

## DANIEL DERONDA: A STUDY IN CHARACTERISATION

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**Annotatsiya:** *Ushbu maqolada Jorj Eliotning so'nggi romani hisoblangan Daniel Deronda romani haqida va asar qahramonlarining xarakter qirralarini o'quvchilarga to'liqroq ochib berish maqsad qilingan. Eliot personajlari orqali real hayotdagi odamlarning qabixliklariyu, insoniylik xususiyatlarini qanday bunchalik muvaffaqiyatlik tarzda shakllantirgani va vaqt o'tishi sayin turli tanqidchilar tomonidan qanday qabul qilinganligi ko'rib chiqiladi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *xarakteristika, tanqid, roman, Daniel Deronda, ingliz adabiyoti, madaniy jihatlar, insoniylik*

**Аннотация:** *В этой статье, посвященной последнему роману Джорджа Элиота «Даниэль Деронда», исследуется природа персонажа, опираясь на определения и отношение к этому термину. В нем рассматривается, как формируются определенные персонажи Элиота, рассматривая их с разной степенью успеха как репрезентации людей, и как они были восприняты критиками с течением времени.*

**Ключевые слова:** *характеристика, критика, роман, Даниэль Деронда, английская литература, культурные аспекты, человеческая природа.*

**Annotation:** *Concerned with George Eliot's final novel, Daniel Deronda, this article examines the nature of character, drawing upon definitions and attitudes to that term. It looks at how certain of Eliot's characters are formed, considering them in their varying levels of success as representations of people, and how they have been received by critics over time.*

**Key words:** *characterization, criticism, novel, Daniel Deronda, English literature, cultural aspects, human nature.*

*We mortals have a strange spiritual chemistry going on within us, so that a lazy stagnation, or even a cottony milkiness may be preparing one knows not what biting or explosive material. The navy waking from sleep and without malice heaving a stone to crush the life out of his still sleeping comrade, is understood to lack the trained motive which makes a character fairly calculable in his actions...*<sup>104</sup>

Eliot presents us with the unpredictability of human nature; each of us at the mercy of individual biology, that 'strange spiritual chemistry', is, although 'fairly calculable', simultaneously capable of working against the ordered patterns of character formation we have previously etched. The image is significant, for if we examine the etymology of 'character', we are taken back to the Greek for 'sharpening', 'furlowing', or 'engraving': the techniques used for imprinting lettering, signs and symbols<sup>105</sup>. Williams explains that the shift in meaning into people came through metaphor, initially with particular reference to the face. He demonstrates through examples from Elizabethan drama:

<sup>104</sup> ...<sup>104</sup> (Eliot 1974: 364) (Daniel Deronda)

<sup>105</sup> Williams 1988: 234).

*'a minde that suites with this thy faire and outward character'*<sup>106</sup>

By the eighteenth century the word had taken on the meaning of 'personality', itself stemming from the Old French 'persone': the masks used by players, or acted 'characters' on stage; while around the same time 'character' began to be used to describe those found in fiction.

The recurrence of the metaphor, from both mask and graphic sign, and with overlap between dramatic or fictional presentation and the possession of a private as well as evident nature, is very striking.

Eliot's impulsive navy, then, is bound up in this metaphorical history; as a hypothetical fictional being he signifies the complexities of both representation of the imagined character, and of the inner workings of actual personal character. Further to this, his brutal act is 'out of character'; motiveless and spontaneous, his behaviour could not have been foreseen, even by those that knew him.

Eliot asks us what it is to know a person and feel able to judge their potential actions. In this question is a real person that we have not yet met, and alongside them is a fictional character. George Eliot, the great 'moral psychologist' endeavouring to merge these figures so closely that from our perspective we can hardly tell the difference between them, searches continually for new ways to represent in fiction the 'character' behind each 'character'.

Phrenology was the first psychology to focus on individual differences, drawing on the natural scientific skills of observation and classification. Throughout her writing career, Eliot was to push her art forward in pursuit of a new 'psychological realism' in response to, and as we shall see, also by way of contribution to, contemporary developments in the study of the human mind.

If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble, but liable to great error – error that is anguish to its nobleness – then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology<sup>107</sup>. This leads us to question what the 'truthful' presentation in art of a 'character' might mean. Eliot's characters are fictional, only existing within the worlds of their novels through her creation; yet her statement implies that it is possible to present a character to the reader in a way which is in some way, not 'truthful'.

If, in a realist novel, the 'truth' is our world, or in this case the Victorian world which Eliot attempts to reproduce, although the characters are entirely imaginary, it is important that we recognise them as people: that they are 'truthful' to the reality of life. To do this, the 'personalities', of fictional characters must appear to be truthful products of the faculties which were thought to combine in forming their minds, so that instead of reading these figures as characters in a book, we feel we ourselves taken into their realities, forming attachments to them as 'people' that we come to 'know'. However, it is the trick of psychological realism which makes us feel attachment, for these 'people' really are only words on a page.

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<sup>106</sup> Shakespeare 1998 - *Twelfth Night*.

<sup>107</sup> Eliot 2004: 385.

Therefore, every physical and psychological trait is, to some extent, calculated for an intended purpose. These major divisions between those who are designed and those who are not, make characters, limited as they are by their powerlessness to replicate the intricacies of the human mind, all the more intriguing when they appear as wonderfully realised, autonomous, and versatile beings, that we can grow extremely attached to.

From our early introduction to this 'problematic sylph' (Eliot 1974: 38) whose character so many pages of a book entitled 'Daniel Deronda' devote to portraying, we are allowed into her 'consciousness'. We see her from many angles in the first chapter alone: through Daniel's perspective, that of our omniscient narrator, subtly merging through into Gwendolen's own thoughts in free indirect style; we hear Gwendolen speak, as well as the characters Mackworth and Mr Vandernoodt speaking about her. In this way we begin to form her image through the outline of physical traits: the *'light-brown hair', 'long narrow eyes', the 'warm paleness' of her complexion, the 'delicate nose with its gradual little upwards curve', 'And then her mouth - there never was a prettier mouth, the lips curl back so finely...'*. Through these come allusions toward her nature. *The paleness of her lips is the sole 'sign of emotion' at the feeling that Daniel is 'examining her as a specimen of the lower order': the absence of a blush becomes an 'inward self-defiance'. The mouth is 'self-complacent', 'as if it knew its own beauty'. Internally she envisions being 'worship[ped] as a goddess'.*

During writes that the characters within Eliot's novel become psychological cases for one another, analysing one other's behaviour constantly. We see them observing each other with intense examination, looking for clues to interpret the mystery of one another's actions in a society where so much is left unsaid: 'expertise is proliferating outside the bounds of institutions, inside a humanism that hopes to exceed them'. It certainly appears that Gwendolen becomes a 'case' for Daniel; he studies her with a deep interest (as does the 'implied reader' with him), which she misinterprets as condescension. Later however, she will submit to his studying her; depend upon the closeness of his attention when she cannot communicate with him otherwise. Later she will think 'I wish he could know everything about me without my telling him' and indeed, he almost does.

Gwendolen's resolve of emotional repression under the awareness of what appears to be Deronda's 'evil eye', drives a 'dominant impulse' to play on at the roulette-table, heedless of her losses. Her display of daring and forced composure, and their ultimate root in vanity, are essential in laying the foundations for Gwendolen's character; for her story requires her to be tragically led by the first of these traits into a life of abject dependency upon the second.

Woman, with her exalted spiritualism, is more forcibly under the control of matter; her sensations are more vivid and acute, her sympathies more irresistible. She is less under the influence of the brain than the uterine system, the plexi of abdominal nerves, and irritation of the spinal cord; in her, a hysteric predisposition is incessantly predominating from the dawn of puberty.

Although undoubtedly 'feminine', Gwendolen subverts the limitations of her gender in several ways. We have already seen self-restraint where emotion might be more of a 'female' inclination. After receiving the letter which informs her that her family have lost their fortune, Gwendolen's immediate reactions are 'deliberate': she sits 'perfectly still, shedding no tears. Her impulse was to survey and resist the situation rather than to wail over it'. Neither does she

feel a feminine abundance of compassion for her mother and sisters. Her emotional response is one of anger, and after a cool analysis of the state of affairs she attempts to gain some control by pawning a necklace inherited from the father she has never known: a surprisingly unsentimental response. In youthful complacency, Gwendolen imagines that she is ready for life, is hungry for exhilaration, disbelieving that severe misfortune could touch her in any real way. 'She had gone to the roulette-table not because of passion, but in search of it; she is driven by the 'lower' propensities:

...Gwendolen felt no check on the animal stimulus that came from the stir and tongue of the hounds, the pawing of the horses, the varying voices of men... that utmost excitement... in feeling something like a combination of dog and horse, with the superadded thrill of social vanities and consciousness of centaur-power which belong to human kind. If the 'equestrian image patterns' surrounding Gwendolen are representations of sexual desire, then it is not here connected with any longing for marriage or male affection, for she 'hates' romantic professions, and equates marriage with constraint on personal freedom, her latent desire is therefore bound up with notions of personal, physical and sexual autonomy.

Gwendolen's social confidence, physical daring, desire to hunt (regardless of prohibition), indifference to others, and craving for personal independence, are not behaviours suited to the virtuous moral 'ideal' of a young female, and are better fitted for the portrayal of a young male. Gwendolen curiously manages to capture the reader's sympathy. The consistency of her negative traits and their collective familiarity allow for her to be vividly realised in a way which justifiably holds our attention, yet less so our compassion.

We might attribute this in part to Gwendolen's physical traits: beauty implying 'correspondence between the psychological, the moral and the physical. Perhaps, aside from the gentle yet firm guidance of Eliot's biased narrator, we are subconsciously lenient towards Gwendolen: captivated in the way that those around her are, or as we ourselves are in life by the beautiful and unexplainably charismatic. We believe from our experience of novels that this character will not betray our trust in her potential for goodness. Gwendolen's character also possesses a small collection of simple and effective inner qualities which work in her favour, such as her naivety, her genuine affection for her mother (if mostly conveyed through compunction), and her strange, deep-seated superstitious terror, expressed in 'fits of spiritual dread. Her limited opportunities as a woman in education and in life also take part responsibility for her narrow perspective, and she herself comments that 'Girls' lives are so stupid'. Pieced together, her traits leave a discerning young woman exceptionally vulnerable in the foolish dream of domination over a man such as Henleigh Grandcourt.

The combination of inexperience and dominant spirit as yet unbridled appear a pleasant acquisition for Grandcourt, and all the more so for Gwendolen's 'proud grace of manner' ; pride, agreeably for him, being valued by her as motivation for the exertion of severe self-control. Once gained physical ownership of, Gwendolen will be psychologically subjugated to the utmost satisfaction of her husband.

*...who can at once describe a human being? Even when he is presented to us we only begin that knowledge of his appearance which must be completed by innumerable*

*impressions under differing circumstances. We recognise the alphabet; we are not sure of the language*<sup>108</sup>.

From his introduction at the opening of Book Two, Grandcourt is presented to us with a vaguely sinister obscurity of nature. During his first conversation with Gwendolen the almost dramatically formatted dialogue is oddly intercepted with pauses, occurring before each utterance Grandcourt makes: this and his affected 'drawl' forcing the other speaker to wait, and pay particular attention to his words. His pauses here are filled for the reader by Gwendolen's internal speculations, revealing her impressions of this unknown man, coloured as they are by her various filters of preconception. Grandcourt generates imaginings of prospective freedom, privilege and adventure in Gwendolen; however, in reality '...his cold and distinguished manners' express little other than his characteristic languid restlessness. These early delineations of character are strengthened by their repetition throughout the course of the novel, and with restrictions to our psychological insight, become shaped by a subtly-distributed vocabulary of terror, creating an alarming power of presence, not lessened by its lack of depth.

Gwendolen and Grandcourt may have appeared to be equal in their separate desires to gain a position of ruling power within the marriage, yet the differences make all the difference; Gwendolen's wilful nature seeks only self-pleasure, whereas Grandcourt's only derivation of pleasure is through merciless oppression: he is the terrifying psychological study of a sadist. 'The core of sadism... is the passion to have absolute and unrestricted control over a living being', and, according to McCarron, this passion is 'generated by the need to compensate for a deep-rooted psychical impotence'. His need to control others then, reflects 'the anxieties of male power', rather than a self-security in it. 'Mastery' is Grandcourt's chief satisfaction, and suited to the brutal white-handed governing of a difficult colony, he exerts easily-won power over his animal subjects, adding his wife to his collection as prize showpiece:

*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*<sup>109</sup>.

Perhaps the most frightening feature in Grandcourt is not his behaviour then, but its effect upon on his new wife. Gwendolen, at twenty-two years old, quite suddenly becomes a shadow of her former exuberance, while her consciousness begins to regularly slip out of the text and into the obscurity of marriage, as her 'self-hood' begins to wane. Within the astonishingly short space of seven weeks, Gwendolen is 'held... by bit and bridle': her animal spirit broken. McCarron interprets the 'sardonic imagery' in Grandcourt's mind of Gwendolen as a horse upon its knees, as presenting 'a clear and illuminating sexual overtone: she has been broken and now must be mounted'. This process of spiritual corrosion is further exacerbated by Gwendolen's self-induced torture, as she endeavours to pay an everlasting penance for having consciously deprived Lydia Glasher and her children of legitimacy. All that is left for Gwendolen is to play out her role using the self-control her pride produces so well. Under the double yoke of Grandcourt and a heavy, secret stain upon her conscience, Gwendolen blindly places all her faith, all her hope, upon a man whose own great influence

<sup>108</sup> (Eliot 1974: 145-146).

<sup>109</sup> Eliot 1974: 365

over her is 'remedy' to the poisoning effects of her husband. Daniel Deronda becomes a moral saviour to Gwendolen:

*He seemed to her a terrible-browed angel from whom she could not think of concealing any deed... it belonged to the nature of their relation that she should be truthful, for his power over her had begun in the raising of a self-discontent which could be satisfied only by genuine change<sup>110</sup>.*

As Deronda will provide this role for Gwendolen through the mutual and tacit connection of consciousness which neither are able to deny, nor yet take full pleasure in, he too searches for a psychological and spiritual broadening; finding his own, unexpected guide, if not through fate then at least through the coincidence of common need. This man has waited to find the right being to whom he will pass on his 'long-wandering soul.

*...he must be an intellectually cultured, morally fervid - in all this a nature ready to be plenished from Mordecai's; but his face and frame must be beautiful and strong, he must have been used to all the refinements of social life, his voice must flow with a full and easy current, his circumstances be free from sordid need..*

Let us attempt to understand Daniel and where his need for this spiritual brother might begin, by returning to an earlier point in the novel. Presented to us in his boyhood, lying among the fallen rose petals, on the grass of his uncle's garden, is a deeply affectionate, intelligent and beautiful child of thirteen. At this tender age of angelic boyhood, when '...there was hardly a delicacy of feeling this lad was not capable of', Daniel is painfully impressed by a sudden self-questioning surrounding his origins. Finding 'relief at length in big, slow tears, which [fall] without restraint', Daniel reveals to us a sensitivity of nature which blurs gender boundaries perhaps equally as radically as the elements of Gwendolen's character which we have already seen. Feminised physically and emotionally by the makeup of his traits, his natural sympathies are enhanced through an aching absence of identity, carried with him as his own filter for understanding others.

Eliot is undoing the gender constructs which hold up Victorian society; expressive sympathy and sensitivity are no more intrinsically 'female' than personal and sexual autonomy are 'male'. By allowing her characters to be limited by traits which do not sit neatly within the gendered guidelines of their repressive culture, we are exposed to the pain caused to individuals through the imposition of such unnatural constraints on a society.

As a conclusion, Education of character draws a recurring thread of thought through Eliot's work; an 'emotional life... constricted by egotism' is 'converted', through the superior influence of another being, to 'transcend the bounds of self'. 'Anagnorisis', or 'recognition', in character development, is in very basic terms the movement 'from not-knowing to knowing'; originating in Aristotle's Poetics, the idea has become an essential process in characterisation for many kinds of modern narrative: for '...complex characters are defined as characters who must develop.

<sup>110</sup> Eliot 1974: 737

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