
A Visible Manifestation of Thought

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Eliot's main use of visibility in figurative language is in describing the difference between Hetty and Dinah. Hetty's invisible world is secret, while Dinah spends most of her energy trying to reveal the invisible to others.

Dinah has a "belief in *visible* manifestations of Jesus, which is common among the Methodists, and she communicate[s] it irresistibly to her hearers." It is significant that we are told this directly so early in the book—Chapter 2—because it is one of the first things we learn about her, and one of her most consistent characteristics.

Her belief in these manifestations is demonstrated by her use of the highly accurate decision-making technique of opening the Bible to a random page and seeing what it says. She says, "when I've opened the Bible for direction, I've always lighted on some clear word to tell me where my work lay" (3). She does not believe that some visible being is helping her to open to the correct page, she believes that God's grace is manifesting itself in her choice of page.

Dinah's ability to make others believe in these visible manifestations is chiefly visible

in her status as one of those manifestations. The most prominent example of this is when Hetty is in prison and on her way to execution. Dinah's visibility is mentioned several times during this period. When Hetty held her, it seemed to Hetty that "the pitying love that shone out from Dinah's face looked like a *visible pledge of the Invisible Mercy*" (46), and Dinah is later called "the only visible sign of love and pity" (47). She feels that it is her calling to be this visible sign, letting others see what would normally be invisible—the love and pity of God.

Hetty, on the other hand, keeps her thoughts secret. Until Hetty's journey, her unseen world consists of earrings, silk, and Arthur Donnithorne, and she tells no one. When she hears that old Thias Bede has drowned, she does not say a prayer, as would Dinah or anyone with a Christian faith. She is "as unsympathetic as butterflies sipping nectar; [she is] isolated from all appeals by a barrier of dreams—by *invisible* looks and impalpable arms" (9). Later, when she takes out the earrings that Arthur gives her, she does not think about the holy bliss of Marriage, nor even about Arthur, but that, "Some day she will be able to wear any earrings she likes." "Already she lives in an *invisible* world of *brilliant* costumes, *shimmering* gauze, soft satin, and velvet" (22).

Eliot also uses visibility in describing the change that occurs in Hetty on her journey: Hetty never thinks about spiritual things before the second part of her journey—quite the opposite, in fact! When Hetty is at Church for the first time in the book, for instance, she is specifically contrasted to Adam in this respect: "Mr. Irwine was pronouncing the solemn 'Absolution' in her deaf ears" while "Adam's thoughts of Hetty did not deafen him to the

service” (18). But in prison after she has disposed of the baby, she tells Dinah, “I *saw* nothing but that place in the wood where I’d buried the baby...I see it now” (45).

Dinah shows the invisible to others, while Hetty makes up a much less respectable invisible world and keeps it to herself. Both of these facts are powerful characterizations. When Hetty’s unseen world changes, her visible life changes also. Eliot’s imagery serves to describe both the powerful unseen world of Dinah’s God and the gauzy unseen world of Hetty, contrasting the two to great effect.