A COMPARISON OF THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF HENRY JAMES AND GEORGE ELIOT

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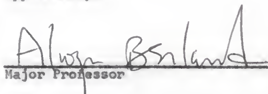

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A COMPARISON OF THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF HENRY JAMES AND GEORGE ELIOT

Henry James wrote nine articles about George Eliot and her work between the years 1866 to 1885. Of the nine articles, five were discussions of her fiction. James read all of her works of fiction at least once and, although his praise was not unqualified, there is no question that he thought highly of her work. In general one may say that James consistently criticized her clumsy plots, the slow action of her novels and her diffuse style. But so glowing were his comments upon many of her characters and upon her morality that one may be sure he greatly admired her as a novelist.

When one novelist admires the works of an older novelist, it is not unreasonable to assume that the older novelist may have influenced the younger novelist, particularly in those respects which excited admiration. I believe that George Eliot has at least indirectly influenced Henry James in some of his character creation. Even more important, however, is the fact that both novelists are moral psychologists. Both novelists tend to place their characters at a crossroads, a point in the characters' lives at which they must make a choice. However, the choice each character makes is not as important as the motives and the psychological drives which lie behind each character's choice. When the character makes a wrong choice, therefore, it is not the choice itself which is wrong; but rather the character's motives are at fault. This fact becomes obvious, though, only after the character has lived through the consequences of his choice. Thus George Eliot and Henry James are moral psychologists in that both authors are interested in delineating the motives which lie behind a character's choice; and both authors subject these motives to a moral standard by tracing the consequences of their character's choice.

In order to understand more fully the similarities and differences in

George Eliot's and Henry James's moral psychology, it is first necessary to exhibit the similarity of their characters. Of George Eliot's characters in general, James said:

> . . . the creations which brought her renown were of the incalculable kind, shaped themselves in mystery, in some intellectual back shop or secret crucible, and were as little as possible implied in the aspect of her life.[1]

After such high praise, it is not surprising then that more than a slight resemblance exists between various characters found in George Eliot's novels and various of James's characters. The most striking similarities are to be found among the heroines. Robert L. Selig has pointed out striking similarities between Dinah Morris, in George Eliot's novel Adam Bede, and Verena Tarrant, in James's novel The Bostonians. Both women are crusaders: Dinah Morris has become an evangelistic minister and Verena lectures on women's rights. Both characters are small with pale complexion, red hair and rather liquid eyes, and both characters sway their listeners, not by the force of their argument, but rather because they deliver their words with a captivating girlish simplicity.[2] But these two characters, although both major characters of the respective novels, are not among the greater, more vivid creations of either novelist. Both George Eliot and James have created some unforgettable heroines, and these heroines, when placed within two broad categories, bear striking similarities to each other.

All of the heroines are quite young women who are at the first crossroads of their lives. It is in terms of the goal that they choose, symbolized by

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[1]Henry James, "The Life of George Eliot," Partial Portraits (London and New York, 1888), 39.

[2]Robert L. Selig, "The Red-Haired Lady Doctor: Parallel Passages in The Bostonians and Adam Bede," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 16 (September, 1961), 164-169.

the man whom they either fall in love with or marry, that the basic distinction can be made. One group of heroines desires marriages which will result in a higher social position. All of these young women are quite selfish and their relationship to the people around them is based upon convenience to themselves. The second group of young women have as their goal an ideal which involves a desire to be of service to the men they marry. Their actions reveal a respect and consideration for those with whom they associate. Furthermore, they are, in one sense, reaching for their vision of the best life they can live. However, they possess such profound belief in their own vision that they will not heed the warnings which are given to them. In a sense they commit a sin of pride and it is this act which leads to their ultimate disillusionment.

Of the first group of heroines, George Eliot created Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede, Rosamond Vincy in Middlemarch and Gwendolen Harleth in Daniel Deronda, while James created Christina Light in Roderick Hudson. Of the second group, while Maggie Tulliver of The Mill on the Floss and Romola from the novel Romola could be included, this discussion will be limited to George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke in Middlemarch and James's Isabel Archer in Portrait of a Lady. It should be pointed out that, while the two divisions which have been set up are quite recognizable, they are not perfectly rigid. Gwendolen Harleth is not always selfish, nor is Isabel Archer always unselfish. And Christina Light is such a glowing mixture of every characteristic imaginable that one is finally forced to qualify any very rigid statement made about her.

Of this first group of heroines the first was George Eliot's Hetty Sorrel. After the publication of Adam Bede in 1866, James wrote both a review of the book and a longer article in which he discussed all of the novels written by George Eliot to that date. Of Hetty he said, "I accept her with all my heart." He felt her to be the "least ambitious" of all of George Eliot's characters

and the "most successful." He believed that Eliot was right not to "make her [Hetty] serious by suffering" because James felt her to be "vain and superficial by nature."

Hetty is a beautiful coquette. She is vain about her beauty and knows of her power over men. She uses Adam's love for her, first to test her own power and later as a means of getting away from her uncle's farm. Her dreams expand from simply wearing white stockings and beautiful earrings to becoming a lady in Arthur Donnithorne's house. She is a proud person for she "would have borne anything rather than be laughed at, or pointed at with any other feeling than admiration" (146).[4] Hetty possesses no foresight: of her "vision of consequences," George Eliot states that it was "at no time more than a narrow fantastic calculation of her own probable pleasures and pains." (247) However, self-centered as Hetty is, when she discovers that she is pregnant with Arthur Donnithorne's child and sets out on the long trek to Stony Stratford, the reader feels only pity for her. Nor does this response change when it is discovered that Hetty has allowed her child to die by exposure. For Hetty is not merely a victim of her own selfishness; she is also uneducated, unsophisticated, and unintelligent. She is essentially a pathetic character. Of her ruin James states:

> . . . there is something infinitely tragic in the reader's sense of the contrast between the sternly prosaic life of the good people about her, their wholesome decency and their noonday probity, and the dusky sylvan path along which poor Hetty is tripping, light-footed, to her ruin.[5]

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[3]James, "The Novels of George Eliot," Atlantic Monthly, 18 (October, 1866), 487.

[4]Citations from Adam Bede in my text are to The Best-Known Novels of George Eliot (New York, n.d.).

[5]James, "The Novels of George Eliot," 487.

Although Rosamond Vincy in the novel Middlemarch is in many ways quite like Hetty, there is virtually no possibility that the reader will sympathize with her. James called her "a rare psychological study," "veritably a mulish domestic flower," and he stated that she "represents, in a measure, the fatality of British decorum."[6] Rosamond has received the education which Hetty never possessed, but George Eliot is quick to show that this education was of a special kind:

> Rosamond never showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date. Think no unfair evil of her, pray: she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact, she never thought of money except as something necessary which other people would always provide. She was not in the habit of devising falsehoods, and if her statements were no direct clue to fact, why, they were not intended in that light--they were among her elegant accomplishments, intended to please. Nature had inspired many arts in finishing Mrs. Lemon's favourite pupil, who by general consent . . . was a rare compound of beauty, cleverness, and amiability (198).[7]

These "elegant accomplishments, intended to please," represented for Rosamond her means of improving her position. For Rosamond felt that it made a difference to be "of good family" and "that she might have been happier if she had not been the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer" (75). Before her marriage to Lydgate she had "foreseen the visits she would pay to her husband's relatives . . . whose finished manners she could appropriate as thoroughly as she had done her school accomplishments, preparing herself thus for vaguer elevations which might ultimately come" (88). She never did anything she found disagreeable. She "had that victorious obstinacy which never wastes its

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[6]James, "George Eliot's Middlemarch," Galaxy, XV (March, 1873), 424-428, reprinted in Nineteenth Century Fiction, 8 (December, 1953), 161-170.

[7]Citations from Middlemarch in my text are to Middlemarch, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston, 1956).

energy in impetuous resistance. What she liked to do was to her the right thing, and all her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it" (427). Those people who stood in her way were "disagreeable people who only thought of themselves, and did not mind how annoying they were to her" (487). Her blonde beauty and her long, graceful neck take on more and more sinister qualities in each successive scene with Lydgate. They are a reminder of a statement earlier in the book that:

> Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her physique: she even acted her own character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own (87).

Although Rosamond moves in a larger world than does Hetty, although she is more sophisticated and intelligent than is Hetty, her view remains as narrow as does Hetty's. But Rosamond is much more sinister than is Hetty, for her vain and selfish nature is fortified by her intelligence and the "elegant accomplishments" of Mrs. Lemon's finishing school.

Hetty is a relatively static creation: regardless of her many sufferings she remains essentially a vain and selfish individual. Rosamond, although a more subtle creation than Hetty, is even more static. Only for one brief moment is Rosamond aware of desires different from her own, and that is only because Dorothea Brooke, with whom Rosamond comes in contact, has a stronger, more passionate nature. In that scene between Rosamond and Dorothea, when Rosamond confesses to Dorothea that Will Ladislaw is not in love with her (Rosamond) but with Dorothea, Rosamond forgets her own selfish desires. But such a lapse does not occur again. Rosamond retains her blind, obstinate nature and finally forces Lydgate to abandon his practice in Middlemarch and move to London where he treats only those patients who can afford it.

Although Hetty and Rosamond are eminently successful creations, Gwendolen

Harleth is "a kind of superior reality," as James has stated.[8] Part of the reason for George Eliot's success in her creation is the fact that Gwendolen Harleth does not remain a static creation. And her growth is one of the most painful processes ever experienced within the covers of a novel.

At the beginning of the story Gwendolen seems to be another Rosamond. She is beautiful, a coquette, selfish and vain. She is more intelligent then Rosamond, quite as accomplished and clever. She, like Rosamond, has acquired the education which has provided all of the elegant accomplishments necessary for the young girl to make a brilliant match. "About her French and music, the two justifying accomplishments of a young lady," Gwendolen "felt no ground for unseasiness" and "on all occasions of display" Gwendolen feels her belief deepen "that so exceptional a person as herself could hardly remain in ordinary circumstances or in a social position less than advantageous" (I, 38).[9] Always, wherever she goes, she excites attention. She is the center of her world, always treated like a "princess in exile." Like Rosamond she is an accomplished actress everywhere but on the stage. But, unlike Rosamond and Hetty, her dreams "never dwelt on marriage as the fulfillment of her ambition." She knows that marriage for her will be a "social promotion," and that it is necessary, but rather than settle into the "dreary state" she has observed most wives to occupy, she means to lead. And she means to lead in such a manner that she will be able "to do what was most pleasant to herself in a striking manner; or rather whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living" (I, 37).

However, there are new touches added to this picture: Gwendolen possesses

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[8] James, "The Life of George Eliot," 108.

[9] Citations from Daniel Deronda in my text are to Daniel Deronda, 3 vols. (Boston and New York, n.d.).

a sort of nameless fear, a fear of loneliness, of open spaces, of the disregard of other people, of passion. This fear, especially her fear of the disregard of other people, is one of the means whereby she later suffers so intensely. Also, although Gwendolen finds most people boring, especially men, she does possess a real affection for her mother, so that when she does finally marry Grandcourt, it is not merely for her own sake; she marries Grandcourt as much to save her mother from a penniless existence as to save herself. Finally, George Eliot has been very careful to show that Gwendolen possesses just the rudiments of a conscience:

> One night under an attack of pain she [Gwendolen's mother] found that the specific regularly placed by her bedside had been forgotten, and begged Gwendolen to get out of bed and reach it for her. That healthy young lady, snug and warm as a rosy infant in her little couch, objected to step out into the cold, and lying perfectly still, grumbled a refusal. Mrs. Davilow went without the medicine, and never reproached her daughter; but the next day Gwendolen was keenly conscious of what must be in her mamma's mind, and tried to make amends by caresses which cost her no effort . . . Though never even as a child thoughtlessly cruel, nay, delighting to rescue drowning insects and watch their recovery, there was a disagreeable silent remembrance of her having strangled her sister's canary-bird in a final fit of exasperation at its shrill singing which had again and again jarringly interrupted her own. She had taken pains to buy a white mouse for her sister in retribution, and though inwardly excusing herself on the ground of a peculiar sensitiveness which was a mark of her general superiority, the thought of that infelonious murder had always made her wince. Gwendolen's nature was not remorseless, but she liked to make her penances easy . . . (I, 21, 22).

This rudimentary conscience has not been fostered by Gwendolen's education nor by the society in which Gwendolen lives. Reared for the "marriage market," Gwendolen's superficial accomplishments identify her as a graceful, well-bred girl, but this exterior is sadly betrayed by her weak moral fiber. However, although she only possesses a rudimentary conscience, when Gwendolen learns of the existence of Grandcourt's mistress and children, she revolts against marriage to him; and she only marries Grandcourt after her mother has lost her

fortune and is in a really straitened condition, and Gwendolen herself is faced with the dreary prospect of becoming a governess.

Victim though Gwendolen is, she yet had been conscious of the fact that her marriage to Grandcourt might lead to his son's disinheritance. Thus, while one may well be in full sympathy with Gwendolen's plight, he yet must agree that her suffering is no greater than that of Grandcourt's mistress and his son, suffering which Gwendolen might have prevented. Gwendolen's suffering is greatly intensified by the mental torture that her husband deliberately inflicts upon her. And ironically, Gwendolen had favored Grandcourt above all of her other suitors because she saw in him the very traits which lead him to torture her so unmercifully. George Eliot clearly delineates those traits:

> . . . his mind was much furnished with a sense of what brutes his fellow-creatures were, both masculine and feminine; what odious familiarities they had, what smirks, what modes of flourishing their handkerchiefs, what costume, what lavender water, what bulging eyes, and what foolish notions of making themselves agreeable by remarks which were not wanted. In this critical view of mankind there was an affinity between him and Gwendolen before their marriage, . . . she had been attractingly wrought upon by the refined negations he presented to her (III, 283).

After her marriage to Grandcourt Gwendolen becomes aware of his reasons for wishing to marry her: he wished to subject her completely to his will precisely because she was beautiful, intelligent and accomplished. Gwendolen learns, while subjected to her unbearable marriage, that the accomplishments and social prominence which she had so highly valued aid her not at all in her miserable condition. Furthermore, when she meets Daniel Deronda, the complete antithesis of Grandcourt, she becomes fully aware of her moral failures, of her selfishness, her unworthiness. And it is because of her developing love for him, her desire to have him think worthily of her that she begins her long, even more painful struggle to forget herself, to live a less selfish life. It

is of this struggle James speaks when he states:

> Gwendolen's history is admirably typical--as most things are with George Eliot: it is the very stuff that human life is made of. What is it made of but the discovery by each of us that we are at the best but a rather ridiculous fifth wheel to the coach, after we have sat cracking our whip and believing that we are at least the coachman in person? We think we are the main hoop to the barrel, and we turn out to be but a very incidental splinter in one of the staves. The universe forcing itself with a slow, inexorable pressure into a narrow, complacent, and yet after all extremely sensitive mind, and making it ache with the pain of the process--that is Gwendolen's story.[10]

Thus, in more universal terms James describes the struggle of this selfish, vain but intelligent creature, who, through her suffering and her respect for a good man, begins, for the first time, to look beyond herself, to see that goals other than the simple fullfillment of her petty desires may be more worthy.

In the same year that Daniel Deronda was published, James published the novel Roderick Hudson, in which he creates a character similar to Gwendolen Harleth. This character, Christina Light, possesses the same vanity as Gwendolen Harleth and an even more dazzling beauty. Like Gwendolen, Christina is completely disdainful of most of the men who court her. But she is much more sophisticated and knowledgeable. Not only does she possess the intelligence of Gwendolen Harleth, she also possesses a self-knowledge much more complete. Speaking to Rowland Mallett she says:

> . . . the only nice thing, I think, really is to be as ignorant as a fish. We can't be though, you or I, unfortunately, can we? We're so awfully intelligent. We're born to know and to suffer, aren't we? (119)[11]

Like Gwendolen, Christina has also been educated in order to attract the

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[10] James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," Partial Portraits.

[11] Citations from Roderick Hudson in my text are to Roderick Hudson (New York, 1960).

best offer in the "marriage market," but unlike Gwendolen, Christina is aware of the fact that her education has been in reality a horrible one. She knows that her mother has attempted to provide for her the education which will make her most attractive to the highest bidder, the highest bidder being the man who holds the highest title and who possesses the most money. Christina is "excessively proud, and holds herself fit for the highest station in the world." Yet, like Gwendolen, when she meets a really good man, Rowland Mallett, a man she can respect, she readily admits her unworthiness to Mallett:

> You see I'm a strange girl, and rather bold and bad. I'm frightfully egotistical. Don't flatter yourself you've said anything very clever if you ever take it into your head to tell me so. I know it much better than you. So it is; I can't help it. I'm tired to death of myself; I would give all I possess to get out of myself; but somehow at the end I find myself so vastly more interesting than nine-tenths of the people I meet (144).

And, like Gwendolen, Christina tries to make the man she respects return her respect: she breaks with Rowland's friend Roderick Hudson because Rowland has convinced Christina that she can only harm Roderick. Because of Rowland's influence, she tries to escape the "marriage market" and the destiny her mother has planned for her. There is a slight hint in the novel that Christina is in love with Rowland and that had he loved her, she might have escaped. As it is she marries the Prince and is doomed to a brilliantly dull future.

It is interesting to note here that both James and George Eliot see this type of heroine as a victim of her culture. And, ultimately, in neither case does her intelligence help either heroine much. Rather, it seems only to intensify their suffering. The only thing which seems to help them at all is their association with a good man, and even that aid is slight.

Although I have placed Isabel Archer in the second group of heroines, various similarities between her and Gwendolen Harleth exist. F. R. Leavis has gone so far as to state: "Henry James wouldn't have written The Portrait

of a Lady if he hadn't read Gwendolen Harleth . . . and . . . Isabel Archer is Gwendolen and Osmond is Grandcourt . . . ."[12] Leavis points out that The Portrait of a Lady was published in 1881, six years after Daniel Deronda was published, and that James was very interested in Gwendolen. He quotes a statement which James made in "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," a review which James wrote in 1876:

> Gwendolen is a perfect picture of youthfulness--its eagerness, its presumption, its preoccupation with itself, its vanity and silliness, its sense of its own absoluteness. But she is extremely intelligent and clever, and therefore tragedy can have a hold upon her.[13]

This statement, says Leavis, is a description of Isabel Archer. Had Leavis wished to do so, he could also have pointed out that in the "Conversation," through James's two characters Constantia and Pulcheria, he wonders how Gwendolen would have acted had she been an American girl, and Pulcheria states that it wouldn't be the same at all, the American girl "wouldn't be afraid of the lord." And, although the reader cannot take Pulcheria's remarks too seriously, when she states that George Eliot made "the fatal error of making Gwendolen vulgarly, pettily, drily selfish," one must admit that the basic distinction which can be made between Gwendolen and Isabel is the fact that Isabel is not selfish as is Gwendolen.

When James first introduces Isabel, his various descriptions of her reveal some characteristics quite similar to Gwendolen's. There are hints that she is a coquette, and although she doesn't exploit it as does Gwendolen, she is proud of her power over the two men who propose to her--Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood. Also, like Gwendolen, Isabel is sure of her own superiority:

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[12]F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Garden City, New York, 1954), 108.
[13]James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," 88.

> Whether or no she were superior, people were right in admiring her if they thought her so; for it seemed to her often that her mind moved more quickly than theirs, and this encouraged an impatience that might easily be confounded with superiority. It may be affirmed without delay that Isabel was probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem; she often surveyed with complacency the field of her own nature; she was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she was right; she treated herself to occasions of homage. Meanwhile her errors and delusion were frequently such as a biographer interested in preserving the dignity of his subject must shrink from specifying. Her thoughts were a tangle of vague outlines which had never been corrected by the judgment of people speaking with authority (I, 67).[14]

It is also true that although Osmond is not Grandcourt as Mr. Leavis asserts, he possesses the same basic nature. Both Osmond and Grandcourt are supercilious men who believe all mankind to be despicable. Both men demand of their wives an extremely "correct" behavior. Regardless of the actual relationship existing between husband and wife, both men are correctly attentive to their wives while in public. The most striking similarity between the two is the fact that their haughty, imperious rudeness is cultivated precisely because they court the favor of the public they seemingly ignore. Both men accomplish their goal each time their incivility results in a fawning audience. However, a quite basic difference exists between the two men: Osmond is a more refined character than is Grandcourt. Osmond wishes to marry Isabel because she will be his finishing adornment just as his home, his possessions, his child are adornments to him. Grandcourt wishes to marry Gwendolen in order to dominate her, in order, in a sense, to be able to assert his mastery over her in the same way he masters his dogs.

A final comparison may be made between the two marriages, one the exact reverse of the other. Because Isabel is rich, Osmond marries her; because

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[14]Citations from The Portrait of a Lady in my text are to The Portrait of a Lady, 2 vols. (New York, 1951).

Grandcourt is rich, Gwendolen marries him. And, ironically, in the case of Isabel, the fact that Osmond is poor is the ultimate factor which leads Isabel to accept Osmond's offer of marriage, while the sudden poverty of Gwendolen heightens her desirability for Grandcourt. Isabel, of course, only wishes to put her money into Osmond's hands while Grandcourt knows that Gwendolen's lack of money will make her more subservient to his will; nevertheless the similarities do exist.

However, striking as the preceding parallels seem to be, Isabel Archer is much more like Dorothea Brooke from the novel Middlemarch than like Gwendolen Harleth. Isabel, unlike Gwendolen, desires knowledge and has cultivated this desire by reading a great deal. Also, as her cousin Ralph informs her at the beginning of the novel, she, unlike Gwendolen, possesses an overactive conscience. When she receives the fortune from her uncle her reaction is one of fear because, as Isabel states:

> A large fortune means freedom, and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it. If one shouldn't one would be ashamed. And one must keep thinking; it's a constant effort. I'm not sure it's not a greater happiness to be powerless (I, 320).

This sense of duty is one of the traits which distinguishes Isabel from Gwendolen and makes her akin to Dorothea Brooke. Dorothea's whole concept of life is one of duty. However, unlike Isabel, Dorothea's sense of duty is heightened by her religious ardor, a trait so intense that she refuses to ride horseback because it gives her pleasure. Her religious ardor is, however, only one of her most important characteristics:

> The intensity of her religious disposition, the coercion it exercised over her life, was but one aspect of a nature altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent: and with such a nature, struggling in the bands of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no whither,

> the outcome was sure to strike others as at once exaggeration and inconsistency. The thing which seemed to her best, she wanted to justify by the completest knowledge; and not to live in a pretended admission of rules which were never acted on. Into this soul-hunger as yet all her youthful passion was poured; the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from the girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path. (21)

If one were to eliminate the reference to Dorothea's religious disposition, he would have a statement quite as descriptive of Isabel as it is of Dorothea.

The union referred to in the above quotation is Dorothea's forthcoming marrige to Casaubon, a man at least twenty-seven years her senior. He is not a well man and his eyesight is failing, but Dorothea believes him to be a great man and a great scholar; consequently, he is one who will "take her along the grandest path." None of Dorothea's friends or relatives believe the marriage to be a good one and her sister Celia's protestations are especially vociferous. Dorothea herself receives hints that this man whom she believes to be a great scholar is actually a pedant, one with an exceedingly withered nature; but Dorothea is so very sure that her vision is correct that she refuses to heed any warnings given to her. It is impossible to find fault with Dorothea's motives for marrying Casaubon. She envisions in her marriage the highest life attainable and she also hopes to serve Casaubon in his work.

Isabel enters her marriage under much the same conditions. Osmond represents to her the life of culture which is to her the best life. As in Dorothea's case, none of Isabel's friends or relatives approve of the marriage and all voice their protestations to Isabel. But, like Dorothea, Isabel believes so greatly in her own vision that she refuses to listen to any advice, even that of her cousin Ralph. Also, as with Dorothea, Isabel's reasons for marrying Osmond are unassailable: as has been stated before, Osmond represents to Isabel the good life; she believes that he will teach her to understand and

appreciate the life of culture. Like Dorothea, Isabel hopes to be of service to her husband. She wishes to place at his disposal her money whereby he will be given the opportunity to satisfy his exquisite taste.

However, in both cases, the heroines are wrong. Dorothea discovers soon after her marriage that her husband is not a great scholar, that he is absolutely incapable of leading her along the "grandest path" because his nature is so withered that he has no ability to respond to either the beauties with which he comes into contact nor her passionate nature. The great study which he has been working on, The Key to All Mythologies, has never been finished because Casaubon has realized that the finished study would betray the fact that he does not possess the intellectual power for which he is noted.

Isabel also discovers soon after her marriage that Osmond's life consists of meaningless, empty forms designed to produce the impression that he is a man of culture. Both women have been betrayed: rather than finding the highest existence possible, they have both found a life of meaningless forms. And although Osmond has been deceptive, although he has kept his past relationship to Madame Merle a secret, neither Osmond nor Casaubon has willingly glossed over his character. Casaubon's pedantry and Osmond's smug superiority were apparent before their marriage, but Dorothea and Isabel chose either to overlook or to attach a different meaning to these signs. Thus, Isabel and Dorothea have been betrayed ultimately by their own vision.

The respective plots involving each heroine further support this theme: that both women have been betrayed by their own vision. For both novelists have endeavored to give their heroines a freedom of choice. While Dorothea is not extremely rich, she has a comfortable income. She is an intelligent being whose independent mind sometimes adheres to beliefs contradictory to popular Middlemarch attitudes. Her rather ascetic religious ardor is at variance with

Middlemarch complacency and her projects for the building of new cottages for her uncle's tenants are at variance with her uncle's ideas of management. However, Dorothea's strong intellect and independent position make it possible for her to continue in her beliefs regardless of the opinions of those around her.

Isabel's situation is relatively similar. She becomes rich when she inherits the great bulk of a fortune left her by her uncle, Mr. Touchett; and she is an intelligent, responsible person. The parents of both heroines are dead and the nearest living relatives are a sister or sisters and an aunt or uncle. Thus, all possible external coercion is eliminated. There is no way in which circumstances or the relatives of either heroine can force her into a path contrary to her wishes.

However, a difference does exist in the situation of the two heroines, a difference which at least gives the illusion that Isabel is a freer agent than is Dorothea. For Dorothea acts out her drama against the background of the whole social and religious tradition of Middlemarch. And the effect of the Middlemarch <u>milieu</u> upon Dorothea is to limit the alternatives available to her. The only other choice available to Dorothea is the proposal of marriage offered by Sir James Chettam, who is certainly an amiable person and a quite wealthy one, but who strikes the reader as being anything but "intellectually consequent." Sir James Chettam, by the ordinary social standards of Middlemarch, is an eminently worthy match for Dorothea, but in reality Dorothea's marriage to him would have resulted in a stifling, commonplace existence, an existence directly contradictory to Dorothea's desire to travel "along the grandest path."

Isabel, however, has been freed from any of the confining influences of a community. Furthermore, she has never been subjected too strenously to the attitudes and determining influences of a definite locality since much of her

time as a child has been spent traveling in Europe. She does exhibit American traits but these traits are usually described as "quaint" or "peculiar"; the American influence has not limited her development. Furthermore, the alternatives of marriage open to Isabel are not as limited as are Dorothea's. Isabel may choose to marry an eminently eligible American businessman, Caspar Goodwood; or the Englishman, Lord Warburton, who can offer Isabel position, influence, wealth, and a highly respectable name. With the addition of Osmond's name, one may assume that Isabel has her choice of three of the best offers of marriage available from America, England, and the Continent. Thus, James has created the illusion that Isabel is a completely free agent; whereas George Eliot, by the very act of placing Dorothea Brooke within the confining influences of the small community of Middlemarch, has, of necessity, limited the freedom of Dorothea's actions.

This difference is distinquishable in other works by the two authors. With the exception of Tito Melema from the novel Romola and Gwendolen Harleth, both of whom traveled during their early years, George Eliot's major creations--Maggie Tulliver from The Mill on the Floss; Adam Bede and Hetty Sorrel, from Adam Bede; Romola, from the novel Romola; Felix Holt, Ester Lyon, and Mrs. Transome, from the novel Felix Holt--are all placed within a social milieu which, in varying degrees, affects the freedom of choice or shapes the attitudes of these characters. James, on the other hand, minimizes such influence upon his major characters by transplanting them to foreign soil. And even, as in the case of Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess Cassamassima, when James places the characters against a social background, the struggle remains a personal battle of conflicting values; the character remains a free agent.

This difference between the two authors becomes even more obvious when one studies the weaker characters in George Eliot's works. Hetty Sorrel, for exam-

ple, seems to possess absolutely no free will. George Eliot is careful to delineate Hetty's character thoroughly; when Hetty has learned that she is pregnant, George Eliot writes:

> In a mind where no strong sympathies are at work, where there is no supreme sense of right to which the agitated nature can cling and steady itself to quiet endurance, one of the first results of sorrow is a desperate vague clutching after any deed that will change the actual condition. Poor Hetty's vision of consequences, at no time more than a narrow fantastic calculation of her own probable pleasures and pains, was now quite shut out by reckless irritation under present suffering, and she was ready for one of those convulsive, motiveless actions by which wretched men and women leap from a temporary sorrow into a life-long misery. (247)

Hetty's act of infanticide is prepared for at this point in the novel; the act seems to grow out of the fact that Hetty possesses a vain nature. The explicit lack of motive implies a lack of volition. When the reader learns that Hetty has murdered her child, he feels that Hetty has been driven to this act by various internal forces. In retrospect, Hetty's doom seems to have been determined from the moment her selfish, vain nature was tempted by the hope of marrying Arthur Donnithorne.

Thus, George Eliot's weaker characters seem to be completely dominated by internal and external forces, while even her strong characters are never completely free from such influences. On the other hand, James's characters are usually freed from such driving forces and are capable of making freer choices.

Both George Eliot and Henry James are moralists. Both novelists depict their major characters in terms of movement away from or toward some kind of moral vision. Early in his career, before James had written any of his novels, he highly praises George Eliot's morality:

> It is not bold, nor passionate, nor aggressive, nor uncompromising--it is constant, genial, and discreet. It is apparently the fruit of a great deal of culture, experience, and resignation. It carries with it that charm and that authority which will always attend the assertions of a mind enriched by researches, when it declares that

wisdom and affection are better than science.[15]

James undoubtedly learned a great deal from a study of George Eliot's characters and morality. But just as he went one step beyond George Eliot in his creation of characters, by removing them from the possibility of coercive external and internal forces, so also did he go a step beyond George Eliot's morality. The characters which George Eliot created finally reach a moral position which is defined in terms of their relation to the society in which they live. But the James hero or heroine reaches ultimately a moral position which transcends the claims of society. The James herodoes not deny the claims of society; he merely goes beyond them to attain what he (or James) deems to be a higher goal, a goal which is dictated by the character's own moral identity. As a result he usually emerges an isolated, lonely individual. This difference between the two authors can best be explained by contrasting Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke with Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether.

Maggie Tulliver renounces her love for Stephen Guest because she has made a commitment to Phillip Wakem and Stephen has made a commitment to Maggie's cousin Lucy. Maggie explains her reasons for doing so to Stephen as he passionately pleads with her to break these former ties and marry him:

> . . . I can't believe in a good for you, that I feel--that we both feel is a wrong towards others. We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or for another: we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us--for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives (751).[16]

Maggie will not marry Stephen because such an action would result in pain for others. She has accepted the full responsibility of being a member of mankind;

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[15] James, Book Review of Felix Holt, the Radical, The Nation 3 (August 16, 1866), 127.

[16] Citations from The Mill on the Floss in my text are to The Best-Known Novels of George Eliot.

thus, she must renounce her own desires for happiness when those desires will result in the pain of another person. Ironically Maggie's decision, a decision which arises from her sense of responsibility to society, results in her alienation from society. But her decision has been based upon a moral integrity which places the good of her fellow man above her own desires for happiness.

Dorothea's movement through the novel is different from Maggie's, but her position at the conclusion is much the same. Dorothea moves figuratively from the chilly heights of an ideal perspective into the reality of suffering and pain in the world. Early after Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon, George Eliot defines Dorothea's moral position. As Dorothea watches a funeral from a window of her room, George Eliot explains:

> . . . this scene of old Featherstone's funeral, which, aloof as it seemed to be from the tenor of life, always afterwards came back to her at the touch of certain sensitive points in memory, . . . Scenes which make vital changes in our neighbours' lot are but the background of our own, yet, like a particular aspect of the fields and trees, they become associated with the epochs of our own history, and make a part of that unity which lies in the selection of our keenest consciousness.
>
> The dream-like association of something alien and ill-understood with the deepest secrets of her experience seemed to mirror that sense of loneliness which was due to the very ardour of Dorothea's nature. The country gentry of old time lived in a rarefied social air: dotted apart on their stations up the mountain they looked down with imperfect discrimination on the belts of thicker life below. And Dorothea was not at ease in the perspective and chilliness of that height (238).

Dorothea is isolated from the world. And her isolation has resulted from the fact that, although her desires have been nobly motivated, they have been largely self-centered. She had wished to marry Casaubon because of her desire to tread "along the grandest path," but her sympathy had never responded to the possible hopes that Casaubon might have had. She was as unaware of the possible hopes that Casaubon might have built around their marriage as he was un-

aware of her hopes. Even Dorothea's desire to serve Casaubon is the result of her own desire to serve in some worthy cause; it is not the result of any divination on Dorothea's part of Casaubon's needs. Thus, Dorothea's movement through the novel is defined in terms of the sympathy which she learns to extend first to Casaubon, then to Ladislaw, Lydgate, and Rosamond. And each time Dorothea extends sympathy to another human being, she must renounce her own desires or her own sense of pain, dissatisfaction or betrayal. She is able to sympathize with another person because she has forgotten "self." Ultimately, then, the moral position which Dorothea reaches soon after the death of Casaubon is a preparation for her final act, her marriage to Ladislaw. Again, as Dorothea watches a scene from her bedroom window George Eliot writes:

> . . . there was light piercing into the room. She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving--perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining (578).

Dorothea has accepted her responsibility as a human being involved with mankind. She has renounced her ideal, unrealistic dream of traveling "the grandest path." And, with it, she has renounced her dreams of effecting grand reforms within the world. She has now accepted the common lot of the individual. Thus, her marriage to Ladislaw is thematically correct, for he is most assuredly not a noble character; rather, he is almost too fallible and too ordinary for the reader to accept him fully as a suitable mate for Dorothea. But the two are united by understanding and mutual sympathy. So, while Dorothea's final marriage is far from the perfect marriage, it does represent her acceptance of the human lot, her entry into the world.

Isabel Archer's movement is also a movement toward moral vision, but of a different kind. Isabel's position at the beginning of the nevel is probably even freer and higher than Dorothea's. Her marriage to Osmond is represented by Ralph Touchett as a fall to earth, not a fall which results in greater human sympathy, but rather in degradation. Ralph states:

> "I had treated myself to a charming vision of your future . . . I had amused myself with planning out a high destiny for you. There was to be nothing of this sort in it. You were not to come down so easily or so soon."
>
> "Come down, you say?"
>
> "Well, that renders my sense of what has happened to you. You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue--to be sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly some one tosses up a faded rosebud--a missile that should never have reached you--and straight you drop to the ground" (II, 69, 70).

Although Isabel's marriage appears to be a fall, the suffering caused by this marriage does result in moral progress. During the length of most of the book, this progress closely resembles Dorothea's. Isabel also reaches a point at which she can pity Osmond, at which she can realize that Osmond's hopes also had not been fullfilled by the marriage. And she completely renounces her pride at two crucial moments: at one time in order to extend comfort to Caspar Goodwood; and at another time in order to comfort Ralph Touchett on his death-bed. The scene with Caspar occurs during his second visit to Isabel after her marriage to Osmond. Caspar Goodwood's love for Isabel has only deepened after her marriage, and Isabel has earlier realized that "he had invested his all in her happiness, while the others had invested only a part" (II, 282). Caspar Goodwood has lost all hope of happiness since he has lost the hope that Isabel will marry him. It is with this knowledge that Isabel grants his last interview with her:

> ". . . I love you as I've never loved you."

> "I know it. I knew it as soon as you consented to go."
>
> "You can't help it--of course not. You would if you could, but you can't unfortunately. Unfortunately for me, I mean. I ask nothing--nothing, that is, I shouldn't. But I do ask one sole satisfaction:--that you tell me--that you tell me--!
>
> "That I tell you what?"
>
> "Whether I may pity you."
>
> "Should you like that?" Isabel asked, trying to smile again.
>
> "To pity you? Most assuredly! That at least would be doing something. I'd give my life to it."
>
> She raised her fan to her face, which it covered all except her eyes. They rested a moment on his. "Don't give your life to it; but give a thought to it every now and then." And with that she went back to the Countess Gemini (II, 320).

Similarly, although Isabel has sworn earlier that Ralph Touchett will never know of her unhappiness, she again renounces her pride and admits to Ralph the wretchedness of her state, for in so doing "it brought them supremely together, and he [Ralph] was beyond the state of pain." (413) But, ultimately, Isabel's final renunciation results not only from her ties of human sympathy with mankind, but also from her moral integrity, from her adherence to a personal principle. She refuses to leave Osmond and go off with Caspar Goodwood because she has deliberately and willingly entered into her marriage. She renounces any future hope of happiness because she believes wholeheartedly in a principle which, ironically, is enunciated by Osmond but which he only values for the sake of appearances: ". . . I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing" (II, 356). It is true that she has also promised Pansy that she will return but the promise was made after Isabel's scene with Osmond.

Similar to Isabel's renunciation is Lambert Strether's renunciation in the novel The Ambassadors. Lambert Strether has gambled everything in the belief

that the relationship between Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet is an innocent one. By the time Strether finally discovers that such is not the case, he has alienated Mrs. Newsome, the woman whom he had planned to marry. Although all of his former ties in America have been sundered, he chooses to return to America even though Maria Gostrey has most generously offered him the comfort of her companionship in Europe. Why does Strether return to America? As he explains to Maria Gostrey in their last interview before he leaves Europe:

> ". . . But all the same I must go." He had got it at last. "To be right."
>
> "To be right?"
>
> She had echoed it in vague deprecation, but he felt it already clear for her. "That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (407).[17]

Strether, in order to be right, in order to be honorable, must not have profited from the trip to Europe. His staying in Europe would hurt nobody; yet he cannot stay if he wishes to remain true to his personal sense of honor.

The James hero or heroine usually, by the end of the novel, arrives at a moral position which results in virtual isolation. James seems to believe that his characters in order to remain true to their personal standards must ultimately renounce all close, personal ties. On the other hand, the George Eliot hero or heroine arrives finally at a moral position in which the close, personal tie based upon sympathy and understanding is one of the most sacred bonds which man can attain. The George Eliot character has reached his goal when he accepts his responsibility to mankind.

James demands more of his characters; he is also more "tough-minded" than is George Eliot. George Eliot seems incapable of allowing the actions of her

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[17]Citations from The Ambassadors in my text are to The Ambassadors, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York, 1960).

characters to carry through to their logical consequences. She allows Arthur Donnithorne to save Hetty melodramatically from the gallows. Just at the point when Gwendolen's situation becomes intolerable, George Eliot allows Grandcourt to drown. And just at the moment Casaubon places the most stringent demands upon Dorothea, George Eliot allows him to die. The reverse is true of James: Christina Light is forced into an unbearable marriage and Isabel Archer deliberately chooses to remain true to her empty existence with Osmond; Lambert Strether loses all and Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess Cassamassima takes his own life rather than to go back on his word.

A difference may also be demonstrated to exist between the George Eliot villain and the James villain or villainess. With the exception of Grandcourt who comes close to being a Jamesian villain, George Eliot's villains fit the pattern of the more traditional villain. They may usually be recognized by the fact that they deliberately violate some public moral standard and they are disgraced publicly. Bulstrode, the villain in Middlemarch has, in the past, been involved in a shady pawnbroker business and has married the owner's rich widow after concealing from her the fact that her daughter is still living in order that he may inherit her fortune when she dies. At her death Bulstrode moves to Middlemarch where he remarries. He lives there as a strong member of the church until his past returns to haunt him in the form of a certain Mr. Raffles. When Raffles becomes ill, Bulstrode conceals the doctor's orders against giving Raffles liquor. When Raffles dies Bulstrode is morally guilty of taking steps which he knew might result in Raffles's death; however, Bulstrode is not legally guilty. His retribution comes, not through the law, but through public disgrace. Tito Melema, in the novel Romola, is a traitor, both publicly and privately. He betrays his adopted father, his wife, the political parties within the city of Florence, and ultimately he betrays the city itself.

While he is trying to escape an avenging mob in Florence, he is caught and strangled by his adopted father. Matthew Jermyn, the villain in Felix Holt, the Radical has been filling his own pockets from the revenues of the Transome estate which he has managed during the absence of Harold Transome, the heir. Ironically, Harold Transome, discovers Jermyn's treachery and prosecutes him legally, an act which results in Jermyn's ruin and public disgrace.

George Eliot's villains are easily recognizable because they are such public types. The James villain, however, is not so easily recognized. He is a manipulator of other persons; he "uses" people in order to gain some end. Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle conceal their clandestine relationship from Isabel Archer and deliberately maneuver her into a marriage with Osmond so that Osmond will have the benefit of Isabel's fortune and so that Osmond's and Madame Merle's illegitimate daughter Pansy will be able to make a handsome marriage. Merton Densher and Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove use Milly Theale in the same manner. Aware that Milly is desperately ill and that she will undoubtedly not live too much longer, Kate persuades Merton to court Milly, for if he marries her, he will inherit her fortune after her death. Since Densher refuses to accept the money after Milly has willed it to him (even though she has learned of Densher's and Kate's betrayal) he is finally redeemed. But Kate remains a villainess throughout the novel.

The James villain also receives retribution, but it is a private retribution. And it comes only in the sense that the villain loses whatever end he had hoped to gain. Complete retribution does not come to Osmond, for although his marriage to Isabel has not become what he had hoped it would be, and although his plans for marrying Pansy to Lord Warburton have been thwarted, yet he retains the benefits of Isabel's fortune and he is able to maintain the public appearance that he is a man of exquisite taste and the "soul of honor."

Madame Merle, however, loses all: she is not able to see Pansy well-married; she must give up all connections with her child; and because Isabel is now aware of Madame Merle's treachery, she is forced to banish herself to America. Private retribution also comes to Merton Densher and Kate Croy. Merton Densher chooses to decline Milly's fortune; thus, Kate Croy loses the fortune also, and Densher and Kate lose each other because they discover that their relationship can never again be the same as it was before they met Milly.

The James villain is a more subtle person than is the George Eliot villain. He is thus more difficult to detect. Not one of the characters discussed above could be legally prosecuted; and not one of them suffers public shame; yet they are all morally guilty. Just as the James hero or heroine is not necessarily seen as a member of a certain social _milieu_, so also the James villain has not transgressed the laws of society.

Although George Eliot and Henry James do differ in their concept of the villain, they exhibit a certain similarity in their view of the paths by which a character may succumb to temptation. Maggie Tulliver and Merton Densher are good examples. Both are well-intentioned people; neither willfully desires to hurt another person. But both succumb to a temptation, the action of which results in the sorrow of another person because both temporarily have a suspension of will. Maggie's temptation occurs when she and Stephen Guest are thrown together alone because Lucy and Phillip have failed to appear for a projected boat trip. Although Maggie knows that the two of them should not take the boat trip alone, she seems unable to exert her will and deny herself that pleasure, for here, through no maneuvering of their own, is a chance for Maggie and Stephen to steal a short time together before they return to their duties. Soon the two are in the boat:

Maggie was hardly conscious of having said or done anything

> decisive. All yielding is attended with a less vivid consciousness than resistance; it is the partial sleep of thought; it is the submergence of our own personality by another. Every influence tended to lull her into acquiescence: that dreamy gliding in the boat, which had lasted for four hours, and had brought some weariness and exhaustion--the recoil of her fatigued sensations from the impracticable difficulty of getting out of the boat at this unknown distance from home, and walking for long miles--all helped to bring her into more complete subjection to that strong mysterious charm which made a last parting from Stephen seem the death of all joy--which made the thought of wounding him like the first touch of the torturing iron before which resolution shrank. And then there was the present happiness of being with him, which was enough to absorb all her languid energy (743).

At this point, Maggie and Stephen have already passed the town down the river which was their point of destination, and they have both realized the impossibility of returning to their home in time to avoid the discovery of their absence. Thus, they continue drifting down the river while Stephen pleads with Maggie to continue with him until they can reach a town where they can be married. Maggie does not consent to Stephen's plan but neither does she reject it, and she remains unable to reject it until the next morning, after Stephen and Maggie have been picked up by a steamer and have been carried down to the town of Luckreth. Ultimately, Maggie does awaken to her responsibilities and she refuses to marry Stephen. By the time she returns to her home, a period of two days has elapsed; Phillip and Lucy have both become aware of the love between Stephen and Maggie and have thus been wounded, and Maggie is disgraced. Yet Maggie never deliberately embraced evil; she was simply unable to exert her will against it.

Up to a point, Merton Densher follows the same path. When he first begins to visit Milly Theale, he is not doing so because he plans to marry Milly in order to inherit her money, but because Kate Croy has instructed him to visit Milly. He is driven by his desire for Kate, a desire so strong that he allows his will to be subjected to hers. After he has followed Milly's retinue to

Venice at Kate's instructions, he realizes how completely he has allowed Kate to dominate him:

> As soon as Kate appeared again the difference came up--the oddity as he then instantly felt it, of his having sunk so deep. It was sinking because it was all doing what Kate had conceived for him; it was not in the least doing--and that had been his notion of his life--anything he himself had conceived . . . . There glowed for him in fact a kind of rage for what he was not having; an exasperation, a resentment, begotten truly by the very impatience of desire, in respect to his postponed and relegated, his so extremely manipulated state. It was beautifully done of her, but what was the real meaning of it unless that he was perpetually bent to her will? (352)[18]

It is at this point that the similarity of Densher's and Maggie's paths ceases, for it is here that Densher first entertains consciously the complete idea--that he will marry Milly in order to inherit her money. His decision is that he will do so if Kate, in return, will spend one night in his room with him. It is after the night that Kate has come to his room that Densher willingly begins to act upon the idea that he will marry Milly.

Through the delineation of the paths of these two characters, George Eliot and James both show how evil may result as readily when the character does not deliberately fight against it as when the character deliberately embraces it. But Eliot and James do not confine their treatment of evil to those characters who only refuse to battle against it. And they both exhibit the same depth of insight into the other character--the one who deliberately embraces evil. George Eliot's character, Tito Melema, from the novel Romola begins his downward journey when he first chooses not to use the money he receives from the sale of his adopted father's jewels in order to ransom him from slavery. And, rather than admitting the evil of his deed, he rationalizes his conduct:

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[18]Citations from The Wings of the Dove are to The Wings of the Dove (New York, 1958).

> If now, under this midday sun, on some hot coast far away, a man somewhat stricken in years,--a man not without high thoughts and with the most passionate heart,--a man who long ago had rescued a little boy from a life of beggary, filth, and cruel wrong, had reared him tenderly, and been to him as a father,--if that man were now under this summer sun toiling as a slave, hewing wood and drawing water, perhaps being smitten and buffeted because he was not deft and active? . . . If that were certain, could he, Tito, see the price of gems lying before him and say, "I will stay at Florence, where I am fanned by soft airs of promised love and prosperity; I will not risk myself for his sake"? No, surely not, if it were certain. But nothing could be farther from certainty. (996)[19]

Later, when Tito learns that his adopted father is still alive, he again chooses to make no attempt to secure his release, but the old excuses will not work; therefore, he invents new ones:

> He had once said that on a fair assurance of his father's existence and whereabouts, he would unhesitatingly go after him. But, after all, why was he bound to go? What, looked at closely, was the end of all life but to extract the utmost sum of pleasure? And was not his own blooming life a promise of incomparably more pleasure, not for himself only, but for others, than the withered wintry life of a man who was past the time of keen enjoyment, and whose ideas had stiffened into barren rigidity? Those ideas had all been sown in the fresh soil of Tito's mind, and were lively germs there: that was the proper order of things,--the order of Nature, which treats all maturity as a mere nidus for youth. Baldassarre had done his work, had had his draught of life: Tito said it was his turn now (1009).

And throughout the novel, each time Tito commits another betrayal, he manufactures new excuses whereby he can excuse his conduct.

James sees his character, Kate Croy, as functioning in much the same manner. She first conceives of the plan which will result in the betrayal of Milly Theale and she puts it into motion because she wishes to marry Merton Densher, who is poor, but Kate wishes to be rich. Yet, she rationalizes by trying to convince both herself and Densher that she is manipulating Milly into marriage

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[19]Citations from Romola in my text are to The Best-Known Novels of George Eliot.

with Densher for Densher's sake and not for her own. Once, after Densher has become deeply involved with Milly, he asks Kate to give him proof of her affection for him as he has done for Kate by allowing himself to become entangled with Milly. Kate "considered with surprise. 'Am I not doing _this_ for you? Do you call this nothing?'" (368) The _this_ which Kate speaks of is her betrayal of Milly. And again, in a later scene Kate assures Densher: "I'm taking a trouble for you I never dreamed I should take for any human creature " (386). Both characters, Tito Melema and Kate Croy, deliberately commit acts which they know will result in pain for others: they know that they are wrong, yet they try to justify their acts by rationalizing their motives.

As has been stated before, both Eliot and James are moralists. Part of their greatness lies in their ability to delineate the consequences of an action. But both novelists are greatest in their psychological insight, in their ability to lay bare the motives of their characters. For often it is not the act itself, but the motives behind the act which are evil. However, the greatest creations of both novelists are not evil characters; they are those characters who are, to quote James "an eminent instance, as eminent as we like, of our own conscious kind."[20] James is speaking of those characters who partake of the universal because they are eminent examples of mankind. And, although the morality of the two novelists differ, their best character creations are equally great because those characters struggle with evil in order to attain a high moral position.

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[20]James, "Preface to _Roderick Hudson_," _The Art of the Novel_ (New York, 1934), 12.

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A COMPARISON OF THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF HENRY JAMES AND GEORGE ELIOT

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to show the similarities and differences between the moral psychology of Henry James and George Eliot. This study will show that the two novelists have created similar heroines and that George Eliot and Henry James have both exhibited similar psychological insights into their characters. Furthermore, both novelists tend to place their characters at a crossroads, at a point at which they must make a choice; then both novelists attempt to delineate the motives and psychological drives which lie behind the choice the character makes. Finally, by tracing the consequences of each character's choice, both novelists subject the motives governing the character's choice to a moral standard. It is because of this method that both novelists may be termed moral psychologists.

In order to carry out this research, I concentrated upon a study of the two authors' novels, the main ones being _Adam Bede_, _The Mill on the Floss_, _Middlemarch_, _Daniel Deronda_, and _Romola_ by George Eliot, and _Roderick Hudson_, _The Portrait of a Lady_, _The Ambassadors_, and _The Wings of the Dove_ by Henry James. I also studied the articles which James has written about George Eliot's works. It was impossible to use much secondary material, for though many critics mention the similarities between the two authors, few have dealt in detail with those similarities.

After I had completed my study of the two novelists, I came to several conclusions. Of the similar heroines created by the two novelists, most can be placed within two broad categories: those who are motivated by purely selfish desires and those who possess a desire to serve others. The first group includes Hetty Sorrel in _Adam Bede_, Rossmond Vincy in _Middlemarch_, and Gwendolen Harleth in _Daniel Deronda_, created by George Eliot, while James

created Christina Light in Roderick Hudson. The second group includes George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke in Middlemarch and James's Isabel Archer in Portrait of a Lady.

However, a difference does exist between the two novelists in their portrayal of characters: George Eliot tends to limit the freedom of choice for her characters by subjecting them to strong internal and external forces, while Henry James attempts to give his characters complete freedom of choice by giving them strong intellects and by removing them from all strong external forces.

Furthermore, although George Eliot and Henry James are both moralists, George Eliot advances a moral standard which is defined by the character's sense of responsibility to mankind, while James defines his moral standard in terms of the character's own sense of moral identity. This difference may also be seen in a comparison of the villains created by George Eliot and Henry James. George Eliot's villains transgress the laws of society and retribution comes to her villains through the means of public retribution. On the other hand James's villains, while they may also transgress the laws of society, are ultimately villains because they use people as tools to gain their own ends. Thus, the James villain never receives public retribution; his retribution is personal resulting in the loss of whatever end he has wished to attain.

Although the differences I have mentioned are present, I arrived ultimately to the conclusion that the greatness of the two novelists lies in their similarities: in their ability to delineate the consequences of a character's choice, in their ability to lay bare the motives of their characters, and in their ability to create characters who partake of the universal, those characters who, as James says in his "Preface to Roderick Hudson," are "an eminent instance, as eminent as we like, of our own conscious kind."