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Inherited Emotions: George Eliot and the Politics of Heirlooms

KATHERINE DUNAGAN OSBORNE

“. . . there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it.”

—George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

THINGS spill out of George Eliot’s novels: Hetty’s handkerchief, Maggie’s fetish doll, Rosamond’s furniture, the lockets of Esther’s parents. These things are active—with “voices” that speak and “ears” that listen—and, as they move into the realm of human consciousness, they develop “cultural biographies,” or histories of their own, that shape the experiences of the people who interact with them.¹

Nineteenth-Century Literature, Vol. 64, No. 4, pp. 465–493. ISSN: 0891-9356, online ISSN: 1067-8352. © 2010 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm>.

¹ The emerging area of thing theory studies such person-thing interactions. See Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” in *Things*, ed. Bill Brown (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 1–16, which rethinks the dynamic connection between subjects and objects. See also Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 64–91; and Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects,” *World Archaeology*, 31 (1999), 169–78. For the application of thing theory to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, see Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003); Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the*

In this essay I explore the ways in which several heirlooms constitute Dorothea Brooke's and Gwendolen Harleth's subjectivities in unexpected ways in Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), respectively. Although in the nineteenth century heirlooms were believed to gesture to generations past and offer promise for future descendents, George Eliot reconfigures their significance on an individual level: they are important not as symbols of timeless family traditions but, rather, as emotional epicenters or psychic landmarks in Dorothea Brooke's and Gwendolen Harleth's interiorities.

Traditionally, heirlooms stimulate nostalgia for bygone times, places, and people, but Eliot imbues heirlooms in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* with erotic, sensual, punitive, redemptive, and even moral charges, which affect character interiority and future social interactions. In this way, she transfers the heirloom's locus of affiliation from the traditional to the emotional; rather than privileging bloodlines, as heirlooms are supposed to, Eliot rewrites them as emblems of the lasting connections based on chosen families and communities.² In *Middlemarch*, for instance, instead of striking Dorothea as memorials of her deceased mother, the emeralds that Dorothea inherits from her mother, coupled with Casaubon's miniature portrait of his Aunt Julia, open Dorothea's eyes to the emotional possibilities of a life filled with sensual beauty and erotic pleasure, which she ultimately achieves in a union with Julia's grandson. Similarly, in *Daniel Deronda* the turquoise necklace made from Mr. Harleth's watch chain and the Grandcourt family diamonds are not significant to Gwendolen as heirlooms but as

Victorian Novel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006); and the essays collected in *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2007). Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth has already noted the significance of things in Eliot's fiction: in Eliot's novels, "the objects with which human beings must contend are intentional objects: not inert objects like rocks and stones and trees but ones informed by [the character's] consciousness" (Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983], p. 225).

² The final scene in Eliot's earlier novel *Romola* (1963) emblemizes Eliot's philosophy that family is often created by choice or necessity rather than by blood; *Romola*'s chosen "family" at the end of the novel consists of herself, her husband's mistress Tessa, Tessa's illegitimate children, and Monna Brigida, *Romola*'s widowed cousin.

emotional stimulants: they allow her to cultivate new affective ties, based on sympathetic connections to others—specifically, Daniel Deronda and Lydia Glasher and her children—rather than on birthrights and bloodlines.

Eliot's heirlooms thus disrupt traditional modes of inheritance.³ My reading recovers the heirloom identities of objects in order to ask exactly why these identities are not important, why Eliot glosses over and her characters barely register them. What did it mean that these objects were in fact heirlooms? Why does Eliot—famous for her love of the past, her belief in the weblike connections between people, and her mantras of duty and responsibility to family—undercut such important material reminders of these factors? In these two novels at least, why is Eliot unconcerned with the heirloom for the heirloom's sake?

The specific heirlooms that Eliot chooses in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* would appear to secure Dorothea and Gwendolen within a rigid gendered and classed tradition. As decorations on women's bodies or in women's rooms, the jewelry and the miniature portrait should fix these women within conventional roles rather than allow them to cultivate any kind of fluid interiority.⁴ Indeed, the female and male characters initially underestimate the heirlooms' complexity for this very reason. For instance, when Dorothea first sees the miniature

³ See Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000). Though Beer does not focus on heirlooms in her discussions of these novels, she persuasively argues that Eliot disrupts "the insistence on descent through the male line" in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* (*Darwin's Plots*, p. 187). In *Middlemarch*, characters like Featherstone and Casaubon change their wills on a whim. In *Daniel Deronda*, inheritance rests on questions of paternity—Is Sir Hugo Daniel's father? And, consequently, is Daniel his heir?—or on the play of the market, as when a speculation gone wrong results in the loss of Mrs. Davilow's entire inheritance.

⁴ Indeed, there are striking similarities between nineteenth-century jewelry and miniature portraits. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass discuss the miniature's particular alliance to jewelry: "miniatures actually turned the sitters into jewels—both in the sense that they were set down in gold, silver, lapis lazuli, lake, and other expensive pigments and in the sense that the painting itself was set into a 'jewel'—a box of ivory or ebony" (Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000], p. 41). Of course, many miniatures were also worn as jewelry throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

portrait, which formally fixes its subject in place and time, she uncritically accepts Casaubon's simplistic story of Julia's past. Refusing to remodel the room and remove the gallery of miniature portraits, she moreover secures herself in a similar one-dimensional role. Like Gwendolen, however, Dorothea later resists the conventional meanings of heirlooms. Separately but similarly, then, these women realize the inconspicuous depths of the heirlooms only after each piece generates emotions— aesthetic and erotic pleasure in Dorothea, and sympathy and guilt in Gwendolen—that do not align with its traditional gendered and classed meaning.

Lingering long after generations of family members have loved, lost, or forgotten them, heirlooms cultivate their own life stories, which extend much further in time than the individual lives of their owners. According to one nineteenth-century writer, because of their timelessness, heirlooms “have an *individuality* which connects them with the history of human beings, and invests them with an almost sacred character.”⁵ Eliot, however, hand-picks heirlooms with specific cultural properties that allow Dorothea and Gwendolen to transcend the objects' limitations and endow them with a *new* individuality that the male characters do not expect. For instance, though Casaubon fears Dorothea's attachment to Will, he only sees the miniature in a straightforward way, failing to imagine how a portrait of a dead woman could stimulate his wife's desire for his rival. Whereas Dorothea's and Gwendolen's perspectives are encouraged (or forced) to be open, accommodating, and receptive to other meanings, the men rely wholeheartedly on the conventional meanings of these feminized heirlooms.

The fact that the objects' individual meanings and non-familial ties eclipse the connections between husbands and wives and between parents and children shows that Eliot privileges the emotions stimulated by these objects independent of their status as heirlooms. Bill Brown's concept of an object's “thingness”—that is, whatever is not quite understood or explainable about the object—elucidates why and how Eliot's

⁵ [Anon.], “Heirlooms,” *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art*, 42 (1865), 803; emphasis added.

heirlooms can complicate the system of inheritance they apparently represent. Although on the one hand an heirloom is “the thing baldly encountered” (a family possession that has been passed down from father to son or mother to daughter), on the other hand it is also “some thing not quite apprehended” (“Thing Theory,” p. 5). The object possesses a “force” or a “magic” outside of or in addition to its more obvious meanings (“Thing Theory,” p. 5).⁶ I suggest that part of the incomprehensible textual power of the emerald jewelry, the miniature portrait, the turquoise necklace, and the set of diamonds resides in these objects’ extratextual meanings, which both Dorothea and Gwendolen sense but cannot explain. Following Elaine Freedgood’s call for analysis of the things that “are largely inconsequential in the rhetorical hierarchy of the text,” but that were “highly consequential in the world in which the text was produced” (*The Ideas in Things*, p. 2), I investigate how these specific objects were consequential to the cultural moments in which Eliot was writing and how their cultural meanings explain their textual thingness.⁷ This reading reveals the surprising politics embedded in the very forms of these heirlooms that Eliot’s nineteenth-century readers would certainly have understood.⁸ Because such a wealth of meanings is inscribed on Eliot’s heirlooms, they are poised to stimulate many different emotional responses—not merely the pride, love, or honor traditionally associated with heirlooms, but also desire, longing, guilt, and dread. Such affective politics imbue Eliot’s heirlooms with the potential to destabilize the traditional inheritance they so obviously symbolize and are meant to uphold, giving women opportunities to use them in new ways and for new purposes.

⁶ Following Marx, Kopytoff explains thingness as “a fetishlike ‘power’ that is unrelated to [the commodity’s] true worth” (“The Cultural Biography of Things,” p. 83).

⁷ In *The Ideas in Things*, Freedgood investigates the cultural contexts of mahogany furniture, calico curtains, and tobacco to inform her readings of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), and Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861).

⁸ Though Eliot does not reference the cultural connotations of her heirlooms explicitly, she alludes to (and reinforces) them through the lessons that unexpected people, including Aunt Julia, Deronda, and Lydia Glasher, teach Dorothea and Gwendolen through these things.



In the first scene of *Middlemarch*, Eliot instructs her reader to interpret heirlooms by the emotions they stimulate in the present rather than the memories they suggest of the past. Dorothea initially rejects her claim to any of her mother's jewels, saying: "I have other things of mamma's—her sandal-wood box which I am so fond of" to remember her.⁹ Yet she later accepts the emeralds, not because they memorialize her mother but because their inherent qualities stimulate her sensually; her mother only matters in this scene because she is *not* important. The connection that Dorothea feels to the emeralds, rather than to the sandal-wood box or some other memorial of her mother, marks her first sensual experience in the novel and initiates her emotional development.

Dorothea first observes the emeralds as "the sun passing beyond a cloud sent a bright gleam over the table" (*Middlemarch*, p. 13).¹⁰ Historically prized for their grass-green color, emeralds were thought to "restore . . . and relieve" wearied eyes, to "rest . . . the eye," and to "fill the eye, without fatiguing it," according to one nineteenth-century gem historian.¹¹ Dorothea, who is actually and metaphorically shortsighted, needs such a

⁹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 13. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

¹⁰ Like diamonds, the force of emeralds was thought to come out when they were paired with sunlight because "there is a mystery in the interior structure of these stones" (see [Anon.], "Stories of Precious Stones," *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art*, 12 [1859], 240). In *The Ideas in Things*, Freedgood argues that Eliot interprets things exhaustively in order to stabilize their meanings and restrict alternate interpretations. Though Eliot may tell us exactly how to read Dorothea's "poor dress" (*Middlemarch*, p. 3), however, she relies on the cultural meanings of other objects to help make her points.

¹¹ See Augusto Castellani, *Gems: Notes and Extracts*, trans. Mrs. John Brogden (London: Bell and Daldy, 1871), p. 206. See also Charles W. King, *Antique Gems: Their Origin, Uses, and Value as Interpreters of Ancient History; and as Illustrative of Ancient Art: with Hints to Gem Collectors* (London: J. Murray, 1860). Eliot's familiarity with Charles King's work shows her awareness of the various meanings that were culturally ascribed to the jewels she employed centrally in her plots. See also Joseph Wiesenfarth, "Antique Gems from *Romola* to *Daniel Deronda*," in *George Eliot: A Centenary Tribute*, ed. Gordon S. Haight and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 55–63; and Anne Dayton, "George Eliot and Gems," *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies*, 34–35 (1998), 67–76.

stimulant to clarify and enhance her vision; according to popular (though often discredited as superstitious) knowledge of gems, her mother's emeralds would have performed this very function. In this moment, Dorothea sees the emeralds with fresh eyes, acknowledging their mystical, aesthetic force. Not knowing how to describe the thingness in the emeralds, however, she likens them to "scents," "spiritual emblems" or "fragments of heaven," and finally to symbols of commodity culture (*Middlemarch*, pp. 13–14).¹² But the longer she stares at the emeralds, the more she acknowledges that they affect her because of their aesthetic beauty: "'They are lovely,' said Dorothea, slipping the ring and bracelet on her finely-turned finger and wrist, and holding them towards the window on a level with her eyes" (*Middlemarch*, p. 14). In the end she discards the alternative meanings, including greed, consumption, and vanity, for the vague aesthetic pleasure that she feels when looking at the jewels, promising herself "to feed her eye at these little fountains of pure colour" (p. 14).¹³ Ultimately, because the gems have satiated her vision in such a way as to eclipse partially her moral or ethical hesitancy, she decides to keep them. This experience, more than nearly anything else, makes Dorothea's later interactions with the miniature portrait occur as they do. This (literally) eye-opening moment with the emeralds prepares her to see beyond the heirloom to what is emotionally, spiritually, or sensually gratifying in it, allowing her to recognize aspects of herself in Julia Ladislaw and to learn from her example.

Dorothea's improved vision is nowhere more evident than in her changing perspective of her boudoir, itself the color of the emeralds. Although this private retreat seems ghostly during her first visit to Lowick, Dorothea slowly imbues it with an "inward life" (*Middlemarch*, p. 363), the miniature portrait of

¹² Dorothea regrets aloud that "miserable men find such things, and work at them, and sell them" (*Middlemarch*, p. 14).

¹³ Many nineteenth-century writers note that ancient engravers always kept emeralds near them—often set in rings—in order to rest their tired eyes when they were fatigued by their work (see [Anon.], "On Various Precious Stones," *The Argosy*, 11 [1871], 464).

Julia Ladislaw functioning as the symbolic center of the room to which Dorothea's awakened eyes are continually drawn.¹⁴ Before her arrival at Lowick, though, the miniature has little meaning or importance, hidden in a room that no one enters. Casaubon only acknowledges the portrait during Dorothea's pre-wedding visit as evidence of his aunt's "unfortunate marriage" (*Middlemarch*, p. 74). In his eyes, the miniature signifies his family's moral rigidity for disinheriting a disobedient daughter as well as his own righteousness for offering an olive branch to that disgraced side of the family. In short, it symbolizes his pride and condescension writ small, causing him to ignore its power to garner fresh meanings and attach itself to a new heir. Indeed, the miniature portrait's very form—small and unobtrusive—encourages him to overlook the potential significance that it may have for his new wife.

Eliot's choice of a miniature portrait is of course deliberate. Resembling and even sometimes functioning as sentimental jewelry, the miniature was tailor-made for affective connection. Its format, many people thought, gave it more intimacy than a full-sized portrait, and its associations with the body and emotions feminized it in ways other portraiture was not.¹⁵ Since miniature painting peaked in the eighteenth century, nostalgia for the art form escalated in the nineteenth century. At the time Eliot was writing *Middlemarch*, the increasing popularity of photography led many people to yearn for the intimate art of miniature painting, repeatedly emphasizing the specific techniques—including its diminutive size, delicate

¹⁴ For discussions of Dorothea's relationship with the miniature portrait and Aunt Julia, see Carol Siegel, "This thing I like my sister may not do': Shakespearean Erotics and a Clash of Wills in *Middlemarch*," *Style*, 32 (1998), 36–59; A. D. Nuttall, *Dead from the Waist Down: Scholars and Scholarship in Literature and the Popular Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2003), p. 46; Joseph Wiesenfarth, "Middlemarch: The Language of Art," *PMLA*, 97 (1982), 363–77; and Henry Staten, "Is *Middlemarch* Ahistorical?" *PMLA*, 115 (2000), 991–1,005.

¹⁵ For more recent interpretations of miniature painting, see Robin Bolton-Smith, "Miniatures and Museums," *Art Journal*, 39 (1980), 306–8; Christopher Lloyd and Vanessa Remington, *Masterpieces in Little: Portrait Miniatures from the Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II* (London: Royal Collection Enterprises, 1996); Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*; and Daphne Foskett, *British Portrait Miniatures: A History* (London: Methuen, 1963).

watercolor hues, and use of ivory surfaces—that made the medium unique.¹⁶ An article in *The Outlook* as late as 1901 claims: “The very size of [the miniature] lends to it the possibilities of romance and sentiment impossible with a larger painting, and now, as in earlier times, the miniature can be, and often is, a solace and a perpetual reminder of an absent friend, relative, or dear one.”¹⁷ In *Middlemarch*, Aunt Julia’s portrait serves as Dorothea’s “perpetual reminder” of what is absent in her life and of how her inner life of “romance and sentiment” is not reflected in her marital reality. In her boudoir, physically and spiritually isolated from Casaubon and the rest of the world, Dorothea can gaze at the miniature in private (only taking it off the wall once), and through this tiny image she can cultivate strong desires for social and sexual freedom.¹⁸

Upon her return from a disappointing wedding trip, Dorothea, perhaps unconsciously, seeks out the miniature. Everything in her boudoir remains as it was during her pre-wedding visit, but the room now seems “disenchanted” and “deadened” (*Middlemarch*, p. 269) because she feels trapped in her forced privacy and loveless marriage.¹⁹ Her gaze and imagination

¹⁶ See S. Wagner Jr., “Miniature Painting,” *Penn Monthly*, 6 (1875), 26–55: “in these days of hurried work and labor-saving inventions, when a good photographer and an indifferent artist . . . will, for a trifling sum and upon a week’s notice, produce a portrait . . . it is worth our while to pause, and justly admire the work of the *pre-photographic* days” (p. 26). Though Julia’s miniature is apparently large enough to be displayed on the wall at a time when miniatures were usually worn on the body as jewelry, its placement in Dorothea’s private boudoir helps it maintain its intimacy and romance—characteristics that, like the emeralds’ surprising beauty, allow her to feel a deep emotional connection to it before her self-repression can impede the connection.

¹⁷ W. G. Bowdoin, “Miniature Painting,” *The Outlook*, 67 (1901), 778. Though Jones and Stallybrass claim that “the miniature, focusing upon the face of the sitter would seem to be the ideal medium for the triumph of individual subjectivity over the distractions of the material world” (*Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, p. 34), it is nonetheless still firmly enmeshed in the material world. Its form, though, allows Eliot to approximate most closely the collapse of the boundary between materiality and subjectivity. For readings of artwork in Eliot’s oeuvre, see Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979); and Abigail S. Rischin, “Beside the Reclining Statue: Ekphrasis, Narrative, and Desire in *Middlemarch*,” *PMLA*, 111 (1996), 1,121–32.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the boudoir’s isolation, see Sophia Andres, “The Germ and the Picture in *Middlemarch*,” *ELH*, 55 (1988), 853–68.

¹⁹ David Trotter posits: “Dorothea finds solitude in her boudoir, but little relief from her heart’s dis-ease. Even the stories arising out of the miniature of Ladislav’s

travel to the group of miniatures on the wall, “and there at last she saw something which had gathered new breath and meaning” (*Middlemarch*, p. 269).²⁰ The miniature of Julia Ladislaw at once reminds Dorothea of the two stories it symbolizes: Julia’s love match and Will’s disinherited past. In this ghostly world of Lowick Manor and the deadened nature of the boudoir, “Dorothea could fancy that [the miniature] was alive now” (*Middlemarch*, p. 269), a subject in its own right.²¹ Unable to separate Julia’s face and story from her feelings for Will, Dorothea watches the face change: “the colours deepened, the lips and chin seemed to get larger, the hair and eyes seemed to be sending out light, the face was masculine” (*Middlemarch*, p. 269). Though Will visually replaces his grandmother in Dorothea’s eyes, both the grandmother and the grandson figure into her thoughts. These two characters, who together represent her longing for a life that mirrors her inner desires, are inseparable in Dorothea’s mind, inducing her to inscribe their identities on the miniature portrait simultaneously.

Unsurprisingly, then, Dorothea no longer sees the miniature as Casaubon’s. If she thinks of it as an heirloom at all, she imagines it to be Will’s—at one point she even attempts to give it to him as a “family memorial” (*Middlemarch*, p. 532). Increasingly, however, she acknowledges that she too has a claim to it. In her private moments with the miniature, Dorothea is able to

grandmother will remain sterile unless acted upon” (Trotter, “Space, Movement, and Sexual Feeling in *Middlemarch*,” in *“Middlemarch” in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Karen Chase [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006], p. 50). I argue that the miniature’s biography will not let the boudoir be “sterile,” but rather enlivens it and Dorothea to action.

²⁰ According to Susan Stewart, “The miniature [object], linked to nostalgic versions of childhood and history, presents a diminutive, and thereby manipulatable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination” (Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984], p. 69). These specific qualities make this portrait safe to receive and strengthen Dorothea’s feelings.

²¹ Elsewhere in the novel Eliot tells us that things tend to come alive for Dorothea, who like “every sweet woman . . . [began] by showering kisses on the hard pate of her bald doll, creating a happy soul within that woodenness from the wealth of her own love” (*Middlemarch*, p. 181). Bruno Latour’s idea that “the world is full of ‘quasi-objects’ and ‘quasi-subjects’” explains the complexity of the subject/object positions of many of Eliot’s objects (Brown, “Thing Theory,” p. 12).

project her desire and hope onto it because she has internalized its biographical history as a memento of the power struggle between a wealthy English family and the young woman who resisted inherited tradition *and* as a reminder of a young man still caught up in the drama of this inheritance. In short, Dorothea's recognition of the miniature's individual biography revolutionizes her own emotional biography. Rather than feeling interested in the miniature because it is Casaubon's heirloom, Dorothea cathects to it as a representation of a woman long dead who resisted the traditional rules of inheritance—defying her family and accepting disinheritance for love—and its resemblance to a living man who could help her resist these rules herself.

In this way, the guilt that Dorothea initially feels for her emotional infidelity to Casaubon lessens during each subsequent interaction with the miniature, replaced by the knowledge of a greater social wrong. Dorothea realizes “that Mr Casaubon had a debt to the Ladislaws—that he had to pay back what the Ladislaws had been wronged of” (*Middlemarch*, pp. 363–64). Increasingly aware of the larger problems associated with Casaubon's inheritance and the Ladislaws' disinheritance, she can no longer simply reflect on her own thoughts, desires, and actions. The heirloom portrait not only stimulates her emotional growth, then, but also fuels her need to reorganize the traditional system of inheritance—to reinstate Will as an heir by splitting her inheritance with him. Since, however, Casaubon refuses her request to split the family fortune, which he believes is “distinctly and properly” his (p. 366), Dorothea must take the matter (quite literally) into her own hands.

Before Dorothea can follow Julia's example in rejecting the Casaubon family inheritance, she must physically practice her emotional longing for this new lifestyle and for Will. Since their interactions are inhibited by social conventions, Dorothea turns to the object that does not have to adhere to conventions but resembles Will nonetheless. Having resolved never to see him again, Dorothea believes that she is at a safe enough emotional (and, ironically, physical) distance from him to be able to hold and caress the object that, more than anything else, represents him and the lifestyle he offers her. Removing the

miniature from the wall, she attempts to comfort the image and receive comfort from it in turn: “she took the little oval picture in her palm and made a bed for it there, and leaned her cheek upon it, as if that would soothe the creatures who had suffered unjust condemnation” (*Middlemarch*, pp. 534–35). Although Dorothea chooses the physical act that most closely approximates an embrace, “she did not know then that it was Love who had come to her [in this moment]” (p. 535), believing blindly that her reigning emotion is sympathy. Though she is unaware of it, however, “her thoughts about the future were the more readily shapen into resolve” because of this intimate exchange (p. 535). Only later, when she reenacts this very moment with Will, does she realize the erotic possibilities that the miniature portrait has opened up for her.

Because the miniature cannot wholly satisfy her mounting desires, however, Dorothea unwittingly seeks out the only other way to assuage them: Will himself. Still misunderstanding her desire (“If I love him too much it is because he has been used so ill” [*Middlemarch*, p. 796]), Dorothea meets Will in the Lowick library, for what she believes to be the last time. Only by taking her longing out of the privacy of her boudoir and into the library can she recognize the complexity of her emotions. Together, “they stood, with their hands clasped” (*Middlemarch*, p. 799), reminding Dorothea of the physical and emotional intimacy she has already experienced with Will, metonymically, through the miniature. The similarity of these narrative moments grounds Dorothea’s desire, and she unleashes “the flood of her young passion” on Will rather than the portrait (p. 801). Since she has been able to negotiate the terms of her growing relationship with Will through her interactions with the miniature, she is now prepared to accept her new inheritance from Julia Ladislaw—the strength to choose the husband she desires despite the wishes of her family.²²

Questions of traditional property inheritance, then, unfold alongside Dorothea’s alternative emotional inheritance.

²² For a discussion of Dorothea’s choice in terms of national politics, see Bernard Semmel, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994).

Indeed, Dorothea's concern for the Ladislaws' disinheritance actually deepens her own affective experience of Julia's miniature. The fact that Will does not prosper from his family's property fuels Dorothea's reclamation of the miniature as a new kind of heirloom, ensuring that Will profits from this emotional inheritance though he never profits from traditional inheritance. In this way, even though Julia Ladislaw's miniature is technically Casaubon's heirloom, both Dorothea and Will are ultimately her heirs. They—and especially Dorothea—have inherited her determined resistance and passionate actions and, in a clever narrative reversal, have profited from the inheritance that Julia herself gave up, only to forego the same inheritance themselves as well. This miniature, left after Julia's disinheritance, stimulates a new kind of inheritance through a triangulated connection between Julia, Dorothea, and Will rather than the pomp and prestige of elite family wealth and tradition. Although upon Casaubon's death the miniature legally passes into Dorothea's possession, she presumably rejects it along with the entire Casaubon inheritance in order to marry Will.²³ For Eliot, however, the thing is not as important now. It has done its work, enhancing Dorothea's life by forcing her to feel.

Dorothea's final choice to live apart from such objects entirely refigures not one but all of the Casaubon family heirlooms. After all, we do not know who inherits the Casaubon estate after Dorothea gives it up; the Casaubon possessions have neither a specified home nor an owner at the end of the novel. Along with Casaubon's notebooks and maps, the contents of Dorothea's boudoir—the tapestry of the pale stag, the polite volumes bound in calfskin, and the family of miniature portraits, Julia's among the rest—have unresolved futures. Just as Dorothea is a Casaubon no longer, so presumably these things are no longer the property of this old English family; there are

²³ Paul Milton notes that “Eliot shows not only that the economic implications of inheritance erase a woman's identity as an individual, but also that the notions of sanctity and duty encoded in the will ensure a woman's metaphysical complicity in her own effacement” (Milton, “Inheritance as the Key to all Mythologies: George Eliot and Legal Practice,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Comparative Study of Literature*, 28, no. 1 [1995], 50). My argument suggests, rather, that Dorothea will not be erased through this traditional system of inheritance, because she enacts another mode of inheritance.

“none but comparatively distant connexions” on whom they will devolve (*Middlemarch*, p. 365). Will the property reach these “distant” hands? Could Casaubon have identified another heir in his codicil? Could an estate auction—like the one that Borthrop Trumbull presides at elsewhere in *Middlemarch*—be the only place left for these treasures? No matter its future, the miniature portrait’s personalized story, the individuality that Dorothea saw in it, will be replaced with new stories by new hands. Things—even though they have connections to the past—are in the end most important for the individual emotional growth they stimulate in the present.



In *Daniel Deronda*, when Gwendolen Harleth’s mother proudly takes her first husband’s miniature portrait out of her private collection to show her daughter, Gwendolen dismisses this memento of her father with a toss of her head. Although Mrs. Davilow “recalled [memories of her first husband] with a fervour which seemed to count on a peculiar filial sympathy,” Gwendolen is overcome with neither “fervour” nor “filial sympathy.”²⁴ At Gwendolen’s callous neglect of her father’s memory and miniature,

Mrs Davilow coloured deeply . . . and straightaway shutting up the memorials she said with a violence quite unusual in her—
“You have no feeling, child!” (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 20)

That Gwendolen’s indifferent response to the miniature disturbs her mother’s usually mild temperament doubles her crime: neither the relic of her father nor her mother’s emotions are sacred to Gwendolen.

The fact that the image is a miniature—which, as *Middlemarch* illustrates, fosters intimacy—exacerbates her sin: Gwendolen is immune to the emotional connection that Dorothea seems so alive to. And yet, is Gwendolen’s treatment of her

²⁴ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 20. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

father's "memorial" so different than Dorothea's thoughts about her mother's emeralds? Neither character sees the deceased parent in the keepsake, only what interests or affects her most in the present. Gwendolen's indifference would *seem* to be more egregious than Dorothea's reaction, however, because this is the second time in the narrative that Gwendolen has forsaken an object connected to her father. Shortly after a gambling loss, Gwendolen pawns a turquoise necklace made from her father's watch-chain, the necklace's small monetary value more important to her than its value as an heirloom. The necklace's rootedness in the past—its ancient Etruscan style, its connection to a father she never knew—shows the importance that it *should* have for Gwendolen as a token of her family's history. But Gwendolen is a creature wholly situated in the present.

Surprisingly, though, *Daniel Deronda* suggests that Eliot disapproves of Gwendolen's act of pawning not only because it suggests Gwendolen's indifference to her father's memory but also because it illustrates her indifference to or lack of awareness of the striking emotional properties of the turquoise necklace. Gwendolen's crime is that she disregards the *thing* as much as the *person* behind it. The turquoises in the necklace, which the Victorians believed were both "*protective and sympathetic*,"²⁵ stress the very qualities that Gwendolen lacks—sympathy, understanding, and compassion. Thought to have an allegiance or affinity to its owner, the turquoise "grew paler as its wearer sickened, lost its colour entirely on his death, but recovered it when placed on the finger of a new and healthy possessor."²⁶ By pawning this specific necklace rather than another set of jewels, Gwendolen unconsciously identifies her most pressing emotional needs and foreshadows the combined role that the necklace and its redeemer will play in cultivating her sensitivity to the feelings of others.

Fortunately for Gwendolen, Daniel Deronda saves her from the mistake of losing the power of the turquoise when he

²⁵ Charles W. King, *The Natural History of Gems or Decorative Stones* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1867), p. 68; emphasis in original.

²⁶ Charles W. King, *The Natural History, Ancient and Modern, of Precious Stones and Gems, and of the Precious Metals* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1865), p. 140.

redeems and returns the necklace. The humiliation and mortification that Gwendolen initially feels are quickly replaced with interest, sentiment, and superstition about Deronda, who is as “*protective and sympathetic*” as the turquoises were believed to be. Significantly, the necklace’s role as a memorial of her father is no more important to Gwendolen after Deronda returns it than before, but this does not matter; its identity as a token of Deronda’s allegiance to and sympathy for her outweighs its identity as an heirloom.²⁷ With Eliot’s blessing, then, Gwendolen rewrites its meaning in her own context, emotionally investing in it over the course of the novel because of its connection to a living, rather than a dead, man.

Later, at Offendene, an opportunity to pawn the necklace for much-needed money surfaces again, but this time Gwendolen hesitates because of the object’s new identity: “Don’t sell the necklace, mamma” (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 255).²⁸ Though Eliot will not let us forget that this necklace comes from Gwendolen’s father (Mrs. Davilow reminds us, “No, dear, no [we won’t sell it]; it was made out of your dear father’s chain” [*Daniel Deronda*, p. 255]), Gwendolen does not seem to hear or even care about this reminder. The necklace’s association with Deronda outweighs not only Gwendolen’s memory of her father but also her awareness of her mother, both Mrs. Davilow’s involvement in the making of the necklace after Mr. Harleth’s death as well as her physical presence in this scene. In a trance, Gwendolen “did not give any caresses [to her mother] with her words as she had been used to do. She did not even look at her mother, but was looking at the turquoise necklace as she turned it over her fingers” (p. 256). Gwendolen’s “caresses” for her beloved mother are replaced by caresses for the necklace

²⁷ It is notable that the turquoise was a popular gift for engagement rings because of “the belief that the permanence of its hue would depend upon the constancy of the donor” ([Anon.], “Opal, Turquoise, Amber, and Jet,” *The Argosy*, 12 [1871], 115). Turquoise is therefore both a token of affection and a clue to Deronda’s inability to remain constant to Gwendolen.

²⁸ Now that the necklace has new meaning for Gwendolen, she rejects the thought of reinserting it into the system of commodity exchange. In “The Cultural Biography of Things,” Kopytoff discusses the thin line between the commodified and noncommodified object.

with its loaded meaning, echoing Dorothea's gentle handling of the miniature. Nearly mesmerized by the necklace and the memory of Deronda, she physically enacts her emotional connection with it in this scene, decisively saying, "I *will* keep this necklace, mamma" (p. 256).

Notably, Gwendolen repeats Dorothea's resolution about her mother's jewels ("Yes, dear, I will keep these" [*Middlemarch*, p. 14]), but Gwendolen's decision is more nuanced than Dorothea's. Gwendolen's interest in the turquoise necklace goes beyond its beauty: "It was something vague and yet mastering, which impelled her to this action about the necklace" (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 257). When Gwendolen pawns the necklace at the beginning of the novel, she is rational about how its monetary value can best serve her despite her superstition in other matters, including Deronda's "evil eye" on her gambling (p. 6). But in this moment at Offendene, she can no longer be rational about the necklace because it has become fully fused to her "streak of superstition" (p. 257). Significantly, *both* Deronda and Gwendolen have invested the necklace with superstition, or thingness. His sympathetic redemption brings out and echoes the gemstone's own sympathetic properties, and her superstitious retention of the necklace wrapped in Deronda's torn handkerchief shows that Gwendolen is open to its emotional power. Although Gwendolen consciously attributes nearly all of her emotional growth to Deronda, her emotional investment in the necklace and the intimacy that develops between it and her as she wears it around her neck and on her wrist and carries it about Europe in her private *nécessaire* play as significant a role in the development of her interiority as Deronda himself does.

The heirloom necklace functions as Gwendolen's only constant material reminder that someone believes she can be a better person. At Sir Hugo's New Year's Eve party, a short time after her marriage, Gwendolen awkwardly wraps it around her wrist "in remembrance of Leubronn" (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 410), longing to revisit the scenes of gambling, pawning, and redemption that figure centrally in her private thoughts. Though initially sites of shame and embarrassment, the events in Leubronn now stand out as the first hopeful stirrings of her

conscience. She wears the necklace-bracelet to show Deronda that she “was conscious of an uneasy, transforming process” (p. 394), in which she is beginning to acknowledge that others besides herself deserve sympathy.²⁹

The necklace, however, plays an additional role that Deronda does not anticipate, though “he thought that he understood well her action in drawing his attention to the necklace” (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 414). When they are alone, Gwendolen says to Deronda: “Suppose I had gambled again, and lost the necklace again, what should you have thought of me? . . . You wanted me not to do that—not to make my gain out of another’s loss in that way—and I have done a great deal worse” (p. 415). Rather than only representing Gwendolen’s appeal to Deronda’s protection and sympathy, the necklace has also come to signify her “last great gambling loss” in marrying Grandcourt (p. 411). Though Deronda’s initial redemption prevented her from additional gambling in Leubronn, it could not prevent this grand marital gamble. Thus Gwendolen wears the necklace not only to reenact her “gain out of another’s loss” through gambling and Deronda’s rebuke of that gain, but also to replay how she injured Lydia to secure her own fortunes. Of course, only Gwendolen is aware of these dual connotations. The simultaneous meanings that she ascribes to the necklace—as a tool to gain Deronda’s sympathy and a reminder of her own need of this quality—reveal the most prominent feature of her changing interiority: she is increasingly conscious of people and things outside of her “small selfish desires” before Deronda even encourages her to make this step (p. 416).

Indeed, besides the necklace, only the Grandcourt family diamonds have as great an influence on Gwendolen, though

²⁹ During this visit, Gwendolen’s changed perspective most obviously manifests itself in her embarrassment about Grandcourt’s inheritance of Topping, to which she imagines Deronda also has a claim: “At the notion of Deronda’s showing her and Grandcourt the place which was to be theirs, and which she with painful emphasis remembered might have been his (perhaps if others had acted differently), certain thoughts rushed in—thoughts . . . embarrassingly new” (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 381). Deronda’s illegitimacy reminds her of Lydia’s children, who also stand to inherit nothing from their father because Gwendolen has unseated them.

each set of jewelry excites utterly different emotions in her.³⁰ These emotions intersect dynamically in her consciousness throughout the second half of the novel, most palpably at the New Year's Eve party, when she wears the diamonds and the turquoises simultaneously. In this scene Eliot shows how the sympathy that Gwendolen has learned vis-à-vis the turquoise necklace has prepared her for the diamonds' lessons in guilt. Just as the emeralds prepare Dorothea to see the miniature with open eyes, then, the turquoise necklace primes Gwendolen to accept the diamonds' message with sympathy, albeit unwillingly.

Before Gwendolen reads Lydia's letter, the Grandcourt family diamonds have little meaning for her interiority. She receives them almost immediately after she arrives at Grandcourt's estate following their wedding, and "she was glad of this diversion—glad of such an event as having her own diamonds to try on" (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 330). These diamonds are mere details disconnected from her inward life—which ironically contributes to their surprising power of insurrection, allowing them to come to life, spring out from behind a deceptive exterior, and pounce on Gwendolen's emotions. Eliot gothicizes them in order to emphasize their aggressive assault, describing the "horrible words clinging and crawling about them, as from some bad dream" (p. 397). When Gwendolen recognizes Lydia's handwriting on the letter, she realizes that these diamonds are not only a "diversion" but also symbols of her wrongdoing.³¹ Having assumed the meanings that Lydia ascribes to them in her letter (evidence of Gwendolen's broken promise, her husband's "withered heart," and her choice "to injure" Lydia and her children [*Daniel Deronda*, p. 330]), these mate-

³⁰ For alternate interpretations of the Grandcourt diamonds, see Margaret Loewen Reimer, "The Spoiled Child: What Happened to Gwendolen Harleth?" *Cambridge Quarterly*, 36 (2007), 33–50; and Marguerite Murphy, "The Ethic of the Gift in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34 (2006), 189–207.

³¹ Jill Matus argues that "the 'poisoned gems' send [Gwendolen] into a state of hysterical nervous shock because she is already primed internally by apparitions signifying her remorse" (Matus, "Historicizing Trauma: The Genealogy of Psychic Shock in *Daniel Deronda*," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 [2008], 70). Although Matus is primarily concerned with Gwendolen's "internal hauntings" ("Historicizing Trauma," p. 70), I suggest that another material object, the turquoise necklace, has also prepared Gwendolen psychically for the force of the diamonds' message.

rial objects emblemize Gwendolen's moral shame, and, as Eliot tells us elsewhere, "from th[at] dim region . . . she shrank with mingled pride and terror" (p. 275).

Eliot's choice of diamonds to signify Gwendolen's crime against Lydia—how, in short, Gwendolen gained from another's loss—would have resonated particularly with the novel's first readers. During the 1870s, when Eliot was composing *Daniel Deronda*, diamonds were enjoying a resurgence in popularity following the discovery of South African diamonds in 1867. The initial sense of excitement and hope stimulated by the diamond rush was superseded by the nagging awareness of the industry's increasing problems, including the exploitation it elicited.³² One 1871 writer explained that, as a result of this discovery, "fortunes will have come to few and misery to many."³³ The narrative politics of diamonds in *Daniel Deronda* echoes these social and political conditions: not only does the transmission of jewels and emotions between Lydia and Gwendolen resonate with this social history, but the exchange of power between Gwendolen and Grandcourt does as well. Though Gwendolen "had said to herself that she would never wear those diamonds" (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 397), Grandcourt sadistically forces them upon her repeatedly after their marriage. As he affixes the diamonds onto her passive neck, ears, and hair, she imagines his strangling white hand encircling her throat like the necklace,

³² An 1877 article predicted that "the discovery of the diamonds of the Vaal promises to be fatal to the independence, if not even to the existence, of the aboriginal races of South Africa" (George Delamere Cowan, "The Diamond of History and Romance," *Tinsley's Magazine*, 20 [1877], 260). Diamonds were caught in a problematic position as colonial resources, representing the "tears [and] blood" of African natives, and as British possessions, highlighting the beauty of "a ballroom belle" ("The Diamond of History and Romance," p. 259). For discussions of Gwendolen's story through the lens of empire, see Deirdre David, *Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels: "North and South," "Our Mutual Friend," "Daniel Deronda"* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1981); Katherine Bailey Linehan, "Mixed Politics: The Critique of Imperialism in *Daniel Deronda*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 34 (1992), 323–46; and Carolyn Lesjak, *Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2006).

³³ T. Rupert Jones, "South Africa and Its Diamonds," *The Popular Science Review: A Quarterly Miscellany of Entertaining and Instructive Articles on Scientific Subjects*, 10 (1871), 176.

“threatening to throttle her” (p. 397). Grandcourt thrives on the threat of violence implied by the jewels—and particularly the diamond necklace—because it exhibits his power over the objects in his life, and “about property he liked to be lordly” (p. 320).³⁴

At the New Year’s Eve party, Gwendolen “dare[s] not offend her husband” by not appearing in her diamonds (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 410), but she also secretly winds her turquoise necklace about her wrist in order to inoculate herself against the diamonds’ venom. Though the jewels seem to compete against each other in this scene because they stimulate such different emotions in Gwendolen, however, they actually work together to develop her conscience. The diamonds remind her of her wrongdoing, coloring her perception of the turquoise necklace, loading it with a new charge, and signifying her injury of Lydia as much as the diamonds do. Despite the diamonds’ viciousness, they cannot erase the power of the turquoise necklace to remind Gwendolen that someone believes she can be a better person. It is the *interplay* of the jewels, rather than Deronda’s sympathy alone or Grandcourt’s cruelty alone, that fuels Gwendolen’s emotional development in this scene. Without the fear and guilt the diamonds inspired in Gwendolen, she would never have realized the vital importance of feeling sympathy for those she had wronged. If the turquoise necklace would have meant less to her, she would not have worn it on this occasion, would never have sought Deronda’s guidance, and would never have felt Grandcourt’s rebuke for exhibiting herself by wearing “that thing” (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 417). Without that rebuke, she would never have been assaulted by “certain words [from Lydia’s letter] . . . gnawing within her” as she sat alone in her room after the party (p. 418), relentlessly exacerbating her guilt and remorse. In other words, without either set of jewelry, Gwendolen would never have understood the complexity of the other set or of her own emotional complexity.

³⁴ Later the narrator remarks of Grandcourt: “If this white-handed man with the perpendicular profile had been sent to govern a difficult colony, he might have won reputation among his contemporaries” (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 552).

It is striking that both Deronda and Grandcourt fail to comprehend the nuanced interaction of the jewels in Gwendolen's psyche. Not only is Deronda utterly unaware of the violence of the diamonds, but he is also unprepared for the multiple meanings that Gwendolen has written onto the turquoise necklace: "he was almost alarmed at Gwendolen's precipitancy of confidence towards him" (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 415). Just as Casaubon and Will never understood the depths of meanings that Dorothea ascribed to the miniature portrait, Deronda also fails to fathom the significance Gwendolen attributes to the turquoise necklace. Since he redeemed the necklace as a good deed, he cannot understand how "that little affair of the necklace . . . had evidently bitten into her" (pp. 375–76). What he had believed to be harmless enough—a simple, anonymous reproach for her indiscretions of pawning and gambling—she reads as his interest in, protection of, and sympathy for her despite her ethical failures. Deronda is unable to live up to the necklace's promise, continually leaving Gwendolen dissatisfied, because he thinks of his redemption as a "little affair," though it is a very grand affair to Gwendolen, to which her mind repeatedly and frequently returns in at least seven disparate scenes in the novel.

Grandcourt is equally unaware of the multiple meanings of these jewels. In his eyes, the turquoise necklace figures into the "telegraphing" between his wife and Deronda (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 417), and though he forbids Gwendolen to indulge in such interactions, he remains indifferent to the exchanged message, confident that he understands their relationship in full. Similarly, Grandcourt only recognizes the meanings that he personally ascribes to the diamonds, utterly uninterested in their other connotations. In his mind, the diamonds only embody the Grandcourt men's control of beautiful women. Confident in his exclusive right to determine and convey this identity to subsequent male generations, he fails to imagine how those very women might also endow his family's property with new meanings.

Indeed, Grandcourt's major weakness is his inability to perceive Gwendolen's complex emotions regarding Lydia and the diamonds. Believing in his complete control of the identity

of the diamonds, he fails to see how this very identity moves out of his hands and into the hands of his mistress and wife:

Grandcourt lacked the only organ of thinking that could have saved him from mistake—namely, some experience of [Gwendolen's] mixed passions [about Lydia and the diamonds]. 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. What he 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. (*Daniel Deronda*, pp. 554–55)

Failing to acknowledge Gwendolen's complicated relationship to the diamonds, Grandcourt unwittingly strengthens her remorse every time he forces her to wear them. As a result, he also undermines his own insult of disinheriting her (and depriving her of the jewels): “this question of property and inheritance was meant as a finish to her humiliations and her thralldom,” but she says that it is “just what [she] desired” (p. 559). Just as Dorothea “has a dislike to Casaubon's property” (*Middlemarch*, p. 805) that encourages her to resign her claim to it, Gwendolen also develops such a dislike by the end of *Daniel Deronda*; she desires neither Diplow nor the diamonds.

By writing her letter in such a way, Lydia inscribes her own story of seduction, scandal, and abandonment upon the jewels, and by reading the letter as she does, Gwendolen sees the diamonds as Lydia's bequest, not as the Grandcourt family's heirlooms.³⁵ Together, then, without Grandcourt's authorization or knowledge, his mistress and wife reconfigure these heirlooms. The method of circulation that Lydia chooses to give the diamonds to Gwendolen—the letter, the moment of delivery—and Gwendolen's desire to cast off the jewels together gesture toward the instability of family inheritance, which can

³⁵ Sarah Gates refers to Lydia's letter as her “last will and testament” (Gates, “‘A Difference of Native Language’: Gender, Genre and Realism in *Daniel Deronda*,” *ELH*, 68 [2001], 712).

be unexpectedly interrupted by the rightful claims of a mistress and the inappropriate possession by a wife.³⁶ Because Deronda and Grandcourt fail to understand how women can ascribe new meanings to objects, the turquoise necklace and the family diamonds take on utterly different identities outside of their putative roles as symbols of family tradition. The turquoise necklace grows mythically large in Gwendolen's mind, readying her for her important interactions with the terrifying diamonds. Simultaneously experiencing sympathy, fear, shame, and guilt from both sets of jewels allows Gwendolen to see beyond herself to other characters and things—to see Lydia as more than a discarded mistress, Grandcourt as more than an eligible match, the turquoise necklace as more than a commodity, and the diamonds as more than a “diversion.”

Though Gwendolen cannot choose her own emotional community at the end of the novel as Dorothea does (Deronda, after all, chooses Mirah, not her),³⁷ she is liberated from a family and a tradition of inheritance to which she has *no* emotional connection. Gwendolen is free from both her sadistic husband and the system of violent patrilineal inheritance that the family diamonds represent. When Grandcourt drowns, nearly all of his property devolves on his illegitimate son, Lydia's four-year-old, Henleigh. Presumably, when Henleigh inherits Grandcourt's wealth and estates, the diamonds also revert to Lydia, who will have control of the property until her son comes of age.³⁸ After Grandcourt's death, Gwendolen muses, relieved, on the material implications of his death: “I am saved from robbing

³⁶ Peter Brooks has argued: “Nothing in [*Daniel Deronda*] better represents the patriarchal attempt to control and barter female sexuality than the drama of the jewels” (Brooks, *Realist Vision* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005], p. 98). My reading, however, suggests that Gwendolen's and Lydia's rewriting of the diamonds' identity complicates this “drama of the jewels.”

³⁷ Notably, the one heirloom in *Deronda* that is valued as a material representative of bloodlines is the chest of documents that Deronda's grandfather bequeaths to him. Since Deronda has *chosen* this family connection because of genuine cathexis rather than mindless tradition, he too falls in line with my argument that heirlooms are only important as characters emotionally invest in them. His indifference toward his father's diamond ring reinforces this point.

³⁸ As Anthony Trollope explores in *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873), however, a widow could stake a claim to heirloom diamonds as paraphernalia. Nonetheless, Gwendolen's aversion to her jewels makes this possibility seem unlikely.

others—there are others—they will have everything—they will have what they ought to have” (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 651). Having borne no heir to the Grandcourt estates but, significantly, retaining the Grandcourt name (she signs her last letter to Deronda “Gwendolen Grandcourt”), however, Gwendolen is more than just a hiccup in the lineage of the Grandcourt family, particularly when her story intersects with Lydia’s and her son’s. When young Henleigh inherits the estate, he “is to take his father’s name . . . he is to be Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt” (p. 665). In a strange twist, then, the boy will share a last name with Gwendolen, not with his mother, who will remain Mrs. Glasher—a circumstance that throws any kind of traditional lineage into confusion.

Though Gwendolen’s story does not reorganize the system of inheritance as fundamentally as Dorothea’s does (young Henleigh inherits the Grandcourt heirlooms, whereas the future of the Casaubon estate is uncertain), Gwendolen ensures that she will be no “vessel” of this family and their things. Yet unlike Dorothea, who chooses to be a vessel to new things, ideas, and bloodlines when she marries Will, moves to London, and has children, Gwendolen is denied this choice.³⁹ Thus, though Eliot envisions a different kind of inheritance not based on bloodlines, she also gestures toward the problems of dismantling the system of traditional inheritance in Gwendolen’s ending.⁴⁰ Indeed, though Eliot offers a radical ending, she does not idealize Gwendolen’s future. Rather than refiguring traditional inheritance by marrying and having children with Deronda, Gwendolen comes to stand for another kind of inheritance. Just as Lydia signified “I am a woman’s life” earlier in the novel (*Daniel Deronda*, p. 137), so at its end does Gwendolen represent “a woman’s life.” Adrift in society, Gwendolen is in possession of a new inheritance that suggests both the possibility and

³⁹ Brooks claims that the novel focuses on “the womb, as that delicate vessel of transmission”; Gwendolen, he argues, “can never recover in a reproductive sense; [the marriage] strikes her with sterility” (*Realist Vision*, p. 101). Since Brooks only discusses transmission via reproduction, however, he ignores the nonfamilial form of inheritance that is unaffected by Gwendolen’s supposed sterility.

⁴⁰ The system of traditional inheritance that is upheld in *Daniel Deronda* is Judaism, though it is not applicable or appropriate for all characters.

the threat of life outside of the traditional family and lines of descent. Not every girl can be as lucky as Mirah or as willing to step outside social norms as Catherine Arrowpoint to marry the man she loves and guarantee her place in patrilineality. What about all of the other girls in the novel? What about the young, unmarried women, many of whom are little girls, that (over) populate Eliot's novel, including Mrs. Davilow's four youngest daughters, Lady Mallinger's three daughters, Dr. Mompert's (the bishop's) three daughters, the three Meyrick girls, Mr. Gascoigne's two daughters, and Lydia's three little girls? Not all of these girls will attain the happiness of a Mirah or a Catherine; some of them will inevitably follow in Gwendolen's footsteps. Gwendolen's new inheritance, then, is passed down from sister to sister, friend to friend, acquaintance to acquaintance, young woman to little girl. Her inheritance is not of things (of tangible heirlooms, as traditional inheritance is) but of an image of herself, young, independent, and alone—both terrifying and riveting.

If things are not important in this new inheritance, then what becomes of the turquoise necklace? Though Eliot does not mention the necklace again after Gwendolen wears it at Topping Abbey, she implies that when Deronda abdicates his position as Gwendolen's sympathetic redeemer and protective savior, the turquoise necklace necessarily loses its charged meaning and thus its presence in the narrative. Though Gwendolen may still retain possession of it at the end of the novel, it has become a mockery of sympathy. Like the miniature portrait, it will become a free-floating agent when Gwendolen dies, with cultural superstitions dancing around it but the particular meanings Gwendolen gave it lost forever. She will never be able to recount the story of the turquoise necklace to the children she might have had with Deronda, and though there is an (unlikely) possibility that Gwendolen will remarry—maybe even to her cousin Rex, as Hans Meyrick hints—and bear children, she will never tell these children what this necklace has meant to her. Its identity will surely remain Gwendolen's own secret, never to be passed on to subsequent generations. The secret will die with Gwendolen, but the thing will most likely live on. It could easily slip back into the system of commodity

exchange: there is always the risk that it could see the inside of a pawnshop again or hear the voice of an auctioneer. It could be passed down through an illegitimate heir, as the Grandcourt heirlooms are, a symbol of scandal, immorality, and a nontraditional family. Or, it could have a future as dauntingly and thrillingly open as Gwendolen's.



In her last two novels, George Eliot's fictional heirlooms have secret lives of their own, unrelated to their apparent sentimental, financial, or symbolic lives as heirlooms. Dorothea's emeralds, Julia's miniature, Gwendolen's turquoise necklace, and Lydia's diamonds all possess "*individuality*" outside of that more universal identity of heirlooms. Yet Eliot writes of them *as* heirlooms in order to show that traditional inheritance based on bloodlines may not be as important as the insular significance that individual owners attribute to their things. For instance, Casaubon's and Grandcourt's unshaken confidence in the traditions represented in their heirlooms ultimately leads to the disappointment of their wishes. Even Ladislav's and Deronda's inability to perceive fully the multifacetedness of heirlooms leads to feelings of social impotence and frustration in many scenes, in which they are unable to follow through on the possibilities the heirlooms promise. Ladislav, however, comes closest to understanding what the miniature means to Dorothea, which is perhaps the reason why he is the only successful lover in these four couplings. When Dorothea offers to give Will the miniature to remember his grandmother, he rejects it outright, perceiving, like Dorothea, that the miniature is more than just a "family memorial," and grumbling: "It would be more consoling if others wanted to have it" (*Middlemarch*, p. 532). Nonetheless, he can guess only half of the miniature's meaning: though he sees himself in the miniature, he fails to acknowledge that its most important aspect is the rebellious woman it depicts, who inspires Dorothea's own rebellion.

Through such nuances in the plots of *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot illustrates her own evolving conflict over the

duty and responsibility that distinguish family ties and the hope she attributes to new forms of community, chosen because of resonating emotional experiences rather than a coat of arms. This tension is most obvious in *Daniel Deronda's* open-ended conclusion. Whereas Dorothea plays out her object cathexis through a second marriage, Gwendolen is unable to actualize the affective connections that develop through her interactions with inherited jewels. Whether an object's promise of connection is able to manifest itself in actual interpersonal connection thus remains a problem for Eliot's aesthetic, gesturing toward the possibility and the danger that accompanies emotional investment in things in these novels.

Because Dorothea and Gwendolen recognize the complicated biographies of these objects, they ultimately obtain their desires—sexual and social freedom for Dorothea, and a lightened conscience for Gwendolen. Though the achievements of these desires have vexed readers for generations, perhaps it is significant that Eliot ties them so closely to timeless material objects. Though we may be disappointed with Dorothea's and Gwendolen's fates, we can find solace in the possibilities that heirlooms will offer to the descendents of their chosen emotional communities. Unlike other symbols of inheritance—the money in the bank, the land that tenants farm, or the name and reputation of the family—heirlooms decorate the family's home, presenting themselves on a daily basis for the physical and emotional pleasure or pain of wives, mothers, and sisters. And in these unacknowledged, daily interactions, the biographies of women and things can mutually constitute each other on an emotional level.

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ABSTRACT

Katherine Dunagan Osborne, "Inherited Emotions: George Eliot and the Politics of Heirlooms" (pp. 465–493)

This essay removes George Eliot's heroines from heterosexual dyads to focus on the roles that things play in women's autonomous moral and sexual development. Because Eliot's female protagonists can adapt heirlooms for their own private and emotional purposes, they can replace traditional inheritance based on bloodlines with a non-familial, emotional inheritance, thus illustrating the subtlety of Eliot's family and gender politics. This reading of Eliot contextualizes specific heirlooms in *Middlemarch* (1871–72) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876)—including miniature portraits, emeralds, turquoises, and diamonds—to reveal the surprising politics embedded in Eliot's heirlooms that her nineteenth-century readers would certainly have recognized.

Keywords: George Eliot; *Middlemarch*; *Daniel Deronda*; Heirlooms; Thing theory