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GWENDOLEN'S MADNESS

By Marlene Tromp

> Grandcourt threw himself into a chair and said, with undertoned peremptoriness, "Sit down." She, already in the expectation of something unpleasant, had thrown off her burnous with nervous unconsciousness, and immediately obeyed . . . "Oblige me in future by not showing whims like *a mad woman in a play*." (502; ch. 36; emphasis added)

NOVELISTIC HEROINES, like Gwendolen in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, become trapped in a complex network of social contradictions when they face the threat of marital violence in a world where such violence was thought not to exist — the middle and upper classes. Though increasing attention was paid to violence in the Victorian home as the century progressed, pamphlets, studies, and legislative inquiry significantly ommited sustained or systematic scrutiny of violence in the home that existed beyond the bounds of the working classes. Frances Power Cobbe's important essay, "Wife Torture in England," sought to raise public awareness about marital violence and to stimulate interest in protective legislation for the victims. Yet, in spite of Cobbe's willingness to consider the possibility that some "gentlemen" might be guilty of abuse, she presents the phenomenon of wife abuse as safely distant from the comfortable quarters of the middle and upper classes, asserting that "the dangerous wife-beater belongs almost exclusively to the artisan and labouring classes" (55). In the debates surrounding the passage of the Divorce Act of 1857, Parliament repeatedly made apparent their belief that middle- and upper-class men could not be a danger to their wives by focusing exclusively on marital violence as a working-class issue. Only in "the humbler ranks of life [was] some prompt remedy" necessary; only "poor women" were conceived of as sufferers of violence at the hands of their husbands (*Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., 145 [25 May 1857], col. 801–02). Popular public discourse still characterized the middle and upper classes as a safe haven for gentlewomen, but, as we know from the case of Caroline Norton, for example, whose public letters to the Queen detailed the abuse she suffered,[1] the traditional social codes that demanded gentlemanly behavior often failed to protect women of the leisured classes.

In *Daniel Deronda* the contradictions between conceptions of social class and marital violence leave Gwendolen searching for ways in which to renegotiate her understanding of social reality, to "justify" her fear of her icy suitor turned cruel husband, Henleigh Grandcourt. However, her family and her confidant Daniel Deronda rebuff her, urging

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her to take what they consider reasonable steps, returning her to a polite social discourse that frustrates her understanding of this strained intimate relationship. Ultimately unable to comprehend her situation or respond to the discomfort she feels within her marriage, Gwendolen seeks radical measures of coming to terms with her fear, crossing the boundaries of "reasonable" conduct and escaping into sensationalized, performative madness, a gesture that expresses the tensions between decorous social convention and her material experience. Although this method is not unequivocally successful for Gwendolen,[2] it provides an interrogation of the discourse of "reason" as a means for Gwendolen to understand her world, and, by the novel's end, an analogous interrogation of "realism" as a generic strategy in the presentation of the narrative, that expose the denial of violence in "genteel" marriages.

In their analyses of Gwendolen and Henleigh's marriage, many critics have overlooked the historical framework that I have sketched above which makes realism and violence incompatible terms, and have argued that the union fails because of Gwendolen's inadequacies or choices, citing her mental health, the lack of substance in her character, or mercenary nature of the marriage she makes. However, Gwendolen desperately seeks other options and is left with no "reasonable" paths in her life but those she unhappily follows until she breaks from the frame of reason. Similarly, though critical literature generally defines Henleigh as a villain, it neglects the significance of his submerged yet very real threat to Gwendolen, an element of their relationship that becomes pivotal not only to understanding Gwendolen, but to understanding the significance of violence, madness, and performance in the novel as a whole.[3] An analysis of the complex series of associations in this novelistic relationship opens up new ways of addressing an entire corpus of literature concerning "unsatisfactory" marriages in the Victorian era.

Although Gwendolen is not victimized by the brutal batterings that haunt representations of working-class characters in many novels of unhappy marriages, she is tyrannized by the ways Henleigh manipulates and threatens her, holding over her the cloaked threat of physical violence. In fact, she initially rejects Henleigh's cold and dispassionate suit and flees — despite his anticipated wealth and social prestige — in part due to a prescient apprehension of him and in part to her discovery that he has a lover and four children. However, when her family is suddenly stricken with poverty after a failed financial investment and her aspirations of securing a satisfying position or pursuing a professional career in acting are squelched, she relents. Gwendolen marries Henleigh and embarks on a life in which she utterly sacrifices her petulant authority and bends to the subtle and severe commands of her husband.[4] Wishing him dead for cruelties she cannot articulate — particularly to Daniel Deronda who demands strict adherence to a moral law based on reason — she believes herself to have murdered Henleigh by supernaturally making her "wish [appear] outside [her]" (761; ch. 56). Thus, through a narrative culminating in what has been called a sensational "murder," Eliot reveals social contradictions that should call into question our stiff critical distinction between the sensational fiction that is often described as the counterpoint to Eliot's novels and social realism, as well as popular notions of Victorian domesticity that denied violence in the ranks of the elite. Eliot exposes the danger in Henleigh's silence, making the violence that Gwendolen and her society seem unable to articulate in the polite language of reason and realism flood into that discourse by the novel's close.

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We first see evidence of these contradictions in Henleigh's characterization. Although he has fathered several children with a married woman and fails to legitimize them when granted the opportunity, even Gwendolen's uncle, the punctilious Rector of Pennicote, can find no fault in Henleigh's behavior. "Whatever Grandcourt had done, he had not ruined himself; and it is well known that. . . a man who has the strength of mind to leave off when he has only ruined others, is a reformed character" (125; ch. 9). Further, Eliot emphasizes Henleigh's hatred of the appearance of violence, particularly in relationship with the women in his life. As he engages in a frustrating discussion with his former lover, Lydia Glasher, the narrator notes that "there was nothing [Henleigh] hated more than to be forced into anything like violence even in words: his will must impose itself without trouble" (396; ch. 30). His refusal to elevate his voice, his determination to behave within the bounds of decency by providing liberally for his lover and their children, and his generosity in granting Gwendolen all that a woman of her debased stature "could expect" seem to mark his propriety in all arenas. Indeed, the narrative defines Henleigh in ways that are antithetical to the social and legal characterization of a violent, and thus inevitably working-class, man.[5] However, Eliot exposes Henleigh's cruelty and violence through a critique of his rational and calm behavior and the discourse of reason that advocates and screens it.

Through Gwendolen's tortured articulations, Eliot dismantles reason and composure as blinds for violence, drawing to the surface the contradictions Gwendolen experiences between reason and her sensations. Eliot pairs Gwendolen's unexplained terror about her relationship to Henleigh in affectively oppositional terms, denaturalizing the social concepts that shore up a barrier between marriage and upper-class violence. The first instance appears when Gwendolen realizes that Henleigh means to propose; she feels "rather pleased, and yet afraid" at his interest (170; ch. 13). This tension becomes more clear when Henleigh seizes an opportunity to see her alone. In this moment, Gwendolen displays a discomfort she cannot rationally define, snatching up her whip "automatically," "giving a harder grasp to the handle." As Henleigh steers toward a marriage proposal, Eliot offers up this startlingly direct deconstruction of the tensions in their relationship.

> "You do care, then" said Grandcourt. . . . "Ha! my whip!" said Gwendolen, in a little scream of distress. She had let it go — what could be *more natural* in a slight agitation? — *and* — *but* this seemed *less natural* in a gold-handled whip which had been left altogether to itself — it had gone with some force over the immediate shrubs. . . . She could run down now, laughing prettily, and Grandcourt was obliged to follow; but she was beforehand with him in rescuing the whip, and continued on her way to the level ground, when she paused and looked at Grandcourt with an exasperating brightness in her glance and a heightened colour, as if she had carried a triumph. (172; ch. 13; emphasis added)

The strange conjunction of conjunctions, "what could be more natural in a slight agitation? — and — but this seemed less natural," emphasizes the tensions in what is "natural" in this moment. Gwendolen's (unusual) inability to manage a socially appropriate gesture to abate her discomfort leaves her awkwardly "escaping" Henleigh. Gwendolen simply has no "natural" formula to which to resort in order to dissipate her fear — nor a reasonable explanation to justify it.

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When she receives a note that indicates he is coming to propose marriage, Gwendolen wonders whether it was "triumph she felt most or terror" (337; ch. 26). Ironically, when faced with making a marriage that social wisdom dictates is appropriate, moral, and desirable, Gwendolen begins to feel terror — not horror, disgust, or confusion, but *terror*. The mingling of these terms, the blending of the seeming contradictions, terror and triumph, pleasure and fear, collapses the naturalized distinction between them. This collapse metonymically represents Eliot's critique of the frail social boundaries that safely frame sexual violence well outside of propriety.

These contradictions appear within Henleigh himself as well, exposing the violence Henleigh's demeanor seems to deny, indicating the problematic status of "reason" and "realism" in general. Gwendolen's fear of Henleigh derives in part from what Eliot describes as his "two remarkably different voices" (162; ch. 12). One is a "superficial interrupted drawl suggestive chiefly of languor and *ennui*," the other, evoking the "sleepy-eyed animal on watch for prey," is one of "subdued, inward, yet distinct tones, which [his intimates would] recognize as the expression of a peremptory will" (162; ch. 12). It is, in fact, his "public" voice of *ennui* that first attracts Gwendolen. The only characteristics she points out to her mother to define her acceptance of his advances revolve around his speech. "He is quiet and *distingué*," she remarks with gravity (175; ch. 13).

Henleigh's public reticence, however, operates much differently than the simple absence of commanding speech. Even before they marry, the effects of what remains publicly unspoken transform Gwendolen. She gives up the animation characteristic of her own speech, becoming mute in Henleigh's presence. Her mother notices an unusual lack of satire, in fact, a "total silence about his characteristics" (167; ch. 13), in Gwendolen's discussions of Henleigh. Further, Gwendolen herself notices that he "caused her unusual constraint [. . . and] that she was less daring and playful in her talk with him than any other admirer she had known" (173; ch. 13). During his proposal, Gwendolen finds difficulty in expressing herself, and at the moment of his offer, she "remained quite pale . . . and with her hands folded before her stood in silence" (347; ch. 27). She realizes that Henleigh has left her no room for any other answer but "yes," and "wait as long as she would, how could she contradict herself? What had she detained him for? He had shut out any explanation. 'Yes' came as gravely from Gwendolen's lips as if she had been answering to her name in a court of justice" (348; ch. 27). Henleigh's request seems entirely reasonable; she would not only contradict herself, but her culture, indeed, the entire system of reason around which her culture operates. Not only is Henleigh forcing her to say "yes," but for a rational, reasoning person within this frame, there simply is no other answer.

As Gwendolen becomes increasingly silenced and her answers to Henleigh's questions formulate *his* desired responses, his private voice becomes increasingly apparent to her. However, his speech all along remains subdued, inward, not conspicuously harsh, not triggering the social cues of violence. Instead, even Henleigh's "gentle" speech becomes a threat to Gwendolen. "His words had the power of thumbscrews and the cold touch of the rack" (745; ch. 54). We see the first evidence of his dangerous speech after the couple is married. Henleigh wishes Gwendolen to wear the family diamonds his former lover, Lydia, has sent to her. Lydia has secretly enclosed an acidic critique of Gwendolen and of the marriage she promised Lydia she would not make. Overcome with horror and guilt, Gwendolen protests to Henleigh that she does not wish to wear the jewels.

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> "What you think has nothing to do with it," said Grandcourt, his *sotto voce* imperiousness seeming to have an evening quietude and finish, like his toilet. "I wish you to wear the diamonds."
>
> "Pray excuse me; I like these emeralds," said Gwendolen, frightened in spite of her preparation. That white hand of his which was touching his whiskers was capable, she fancied, of clinging around her neck and threatening to throttle her; for her fear of him . . . had reached a superstitious point. (481; ch. 35)

His language has the polish and icy composure of his appearance, betraying nothing within the frame of their cultural morés, yet infusing Gwendolen with not simply a vague fear, but an emotion, that, although impossible to justify with his literal comments, fills her with a dread of losing her life. Eliot uses this tension to point up the difficulties of its representation within the frame of reason, and thus, realism. Gwendolen's fear becomes one of "superstition" because she cannot contain it within the linguistic frame she understands as reality. Ultimately, Gwendolen comes to understand that "she had neither devices at her command to determine his will, nor any rational means of escaping it" (480; ch. 35). The language of reason provides her with no way of skirting his fusion of gentility and violence; her understanding of his abuse and her fear seem unspeakable within these bounds. "The sort of truth that made any excuse for her anger could not be uttered" (743; ch. 54). Further, although Gwendolen grows to recognize more and more clearly that Henleigh has her on the "rack" (745; ch. 54), Eliot emphasizes that her dumbness does not result from lack of feeling, but an inability to articulate the horrors she feels. The epigraph to Chapter 54, in which Gwendolen and Henleigh embark on an excursion alone together, serves to highlight Gwendolen's frustrated silence:

> The unwilling brain
> Feigns often what it would not; and we trust
> Imagination with such phantasies
> As the tongue dares not fashion into words;
> Which have no words, their horror makes them dim
> to the mind's eye.
>
> –Shelley.

The horrors, which remain unspoken, remain dim. They become inaccessible and silent, embodied in fantasies, feelings, and sensation. If there were any doubts as to what these horrors might be, the narrator follows with an account of Madonna Pia, "whose husband . . . got rid of her [amid the swampy flats of the Maremma]" (731; ch. 54). This woman, the narrator explains, "makes a pathetic figure in Dante's Purgatory," and she encourages us to "infer with some confidence that the husband had never been a very delightful companion." The narrator introduces Gwendolen into this chronicle by suggesting the reader should feel even more sympathetic toward Gwendolen than Madonna Pia because Gwendolen remains undelivered from her tormentor's presence and suffers "inward torture" (731–732; ch. 54). Gwendolen feels the sway of his authority and rationalizes her inward torture as the product of the fact that "she had sold herself . . . had sold her truthfulness and sense of justice, so that [Henleigh] held them throttled into silence, collared and dragged behind him to witness what he would, without remonstrance" (733; ch. 54). Gwendolen's truthfulness and sense of justice have been sacrificed not to Henleigh,

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however, but to the contradictions she cannot identify in his behavior. Gwendolen only understands that she hates him, a hatred, Eliot informs us, of the most intense variety, a hatred "rooted in fear" (737; ch. 54).

As Ann Cvetkovich argues in *Mixed Feelings*, sensation pivots on affect, on the private and personalized. I would add that the sensation narratives that preceded *Daniel Deronda* use sensationalism (as a literary formula) and sensation (as the affective expression of dissonance) to draw the private into public discourse, exposing how the conventions of reason and realism camouflage intrafamilial violence. Once articulated, sensation provides a rhetoric for introducing these issues into convention, offering a framework for the material experience of women who could not describe their fears otherwise. This narrative delineates the tensions and fears associated with impossible realities, such as non-working-class violence, as "ghosts." Images that terrify, these ghosts remain outside the bounds of reason.[6] By employing this metaphor, Eliot indicates the marginalization of themes that were only vaguely visible in contemporary social and legal discourse. The sensational then becomes its own vehicle, and like the ghosts, briefly materializes the mystical and scandalous into "reality." This metaphor also denotes the ephemeral and diaphanous nature of the concepts with which Gwendolen struggles, in Henleigh's polite violence, and more generally, in the potential for violence in an upper-class home. Ghostly spirits, then, although external to "realism," actually buttress Henleigh's attempts to control Gwendolen. Here, the narrative voice affirms the tensions that Gwendolen's limited comprehension of her situation seems to unearth. She cannot avoid "the nightmare of fear" he imposes; she could neither rebel nor speak, even outside of his presence, for "[h]er husband had a ghostly army at his back, that could close round her wherever she might turn" (503; ch. 36). It is in this form that the unspeakable specter of gendered violence haunts the novel, and the laws and social conventions that ensure its secrecy exist as a "ghostly army" to sustain Henleigh's position and to keep Gwendolen in a state of terrified submission.

Despite her desire to flee Henleigh or to act according to her own will, she cannot defy these ghosts, bowing to the reasonable considerations that dimly, imperceptibly, and yet implacably, require her to stay in this dangerous situation. When Gwendolen considers leaving Henleigh, she anticipates resistance on several levels: her rector uncle "would tell her to go back. Her mother would cry. Her aunt and Anne would look at her with wondering alarm. Her husband would [legally and indeed physically] have the power to compel her" (665; ch. 48). The spirits that sustain this ideology rise up whenever Gwendolen experiences the threat of Henleigh's violent behavior or the allied cultural structures that support it. For instance, when Mr. Lush informs her of Henleigh's intention of providing handsomely for Lydia and their children in his will, her "words were no better than chips" and she could only perceive "Lush [as] getting merged in a crowd of other feelings, dim and alarming as a crowd of ghosts" (662; ch. 48). Their dimness does not, however, diminish their authority, and Gwendolen feels their threat as much as she does Henleigh's. Henleigh's will, like his legal Will, still becomes the law, entrenched in a misogyny that callously determines her future.

When Sir Hugo, Henleigh's uncle and Daniel's guardian, remarks that the ghosts of the past generations lie in their homes, Gwendolen replies, "It is very nice to come after ancestors and monks, but they should know their places and keep underground. I should be rather frightened to go about this house all alone. I suppose the old generations must be angry with us because we have altered things so much" (461; ch. 35). The heritage of

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legal and religious sanctions that make Henleigh's behavior possible lies at the foundation of his actions, keeping Gwendolen always terrified. Further, these ghosts become ominous when faced with the possibility of change, any shift in the ministrations of their authority or any attempt on Gwendolen's part to defy them. As long as Henleigh remains within the bounds of propriety and reason, her resistance to his abuse would draw this ghostly army down upon her from all its quarters: religious, social, and legal.

Even Henleigh himself becomes a ghostly vision to her. She recognizes that her desire to eliminate him from her life leaves her with images that "instead of freedom, [offer up a] palsy of a new terror — a white dead face from which she was for ever trying to flee and for ever held back" (738; ch. 54). His absence will not erase her fear of the sway he holds over her, because the power to command such authority does not lie solely within Henleigh, but in the battalion that stands all around her and at his sides. Even if she were alone, she would remain within the same frame, "for ever held back" in this world of confusion, with ghostly boundaries and blurred signifiers. After he dies, Gwendolen remarks that she "will never get away from [his dead, white face]" (753; ch. 56). Daniel, Gwendolen's confidant and the unhappy attendant to this lament, wonders whether Gwendolen makes these comments because she is experiencing reality "through an exaggerating medium of excitement and horror . . . in a state of delirium" (753; ch. 56). Strictly bound to reason, Daniel cannot conceive of the things Gwendolen attempts to articulate. When she turns to him in desperation, the only response he offers her despite her "helpless misery" is a dictate that plays directly on the terror Gwendolen feels for Henleigh and the "natural" reassertion of authority for which Daniel longs:[7] "Confess everything to your husband; leave nothing concealed" (673; ch. 48).[8]

Despite Daniel's understanding that Gwendolen feels despondent and afraid, along with his recognition that Henleigh's "private deportment" lies at the heart of her unhappiness, Daniel urges Gwendolen back into her husband's authority when she contemplates escape. Since Daniel is her only confidant and her last guidepost to reality, his injunctions haunt her like those of Henleigh himself. She even feels his directives in her dreams. She "felt herself escaping over the Mount Cenis, and wondering to find it warmer even in the moonlight on the snow, till suddenly she met Deronda, who told her to go back" (740; ch. 54) — back to Henleigh and his abuse, back to her enforced submission, back within the law. Further, Gwendolen's fear of Henleigh after his death seems absurd to Daniel because he can only vaguely acknowledge the threat Henleigh poses in the first place. Gwendolen's remarks resistantly reassert her notions of another reality. "Sometimes I thought he would kill *me* if I resisted his will. But now — his dead face is there and I cannot bear it" (758; ch. 56). She must live in terror for the rest of her life; his absence does not erase his ghostly authority, just as his silence did not indicate a lack of signification. Therefore, Gwendolen may only come to understand this non-rational language, to comprehend her fears as legitimate, through a seemingly mad and sensational performance.

The culminating moments of the novel are not the only points at which Gwendolen's fears are defined as superstitious and outside the realm of rationality. Early in the novel, her family discovers a "picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms" behind a locked panel (56; ch. 3). More than simply foreshadowing Gwendolen's flight from Henleigh's dead, upturned face, this image demonstrates Gwendolen's dread of the ghostly faces that hover around her before she meets Henleigh. Later, during a play Gwendolen has orchestrated, the panel flies open

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and Gwendolen becomes terrified. She "fell on her knees and put her hands before her face. She was still trembling, but mute, and it seemed that she had self-consciousness enough to aim at controlling her signs of terror" (92; ch. 6). The terror, that appears here as it does in her relationship with Henleigh,[9] seems to the audience to derive from "spirits" and "myster[y]." The narrator's rational explanation of the exposure of the ghosts at a peak in sensation — Gwendolen's performance of the performance of Hermione — doesn't dissipate the mystery and terror surrounding the ghostly face. Significantly, even after learning of her sibling's tampering with the panel, the event still "seemed [to Gwendolen] like a brief remembered madness" (94; ch. 6).

Her foray into this "brief remembered madness" offers Gwendolen the possibility of understanding Henleigh's cruelties. Forced to view life through the "window" of Henleigh's oppression, through "a piece of yellow and wavy glass that distorts form and makes colour an affliction" (736; ch. 54), Gwendolen rejects the frame both Henleigh and Daniel provide and, along with it, the discourse of reason they embody. In this rejection, Gwendolen rejects an epistemology that grants reason sway. Entering a marginal space of sensationalism, Gwendolen disrupts the boundaries of reason and performs an identity that cannot be contained by the strictures of this realm. Like Gwendolen, other women in the novel[10] find reprieve from the "distortion" of their lives by engaging in a mingling of sensation and reality as well. For Gwendolen and Lydia, Henleigh's jilted lover, a radical recontextualization of reality — a shattering of this yellow window — even to the point of performing madness[11] shifts the terms of their situations and grants them a modicum of control over their relationship with Henleigh and perhaps a way in which to comprehend the tensions of their culture. Though clearly not an unequivocally propitious construction of female identity,[12] these characters' excursions into performance allow them a wider range of tolerated behavior. As long as the "madness" is always perceived as sensational performance, they may gain some ground.[13] In such scenes, Eliot interrogates the ways performance offers women a potentially subversive, if dangerous, alternative to silence.[14]

Early in the novel, we are offered the first connection between women's fear, madness, performance, and a resultant escape. When Gwendolen plays Hermione in a tableau in her home and the portrait of the dead face so insistently associated with Henleigh is exposed, Eliot relates the visible but unspoken terror of death in the context of a woman's performance.[15] Later, when Gwendolen performs the performing woman, she drops to her knees at the sight of the portrait in real fear, fear that has the effect of legitimizing her performance to her audience and ironically exposing a delegitimized terror. When Gwendolen speaks of this performance with her mother prior to its staging, she compares herself to Rachel, the great Victorian actress, and remarks that "the more feminine a woman is, the more tragic it seems when she does desperate actions." Her mother expresses dismay at this "unnatural" coupling of terms, and their ensuing conversation sheds light on the significance of these concepts:

> "Oh mamma, you are so dreadfully prosaic! As if all the great poetic criminals were not women! . . . "
>
> "Well, dear, and you — who are afraid to be alone in the night — I don't think you would be very bold in crime, thank God."
>
> "I am not talking about *reality*, mamma," said Gwendolen, impatiently. (84–85; ch. 6; emphasis added)

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Gwendolen's alignment with the (in)famous Victorian actress, Rachel, an identification she is later urged to abandon when she hopes to escape marriage to Henleigh, evokes images of an independence and autonomy that few women of the period besides the actress enjoyed (a phenomenon mirrored in Daniel's mother, Leonora). Further, the fact that Rachel's betrayal of social boundaries occurred during performance guarded her character (here, clearly a loaded term).[16] Significantly, Gwendolen suggests that her own facility at manipulating her performance while maintaining her femininity and defying cultural strictures surpasses even Rachel's. Thus, although critics have called the performance of this tableau Gwendolen's "fail[ure]" (Stokes 788), it instead provides a method that will grant her with an occasional means of resistance, of reconfiguration. To this end, Gwendolen urges her mother to look beyond reality, into performance — into the sensational, for a space in which she might become a poetic criminal. This gesture grants her that status not for the wishful "murder" of her husband but for her willingness to draw this sensational scene into her culture's jealously guarded reality.[17] The "brief remembered madness" (94; ch. 6) Gwendolen associates with this tableau is the form these performances most often take in the novel.

The first explicit performance of madness that gives a woman mastery over Henleigh occurs when he informs his lover Lydia that he has decided to marry another woman and to retain the family diamonds of which she had been in possession. Lydia initially responds with anger and bitterness, and when she lashes out with a venomous critique, Henleigh remarks severely, "I advise you not to say that sort of thing again . . . things that you will repent of" (394; ch. 30). As long as they remain within the realm of ordinary social discourse, Lydia must maintain the same silence that stifles and bewilders Gwendolen. Despite the fact that Henleigh's treatment of Lydia is like the torture of "the thumb-screw and the iron-boot" (392; ch. 30), she fears to respond. She "knew her helplessness and shrank from testing it by any appeal — shrank from crying in a dead ear. . . . She did not weep nor speak" (392; ch. 30). As his assault continues, like a "surgical operation" (394; ch. 30), "[s]he dare[s] not answer" (393; ch. 30).

Placed in this painful impasse, Lydia bends to the contradictory impulses that pervade the novel and finds herself embodying "the one suicidal form of threat within her power" (397; ch. 30). When she begins to speak, exploiting the excess of sensation and defying reason,[18] Henleigh quickly responds, attempting to overpower this posture that threatens to betray the ideology on which his authority is based: "Of course, if you like, you can play the mad woman" (397; ch. 30). However, it is in precisely this instance that Henleigh does not gain his will. Lydia "madly" offers to deliver the diamonds to Gwendolen herself, to exact her revenge against Gwendolen, refusing to give them up to Henleigh as he demands. Henleigh "remain[s] silent without turning his eyes upon her" (397; ch. 30) and eventually realizes that he cannot move her when she does not stand on his ground. She forces him to exchange his brutal speech for an empty, impotent silence when he remarks, "What is the use of talking to mad people?" Lydia's behavior after this comment only serves to cement his notion that he must grant her wish.

> "Yes, I am foolish — loneliness has made me foolish — indulge me." Sobs rose as she spoke. "If you will indulge me in this one folly, I will be very meek — I will never trouble you." She burst into hysterical crying, and said again almost with a scream — "I will be very meek after that."

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> There was a *strange mixture of acting and reality* in this passion. . . . Even Grandcourt was wrought upon by surprise: this capricious wish, this childish violence, was as unlike Lydia's bearing as it was incongruous with her person. (398; ch. 30; emphasis added)

Lydia's foray into performative madness, into a paradoxical behavior, leaves Henleigh without access to his formidable arsenal of torturous language and behavior. Exposing and contrived by the tensions between gentility and violence, her language, her hysteria, her protestations, shift her from the realm of rationality and reason in which Henleigh has so successfully operated. Although she recognizes the potentially "suicidal" danger involved in speaking against Henleigh, the novel makes clear the power of this language to reshape her situation. The narrator proclaims of Lydia's language in a remark of Biblical gravity: "the word had been spoken" (396; ch. 30), and the significance of her speech is not lost on Henleigh. With an agitated sense of fear, he orders her, "Be quiet, and hear what I tell you" (398; ch. 30). Henleigh serves as the representative of his culture's failure to reconcile the wealthy man with the violent man, but in this contradiction, Lydia finds a space in which she can resist Henleigh's will, a contradiction of her own. He must reassert his authority by silencing her threatening speech and insisting on his verbal command of the conversation. Despite this re-establishment of his authority (which very well could have saved her from the asylum), Lydia gains her point and Henleigh grants her the right to deliver the diamonds to Gwendolen as she chooses.

Henleigh departs from Lydia with the "baffling sense that he had to deal with something like madness [in which] he could only govern by giving way" (399; ch. 30). Lydia's performance, "the strange mixture of acting and reality," impresses Henleigh with "a sense of imperfect mastery" (399; ch. 30). Through this discussion, Eliot offers us a key to understanding both that which is incomprehensible in Gwendolen's terror and the method by which Lydia and, ultimately, Gwendolen herself begin to challenge Henleigh's successful formula of control. In abandoning themselves to the contradictory realities that plagues them, they themselves move beyond the conventionally real and into the sensational, a move, that in the final scenes of the novel, the narrator identifies as a means of managing these tensions.

Gwendolen initially becomes infected with this "madness" when Lydia communicates it to her as a result of her triumph with Henleigh. Lydia's "madness," her "strange mixture of acting and reality," is conveyed to Gwendolen with the jewels Lydia has promised to deliver. Lydia includes a letter with the diamonds that arrive for Gwendolen on her wedding day. The note contains a bitter curse whose effect is surprisingly mixed. Initially, the jewels seem to carry only negativity, in spite of the fact that they announce a rise in her position and her movement out of the poverty for which she had been destined: "[t]ruly here were poisoned gems, and the poison had entered into this poor young creature" (407; ch. 31). This poison, like madness, leaves Gwendolen "scream[ing] again and again with hysterical violence" at the sight of her new husband (407; ch. 31), a scene that clearly unnerves Henleigh.[19] In fact, he believes that it must either be "madness" or "the Furies [who] had crossed his threshold" (407; ch. 31). The unmanaged eruption of madness fostered by the jewels, however, also foreshadows a pattern that evolves out of the contradictions Gwendolen experiences in her relationship with Henleigh, a pattern that will become Gwendolen's more intentional management of what Henleigh will perceive as performed "madness," and a pattern that will again challenge his authority.

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Gwendolen employs this performative madness, just as Lydia had, to achieve ascendancy over Henleigh only when she understands "that she had neither devices at her command to determine his will, nor any *rational* means of escaping it" (480; ch 35; emphasis added). She must lose her engagement with rationality to gain any safety or autonomy in her relationship with Henleigh (as she earlier loses her whip to gain safety when caught in the contradictions between her fears and Henleigh's proposal). Her fear of him, her sense that "his eyes showed a delight in torturing her" (481; ch. 35), leaves her with the alternative that Eliot fashions here — to take means other than those that are reasonable to escape. Madness *is* this absence of reason that Gwendolen performs when her gendered script leaves her no alternative within reality to gain her desires.[20]

Gwendolen embodies this madness at the crises in her relationship with Henleigh, and, again, it plays out in relation to Gwendolen's jewels. Many of the elements of this scene evoke the earlier one in which Gwendolen had collapsed hysterically after reading Lydia's clandestine note (nestled with the necklace) that marked Gwendolen's new position as Henleigh's wife. Gwendolen, like Lydia, uses her jewels to communicate furtively, and like Lydia, speaks through them her resistance to the position in which she has been placed by Henleigh — a resistance that Henleigh again perceives as performative madness. When she desires to communicate with Daniel against Henleigh's wishes, she chooses to wear a necklace that she had lost gambling and that Daniel had redeemed for her, rather than the dazzling family diamonds that might be expected in her first public appearance as his wife. Despite the fact that she "[d]ared not to offend her husband, . . . [she was] determined to wear the memorial necklace somehow" (495; ch. 36), and her determination both communicates her will and resists Henleigh's — an end she achieves by moving outside the realm of "reasonable" behavior. A bauble unbefitting her new rank and station, Gwendolen's unpretentious trinket not only adorns her at the grand dinner party and ball, which, in and of itself, would have been bizarre, but she also winds it around her wrist in a clumsy fashion that was "necessarily conspicuous" (499; ch. 36). Finally, when she and her husband returned to their room

> Grandcourt threw himself into a chair and said, with undertoned peremptoriness, "Sit down." She, already in the expectation of something unpleasant, had thrown off her burnous with nervous unconsciousness, and immediately obeyed . . . "Oblige me in future by not showing whims like a mad woman in a play." (502; ch. 36)

Gwendolen has achieved a successful performance of madness, which, although leaving her chastised, permits her to behave as she desires. She communicates with Daniel by visually performing her message for him; she converses despite the fact that Henleigh demands her silence. Henleigh informs her that, like Lydia, she must "not make a spectacle of [herself]" (503; ch. 36). If her performance of madness must occur, she must take care to avoid sliding from the margins she's playing on and into the behavior that would "justify" his use of the asylum, emotional or physical abuse. "You are my wife. And you will either fill your place properly — to the world and to me — or you will go to the devil" (503; ch. 36).[21]

Not only does a performance of madness serve to give Gwendolen a trace of fleeting autonomy, but it also provides her with the means of comprehending her situation. Her performed madness in this frame indicates the blurring of the boundaries between her

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terror and social propriety, between the real and the sensational. If Gwendolen can fracture the barriers that separate these two worlds, she can conceive of Henleigh's violence. Within sensation, understanding Henleigh's behavior as violence, despite his class, wealth, and composure, becomes possible. Only when Gwendolen remains confined to these traditional frames does she have difficulty in identifying Henleigh's behavior as cruel. For example, Gwendolen's desire to be separated from Henleigh seems unreasonable to her in the realm of the rational. "Search as she would in her consciousness, she found no plea to justify a plaint" (659; ch. 48). If she remains within the bounds of reason, "[s]he had absolutely nothing that she could allege against him in judicious or judicial ears" (665; ch. 48). Being unable to name them in "real" speech, acknowledging the impossibility of addressing them within the historical framework she has been given, Gwendolen retreats to the only other means available: sensation, a play of madness.

Ultimately, this madness aids in freeing her from Henleigh, and, again, the narrative draws together Gwendolen's limited vision of predicament in which she has been placed with the wider vision of the narrator, wedding Gwendolen's madness to literary sensationalism. On their first and last voyage together, they are forced to dock in Genoa, where unbeknownst to them, Daniel is visiting his mother. Once they learn of Daniel's presence, Henleigh refuses to allow Gwendolen any solitude or freedom, taking her out on a small sailboat with him to prevent her from seeing Daniel. Gwendolen's hatred of Henleigh along with her fear that "her life was a sailing and sailing away" (760; ch. 56) initiates the novel's most "unnatural" melding of sensation and reality. As Vrettos notes, Eliot frames this final scene as a (melo)drama: "the scene was as good as a theatrical representation for all beholders" (*Daniel Deronda* 745; ch. 54). It culminates in Gwendolen's "dread" of Henleigh (761; ch. 56) and a wish that he were dead. At this crisis, and in absolute isolation, she begins to behave madly again. "'I think we shall go on always like the Flying Dutchman' said Gwendolen wildly" (746; ch. 54). When she later relates the narrative to Daniel, she affirms that she "did not want to die" herself: "I was afraid of being drowned together. I knew no way of killing him there, but I did, I did kill him in my thoughts" (760; ch. 56). Gwendolen believes that Henleigh, knocked overboard by the sail and drowned, was a victim of a sensationally magic wish for his death.

> [T]he evil longings, the evil prayers came again and blotted everything else dim, till, in the midst of them — I don't know how it was — he was turning the sail — there was a gust — he was struck — I know nothing — I only know that I saw my wish outside me. . . . [T]here 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. (761; ch. 56)

As she describes this moment to Daniel, Gwendolen becomes increasingly silent, "submerged by the weight of memory which no [reasonable] words could represent" (760; ch. 56). Even the next day, she remained in fear, that was "hindering" her talk, and only offered facial expressions that "did not issue in speech" (763; ch. 57). Gwendolen cannot speak about the sensational madness that makes it possible for her to *imagine* Henleigh to death, nor can she return to her normal "well[ness] and calm," as Daniel orders (766; ch. 57). The narrative voice alternately sensationalizes and naturalizes this event, consistently blurring sensation and realism, and thus "enabling" Gwendolen to perform the most radical act she can against her husband: murder.

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Significantly, the critical reluctance to examine the violence in this novel may be linked to Eliot's generic classification as a social realist and the dearth of literature on the link between non-working class violence and Victorian reality.[22] The novel's denouement has been called "sensational" perhaps because of its direct interrogation of violence and an angry woman's response, a prominent theme in sensational fiction; but if we examine the entire text as an analysis of the presence of sensationalism in reality, the exploration of a wider range of topics becomes possible, rendering Gwendolen's "madness," and upper-class cruelty, visible in the interstices of polite discourse.

Perceiving sensation as a means of reading these texts offers us a new lens on the narrative complications of this novel and, potentially, others. Eliot points up the necessity of analyzing the text in these terms by noting that Henleigh's life is "so little suggestive of drama" that Gwendolen has difficulty imagining that any sensational or dangerous situations might occur behind the facade of his polite discourse. However, the reader can disclose that which lies behind the barriers of decorum by examining the tensions in the novel. Without this lens, Henleigh's behavior and explicit language remain beyond reproach. The narrator tells us that although Henleigh's conduct does not "seem black in mere statement," something in his motives circulates outside the language in which he communicates, something that might reveal the "blackness" that he conceals. The reader, in fact, must map Henleigh's cruelty by indicators that lie outside of his explicit, normative persona and outside realism. Further, since Gwendolen's "inward torture is disproportionate to what is discernible as outward cause" (732; ch. 53), we must expand our examination beyond the outwardly discernable to learn the cause of Gwendolen's anguish. Critical readers in search of an understanding of Victorian marital violence and all the novels that depict painful marriages among the elite classes must risk the same intrusion of the sensational into their comprehension of reality to read those themes that have been obscured. We must follow the signals that Eliot lays out, examining her incorporation of the images and methods of the sensation novel into her realism.

The vector of drama and fiction, along with the concept of sensation, decodes the blurred boundaries that this culture manufactures in order to screen marital violence. Within the novel lies a discourse of performance and reality that collapses the framework that would classify them separately. Gwendolen's "yeasty mingling of dimly understood facts with vague but deep impressions, and with images half real, half fantastic" (402; ch. 31) furnishes the reader with a clue to the space in which this language must be rendered and understood. It is within the half real and half fantastic that we must direct our inquiry in order to comprehend the novel and the violence of characters like Henleigh and the response of those like Gwendolen, indeed to begin to comprehend the representation of marital violence in fiction throughout the period.

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NOTES

1. Caroline Norton, Richard Brinsley Sheridan's granddaughter, actively agitated to draw attention to the plight of abused women when her husband abused her physically, emotionally, and economically. Though we might be tempted to simply subsume George Norton's

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behavior under the rubric of the "degenerate aristocracy," the upper classes in the Regency, even if perceived as flawed, were primarily exempted from feminists' and Parliament's considerations of physical and emotional cruelty. Furthermore, when Norton publicized her husband's acts of brutality, she chose to identify herself as a member of the "helpless classes," evoking images of the poor, exploited, and working-class (ctd. in Poovey 65), rather than excessive wealth and corruption.

2. Showalter discusses the dangers women faced when identified as "mad" in *The Female Malady*.
3. A notable exception to this is Reilly's *Shadowtime* which suggests, but does not explore in detail, that there is a "menace, a sense of violence coiled at the heart of things [in *Daniel Deronda*]. Everywhere the novel registers the nuanced workings of power and particularly their diffusal through sexual relations. The especial brilliance of the Gwendolen plot is its evocation of the tissue of covert coercions, of violences cloaked, transmuted and internalised to which the heroine, with only partial awareness, is subject" (123). The critical omission of this phenomenon's further study lies in the fact that Gwendolen's nebulous understanding of her situation has been duplicated by our own critical reluctance to identify the source of her fear and the source of the violence.
4. Kucich argues in *Repression in Victorian Fiction* that Gwendolen simply marries Henleigh to "[restore] to her a sense that she can again live through the attentions of others" (196), and Demaria argues that "Eliot insist[ed] on the personal and social destructiveness of the mercenary marriage" between Gwendolen and Henleigh (405), pointing to Gwendolen's desire for social power and her eleventh hour recognition that she had "sold herself." A reading that takes into account the tensions between reason and violence lends complexity to a reading of Gwendolen's marriage. Significantly, Gwendolen believes that Henleigh is the first and only man she has encountered whom she might be able to love. He is the first suitor who does not bore or irritate her with worn petitions and gestures of affection. Further, despite the fact that his silence initially seems to imply a wider range of freedom for her, she admits that he has an authority over her, an ability to compel her, and a fear of him, well before their marriage. Therefore, in this revised frame, her relationship to Henleigh implies that she will not be able to "operate powerfully" or reestablish her centrality as Demaria (405) and Kucich suggest (196).
5. Lambertz notes that "the problem" of Victorian wife-abuse was set "in the broader context of working-class urban manhood, a contextualization aided by mass press accounts of court decisions. These generated a stereotype of the culprit in 'wife-torture' as a 'lower' type of working-class man, an insensitive, drink-crazed brute, a primitive" (27). Indeed, in the Divorce Act debates, Parliament exclusively defined wife batterers as working-class "drunken, profligate" beasts (*Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., 145 [25 May 1857], col. 797), a widely accepted characterization that fails to identify Henleigh as potentially dangerous, and in fact makes his identification as such impossible.
6. As Auerbach notes in *Private Theatricals*, the Victorian image of ghosts "manifests truer, if trickier 'own selves' than the authorized cycle of life accommodates" (18). Indeed, these ghosts evoke the "real" but unrepresentable in the text.
7. Daniel, who has never known his parents, discovers when he meets his mother that his surname is not that of his father or grandfather. His mother "indifferently" remarks to him at their meeting that his name is "as real as another" (701; ch. 51). Daniel uncomfortably seeks the security and solidity of the law, perhaps hoping to contain the unmoored identity that leaves him adrift in the patrilineal system. Several critics have commented on the threat to Daniel's male/masculine identity that lies in a name that seems to have no patriarchal precursor, his invisible father, and the shame he feels surrounding this disconnectedness.

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8. Rather than simply granting Gwendolen a means of "achiev[ing] the birth of a liveable identity" as Beer suggests in *George Eliot* (223), Daniel's prescriptions for behavior and reading leave Gwendolen increasingly frustrated and unhappy. Indeed as some have suggested, Daniel becomes an analogue for Henleigh and his abuse. Gwendolen finds escape from Henleigh in spite of, not because of, Daniel's interactions with her.
9. Although many critics have attempted to dismiss this scene as a manifestation of Gwendolen's hysteria, this does not reflect the complexity and significance of this scene in the narrative. To my knowledge, no attempt has ever been made to determine the thematic significance of Gwendolen's terror until now.
10. This is true with the possible exception of Mirah. Although critics often describe Mirah as the antithesis to Leonora (as well as Gwendolen and Lydia) and her (their) performance, she escapes her abusive father by performing a submission to his will (which is that she marry/prostitute herself to a count, who ironically, promises her she will never have to act again). Her fear that she will be put in a madhouse is thwarted by her decision to "*act* against" her father (260; ch. 20).
11. I want to distinguish the performance of madness that results from the host of contradictions in which these characters find themselves from madness as "the opposite of rebellion . . . the impasse confronting those whom cultural condition has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation" (Shoshana Felman, qtd. in Showalter 5). Admittedly, these concepts may be linked and the phrases blurred — which I will discuss here as well. However, I am interested in the way in which the tensions these characters experience leave them recourse only to the socio-political blurring of terms found in sensation and in a Butlerian "performance" of madness. (Butler defines a performance as a "perpetual displacement constitut[ing] a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation depriv[ing] hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized" identities [*Gender Trouble* 138]). I examine how this might ultimately become a subversive act, that not only reframes female identity but also rescripts the "natural" absence of sexual violence in the domestic space.
12. Showalter marks out the ways in which this association was detrimental to women throughout the century in *The Female Malady*.
13. A trope of sensation, the madwoman had become the central figure in a subversively "sensational protest" against the limitations in women's lives. Showalter notes that it was often sensation novels that utilized and critiqued the constructions of female madness (71, 48). Further, "violations of conventions of feminine speech," although startling, were considered the province of even fleeting madness (Showalter 81). This identification/diagnosis granted the women who fell into these performances access to language that would otherwise be denied (from specific forms of language, such as cursing [81], to topics considered indelicate for a woman, such as battery). Finally, because contemporary psychology had noted the connection between madness in women and victimization through sexual violence and battery, this play might also have subversively transmitted their identity as abused women to the reader.
14. A performance, such as the those in this novel, provides "a fluidity of character that decomposes the uniform integrity of self" (Auerbach, *Private Theatricals* 4). Eliot recognizes the subversive nature of altering traditional theater and performance, which Auerbach argues "shared — and eventually, self-consciously aped — the paradoxes of Victorian culture as whole" (16). By staging *Daniel Deronda* as an examination of performance (it was even cast into a play by Eliot herself [Auerbach 13]) and paradoxes, Eliot examines women's responses to untenable situations. Further, Gallagher argues that, for Eliot, women's performance in *Daniel Deronda* is a form of prostitution, an "'unnatural' reproduction of mere signs" as opposed to the "natural" female reproduction of children (41). Although Gallagher

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believes Eliot disdained the reproduction of signs (something she aligns with Sensation/Popular novels) as a non-labor void of "origination of substance" (55), I would argue that Eliot recognized the impossibility of escape from the linguistic system and saw a manipulation of signs as a powerfully subversive — if dangerous — tool.

15. Auerbach suggests in "Alluring Vacancies" that this scene marks "the realization of a pervasive Victorian fear of soullessness within the portrait of the lady" (47). Rather than being a marker of absence for Gwendolen, this portrait is so overdetermined that it appears throughout the narrative as a sign of this constellation of issues.
16. See also Stokes's "Rachel's 'Terrible Beauty': An Actress Among the Novelists." Stokes further argues that the tableau Eliot chooses, the climax of *The Winter's Tale*, was a piece known for its "theatrical ambiguity" (786), emphasizing the difficulty of discerning the real from the performance.
17. Vrettos argues that "Gwendolen's hysteric visions reveal the tenuous boundaries between her private life and the world outside. The scene of Grandcourt's drowning punctuates this rift between public veneer and private violence" (573). Vrettos, however, represents the boundaries Gwendolen ruptures as those of mental health, and argues that this violence is an aspect of *Gwendolen's* neurosis. David concurs, calling Gwendolen "a remarkable study in neurosis" (143). I suggest that Gwendolen punctures instead the boundaries of realism and that the tradition of reading the violence in this novel as a product of Gwendolen's (mental health) problem, derives from the same discourse in which the laws restricting "dangerous women," such as The Contagious Diseases Acts, were written. These laws targeted syphilitic prostitutes as the sole source of poison and taint, ignoring the participation of men that necessarily participated in the spread of the disease and introduced it into the middle-class home.
18. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler describes citation "not as enslavement or simple reiteration of the original, but as an insubordination that appears to take place within the very terms of the original" (45). There is, she says, a "metonymic excess in every mime, indeed, in every metaphorical substitution, that is understood to disrupt the seamless repetition of the phallogocentric norm" (48). Lydia's citation of the failing boundary between reality and sensation, distorts these "phallogocentric norms" in a way makes her a threat to the structure from which Henleigh derives his power.
19. Vrettos agrees that in this scene "Gwendolen's nervous sensibility temporarily displaces Grandcourt's mastery" (571). Although she argues that this "reveals the division in Gwendolen's public and private narratives," I would argue that it draws them together and displays the tensions between them.
20. Auerbach compares Charcot's hypnotized women to *performers* noting that "the versatility of these supposed mad women, their mesmerizing movement back and forth between demonism and saintliness [was] that of the Victorian actor. . . . Their hysteria [was] their aptitude at conversion" (*Private Theatricals* 82).
21. McCarron suggests in "Evil and Eliot's Religion of Humanity: Grandcourt in *Daniel Deronda*" that this manifests in rape — what he describes as a "sadistic sexuality" — and beatings. He believes that these are metaphorically represented in the physical and verbal exchanges over the diamonds (80). However, he also argues that Eliot chooses this method of presentation because she cannot represent physical abuse directly. Though a compelling reading, her novella "Janet's Repentance" defies a claim that absolute. What she does express in *Daniel Deronda*, however, is a much more subversive rhetoric of resistance rather than simply repentance on behalf of the abused woman.
22. Significant exceptions include Doggett's *Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England* and Tomes's "A 'Torrent of Abuse': Crimes of Violence Between Working-Class Men and Women in London, 1840–1875."

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