

Evil and Eliot's Religion of Humanity: Grandcourt in *Daniel Deronda*

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But as to the particular movements which made this process in his [Grandcourt's] baffling mind, Lush could only toss up his chin in despair of a theory.¹

WHILE much critical discussion of *Daniel Deronda* has centered upon the novel's two major figures, exploring such subjects as the psychological complexity of Gwendolen's development and the unnaturally idealized nature of the eponymous hero, analysis of the work's third principal character, Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt, has advanced little beyond Lush's plea for an answer to his superior's "baffling mind." Yet this seemingly enigmatic personality demands closer attention.² For Grandcourt is at once as complex a figure as Gwendolen and a more serious critical problem than Deronda, and his character and role within the novel illuminate a seldom explored facet of Eliot's philosophic-moral thought: her ambivalent response to the question of human evil.

This ambivalence is subtly yet clearly manifested. Throughout the greater portion of the work, Eliot forms Grandcourt into her most uncompromising depiction of deliberate evil, essaying a detailed study of sadistic sexuality and power-lust. Later in the novel, however, in several brief yet significant authorial comments, Eliot introduces various mitigating factors, decidedly altering the nature of Grandcourt's character and in turn the reader's response to his thematic role. The essential problem lies in the degree of conscious perception which Eliot attributes to Grandcourt, his

ability to comprehend both his own motives and the workings of another's mind. The earlier depiction leaves no doubt that Grandcourt is acutely aware of his own nature, possesses an equally insightful perception of his victims' weaknesses, and employs, through such knowledge, the precise means — economic, emotional, sexual — to gratify his power-lust. Eliot's later qualifications, in contrast, transform that perceptiveness into self-deluded egoism whereby Grandcourt seems unable (or unwilling) to acknowledge either his own desires or his victims' inner fears, his deliberate evil becoming unconscious and rationalized.

Merely to point out inconsistencies in an author's depiction of character is seldom a useful task, and my purpose here is not a further attack on *Daniel Deronda's* artistic flaws. Eliot's modifications in Grandcourt's character raise larger questions about the capacity of her humanistic moral theory to accommodate all the varieties of human experience and action, particularly the darker impulses of the human psyche. U. C. Knoepfelmacher offers a similar observation. "Humanism," he argues, "minimized the existence of sin and evil," and thus compelled Eliot "to disregard her own sense of human depravity and to distort character in order to remain faithful to the profound idealism on which her 'humanism' was built."³ Knoepfelmacher does not extend this argument to Grandcourt, although Grandcourt is unquestionably Eliot's clearest and most thematically significant example of such character distortion. As many critics have noted, "for Eliot the essential thing, the foundation of genuine benevolence, is not feeling as such but understanding,"⁴ an awareness of the "I-Thou" relationship. Adam Bede and Silas Marner must learn to enlarge the range of their sympathetic contact with the other, while Dorothea and Deronda must learn to direct their immaturely vagrant sympathies to realistic ends; the inter-dependence of sympathy and understanding forms the cardinal basis of all Eliot's moral thought. In this final novel, however, in counterbalancing juxtaposition to the ideal moral nature of *Deronda*, Eliot offers her most searching critical analysis of the sympathetic imagination, acknowledging,

through the depiction of Henleigh Grandcourt, that this "I-Thou" construct is a far from certain basis for secular morality. For like Deronda, Grandcourt displays a penetrating knowledge of the other's "equivalent centre of self,"⁵ but that insightfulness does not quicken his moral sense. Rather, because his awareness of the other's inner life vitally enhances the piquancy of his dominance, Grandcourt's "non-sympathetic" imagination is the principal means by which he enacts and gratifies his lust for mastery.

Such a figure, unprecedented among Eliot's darker characters, necessarily challenges her moral thought. In order for Grandcourt to be accommodated within *Daniel Deronda's* idealistic humanism, his conscious cruelty must be denied; and it is precisely those qualities of self-knowledge, intention, and imaginative identification with the other that Eliot's authorial commentary annuls. In this discussion I will explore the complexities of Grandcourt's changing role in *Daniel Deronda*, analysing Eliot's efforts to question the limitations of imaginative sympathy as a basis for morality and her subsequent attempts to palliate the disturbing portrait she creates.

"That is my notion about the plants: they are often bored, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous' "(p. 171). Gwendolen's comment, however playfully intended, represents the novel's principal insight into the underlying basis of Grandcourt's perversion. As Erich Fromm maintains, "the bored person often is the organizer of a 'mini-Colosseum' in which he produces his small-scale equivalents of the large-scale cruelty staged in the Collosseum."⁶ Perhaps more moralistic than psychological, Fromm's central description of the sadistic character is nonetheless an enlightening approach to Grandcourt's nature. For Fromm, "the core of sadism, common to all its manifestations, is *the passion to have absolute and unrestricted control over a living being*,"⁷ a passion generated by the need to compensate for a deep-rooted psychical impotence: "What the sadist is striving for is power *over* people, precisely because he lacks the power *to be*."⁸ He has no creative, spontaneous contact with life, realizing his only emotional gratification by bending

others to his will. Sadism, in short, "*is the transformation of impotence into the experience of omnipotence; it is the religion of psychical cripples.*"⁹

Although the precise sources of Grandcourt's perversion are obscure, the nature of his "poisonous" personality is clearly expressed. Like the Frommian sadist, Grandcourt is a "remnant of a human being" (p. 456) whom the years "were dulling into a more and more neutral obstinacy" (p. 391) and whose benumbing ennui rises "from a state of the inward world, something like premature age . . . where impulse is born and dies in a phantasmal world, pausing in rejection even of a shadowy fulfilment" (p. 364). This state of chronic internal stagnation, perhaps exacerbated by his undemanding social prominence, a surfeit of pleasure, and the absence of any serious challenge to his will or energies, engenders Grandcourt's psychical crippling, that sense of personal deadness which can only be exorcized by controlling and denying the potency of others. In Grandcourt's character, all emotional and sexual contacts are subordinate to power, and in his two major inter-personal relationships — with Lydia and Gwendolen — the intense need to master more vital and passionate creatures than himself is his sole ambition. As Fromm suggests, "it does not cause any sadistic pleasure . . . to inflict a wound on an enemy in a fight between equals, because in this situation the infliction of the wound is not an expression of control."¹⁰ Grandcourt's desires embody and refine this precept, seeking an equal enemy but an unequal contest. "His will must impose itself without trouble" (p. 396), while the woman he rules must resist (inwardly) to make the victory satisfying; "to be worth his mastering it was proper that she should have some spirit" (p. 195) though that spirit be driven into tortured silence. Grandcourt is, in effect, among "those who prefer command to love" (p. 646), and in subduing Lydia's and Gwendolen's impassioned natures, controlling and stifling their passion itself, he finds the only challenge and delight that life still offers him: "He had no taste for a woman who was all tenderness to him, full of petitioning solicitude and willing obedience. He meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master

him, and who perhaps would have been capable of mastering another man" (p. 395).

Lydia and Gwendolen, both beautiful, emotional, and domineering, anxious for wealth and social prestige, richly possess that dynamic vitality that Grandcourt seeks to destroy. Despite their similarities, however, Grandcourt's response to each woman is markedly different, a distinction essential to a more complete understanding of his character.

Lydia, "an impassioned, vivacious woman," was attracted to the young Grandcourt in a direct, sensual manner. Escaping from a "disagreeable husband," she found a "sort of bliss with a lover who had completely fascinated her — young, handsome, amorous, and living in the best style" (p. 386), a bliss that Grandcourt himself apparently shares.¹¹ Whatever Grandcourt's psychosexual state in the early stages of this relationship, however, at some point the inner neuroses of this once "amorous" lover emerged predominant. Although "his passion for her had been the strongest and most lasting he had ever known" (p. 386), sexual passion is no longer Grandcourt's goal. Lydia, rather, longing for social recognition and her children's rights, must endure her frustrating economic dependence and uncertainty, a situation inimical to her ambitious character and fervent emotions.

The gratification which Grandcourt derives from Lydia's enforced imprisonment, however, far from fulfilling his desire for utter dominance. She is confined and tyrannized, but her force of will and sensual nature make her impervious to complete emotional subjugation. Lydia can still exert some power over her gaoler in their argument about his mother's diamonds, a gift to her which he now wishes to transfer to Gwendolen, and "the effect that clung and gnawed within Grandcourt was a sense of imperfect mastery" (p. 399). It might be conjectured, therefore, that Grandcourt, embittered by his inability to master Lydia totally, is driven to seek a more susceptible, gratifying victim. And in Gwendolen Harleth, "a creature with a large discourse of imaginative fears" (p. 477), whose weaknesses (unlike Lydia's) are highly vulnerable to attack, Grandcourt finds the perfect victim.

Discussing Gwendolen's reaction to Rex's advances, R. T. Jones argues that "perhaps we should need resources of language to describe it that were not available to George Eliot — the resources that D. H. Lawrence developed."¹² While Gordon Haight's suggestion that Gwendolen evinces latent lesbian tendencies is problematical,¹³ her sexual responses are clearly frigid. As Eliot states, Gwendolen "objected, with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to. With all her imaginative delight in being adored, there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her" (pp. 101-2). the mere "perception that poor Rex wanted to be tender made her curl up and harden like a sea-anemone at the touch of a finger" (p. 113). Her aversion to Lush, likewise, is specifically described as one of her "physical antipathies" as "prominent eyes, fat though not clumsy figure, and strong black grey-besprinkled hair of frizzy thickness" (p. 157) exude a coarse sexuality that Gwendolen finds revolting.¹⁴ Her initial response to Grandcourt reinforces this interpretation, for although obviously impressed with his wealth and social standing, she is also attracted by his cold, unimpassioned love-making, by "the absence of all eagerness in his attentions to her" (p. 156): "Clearly it was faint praise to say of him that he was not disgusting: he was almost charming; and she felt at this moment that it was not likely that she could ever have loved another man better than this one. His reticence gave her some inexplicable, delightful consciousness" (pp. 373-4). Specifically, Gwendolen believes that Grandcourt's sexual conduct will be as reserved and lifeless as his courtship. She "imagined him always cold and dignified, not likely ever to have committed himself. He had hunted the tiger — had he ever been in love, or made love? The one experience and the other seemed alike remote in Gwendolen's fancy" (p. 174).

For his part, Grandcourt has no direct knowledge of Gwendolen's sexual timidity in the early stages of this relationship; his motives for pursuing the marriage, however, are clear. Deriving "none of his satisfaction from the belief that Gwendolen was in love with him," Grandcourt

believed that this girl was rather exceptional in the fact that, in spite of his assiduous attention to her, she was not in love with him. . . . From the

very first there had been an exasperating fascination in the tricksiness with which she had — not met his advances, but — wheeled away from them. She had been brought to accept him in spite of everything — brought to kneel down like a horse under training for the arena, though she might have an objection to it all the while. On the whole, Grandcourt got more pleasure out of this notion than he could have done out of winning a girl of whom he was sure that she had a strong inclination for him personally. (pp. 364-5)

Gwendolen's reluctance (manifested particularly in her flight to Leubronn) exacerbates Grandcourt's desire, convincing him that the victory over such a strong-willed creature will prove emotionally fulfilling.

Her knowledge of his illicit relationship with Lydia is also a powerful stimulus. As he proposes marriage to Gwendolen, "his strongest wish was to be completely master of this creature — this piquant combination of maidenliness and mischief: *that she knew things which had made her start away from him, spurred him to triumph over that repugnance*; and he was believing that he should triumph" (p. 346, emphasis added). The fact that he "attributed her hesitation entirely to her knowledge about Mrs. Glasher" (p. 347) only increases his desire; Grandcourt is fully aware that Gwendolen's undeveloped conscience is vulnerable, and to triumph even over her moral objections magnifies his sense of dominance. His response to her later relationship with Deronda, for example, as he explicitly attacks her tentative though earnest search for moral enlightenment, clearly supports this view. Gwendolen never consciously regards Daniel as a physical, sexual being, but a priest or mentor who had "impressed her as being not her admirer but her superior" (p. 468). Grandcourt accurately discerns this emotional-moral dependency, and therefore seeks to undermine Gwendolen's idealized devotion by casting aspersions on Daniel's relationship with Mirah: "'Men can see what is his relation to her' . . . said Grandcourt, *conscious* of using pincers on that white creature, 'I suppose you take Deronda for a saint'" (p. 649, emphasis added). Throughout their relationship, in short, Grandcourt displays an acute perception of Gwendolen's emotional and moral weaknesses, those aspects of her character that are most susceptible to his manipulation. As Gwendolen's husband, then, when still more of her character falls under his

scrutiny, he gains a greater opportunity to express his sadistic desires, creating his own "mini-Colosseum" in "an empire of fear" (p. 479).

The reader does not, of course, witness Grandcourt physically abusing Gwendolen, and yet, "in seven short weeks" after their marriage, "which seemed half of her life, her husband had gained a mastery which she could no more resist than she could have resisted the benumbing effect from the touch of a torpedo" (p. 477). His strangle-hold on her pride and conscience undoubtedly exerts a powerful effect, but the physical, sexual element in Grandcourt's domination is perhaps of even greater significance. The more important scenes, one is inevitably led to speculate, occur between the chapters, in those bedroom confrontations that Eliot could not directly depict.

Despite Eliot's self-censorship, however, a coherent history of Grandcourt's and Gwendolen's sexual relations can be extrapolated. The animal imagery surrounding Grandcourt establishes a primary connection between sexuality, danger, and power-lust.¹⁶ He is frequently reptilian in appearance — a lizard (p. 174), an alligator (p. 195), a boa-constrictor (p. 477), "a dangerous serpent ornamentally coiled in her cabin without invitation" (p. 735). The equestrian image patterns, through which Eliot presents Gwendolen's desire "to mount the chariot and drive the plunging horses herself" (p. 173) giving way to Grandcourt's awareness "that he held his wife with bit and bridle" (p. 744) similarly clarify their sexual relationship. Grandcourt's sardonic metaphoric image of Gwendolen as a horse "brought to kneel down under training for the arena" presents a clear and illuminating sexual overtone: she has been broken and must now be mounted.

Their marriage-ceremony and wedding-night are similarly replete with suggestions of sexual violence. During the ceremony itself, for instance, an illustrative parable is circulated among the crowd outside:

The miller's daughter of fourteen could not believe that high gentry behaved badly to their wives, but her mother instructed her — 'Oh, child, men's men: gentle or simple, they're much of a muchness. I've heard my mother say Squire Pelton used to take his dogs and a long whip into his wife's room, and flog 'em there to frighten her.' (p. 400-1)

With its unsubtle allusion to Grandcourt (cf. his treatment of his dogs), this tale of sadistic sexuality is a symbolic prelude to the coming marriage-night. After the marriage, and the three intervening chapters, these revealing implications continue. Gwendolen's previous delight in male admiration (as opposed to direct physical contact) disappears; all masculine sexuality is transformed into an object of loathing, and the "fascinated gentlemen" of her girlish visions now "presented themselves to her imagination with the fatal circumstance that, instead of fascinating her in return, they were clad in her own weariness and disgust" (p. 484). Gwendolen's now terrified response to Grandcourt also reveals the fundamental changes in her preconceived opinion of his sexual reticence: "The poor thing has passed from her girlish sauciness of superiority over this inert specimen of personal distinction into an amazed perception of her former ignorance about the possible mental attitude of a man towards the woman he sought in marriage" (p. 480). While it is unlikely that Eliot is suggesting that Grandcourt is overtly violent with his wife in their sexual relations — Gwendolen's neurotic fears of sexual contact, and Grandcourt's hatred of being "forced into anything like violence" (p. 396) make brutality doubtful — the psychological effect is essentially the same. Grandcourt has realized Gwendolen's sexual fears, and, simply demanding his marital rights, enjoys her unspoken revulsion and his own vastly enhanced mastery.¹⁷ Gwendolen's fantasies about Grandcourt's death, brought to their height by the unendurable physical proximity on the yacht, are germane to this analysis:

Inarticulate prayers, no more definite than a cry, often swept out from her into the vast silence, unbroken except by her husband's breathing or the splash of the wave or the creaking of the masts. . . . It was sometimes after a white-lipped, fierce-eyed temptation with murdering fingers had made its demon-visit that these best moments of inward crying and clinging for rescue would come to her, and she would lie with wide-open eyes in which the rising tears seemed a blessing. (p. 738)

The physical setting is unobtrusively yet strikingly visualized: terrified and humiliated after having been forced to submit to sexual intercourse, Gwendolen, fighting her homicidal temptations, tormented by her sexual fears, lies sleeplessly in bed with Grandcourt.

Beyond all this, moreover, in two highly emblematic scenes (involving the conflict over the diamonds), Eliot offers an even clearer account of that dramatic wedding-night. As Eliot herself notes, "what had occurred between about her wearing the diamonds was typical" (p. 480), a statement which must be seen in the full light of their relationship:

Her little coquetries, voluntary or involuntary, had told on Grandcourt during courtship, and formed a medium of communication between them, showing him in the light of a creature such as she could understand and manage: but marriage had nullified all such interchange, and Grandcourt had become a blank uncertainty to her in all but this, that he would do just what he willed, and that she had neither devices at her command to determine his will, nor any rational means of escaping it. (p. 480)

Aggravating Grandcourt's need to dominate this elusive quarry, Gwendolen's "little coquetries" revealed to him (at least in part) the essential weaknesses of her character: " 'Then I am not to ask for one kiss,' said Grandcourt, contented to pay a large price for this new kind of love-making, *which introduced marriage by the finest contrast*. 'Not one!' said Gwendolen, getting saucy, and nodding at him defiantly" (p. 373, emphasis added). When, on her wedding-night, Gwendolen receives the diamonds and a bitter letter from Lydia, she falls into un-controllable hysteria, and Grandcourt's tentative suspicions are brought to full consciousness:

After that long while, there was a tap at the door and Grandcourt entered, dressed for dinner. The sight of him brought a new nervous shock, and Gwendolen screamed again and again with hysterical violence. He had expected to see her dressed and smiling, ready to be led down. He saw her pallid, shrieking as it seemed with terror, the jewels scattered around her on the floor. (p. 407)

The scene resonates with sexual implications, the time (the reader's final view of Gwendolen and Grandcourt on their wedding-night), the jewels (given to both Grandcourt's sexual partners), and Gwendolen's "hysterical violence" (which must be seen in conjunction with her fear of men) all contributing to the suggestion of imminent sadistic sexuality.

The second diamond scene further elucidates the sexual nature of their power-struggle. Though Gwendolen initially refused to wear the jewels, "her fear of him . . . had reached a

superstitious point" (p. 481) and she is powerless before Grandcourt's imperious demands: "She fancied that his eyes showed a delight in torturing her. How could she be defiant? She had nothing to say that would touch him — nothing but what would give him a more painful grasp on her consciousness. 'He delights in making the dogs and horses quail: that is half his pleasure in called them his' " (pp. 481-2). Thoroughly cowed by her terror, Gwendolen can only passively endure Grandcourt's advances:

'You want some one to fasten them,' he said, coming towards her.

She did not answer, but simply stood still, leaving him to take out the ornaments and fasten them as he would. . . .

'What makes you so cold?' said Grandcourt, when he had fastened the last ear-ring. 'Pray put plenty of furs on. I hate to see a woman come into a room looking frozen. If you are to appear as a bride at all, appear decently.'

This marital speech was not exactly persuasive, but it touched the quick of Gwendolen's pride and forced her to rally. . . . Grandcourt inwardly observed that she answered to the rein. (p. 482)

In this confrontation, Gwendolen's physical fear of Grandcourt, his pleasure in tormenting her, her unresponsive frigidity, and the suggestive equestrian imagery coalesce to produce a paradigm of their sexual relations. Gwendolen must submit to wearing the diamonds "on her neck, in her ears, in her hair" (pp. 458-9), subdued and humiliated by Grandcourt's demands.

Grandcourt's response to Gwendolen's inner anxieties, then, is psychologically consistent with the character Eliot has delineated. Unlike his affair with the less vulnerable Lydia, his marriage, bringing "more of aim into his life, new objects to exert his will upon" (p. 645), has thoroughly satisfied his sadistic impulses. If Grandcourt had truly expected to see Gwendolen "dressed and smiling" in the first diamond scene, he had certainly "not repented of his marriage" (p. 645) afterwards, for he "had found a motive to exercise his tenacity — that of making his marriage answer all the ends he chose, and with the more completeness the more he discerned any opposing with in her" (p. 608). Far from proving a disappointment, Gwendolen's anguished tension between resistance and resignation ideally gratifies Grandcourt's desires. Her sexual frigidity, in fact, is

even more gratifying than her previous hysteria, offering him a perverse satisfaction in the knowledge that she suffers inwardly without overt defiance.

Despite the bewilderment expressed by Lush in the epigraph to this paper, therefore, Grandcourt's actions and psychology are not inexplicable. His deep-rooted lack of vitality and passion has generated an intense need to confine and control those qualities in others, to gain release from his impotence by suffocating the potency of his victims. He is unique among Eliot's darker creations. Her earlier villains, though equally egoistic, are more pathetic or confused than evil, exemplifying *Daniel Deronda's* axiom that "want of sympathy condemns us to a corresponding stupidity" (p. 658); the pier-glass of ego effectively blinds such characters as Hetty, Arthur, Casaubon, Bulstrode, and Rosamund to the inner workings of another's mind and to the true consequences of their own actions.¹⁸ However, though it is not expressed in a like axiom, *Daniel Deronda* also offers a contrasting point of view. Throughout her portrayal of Grandcourt, Eliot reverses her previous pattern and accentuates the fact that his understanding of the other is far from limited; he comprehends the nature of his victims and exploits that knowledge of their weaknesses to gain his perverse sense of pleasure and excitation. In Eliot's depiction of his character, he experiences no guilt, no self-delusion, no remorse, and possesses none of the mitigating blindness or inner confusion that temper the reader's response to her earlier villains.

This uncompromising portrait, however, confronts Eliot with a profound philosophic-artistic dilemma: to continue questioning the underlying basis of her moral theory, or to qualify Grandcourt's challenging presence, converting *Daniel Deronda's* conscious sadist into a *Middlemarch* egoist whose actions produce evil but whose lack of understanding palliates his culpability. The passages in which Grandcourt's self-knowledge, imaginative insight, and deliberate intent are reduced are admittedly minor, but the simple fact that Eliot undertakes to transform those precise qualities clearly demonstrates her awareness of the central problem

This process of transformation begins tentatively:

Grandcourt could not indeed fully imagine how things affected Gwendolen: he had no imagination of anything in her but what affected the gratification of his own will; but on this point he had the sensibility which seems like divination. What we see exclusively we are apt to see with some mistake of proportions; and Grandcourt was not likely to be infallible in his judgments concerning this wife who was governed by many shadowy powers, to him non-existent. He magnified her inward resistance, but that did not lessen his satisfaction in the mastery of it. (p. 616)

Still asserting that Grandcourt acutely perceives fundamental aspects of Gwendolen's psyche and derives intense gratification by tyrannizing his wife, Eliot also begins to question the extent of his insight, claiming that, like the befuddled villains of her earlier fiction, Grandcourt's egoism obscures his full understanding, a claim that becomes increasingly apparent and less tentative as the novel progresses. Grandcourt's interpretation of the conflict between Lydia and Gwendolen is an illuminating example. Eliot argues that

Grandcourt lacked the only organ of thinking that could have saved him from mistake — namely, some experience of the mixed passions concerned. He had correctly divined one half of Gwendolen's dread — all that related to her personal pride, and her perception that his will must conquer hers; but the remorseful half, even if he had known of her broken promise, was as much out of his imagination as the other side of the moon. (pp. 657-8)

This analysis returns us to the classic pattern of Eliot's moral theory: understanding derives from the personal experience of a similar emotion, and thus Grandcourt, lacking any "mixed passion," can see only Gwendolen's pride and fear, not her remorse. Continuing this argument, Eliot suggests that what Grandcourt "believed her to feel about Lydia was solely a tongue-tied jealousy, and what he believed Lydia to have written with the jewels was the fact that she had once been used to wearing them, with other amenities such as he imputed to the intercourse of jealous women" (p. 658). Earlier, however, Eliot suggested that Grandcourt had "felt sure that Lydia had enclosed something with the diamonds, and that this something, whatever it was, had at once created in Gwendolen a new repulsion for him and a reason for not daring to manifest it" (p. 479), a recognition of more than mere jealousy. The desire to

triumph over Gwendolen despite her incipient moral scruples, furthermore, was a major motive for Grandcourt's proposal. The fact that Gwendolen "knew things which had made her start away from him, spurred him to triumph over that repugnance," for he had recognized the intensity of her feelings about Mrs. Glasher and sought to increase his domination by conquering and exploiting her moral qualms.

Continuing to mitigate Grandcourt's awareness and intention, Eliot's qualifications gradually assume more directness. On the one hand, Grandcourt had formerly not only recognized Gwendolen's violent physical antipathy to Lush, but had employed it as a subtle yet effective punishment for her interest in Deronda. Returning from Lady Mallinger's party, for example, Gwendolen fears that her earnest conversation with Daniel has aroused her husband's anger:

But Grandcourt made no observation on her behaviour. All he said as they were driving home was —

'Lush will dine with us among the other people to-morrow. You will treat him civilly.'

Gwendolen's heart began to beat violently. The words that she wanted to utter, as one wants to return a blow, were, 'You are breaking your promise to me — the first promise you made me.' But she dared not utter them. She was as frightened at a quarrel as if she had foreseen that it would end with throttling fingers of her neck. (p. 626)

On the other hand, Eliot later argues that Grandcourt no longer recognizes the cruelty of compelling his wife to endure Lush's company. Angered by the "confounded nonsense" that continues between Deronda and Gwendolen, Grandcourt perceives the "threatening moods in Gwendolen which the unity between them in his views of marriage required him peremptorily to check" (p. 656). He therefore decides that Lush will communicate the conditions of his will to Gwendolen, an act (as in the previous incident) of calculated cruelty. Eliot, however, now suggests that his motives are significantly less conscious, for "in his employment of Lush he did not intend an insult to her: she ought to understand that he was the only possible envoy" (p. 658). Regardless of Lush's debatable indispensability, in light of the earlier scene Eliot's argument that Grandcourt does not realize and intend that Lush's company will be utterly insulting

to Gwendolen is unconvincing; in both cases, Grandcourt knows that Gwendolen harbours a special feeling for Deronda and employs the same punishment.

This diminishment of Grandcourt's conscious cruelty is given its most adamant articulation in Eliot's analysis of Grandcourt's supposed state of mind during the Mediterranean cruise. Eliot asks

Had Grandcourt the least conception of what was going on in the breast of this wife? He conceived that she did not love him: but was that necessary? She was under his power . . . But what lay quite away from his conception was, that she could have any special repulsion for him personally. How could she? He himself knew what personal repulsion was — nobody better . . . Hence he understood her repulsion for Lush. But how was he to understand or conceive her present repulsion for Henleigh Grandcourt? . . . He had all his life had reason to take a flattering view of his own attractiveness, and to place himself in fine antithesis to the men who, he saw at once, must be revolting to a woman of taste. He had no idea of a moral repulsion, and could not have believed, if he had been told it, that there may be a resentment and disgust which will gradually make beauty more detestable than ugliness, through exasperation at the outward virtue in which hateful things can flaunt themselves or find a supercilious advantage.

How, then, could Grandcourt divine what was going on in Gwendolen's breast? (pp. 734-5).

At this intense point in the novel — the isolation of Grandcourt and Gwendolen on the yacht — Eliot cannot leave the emotional and psychosexual overtones of this encounter unanalysed. Such an explication, however, involves the necessity of probing deeply into the nature of Grandcourt's acute awareness of Gwendolen's inner fears and his conscious delight in her subjugation, acknowledging that Grandcourt's evil is not in fact based upon a lack of understanding. Confronted by this prospect, Eliot's philosophic-moral impulses lead her to contradict the portrait she has already revealed, asserting that Grandcourt is blind to Gwendolen's sexual frigidity, that he is oblivious to the concept of moral repulsion, that he is unable to comprehend her inner life, a series of qualifications that bears little resemblance to the Grandcourt that Eliot has delineated.

Grandcourt's final appearances continue to display Eliot's ambivalence. On the one hand, his sexual menace is unabated: "There seemed to be a magical effect in this close vicinity. Gwendolen shrank and ceased to sob. She kept her eyelids down,

and clasped her hands tightly" (p. 744). Grandcourt's need to dominate and his capacity to discern the essential weaknesses in his wife's character are similarly unaffected. Gwendolen acknowledges that "this dual solitude in a boat was the more attractive to him because it would be wearisome to her" (p. 7420, and Grandcourt experiences "the gratified impulse of a strong will" by forcing her into this physical closeness (p. 745). On the other hand, Eliot also insists that his insight remains egoistically clouded as he interprets Gwendolen's psyche "with the narrow correctness which leaves a world of unknown feeling behind" (p. 742). Eliot's two conceptions of Grandcourt remain unreconciled and his timely death nullifies but does not resolve her dilemma.

Grandcourt's true importance in *Daniel Deronda*, then, reveals a central problem in Eliot's moral philosophy. One of the major questions confronting Victorian agnostics was the creation of a system of ethics without divine sanction. Eliot's secular Religion of Humanity responded by maintaining that the sympathetic imagination is the proper basis for man's moral sense and that, although evil exists in the human world, it is the result of moral immaturity or egoistic self-blindness rather than a willing decision to embrace perversity. Such humanistic idealism, however, as Knoepfelmacher points out, can lead to significant distortions in the novelist's presentation of character. For a substantial portion of *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot confronts the possibility that an individual can recognize another's equivalent centre of self and yet attempt to achieve mastery through that recognition, unsympathetically and knowingly exploiting the other's inner fears. And perhaps it should be added that in this morally earnest novel where Daniel's own character and pontifications express Eliot's principal humanistic beliefs, the distortion that Knoepfelmacher describes is inevitable; *Daniel Deronda's* moral ideology cannot, in effect, accommodate a character who sees, but refuses, the light. In her qualifying passages, Eliot never denies that Grandcourt engages in sexual terrorism; it is only his conscious delight in the knowledge that his is subjecting Gwendolen to pain that Eliot ambiguously refutes.

The ethos of Eliot's agnosticism therefore encounters a serious challenge in Henleigh Grandcourt, a character not egoistically blinded to the "I-Thou" relationship, and yet whose imagination remains devoid of sympathy. Reflecting more of Victorian opinion, Dickens could assert that there are people "who have no good in them . . . whom it is necessary to detest without compromise . . . who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race."²² Eliot's own Calvinistic upbringing, stressing an equal awareness of man's sinfulness, would have endorsed Dicken's sentiments, leading one to speculate that the uncompromised portrait of Grandcourt's conscious evil is in fact the point of conflict between two primary forces in Eliot's mind — the evangelical and humanistic — rather than a seeming anomaly. Whatever Grandcourt's roots in Eliot's intellectual-cultural heritage, however, her mature moral theories could never accept such a figure. And since *Daniel Deronda's* moral philosophy will not change to accommodate Grandcourt, Grandcourt must be changed, his conscious sadism reduced to self-delusion and moral obtuseness. Following Grandcourt's death, the novel's only surviving villainous (or quasi-villainous) character is the elder Lapidoth, as pathetic and petty an emblem of evil as any among Eliot's previous dark figures. The large questions raised by Grandcourt's deliberate evil and insightful perceptiveness, the tension between the evangelical and humanistic viewpoints, the intense inquiry into the moral limitations of imaginative sympathy remain unresolved.

NOTES

¹George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Barbara Hardy (Harmondsworth: Penquin Books, 1967), p. 332. All subsequent quotations from this edition are indicated in parentheses by page number only.

²The more important studies include Jerome Thale, *The Novels of George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 127-36; Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (1959; rpt. London: The Athlone Press, 1963), pp. 227-9; R. T. Jones, *George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 105-8; Felicia Bonaparte, *Will and Destiny: Morality and Tragedy in George Eliot's Novels* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 100-2.

³*Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 60.

⁴Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 278.

- ⁵Middlemarch, ed. Gordon Haight (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1956), p. 157.
- ⁶*The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), p. 248.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 288-9.
- ⁸*Ibid.*, p. 296.
- ⁹*Ibid.*, p. 290.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 291.
- ¹¹Grandcourt even fought a duel with Lydia's husband (385), an impassioned response quite unlike his present emotional stagnation.
- ¹²Jones, *George Eliot*, p. 103.
- ¹³Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 496.
- ¹⁴It is important to recall that Gwendolen displays this repulsion for Lush *before* his involvement in her meeting with Lydia. Gwendolen's antipathy is, at this point, exclusively physical.
- ¹⁵See also p. 654.
- ¹⁶Barbara Hardy's *The Novels of George Eliot* (pp. 227-9) offers the fullest account of these image patterns.
- ¹⁷Fromm's distinction between the destructive and sadistic characters is pertinent here: "The destroyer wants to do away with a person, to eliminate him, to destroy life itself; the sadist wants the sensation of controlling and choking life" (*Human Destructiveness*, p. 291). Grandcourt's satisfaction, likewise, comes not from injuring Gwendolen but from dominating her against her will.
- ¹⁸*Middlemarch*, pp. 194-5. Characters like Dempster, Raffles, and Dunstan Cass are also relatively sinister, but none equals the degree of insightfulness or conscious delight in mastery evinced by Grandcourt. Tito Melema, in *Romola*, is Grandcourt's closest parallel, but even he is a far more vacillating and self-rationalizing character, lacking the deliberateness of Grandcourt's evil.
- ¹⁹*Little Dorrit* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1922), p. 119.