposes such a cultural unity as a solution for the social ills of modernity. However, when one considers Dinah's biblical namesake, her marriage to Adam can be seen in a very different light.

The Dinah of Genesis is a silent figure. Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite rapes her, and her brothers Simon and Levi lay waste to the city of the Shechemites and put "Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword" (Gen 34: 26). Dinah functions only as an object in the story; she neither acts nor speaks for herself. The biblical Dinah resembles George Eliot's Dinah Morris neither in characterization nor in circumstance. However, the connection between the two can allow for a reading of the finale of *Adam Bede* that is drastically different from that which Newton proposes. The Dinah of Genesis is nothing more than a cipher, a pathway for communication and conflict between her brothers and the Shechemites. She has no identity or purpose apart from her relationships to the men

in her society. In marrying Adam Bede, George Eliot's Dinah Morris gives up her spiritual sovereignty. The Conference of Wesleyans forbids women to preach. Dinah accepts the ruling, and says nothing on the subject when Seth and Adam discuss it:

“Ah,” said Seth. . . , “and a sore pity it was o’ Conference; and if Dinah had seen as I did, we’d ha’ left the Wesleyans and joined a body that ‘ud put no bonds on Christian liberty.”

“Nay, lad, nay,” said Adam, “she was right and thee wast wrong... Most o’ the women do more harm nor good with their preaching – they’ve not got Dinah’s gift nor her sperrit; and she’s seen that, and she thought it right to set th’ example o’ submitting, for she’s not held from other sorts o’ teaching. And I agree with her, and approve o’ what she did.”

Seth was silent. This was a standing subject of difference rarely alluded to, and Dinah wishing to quit it at once said,

“Didst remember, Adam, to speak to Colonel Donnithorne the words my uncle and aunt entrusted to thee?” (583)

Gillian Beer, in *George Eliot*, discusses the tendency of some to label this ending anti-feminist. She quotes Ellen Moer, who wrote, “‘Dinah Morris gives up her preaching career at the end of *Adam Bede* with a flutter of glad submission, for George Eliot. . . was no feminist. That is, her aim as a novelist was not to argue for a diminishing of the social inhibitions and a widening of the options that affects the lives of ordinary women’” (5). This summation however assumes, as did Newton, that the only function of Dinah’s marriage in the novel is to reestablish the status quo of Hayslope, to restore the cultural unity that will ensure the survival and flourishing of the society.

George Eliot does not make her heroine a martyr or a symbol of female sovereignty. Dinah is allowed to live a happy, if conventional, life in a society that forces female submission to male authority, which understandably causes Ellen Moer to cry foul. However, consider the link to the Genesis story of Dinah. Dinah Morris, like her namesake, has descended into passive silence. Her story may end in familial harmony, but the violence and bloodshed that characterizes the account of the Dinah of Genesis underlines a more caustic comment on society. The homogenous society, in which the individual must conform to the expectations of the collective, smothers the identity and the personal spirituality of the individual. Here the suggestion may be a faint one, but it is one that George Eliot echoes and intensifies in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Chapter II

“It is enough that thy heart needs it”: The Needs of Self vs. the Needs of Society in
The Mill on the Floss

In *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot shifts from the pastoral setting of *Adam Bede* to the more industrialized setting of St. Ogg's. No character in *The Mill on the Floss* earns their livelihood by working the land. Mr. Tulliver operates the mill of the novel's title and Mr. Glegg is “retired from active business as a wool-stapler” (105). Mr. Deane is “in a great way of business,” and Tom hopes one day to “get a situation in some great house of business and rise fast” (196-197). Mr. Pullet sees land merely as a way to ensure “security for his money” (85). Seemingly in support of K. M. Newton's claims that the tension in George Eliot's novels arises from the fragmenting of modern society due to the growing multiplicity of the industrialized world, this move from the agrarian to the commercial corresponds with an escalation of the antagonism between society and the individual. Maggie Tulliver is ostracized for her very appearance: “There was always something questionable about her. . . . To the world's wife there had always been something in Miss Tulliver's very *physique* that a refined instinct felt to be prophetic of harm” (432). After spending a night in the company of a man, Stephen Guest, and returning unmarried, Maggie is labeled a “bold, designing girl,” cast off by both society and her brother Tom, and dies before the close of the novel (432).

Maggie, however, dies in a way that seems to acquit society from any role in her demise. She is drowned during the flooding of the Floss, an event that naturalizes the

commercial town of St. Ogg's, transforming it into a mere extension of the river. Gillian Beer asserts that Maggie's death, in removing her from the societal pressures that oppress her, does not allow the end of *The Mill on the Floss* to comment upon the social tensions depicted in the novel:

The level of desire explored at the end of the book is *a-historical*, and ceases to be focused as a criticism of a specific social order. Up to that point, when it seemed that Maggie must endure attrition, misunderstanding, the drudging work of being a governess, the mode of the novel has been that of social critique: a recognition of the grinding power of social mores which are *capable of being changed*.

Maggie's release removes the question of social change. Society's treatment of her is first brought into question, and then the question is set aside. (99-100)

I, however, will argue that Maggie's drowning allows for a much more general comment upon society than her toiling as a governess would have done. I propose that George Eliot uses the Floss as a symbol of the evolution of the organic society, much in the same way that Herbert Spencer used speciation as a model for the development of societies, allowing Maggie's death to depict what I claimed was suggested in *Adam Bede*: the inherent antagonism between society and the individual. In doing so, I will further challenge Newton's take on George Eliot's formulation of the organic society.

Newton includes as part of the "general social consciousness" of an organic society a "sense of continuity" between the past and the present (97). In his critique of *The Mill on the Floss*, he discusses this in the context of the lives of individual characters rather than the society as a whole, but here I will consider the latter context. In one sense, St. Ogg's does possess a level of continuity between past and present. The social and

cultural practices of its inhabitants are connected with the different epochs in their history, even those that contradict one another. This is most apparent in St. Ogg's religion, which is a bizarre mixture of the Anglican, the Catholic, and the "pagan."

For the inhabitants of St. Ogg's "belief in the Unseen, so far as it manifests itself at all, seems to be rather a pagan kind; their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom" (238). The society of St. Ogg's is built upon ideas of kinship that seem to be more Anglo-Saxon than Anglican in nature. This is seen in Mrs. Tulliver's sisters' fierce, if sanctimonious, familial loyalty, their tendency to be "frankly hard of speech to inconvenient 'kin'" though they would never "let them want bread, but only require them to eat it with bitter herbs" (240). This value of individuals based on their status as kin echoes the Anglo-Saxon idea of kinship and *wergild*, in which "if one of his kinsmen had been slain, a man had a moral obligation either to kill the slayer or to exact the payment of *wergild* (man-price) in compensation" (Reidhead 31).

The feud between the Wakems and the Tullivers reveals the importance of this system in St. Ogg's. Mr. Wakem initially forbids his son to marry Maggie because of her family, saying, "We don't ask what a woman does - we ask whom she belongs to" (374). Likewise Mr. Tulliver requires Tom to swear to take vengeance upon Wakem and "make him and his feel it, if ever the day comes" (233). Years later, Tom still feels "bound by his duty to his father's memory, and by every manly feeling, never to consent to any relation with the Wakems," and therefore he refuses to sanction Maggie's marriage to Philip Wakem (401). This ancient system of kinship and blood loyalty, in which "failure to take revenge or to exact compensation was considered shameful," is

deeply engrained into Tom's belief system (Reidhead 31). Mr. Tulliver's decision to record "his vindictiveness on the fly-leaf of his Bible," shows that this system of beliefs well outweighs the somewhat less ancient custom of Christianity (240). The scene dramatizes the incomplete mixing of the two creeds and, in creating much of the conflict of the story, delineates the incompatibility between this kinship system and the Christianity that the society espouses.

In St. Ogg's "The Catholics, bad harvests, and the mysterious fluctuations of trade [are] the three evils mankind [has] to fear" (103). Humorously beyond the notice of St. Ogg's inhabitants is the fact that their town derives its name from a Catholic legend. "Ogg the son of Beorl" is said to have once ferried the Virgin Mary across the waters of the Floss, and the legend still holds a certain grip upon the town:

Yet it was witnessed in the floods of aftertime, that. . . Ogg the son of Beorl was always seen with his boat upon the wide-spreading waters, and the Blessed Virgin sat in the prow, shedding a light around as of the moon in its brightness, so that the rowers in the gathering darkness took heart and pulled anew. (102-103)

A "remnant of the original chapel dedicated to St Ogg" is said to be "the bit of wall now built into the belfry of the parish church" (102). The citizens of St. Ogg's, however, choose to ignore this fact.

In one sense, St. Ogg's seems to have inherited the sort of organic society that K. M. Newton describes when he writes of a "sense of corporate consciousness based on shared values and assumptions" (82). St. Ogg's society operates by a system of corporate tradition stemming naturally from the shared pasts of its inhabitants. The social and cultural practices of its inhabitants are connected with the different epochs in their

history, even those that contradict one another: “It was still possible, even in that later time of anti-Catholic preaching, for people to hold many pagan ideas, and believe themselves good church-people notwithstanding” (240). The culture of St. Ogg’s contains a complete and subtle mixture of its turbulent and self-contradicting history. Its fate has not been “to be cut off from or to reject the past” (Newton 97). What it is missing in its “sense of continuity between the formative experience of one’s past life and one’s present self,” is the recognition of the mechanism that has constructed its peculiar and often contradictory system of beliefs (Newton 97).

The people of St. Ogg’s do not see the ebb and flow, the fluctuations and upheavals of a stream of chaotic events that have shaped its heritage: “The mind of St Ogg’s did not look extensively before or after. It inherited a long past without thinking of it, and had no eyes for the spirits that walk the streets” (103). Since St. Ogg’s possesses a culture derived from history and tradition, it’s inhabitants failure to see “the spirits that walk the streets” suggest that St. Ogg’s disconnect is with the mechanism that created their traditions rather than the traditions themselves (103). The people of St Ogg’s no longer allow for the sort of significant change that formed their past to also form a part of their present and future. They have forgotten that at one time St. Ogg’s “was a continual fighting-place, where first Puritans thanked God for the blood of the Loyalists, and then Loyalists thanked God for the blood of the Puritans” (103). They no longer accept that their creeds are the result of an organic process, in which tumultuous struggle results in the perpetuation of certain practices over others. Instead they accept the conventional as the sacred, with no thought to its origin or purpose:

The religion of the Dodsons consisted in revering whatever was customary and respectable; it was necessary to be baptized, else one could not be buried in the church-yard, and to take the sacrament before death, as a security against more dimly understood perils; but it was of equal necessity to have the proper pall-bearers and well-cured hams at one's funeral, and to leave an unimpeachable will.

(239)

The citizens of St. Ogg's have not lost touch with the events of the past but rather with the dynamism that created them and that still flows onward, as does the river that serves as a symbol of their town's evolution through time.

The River Floss dominates both the landscape of St. Ogg's and the novel itself. The first image the narrator gives of St Ogg's features "the broadening Floss" upon which "the black ships – laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal – are borne along to the town of St Ogg's" (7). As Beer notes, the Floss has clearly been instrumental in the development of the "particular economic order of St Ogg's" (100). The Floss therefore has created St Ogg's and, as a recurrent image throughout the novel, serves as an illustration of the development of societies in general.

George Eliot juxtaposes the ruins upon the banks of the Rhone and those upon the Rhine, and then creates a parallel between the Rhone and the Floss, in order to establish a basic pattern of the structure of society. She begins this process with a description of the Rhone:

Journeying down the Rhone on a summer's day, you have perhaps felt the sunshine made dreary by those ruined villages which stud the banks in certain

parts of its course, telling of how the swift river once rose, like an angry
destroying god, sweeping down the feeble generations whose breath is in their
nostrils, and making their dwellings a desolation. (237)

This image is then contrasted with that of “those ruins on the castled Rhine” belong to “a time of adventure and fierce struggle – nay, of living, religious art and religious enthusiasm” and “the grand historic life of humanity” (237). However, George Eliot’s use of hyperbolic language and contradictory images when she describes “those robber-barons” who, though “somewhat grim and drunken,” had “a certain grandeur of the wild beast in them” or “the demon forces for ever in collision with beauty, virtue, and the gentle uses of life” that made “a fine contrast in the picture with the wandering minstrel, the soft-lipped princess, the pious recluse, and the timid Israelite” suggests that she rejected romantic visions of the past as well as the idea that the mores of human society could be crafted into anything as idyllic as the world she describes (237). She then returns to the more realistic image of the Rhone and concludes that “the human life – very much of it – is a narrow, ugly, groveling existence, which even calamity does not elevate” (237).

George Eliot then creates a parallel between St Ogg’s and the same stream of turbulent history that has shaped the ruins upon the Rhone. The narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* questions whether “something akin to this oppressive feeling,” inspired by the “dead-tinted, hollow-eyed, angular skeletons of villages on the Rhone,” is also felt “in watching this old-fashioned family life on the banks of the Floss” (237-238). Again and again in these passages, George Eliot uses words that evoke the moving current of water. She connects this natural imagery to the course of human society by fluctuating between

images of the literal “swift river. . . sweeping down the feeble generations” and the figurative sweeping of the “the lives that these ruins are the traces of. . . into the same oblivion with the generations of ants and beavers (237-238). Eliot therefore uses the rivers Rhone and Floss as symbols of the mechanism of social evolution. She rejects that human society can be elevated to a utopia, and instead posits that societies are no more than the amassing of arbitrary, and often contradictory, customs from the natural progression of history.

George Eliot turns to the practice of natural science to justify these comparisons between the modern lives upon the Floss and those lives long past upon the Rhone and between the current of rivers and the passage of time:

For does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest? In natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life. (238)

This link between the natural sciences and human life echoes Herbert Spencer’s description of human society. In “The Social Organism,” Spencer argues that “under all its aspects and through all its ramifications, society is a growth and not a manufacture” (269). He compares the development of societies with the natural evolution of living organisms.

Such, then, is a general outline of the evidence which justifies the comparison of societies to living organisms. That they gradually increase in mass; that they become little by little more complex; that at the same time their parts grow more

mutually dependent; and that they continue to live and grow as wholes, while successive generations of their units appear and disappear. (306)

Spencer's ideas clearly influenced George Eliot's argument, as she joins him in "opposing 'the existing philosophical practice of contemplating social elements separately, as if they had an independent existence,' and in insisting that the proper procedure is 'to regard them as in mutual relation, and forming a whole which compels us to treat them in combination'" (Paris 42).

This view of the Floss as a depiction of the force driving the development of Maggie's society challenges Beer's assertion that the conclusion of *The Mill on the Floss* is "a-historical" (99). After Maggie and Tom resolve to row their boat through the flooded town to look for Lucy at Park House, a "new danger" is "carried towards them by the river":

Some wooden machinery had just given way on one of the wharves, and huge fragments were being floated along. . . A large company in a boat that was working its way along under the Tofton houses, observed their danger, and shouted, "Get out of the current!" (458)

Tom and Maggie, however, are not able to escape, and the "huge mass" forces them under "in hideous triumph" (459). If the Floss is to be viewed, as I have argued, as a representation of the forces driving societal evolution, then Maggie's death may still be viewed within a social context. If the Floss represents the mechanism by which societies change and develop, then Maggie and Tom's drowning because of their inability to escape the current can be seen as their being sacrificed to this mechanism. The fact that a fragment of "some wooden machinery" overwhelms Maggie and Tom's boat is

significant (458). The flood has naturalized St. Ogg's and temporarily upset its social order. However, the intrusion of the fragment of "wooden machinery" forces human society back upon the reader's notice (458).

The wooden machinery is not an implement of Mr. Tulliver's world. He is tied to the mill, wishing to die "'in th' old place, where [he] was born and [his] father was born'" (233). The machinery is an emblem of a new world, one built upon trade and commerce, a world for the mobile ships associated with the wharves from whence came the "huge mass" that kills Maggie and Tom and not one for the sessile mill (459). This seems to support Newton's claim that the loss of a corporate consciousness as a result of industrialization is the force driving the social unrest of George Eliot's works, as Tom and Maggie are destroyed by an object from this world. However, I would argue that, when viewed alongside the imagery of the Floss as a model of the progression of society in the context of Eliot's essay "The Antigone and Its Moral," the event takes on a different meaning.

The similarity between Antigone and Maggie Tulliver is significant. Each defies social convention and dies because of her loyalty to family in general, and to a brother in particular. Maggie's connection to Antigone allows for an interpretation of her end that places it well within the realm of social commentary. In "The Antigone and Its Moral," George Eliot writes, "The struggle between Antigone and Creon represents that struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs" (264). George Eliot, however, does not see one of these powers as entirely good, and the other as entirely evil:

Until this harmony is perfected, we shall never be able to attain a great right without also doing a wrong. . . . Wherever the strength of a man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, *there* is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon; such a man must not only dare to be right, he must also dare to be wrong. . . . Like Antigone, he may fall a victim to the struggle, and yet he can never earn the name of a blameless martyr any more than the society – the Creon he has defied, can be branded as a hypocritical tyrant. (264-265)

In Eliot's depiction of the relationship between the individual and society, neither party is cast as purely protagonist or antagonist. They exist in an essential state of conflict, and yet they cannot exist separately. Eliot does not write of the individual triumphing over society, or society over the individual. She writes of a "harmony" that must be "perfected" (264). The dynamic give and take between the individual and the collective is absolutely necessary to the survival of both. The individual is not called upon to defeat the unjust society, but rather to bring such a society into a dynamic equilibrium with the needs of the individuals of which it is comprised.

In drowning in the river that represents the evolution of St Ogg's as a society, Maggie is sacrificed, not simply to the demands of a narrow and unjust society, but also to the very organic mechanism by which the social organism develops. Beer is right to say that, in naturalizing Maggie's struggle, Maggie's death removes the role of society's wrongs in her destruction. It seems that Maggie is the victim, not solely of the narrowness of her own society, but also of the tide that is necessary to alter societies and carry them along. Her near elopement with Stephen, by contrast, removes her from this

natural progression of time. It envelops her in an “enchanted haze,” and “the past and the future lay outside the haze” (407). Rather than acquitting society of any hand in her death, Maggie’s drowning highlights an elementary, even necessary, antagonism between the needs of the individual and the requirements of society.

Tom and Maggie’s death mirrors the “struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs” that George Eliot sees at the heart of the Sophocles’ *Antigone* (“*Antigone*” 264). The siblings live in a world dominated by contradictions. I have already discussed the incongruities present in the Anglicanism of St. Ogg’s, but there are two other polarities that are particularly involved in the conflicts between brother and sister, and which are markedly resolved in “*The Final Rescue*.” These are the incompatible philosophies of free will and determinism, and the polarization of what is male and what is female in the St. Ogg’s.

Much of the tension in the novel results from Tom and Maggie’s differing views of human behavior. Tom believes that an individual can control his or her actions by sheer will power. When Maggie asserts that she could not help forgetting to feed his rabbits, he responds, ““Yes you could. . . if you’d minded what you were doing”” (32). He sees human sin as a list of demerits that must be balanced by equal punishment:

Tom was only thirteen, and had no decided views in grammar and arithmetic. . . but he was particularly clear and positive on one point – namely, that he would punish everyone who deserved it. Why, he wouldn’t have minded being punished himself if he deserved it; but, then, he never *did* deserve it. (33)

Maggie, on the other hand, has a much more deterministic view of human actions. When Luke tells Maggie that the rabbits have all starved to death, she exclaims, ““O, Luke, Tom told me to be sure and remember the rabbits every day; but how could I, when they didn’t come into my head, you know?”” (27). She believes that her feeding the rabbits was determined by an aspect of her nature that lies beyond her control – namely, whether or not she was capable of remembering to do so.

Implicit in Tom and Maggie’s contradictory stances on determinism and free will are their differing notions on what decides the worth of human actions. Tom, always the staunch legalist, judges human actions solely upon their consequences, in complete disregard for the feelings that motivate them. He says to Philip Wakem, ““I’m not to be imposed upon by fine words; I can see what actions mean”” (304). While chastising Maggie for accepting addresses from Philip, he demonstrates his belief that a person’s actions are an infallible indicator of his or her feelings.

“Well,” said Tom, with cold scorn, “if your feelings are so much better than mine, let me see you show them in some other way than by conduct that’s likely to disgrace us all – than ridiculous flights first into one extreme and then into another. Pray, how have you shown your love, that you talk of, either to me or my father? By disobeying and deceiving us. I have a different way of showing my affection.” (305)

Maggie, however, attaches far more importance to abstract feelings and sentiment than to the actual results of actions. She protests against Tom’s assertion that human actions and human feelings are inextricably linked: ““But yet, sometimes when I have done wrong, it has been because I have feelings that you would be the better for, if you had them””

(305). Her private criticisms of Tom more clearly underline these feelings: “And yet, all the while, she judged him in return: she said inwardly that he was narrow and unjust, that he was below feeling those mental needs which were often the source of the wrong-doing or absurdity that made her life a planless riddle to him” (345).

The polarization of male and female in St. Ogg’s society causes just as much conflict between Maggie and Tom as do their differing philosophies of determinism and free will. Tom and Maggie are expected to fulfill certain gender roles which neither is particularly suited for. The siblings present a problem for the carefully delineated social boundaries in St Ogg’s, a case in which nature has not agreed with social convention and “elemental tendencies” do not fit the mold of “established laws” (“Antigone” 264). The narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* refers to Maggie as a “small mistake of nature” and her father laments that she has inherited more of the traits desirable in a boy than has her brother Tom:

“It seems a bit a pity, though,” said Mr. Tulliver, “as the lad should take after the mother’s side instead o’ the little wench. . . The little un takes after my side, now: she’s twice as ‘cute as Tom. Too ‘cute for a woman, I’m afraid. . . It’s no mischief much while she’s a little un; but an over-‘cute woman’s no better nor a long-tailed sheep, - she’ll fetch none the bigger price for that.” (11-12)

Mr. Tulliver’s likening Maggie to a long-tailed sheep further establishes her failure to satisfy convention. This incongruity between what is expected of Maggie and Tom and what they are capable of doing breeds conflict between them. Tom, embarrassed that Maggie picks up Latin pronunciation more quickly than he does, demands assurance from Mr. Stelling, his tutor, that girls cannot learn the same subjects that boys can. Mr.

Stelling answers in the affirmative, and describes the very quickness of which Maggie is so proud as an undesirable and uniquely feminine trait:

“Mr. Stelling,” she said. . . “couldn’t I do Euclid, and all Tom’s lessons, if you were to teach me instead of him?”

“No; you couldn’t,” said Tom, indignantly. “Girls can’t do Euclid: can they, sir?”

“They can pick up a little of everything, I daresay,” said Mr Stelling. “They’ve a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn’t go far into anything. They’re quick and shallow.”

Tom, delighted with this verdict, telegraphed his triumph by wagging his head at Maggie behind Mr Stelling’s chair. As for Maggie, she had hardly ever been so mortified. She had been so proud to be called “quick” all her little life, and now it appeared that this quickness was the brand of inferiority. (132)

Tom’s feeling of superiority as a male leads to his attempts to control Maggie. He demonstrates “early that desire for mastery over the inferior animals. . . and small sisters, which in all ages has been an attribute of so much promise for the fortunes of our race.” (80). His objection to Maggie’s relationship with Philip is at least due as much to his conception of gender as to the feud between their fathers. In her relationship with Philip, Maggie, of greater stature and strength than the crippled Philip, is cast in the more masculine role. Maggie stoops “her tall head to kiss the pale face. . . full of pleading, timid love, - like a woman’s” (296). Tom is unable to accept this reversal of classic gender roles. He feels that “a love for a deformed man would be odious in any woman, in a sister intolerable” (299).

Book Seventh of *The Mill on the Floss*, “The Final Rescue,” reconciles both of these dichotomies. Maggie’s voyage upon the flooded Floss is guided by her own decisions and ability, as well as by the current of the river. When Maggie first sets off in the boat, she abandons herself to the current and “for a long while [has] no distinct conception of her position” (455). However, she is eventually roused. She “[seizes] an oar and [begins] to paddle the boat forward with the energy of wakening hope” (455-456). Her approach to the mill further mingles the passive and the active:

She must get her boat into the current of the floss, else she would never be able to pass the Ripple and approach the house. . . But then she might be carried very far down, and be unable to guide her boat out of the current again. . . she floated into the current. Swiftly she went now, without effort. . . she had passed the mouth of the Ripple, then: *now*, she must use all her skill and power to manage the boat and get it if possible out of the current. (456-457)

Maggie must rely upon the river’s current as well as “her skill and power” (457). George Eliot ultimately does not choose either determinism or free will as the arbiter of human fate. She offers instead a scenario in which the consequences of each are united in one act.

Maggie’s reconciliation with Tom serves to wed the male with the female. They go “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” (459). Beer refers to the sibling’s drowning together as “the knitting up again of the divided self which has been split into the twin forms of male and female each with their separate order” (99). Maggie’s relationship with her brother and their final union,

sealed by their deaths, allows a reconciliation of male and female that is not possible in Maggie's relationships with Philip and Stephen. The deformity that feminizes Philip in Tom's eyes is both that which allows him to relate to Maggie, and that which leads to Maggie's preference for Stephen: "[Philip's] exclusion from active life sets him alongside Maggie in a way which confuses likeness and difference. He tempts Maggie with his offer to be 'brother and teacher' but he can never satisfy her sexually" (Beer 92). Stephen, however, offers Maggie a romantic love that contains the passion and sensuality that Philip's lacks. Maggie and Stephen are "oppressively conscious of the other's presence, even to the finger-ends" (354). This sensuality, however, is tied to the conventional subjection of the female to the male. When Stephen assists Maggie in exiting the boat after an outing on the river, she feels that it is "very charming to be taken care of in that kind graceful manner by some one taller and stronger than oneself," contrasting Stephen to Philip who is Maggie's inferior both in strength and height (336). Maggie, however, eventually rebels against this mastery. Protesting against Stephen's assertion that they can love one another with their "whole heart and soul" if Maggie consents to an elopement that would violate her duty to Philip, and his to Lucy, Maggie says, "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." (418)

The final scene, however, manages to wed together the male and the female without compromising Maggie's independence. When Tom realizes the danger that Maggie faced in rowing through the flooded Floss to rescue him, his lips "[find] a word they [can] utter: the old childish – 'Magsie!'" (458). In doing so, Tom draws the reader's attention back to the scenes of his and Maggie's childhood, when, though infrequently,

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Tom and Maggie displayed a simple and natural affection for one another, one semi-animalistic and completely uninformed by social constructs, including those of gender.

Maggie and Tom were still very much like young animals, and so she could rub her cheek against his, and kiss his ear in a random, sobbing way; and there were tender fibres in the lab that had been used to answer to Maggie's fondling. . . and they ate together and rubbed each other's cheeks and brows and noses together, while they ate, with a humiliating resemblance to two friendly ponies. (34)

This brand of affection is stronger than that which Philip offers, and possesses none of the inequality implicit in Stephen's romantic love. It is a something between the romantic and platonic, a consummation of the polarized male and female, a "marriage of the soul with itself, the yolk and white of Plato's parable" (Beer 94).

The final scene also weds the male to the female by feminizing the Christ figure. Earlier in the novel, Tom is cast in the role of savior. Tom initially refuses to forgive Maggie for forgetting to feed his rabbits and letting them starve to death. Maggie retreats to the attic, desperately wishing for Tom to forgive her: "If she went down again to Tom now – would he forgive her? – perhaps her father would be there, and he would take her part. But, then, she wanted Tom to forgive her because he loved her, not because his father told him to" (32). In this scene, Tom is clearly represented as a Christ figure, albeit a warped one who refuses redemption to the sinner unless remonstrated by his father. Very soon after, however, he embodies a more conventional representation of the Christ. He finally forgives Maggie, and the two participate in a sort of communion: "'Don't cry, then, Magsie – here, eat a bit o' cake.' Maggie's sobs began to subside, and she put out her mouth for the cake and bit a piece: and then Tom bit a piece, just for

company, and they ate together” (34). I have already discussed how Tom shows himself much more a proponent of the free will and *wergild*, demonstrating that he believes in a system in which punishment equal to the wrong committed must be exacted. He does not in general value forgiveness freely given. It therefore seems odd that he is at all cast as a Christ figure. The trait that qualifies him to be a savior appears to be his gender. As Mr. Tulliver is God the Father, Tom Tulliver is God the Son. This moment therefore highlights the contradictions present in St. Ogg’s society. However, the scene also shows that Tom’s deepest loyalty is to his sister Maggie, rather than to his personal convictions. It foreshadows the upheaval of social constraints in favor of the more natural ties between Tom and Maggie that are solidified in the final role reversal that casts Maggie as Tom’s savior.

The final scene contains a marked reversal of these roles of savior and saved. In rescuing Tom, Maggie accomplishes a feat of courage and physical strength. The very act of rowing has also already been gendered male when Lucy Deane says, ““If the Floss were but a quiet lake instead of a river, we should be independent of any gentleman, for Maggie can row splendidly”” (403). Maggie rows a boat through the flooded waters to rescue Tom and is therefore cast not only as a savior, but even as a masculine savior. The image is completed when Tom, realizing the full extent of Maggie’s heroism and guessing “a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort,” experiences “a new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear” (458). The changing of a male Christ figure for a female further intensifies the absence of the conventional distinctions of male and female in the siblings’ relationship and sanctifies “the knitting up again of the divided self which has

been split into the twin forms of male and female each with their separate order” (Beer 99).

Beer sees the siblings’ deaths as nothing more than an admission that St. Ogg’s society is too narrow and unjust to accept this marriage of the male and the female. She interprets Tom and Maggie’s death as a “dour answer” to the question “how long can that oneness survive after calamity?” (93). St. Ogg’s certainly would not accept this mingling of the male and the female, but I argue that the siblings’ death serves another purpose within the structure of the novel. I have argued that the novel’s conclusion allows for the reconciliation of the philosophies of determinism and free will as well as the polarization of the male and the female. I have also argued that the siblings’ drowning in the Floss, a symbol for the evolution of societies, dramatizes their sacrifice to the mechanism driving the development of St. Ogg’s. I therefore assert that *The Mill on the Floss* takes the idea of the elementary and inevitable antagonism between the individual and society present in *Adam Bede*, and establishes it as a necessary part of social progress, the process by which “the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs” (“Antigone” 264). I offer this as an alternative to Newton’s view that the organic society George Eliot advocated was one that possessed a homogenous, corporate system of beliefs and traditions. I argue instead that George Eliot adhered to Spencer’s philosophy that the organic society is that which has grown out of the natural course of history and which does not constrain the individual’s desires. *The Mill on the Floss* offers a model of social progress, in which social tensions arise from ignoring the organic nature of society and treating the conventional as the absolute. In this model, social harmony will be achieved not through homogeneity but instead through a cycle of

catastrophe and renewal, “while successive generations of their units appear and disappear,” until society has ceased to place limitations on individual needs and identity (Spencer 306).

Chapter III

“And the world will gain as Israel gains”: The Homogeneous Society as a Means to an End in *Daniel Deronda*

In *Memory and History in George Eliot*, Hao Li references George Henry Lewes' description of society and culture as a necessary “medium of the individual mind, as a sea, a river or a pond is the medium of a fish” (152). Hao Li applies this quotation to her argument that *Daniel Deronda*, along with *The Spanish Gypsy*, marks a transition in George Eliot's social theory from the universal to the specific, in which “a general sense of ‘humanity’” is “narrowed down to the racial level” (153). Hao Li goes on to discuss in detail the nature of the Jewish nationalism in *Daniel Deronda*. I will take a different stance on the idea of society as medium. I have already in this thesis taken the position that George Eliot did not intend the homogeneous organic society as the ultimate goal of a teleological progression of society. In this chapter, I will argue that George Eliot presents Jewish nationalism in *Daniel Deronda* not as the ideal state of society in itself, but rather the most practical method by which to achieve the ideal state of society. I will argue that George Eliot saw the homogeneous society as a means to an end, as a way to give necessary form and medium to human actions until the individual could exist independently of a limiting societal structure. I will examine the universal nature of the Judaism in *Daniel Deronda* as well as how it fails the Princess Leonora Halm-Eberstein. I will also contend that Gwendolen Harleth is able to consciously choose empathy with a collective humanity over egotistic isolation even without a specific social medium. I

offer these arguments as support for my claim that George Eliot only valued the homogeneous society as far as it allowed for the evolution of humanity toward a point when the claims of society did not supersede the needs of the individual.

The Judaism of Mordecai and Mirah is distinctly familial and social, rather than doctrinal, in nature. Mirah admits, as Amy Meyrick reports, that she ““does not half know her people’s religion”” (334). However she still clings to her identity as a Jew, declaring, “I will never separate myself from my mother’s people. . . I will always be a Jewess” (347). It is notable that Mirah stresses her inability to break with her *mother’s* people. Mirah’s love for her mother has come to supply the substance that her religion is lacking:

“I think my life began with waking up and loving my mother’s face: it was so near to me, and her arms were round me, and she sang to me. One hymn she sang so often, so often: and then she taught me to sing it with her: it was the first I ever sang. They were always Hebrew hymns she sang; and because I never knew the meaning of the words they seemed full of nothing but our love and happiness.”

(194)

Mirah’s love for her mother is the emotion, the memory, that first fills and defines her existence. This love that imbues the unintelligible Hebrew hymn with meaning also creates a structure for Mirah’s Judaism, allowing her to identify as a Jewess even through the many years with her father, who ““did not follow [their] religion. . . and wanted [her] not to know much about it”” (197).

Mordecai’s Judaism is much broader and more abstract than his sister’s. His namesakes are the Biblical Ezra and Mordecai, the former an Old Testament prophet who

reintroduced the Torah to the exiled Israelites and discouraged their intermarrying with other peoples, the latter a Jewish exile who saved the Jews of Persia from extermination. He takes on their personas as both prophet and savior of the Jewish cultural identity, expounding his fellow Jews to “revive the organic centre: let the unity of Israel which has made the growth and form of its religion to be an outward reality” (494). Yet Mordecai’s Judaism still retains a strong emphasis upon family and community. He says of his mother:

“She was a mother of whom it might have come – yea, might have come to be said, ‘Her children arise up and call her blessed.’ In her I understood the meaning of that Master who, perceiving the footsteps of his mother, rose up and said, ‘The majesty of the Eternal cometh near!’” (503)

His use of religious language continues as he tells Deronda of his decision to turn back from his journey to “behold the lands and people of the East” to care for his mother after his father takes Mirah away (502). He equates duty to his mother with duty to God, the obligation to care for her trumping his spiritual journey.

“Mine was the lot of Israel. For the sin of the father my soul must go into exile. For the sin of the father the work was broken, and the day of fulfillment delayed. She who bore me was desolate, disgraced, destitute. I turned back. On the instant I turned – her spirit, and the spirit of her fathers, who had worthy Jewish hearts, moved within me, and drew me. God, in whom dwells the universe, was within me as the strength of obedience.” (503)

For both Mirah and Mordecai, the familial and cultural bonds of Judaism are stronger than any religious creed. Deronda's integration into the Jewish world, however, is slightly different.

Newton argues that "Deronda is drawn to Mordecai's nationalism because of its organicist nature; he has always felt the desire to be 'an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real' (Chapter 32)" (91). This, however, is not Deronda's only agenda, to have a society in which he may be an integral part. He also longs for a sort of universal sympathy. Long before discovering his Jewish origins, Deronda expresses this longing to Sir Hugo: "I want to be an Englishman, but I want to understand other points of view. And I want to get rid of a merely English attitude in studies" (168). He also says to his mother, "It must always have been a good to me to have as wide an instruction and sympathy as possible" (616). And in fact this is what Mordecai values in Deronda, what he believes will make Deronda more successful in carrying on his work of establishing a new Israel. Mordecai yearns for another person to finish the task he will not live to see fulfilled. He looks for a man "who differed from himself" (440). Like Mordecai, this man must be "a Jew, intellectually cultured, morally fervid," but unlike Mordecai "he must have been used to all the refinements of social life" and his circumstances must be "free from sordid need" (440).

Deronda's status as the English gentleman has prepared him to fulfill these particular requirements and will prevent him from being discounted, as Mordecai often is, as nothing more than "an odd-looking Jew, who probably got money out of pictures" (441). In Lewes' analogy, Deronda is therefore not the individual who never goes

beyond one sphere of experience and “touches the outlying world” only indirectly through his or her own cultural medium (Li 152). Deronda has been part of a wider world and has taken from it a “wide instruction and sympathy” which proves invaluable in his mission to finish Mordecai’s work (*DD* 616). This Jewish nationalism gives Deronda his “ideal task, in which [he] might feel [himself] the heart and brain of a multitude – some social captainship, which would come to me as a duty,” and in doing so is an organic society in Herder’s sense, in which a “high degree of corporate consciousness based on a shared culture and traditions” is valued (*DD* 698, Newton 81). However, this same Jewish nationalism possesses a universality that is not present in the organicism seen in the earlier novels, *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*. It can be seen not only in Deronda’s yearning for a more sympathetic understanding of other cultures, but also in the universal implications of the Zionism in the novel, whose “‘highest transformation’ is world community” (Graver 236).

Mordecai’s formulation of nationalism is not entirely isolationist. While he believes that the individual must embrace his own historic culture rather than take on a new, doubting that “‘a fresh-made garment of citizenship’” can “‘weave itself straightway into the flesh and change the slow deposit of eighteen centuries,’” he sees this acceptance of a specific heritage as a blessing to the world’s people in general (490). He sees the revival of a people’s collective consciousness as giving and receiving benefit to and from the global community in a dynamic process. In support of the political and geographical establishment of a sovereign Israel, he states:

“I believe in a growth, a passage, and a new unfolding of life whereof the seed is more perfect, more charged with the elements that are pregnant with diviner form.

The life of a people grows, it is knit together and yet expanded, in joy and sorrow, in thought and action; it absorbs the thought of other nations into its own forms, and gives back the thought as new wealth to the world; it is a power and an organ in the great body of the nations.” (489)

Mordecai adds, “Each nation has its own work, and is a member of the world, enriched by the work of each” (492). However, he sees Israel as playing a much more significant role in this give and take than any other people. For Mordecai, “Israel is the heart of mankind” (492). However, just as Deronda’s importance to Mordecai’s mission relies upon his possessing more than an exclusively Jewish sensibility, Israel’s elevated position in the interaction between nations is based on its heterogeneity, its accumulation of the wisdom of other nations through its dispersion over the face of the earth:

“Looking towards a land and a polity, our dispersed people in all the ends of the earth may share the dignity of a national life which has a voice among the peoples of the East and the West – which will plant the wisdom and skill of our race so that it may be, as of old, a medium of transmission and understanding.” (494)

For Mordecai, Israel’s importance as a nation lies in its ability to integrate and disseminate the wisdom of the nations of the world. Even in the act of choosing Judaism as the archetype of “collective heritage that cannot be unjustifiably dismissed because of its inadequacies or deficiencies,” Eliot adds a universal component to the organic nation (Li 186). In Genesis, long before the establishment of Israel as a sovereign nation, God says to Abraham, “And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (Gen. 22:18). George Eliot’s organicism therefore extends

beyond the personal or national cultural heritage to the global. Judaism is not complete in itself, as can be seen in the history of Princess Leonora Halm-Eberstein.

Daniel Deronda's mother is a woman of many identities: Leonora Charisi, the daughter of Daniel Charisi, an Orthodox Jewish rabbi; the great actress Alcharisi, whose "name had magic wherever it was carried;" and the Princess Leonora Halm-Eberstein, baptized Christian and wife to a Russian aristocrat (591). Critics have characterized her as the pure egotist and an enemy of organicism. For example, Neil Roberts states that the Princess "has attempted to defy" the natural progression of organic evolution "for the satisfaction of her selfish purposes" (193). Bernard J. Paris asserts that "her Jewish heritage, which remained with her even though she had been baptized, was a force for good in Deronda's mother, compelling her to bend her selfish nature to a higher law" (209). K. M. Newton sees acting in general as a "symbol in the novel of the ego's desire for power and dominance" and the Princess's acting in particular as a motive for denying herself "any emotional commitment which might set up claims superior to the self" (177-178). However, when one examines the Princess's personal account of her past as well as her thematic positions as Gwendolen Harleth's complement and Mirah Lapidoth's foil in the novel, one sees the Princess cast, not as the enemy of a Judaism that enables organicism, but rather the victim of a Judaism that "instead of feeding organic life, renders it inert" (Graver 241).

Bernard J. Paris states that the Princess's "Jewish heritage, which remained with her even though she had been baptized, was a force for good in Deronda's mother" (209). In this account of her actions, the Princess's Jewish heritage is presented as an ineffaceable aspect of her character and the only part of her that can counteract her

egotism. The Princess's narrative, however, reveals a strikingly different depiction of her identity as a Jewess. She says of her father, "He never comprehended me, or if he did, he only thought of fettering me into obedience" (587). She then describes this particular subjection of the individual identity, and especially the female identity, to the demands of Orthodox Judaism:

"I was to be what he called 'the Jewish woman' under pain of his curse. I was to feel everything I did not feel, and believe everything I did not believe. I was to feel awe for the bit of parchment in the *mezuzah* over the door; to dread lest a bit of butter should touch a bit of meat; to think it beautiful that men should bind the *tephillin* on them, and women not, - to adore the wisdom of such laws, however silly they might seem to me. I was to love the long prayers in the ugly synagogue, and the howling, and the gabbling. . . and my father's endless discoursing about Our People, which was a thunder without meaning in my ears." (587)

Before she became the Princess Halm-Eberstein, Deronda's mother was forced to uphold and revere traditions that held no meaning for her, to "feel everything [she] did not feel, and believe everything [she] did not believe" (587). The *mezuzah* and *tephillin*, the kosher laws, Hebrew prayers, and the teaching of Zionism are all meaningless to her – nothing more than a "howling" and a "gabbling" (587). In this way she is strikingly similar to Hetty Sorrel, who is expected to obey the codes of morality of a religion that has become more of a cultural tradition than a system of beliefs. The Princess, however, also focuses upon the exclusion of women from the core of Jewish beliefs.

The Princess's father forces her into the role of "the Jewish woman' under pain of his curse" (587). By doing so, he does not only force her into practicing what she

considers a hollow, meaningless religion; he also forces her into a specific niche that not even Jewish men are required to fill. The Princess admits that her father was “‘a man to be admired in a play,’” but she adds, “‘Such men turn their wives and daughters into slaves” (589). The Princess’s subjection as a woman, however, goes beyond the mere tyranny of her father, for the orthodox Judaism she experiences allows women nothing more than a marginal place in its traditions. The Princess rebels against the expectation that she was to revere the *tephillin*, but she resents even more the exclusion of women from this practice, and scorns the traditions that required her to “‘think it beautiful that men should bind the *tephillin* on them, and the women not”” (587).

The Princess’s struggles against the confining definition of woman parallels Maggie Tulliver’s struggle of the same nature in *The Mill on the Floss*. The Princess, while explaining her reasons for rejecting the conventional identity of the Jewish woman, states, “‘I wanted to live a large life, with freedom to do what every one else did”” (588). Her words are strikingly similar to what Maggie Tulliver tells Philip Wakem during one of their meetings in the Red Deeps: “‘I was never satisfied with a *little* of anything. . . I never felt that I had enough music – I wanted more instruments playing together – I wanted voices to be fuller and deeper”” (288). The Princess is also like Maggie in that she has inherited conventionally masculine traits from her father. She says of men like her father, “‘They throw all the weight of their will on the necks and souls of women. But nature sometimes thwarts them. My father had no other child than his daughter, and she was like himself”” (589). The Princess’s father is disappointed in just the same way as Mr. Tulliver, who regrets that “‘the lad should take after the mother’s side instead o’ the little wench”” (11). Like Maggie, the Princess finds it impossible to live up to the

predetermined conception of femininity. She defends herself against the supposition that “every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster,” declaring, “I am not a monster, but I have not felt exactly what other women feel – or say they feel, for fear of being thought unlike others” (586). She rejects the society that asserts, “A woman’s heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small, like Chinese feet; her happiness is to be made as cakes are, by a fixed recipe” (588). She yearns, and is suited, for a different life than her society allows her. Even Deronda, who is the character most harmed by the Princess’s self-conceit, admits her right to throw off a tradition that stifled her individual identity.

Deronda sympathizes with his mother for her past: “I gather that my grandfather opposed your bent to be an artist... I can imagine the hardship of an enforced renunciation” (588). Later Deronda explicitly concedes that his mother had the right to follow a calling that satisfied her nature, rather than one that her culture and father expected of her:

“Had I not a rightful claim to be something more than a mere daughter and mother? The voice and the genius matched the face. Whatever else was wrong, acknowledge that I had a right to be an artist, though my father’s will was against it. My nature gave me a charter.”

“I do acknowledge that,” said Deronda. (619)

These would seem nothing more than the sympathy and selflessness of the exceptionally empathetic Deronda if it were not for the similarities between the Princess’s struggles with Judaism and those of her son with the world of the English gentry.

In a way, The Princess's decision to reject Judaism is mirrored in Deronda's casting off his identity as an English gentleman. The Princess says of her family, "I was born amongst them without my will. I banished them as soon as I could" (614). Here she expresses a feeling of alienation within a society she knows to be her own. Deronda feels the same alienation from the world and traditions of Sir Hugo, even before he is told that this is not his native culture. He feels adrift and aimless in the position of the English gentleman; he longs to become "an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real" (336). The Princess too expresses a yearning to exchange a life in which she was expected to passively absorb traditions she found meaningless for one of action and excitement.

"I was to care for ever about what Israel had been; and I did not care at all. I cared for the wide world, and all that I could represent in it. I hated living under the shadow of my father's strictness. Teaching, teaching for everlasting – 'this you must be,' 'that you must not be' – pressed on me like a frame that got tighter and tighter as I grew." (588)

Far more notable than the similarities between the histories of the Princess and Deronda is the likeness between the characters of the Princess and Gwendolen Harleth. The Princess' nature and history parallels those of Gwendolen Harleth far more than they do those of Deronda. Therefore, as Gwendolen becomes an example of affection trumping ego, the Princess' identity as a pure egotist is further challenged.

Like the Princess, Gwendolen is harmed, rather than nurtured, by her native social medium. Gwendolen is a spoiled child, the "princess in exile," yet she finds her desires

thwarted by the role she is to play in society (35). Gwendolen plans to accept married life as the only respectable advancement for a woman, but she is aware that this will require the sacrifice of her personal freedoms:

That she was to be married some time or other [Gwendolen] would have felt obliged to admit; . . . but to become a wife and wear all the domestic fetters of that condition, was on the whole a vexatious necessity. Her observation of matrimony had inclined her to think it rather a dreary state, in which a woman could not do what she liked, had more children than were desirable, . . . and became irrevocably immersed in humdrum. Of course marriage was social promotion; she could not look forward to a single life; but promotions have sometimes to be taken with bitter herbs. (33-34)

This need to have her own will, this “inborn energy of egoistic desire,” establishes Gwendolen as the egotist, the enemy of the organic society (36). This need also leads her to misery and disaster, as is foreshadowed by Mrs. Glasher’s letter: ““These diamonds, which were once given with ardent love to Lydia Glasher, she passes on to you. You have broken your word to her, that you might possess what was hers. . . You will have your punishment”” (330). However, George Eliot does not allow the simple conclusion that Gwendolen’s misfortune is nothing more than her just desserts for her selfishness and conceit. Gwendolen’s actions are explained as being the result of not only her character but also the pressure society places upon her character. Of Gwendolen’s need to rule, to be admired and distinguished, the narrator of *Daniel Deronda* says ironically, “Such passions dwell in feminine breasts also” (34). Here Eliot repeats nature’s “mistake” of giving women masculine traits, which is also seen in the characters of

Maggie Tulliver and the Princess Halm-Eberstein. The narrator further calls attention to society's refusal to accept certain traits in women that it allows in men, asking the reader, "Who is so much cajoled and served with trembling by the weak females of a household as the unscrupulous male – capable, if he has not free way at home, of going and doing worse elsewhere?" (36). Gwendolen's faults of pride and selfishness, however, will meet with very different treatment because she is a woman. As a woman, the only respectable path for Gwendolen is marriage, a path for which she is particularly unsuited, much like the Princess.

The question still remains of whether Gwendolen, even if she is not to be held entirely responsible for her misfortunes, is to be considered nothing more than an example of the mischief wrought in the character of an individual who has not been integrated into a specific social consciousness. Newton, in his study of Gwendolen's character, examines her egotism, which he says is exacerbated by her being deprived of "any settled life which would allow her feelings and memories. . . which can help to shape and control the egotistic forces in her nature" (175). However, he does not address how Gwendolen's resolution to give up her egotism in favor of living for others can comment on narrator's assertion that "a human life. . . should be well rooted in some spot of a native land. . . a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection" (18).

It is true that "Gwendolen's coldness and egoism were partly the result of her rootless, pampered existence" (Paris 233). However, this should not be the only consideration when examining how Gwendolen as a literary character colors the depiction of the organic society in *Daniel Deronda*. To determine whether Gwendolen

could have led a different life had she possessed a settled childhood and strong cultural ties, we only need to look at her foil, the Princess Halm-Eberstein. The Princess has been carefully brought up in the rich culture of Orthodox Judaism, and yet she possesses the same just as much the egotist as Gwendolen. The Princess explains her lack of empathy in terms of ability rather than character. She says to Deronda, “I am not a loving woman. That is the truth. It is a talent to love – I lacked it. Others have loved me – and I have acted their love” (620). Since a rich cultural background has not saved the Princess Halm-Eberstein from selfishness, it does not follow that Gwendolen, raised in a different manner than she has been, should have learned sympathy and affection.

Gwendolen, however, differs from the Princess, who is never able to turn away from her egotism, to embrace others in total, pure affection. Deronda implores her, “Mother! Take us all into your heart – the living and the dead. Forgive everything that hurts you in the past. Take my affection” (591). The Princess, however, replies, “I reject nothing, but I have nothing to give” (591). She is ultimately incapable of abandoning her selfishness. Gwendolen also admits to Deronda that she is “not very affectionate” (388). She even, in a moment of bitterness, chastises Deronda for having interfered with her gambling at Leubronn.

“You must tell me then what to think and what to do; else why did you not let me go on doing as I liked, and not minding? If I had gone on gambling I might have won again, and I might have got not to care for anything. You would not let me do that. Why shouldn’t I do as I like, and not mind? Other people do.” (415-416)

Gwendolen, however, does not choose to passively submit to this strain of apathy and egocentricity. She beseeches Deronda to advise her, and tell her ““what better [she] can do,”” to which he responds:

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

(416)

What Deronda offers to Gwendolen is a sort of universalism; he advises her to force her attention outside herself to the world surrounding her, to the feelings and needs of others. He points her toward a path of conscious empathy with humanity, in which the force of her own will, rather than the outside influence of a cultural heritage, guides her into harmony with a collective consciousness.

As Newton points out, Gwendolen does not entirely succeed in stifling her egotistic urges. Subjected to the sadistic tyranny of her husband, Henleigh Grandcourt, Gwendolen becomes increasingly alienated and conflicted, until the battle between her better and worse selves result in crisis:

Her egotistic energies become trapped within the self, and are perverted by her hate and fear into an intense resentment which arouses the temptation to surrender to the demonic forces in her nature. . . She becomes afraid of her own desires ‘which were taking shapes possible and impossible, like a cloud of demon-faces.’ This state of mind is responsible for her belief that she is guilty of murdering Grandcourt after his drowning. The conflict between her willful and impulsive

egotism and her moral feelings has finally produced the psychological crisis which has been threatening all through the novel. (Newton 176)

However, Gwendolen's story does not end here. She describes to Deronda her fear of being alienated from all that might influence her to be good, a terror that grows unbearably oppressive when Grandcourt forces her to go out in the sailboat with him: "I had stepped into a boat, and my life was a sailing and sailing away – gliding on and no help – always into solitude with *him*, away from deliverance" (647). Cut adrift from all better influence, Gwendolen begins to surrender to her egotistic desires. She admits to Deronda:

"And because I felt more helpless than ever, my thoughts went out over worse things – I longed for worse things – I had cruel wishes – I fancied impossible ways of – I did not want to die myself. . . I knew no way of killing him there, but I did, I did kill him in my thoughts." (647)

Deronda, after hearing Gwendolen's confession, refuses to accept that she will "always be too wicked," saying "I believe that you may become worthier than you have ever yet been – worthy to lead a life that may be a blessing. . . You *have* made efforts – you will go on making them" (651). Deronda offers Gwendolen a different path to generosity and benevolence than learning a "love of tender kinship" by being "well rooted in some spot of a native land" (18). He offers her instead the salvation to be had from consciously willing herself to live for others.

Gwendolen's final transformation is not affected by some discovery of a cultural sensibility. First of all, it occurs in Genoa, far away from Gwendolen's native land. Second, the event that begins the transformation takes place when Gwendolen and her

husband are adrift in a boat, separated from all contact with society. Eliot has already, in *The Mill on the Floss*, used the solitary boat as a symbol of isolation of the individual from the ties of a collective consciousness. Stephen beseeches Maggie to see the tide as a deliverance from the social ties that would keep them apart. He says to her, ““See how the tide is carrying us out – away from all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster round us”” (408). Maggie however concludes that this way of thinking is only an alienation from and a hardness toward the lot of a larger humanity. She rejects Stephen’s argument:

“If we judged in that way, there would be a warrant for all treachery and cruelty – we should justify breaking the most sacred ties that can ever be formed on earth. If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment.” (417)

This idea is reiterated with Gwendolen’s saying, ““I had stepped into a boat, and my life was a sailing and sailing away – gliding on and no help – always into solitude with *him*, away from deliverance”” (647). Gwendolen, however, even though in ““solitude”” and ““away from deliverance,”” is able to fight her egotistic urges and keep herself from a final, irreversible alienation of self from humanity (647). When Grandcourt first falls into the sea, Gwendolen hesitates to throw him the rope, as she tells Deronda: ““But he was gone down again, and I had the rope in my hand – no, there he was again his face above the water – and he cried again – and I held my hand, and my heart said, ‘Die!’ – and he sank; and I felt ‘It is done – I am wicked, I am lost’”” (648). But then Gwendolen fights her murderous impulse. She continues, ““I don’t know what I thought – I was leaping from

myself – I would have saved him then. I was leaping from my crime” (648). Deronda prophesies that Gwendolen’s efforts to flee from her evil urges will be rewarded:

“I believe that you may become worthier than you have ever yet been – worthy to lead a life that may be a blessing. No evil dooms us hopelessly except the evil we love, and desire to continue in, and make no effort to escape from. You *have* made efforts – you will go on making them.” (651)

Adding to the peculiarity of Gwendolen’s situation is that, in the absence of a settled past and rich cultural tradition, she learns sympathy and generosity from a person unconnected with her early life and not even of her ethnicity. She gives to Deronda, a man who has until very recently been a stranger to her, all the credit of her more empathetic urges. She says of her efforts to be less egotistic, “‘But you were the beginning of them. You must not forsake me” (651). However, not even this human connection is allowed her. She pleads for Deronda not to leave her: “‘I will lead any life you tell me. But you must not forsake me. You must be near. If you had been near me – if I could have said everything to you, I should have been different” (652). But she soon becomes aware that Deronda will not be able to continue with her. She feels that “the distance between them was too great” and that “she was a banished soul” (653). Then, even removed from this influence, feeling that “he was going, and that nothing could hinder it,” makes an effort to free Deronda from any guilt in his going away from her. She tells him, “‘It should be better. . . better with me. . . for having known you,”” and, “‘Don’t let me be a harm to *you*” (750). And when Deronda does leave, she does not lose her ability to will herself into a more empathetic sensibility. “When he [is] quite gone” she tells her mother, “‘Don’t be unhappy. I shall live. I shall be better” (751).

In “The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!,” George Eliot asserts, “The pride which identifies us with a great historic body is a humanizing, elevating habit of mind, inspiring sacrifices of individual comfort, gain, or other selfish ambition, for the sake of that ideal whole” (201-202). She here expresses her belief that a strong cultural identity is necessary to develop what is good and noble in the individual. She praises the Jewish people in particular for nurturing this sort of cultural consciousness:

Whether we accept the canonical Hebrew books as a revelation, or simply as a part of an ancient literature, makes no difference to the fact that we find there the strongly characterized portraiture of a people educated from an earlier or later period to a sense of separateness unique in its intensity – a people taught by many concurrent influences to identify faithfulness to its national traditions with the highest social and religious blessings. (191-192)

What is significant in this description is Eliot’s emphasizing that it little matters whether one accepts “the canonical Hebrew books as a revelation, or simply as a part of an ancient literature.” Eliot is quick to point out the subjectivity of all cultures; she feels that none is in itself complete or inherently good. It therefore follows that, in suggesting that a people cultivate a specific national pride, she is not offering this national pride as an end in itself. It must rather be a means to an end. I have argued that in *Daniel Deronda* we are given a suggestion of what that end is to be: the development of society through the establishment of distinct national identities that will allow the individual to evolve, and therefore society itself to evolve, until the individual is no longer dependent upon the society for form and purpose and the society no longer has the right to demand sacrifices of the individual. George Eliot hints at this end in “The Modern Hep! Hep!

Hep!” by denying that it could possibly exist at the time of her writing the essay: “A common humanity is not yet enough to feed the rich blood of various activity which makes a complete man. The time is not come for cosmopolitanism to be highly virtuous, any more than of communism to suffice for social energy” (189). In “The Natural History of German Life,” one finds a more positive suggestion of this possibility:

And there is an analogous relation between the moral tendencies of men and the social conditions they have inherited. The nature of European men has its roots intertwined with the past, and can only be developed by allowing those roots to remain undisturbed while the process of development is going on, until that perfect ripeness of the seed which carries with it a life independent of the root.
(287-288)

Society, as is seen in the character of Daniel Deronda, is indispensable in that it gives direction to the empathetic urges of man. However, as seen in the history of the Princess, society may be destructive, as well as edifying, to the individual. And finally, in the transformation of Gwendolen Harleth, we see a shadow of the individual “independent of the root,” the individual capable of entering into the collective consciousness of humanity without the guiding force of a cultural heritage.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed the development of the relationship between society and the individual from George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, to her later novel, *Daniel Deronda*. Society is first established as "Nemesis" in *Adam Bede*, with the destruction of Hetty Sorrel and the silencing of Dinah Morris. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the River Floss serves as a representation of the evolution of an organic society in Johann Herder's sense, such as that of Hayslope in *Adam Bede*, to an organic society in Herbert Spencer's sense. Maggie and Tom Tulliver's drowning in the Floss dramatizes the sacrifice of the individual to this process of social evolution. However, since the Floss is used as a symbol of social progress, their deaths also serve to suggest that St. Ogg's will eventually change for the better. In *Daniel Deronda*, Herder's version of the organic society, in which traditional and homogeneous culture provides a medium for the development of the individual, remains, but it is accepted only as a way to allow the creation of Spencer's version of the organic society, in which the needs of the society are secondary to the desires of the individual.

The sociological forces that George Eliot attempts to dramatize in these three novels are remarkably complex. In "*Felix Holt: Society as Protagonist*," David Carrol writes:

But there are clear signs in *Romola* that George Eliot is becoming more and more aware of complexities inherent in her conception of the social organism... the dilemma occurs when, for the moment, macrocosm and microcosm are not merely

juxtaposed for the sake of demonstrating the working of universal laws, but are shown in conflict. This conflict means in fact that the metaphor of the social organism has broken down. (125)

George Eliot refused a solution that was entirely in line with either Herder's philosophy or Spencer's. She instead created a model that relied upon a dynamic exchange between the two systems. She expresses her idea of complex give and take between the development of the individual and that of the society as a whole in "The Natural History of German Life:"

The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium, and development can take place only by the gradual consentaneous development of both. (287)

It is therefore difficult to label either society or individual as entirely antagonist or protagonist, and in the three works I have examined, Eliot never entirely reconciles the individual's duties to family and society with the desires of his or her heart. Dinah Morris must abandon her preaching in order to fulfill a conventionally feminine role; Maggie Tulliver, trapped between her love for Stephen Guest and her ties to family, society, and Philip Wakem, drowns in the River Floss; Gwendolen Harleth abandons her egotism only after extreme personal suffering; and Daniel Deronda, though he finds in his love for Mirah Lapidoth the fulfillment of both personal desire and cultural duty, must cast off his former identity in favor of a new one and break his earliest ties of affection and duty.

It is in *Daniel Deronda* that George Eliot seems to offer her most unwavering support of the subjection of the individual to the collective, as Deronda devotes himself to the cause of Jewish nationalism. However, even here there is the suggestion that homogeneity is merely a necessary phase, and not the ultimate goal, of a teleological evolution of society. The Zionism of *Daniel Deronda* is lauded because it will be a universal blessing. Deronda himself longs “to have as wide an instruction and sympathy as possible” (616). Gwendolen Harleth strives for goodness and altruism even in the absence of a rich cultural medium.

In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot concludes that empathy, and not the willful pursuit of personal desires, is the highest calling of the individual. However, Eliot does not present the subjection of the individual to any particular culture or polity as the natural end of this philosophy. She defines the perfect society as that which reconciles the individual’s desires with his or her duty to others. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver expresses the belief that in Eden man was not required to choose between love and duty:

“If life were quite easy and simple, as it might have been in paradise, and we could always see that one being first towards whom... I mean, if life did not make duties for us before love comes, love would be a sign that two people ought to belong to each other.” (395)

But Eliot also recognizes that this perfect relationship between the individual and society does not exist. In its absence, she upholds the renunciation of personal desires for the good of the collective as the best aspiration of man. Maggie therefore continues, “But I see – I feel it is not so now: there are things we must renounce in life; some of us must resign love” (395). Maggie’s statement that it “is not so now” evokes the fall of man,

linking the antagonism between self and society with the wages of sin. However, in Eliot's works, the story does not end here. Though Maggie Tulliver drowns, Gwendolen Harleth is pulled from the water, and lives to strive to align her personal desires with the duties of affection. With the Zionism of *Daniel Deronda*, there is a suggestion that paradise will return, that, to carry out the allusions to the Biblical paradise and subsequent fall of man, there shall be a "new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" and consequently a "new earth" (Rev. 21:1-2). According to Maggie Tulliver's description of paradise, this restoration would entail a reconciliation between self and society. According to George Eliot, the homogeneous society is a necessary stage of social development, but only until "the outer life of man is gradually and painfully... brought into harmony with his inner needs" ("Antigone" 264).

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