Judaism in *Daniel Deronda*

Anne Strauss

Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

2012

Advisor: Dr. Susan Einbinder

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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my thesis advisor, Dr. Susan Einbinder. She has guided and mentored me throughout this thesis project, always patient, encouraging, and supportive. Her advice not only in the thesis but in so many other areas – career, navigating rabbinic school, and life "in general" – is priceless to me. Her mentorship, which I look forward to having post-ordination as well, is one of the defining features of my rabbinic school experience.

I would also like to thank Nancy Rivin for letting me sit in the beautiful (and wonderfully air-conditioned) library of Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, TX, throughout the summer of 2011. I will always remember those days of research as ones of blissfully pure and peaceful study.

Thank you to my family and especially my parents, who have discussed many aspects of not only *Deronda* but other Eliot novels with over the past four years. I am lucky to have parents who want to learn and explore with me, and who willingly undertake 800+-page Victorian novels to read on their own.

A Note About References

Citations from *Daniel Deronda* itself appear in parenthesis with no author but come from the Barnes and Noble Classics edition, 2005.

All other references are noted with author and page number.

Introduction

Although I studied English literature in college, I did not pick up *Daniel Deronda* until my second year of rabbinic school. Several professors had mentioned the book as an abnormally proto-Zionist work, and I picked up a copy. Then, during a winter break in which I got a bad case of the flu and could not sleep well, I started reading it, thinking the 800-page tome looked boring enough to put me to sleep. I was immediately drawn into the story of Gwendolen (which takes up the first few chapters). When the "Jewish part" with Daniel begins, I was even more intrigued.

I was as enthralled by the characters and the plot as I was by the language. A serious use of language, by an artist such as Eliot, arrests a reader's attention. Eliot's ability to capture a feeling or a personality – so that, when reading, I think "Yes I know someone *just* like that" or "I know just what she means – yet could never express it so elegantly or succinctly" – is one of my favorite parts of reading any of her novels. The artistry and psychological depth in her language gives the reader a feeling of having gained perception and insight into people – and the world in general – just by reading. As soon as I was done with *Deronda*, I moved on to *Middlemarch*, and the rest of her works.

But I was the most drawn to *Deronda*, and its fascinating discussions about Judaism: whether it is a race or a religion, the pros and cons of following the *mitzvoth*, the nature of prejudice and perceptions that people have about Jews (and whether some of them might not have any truth?). As a rabbinic student, and future rabbi, I felt that this novel addressed the same issues – such as nationalism, assimilation, observance - that we frequently discussed in classes and in congregational settings. I wondered why this book was not more widely read and appreciated by Reform Jews. Its frank but beautifully and

poignantly written discussions of these issues could not only provide an articulation of various viewpoints on difficult topics, but also provide a framework for further discussion. I believe that Eliot deliberately leaves the difficult questions of the novel unresolved, preferring to prod her readers into thinking deeply about their previously held convictions. This is precisely what I believe could be what makes *Deronda* so appropriate for Reform Jews to read today: Eliot begins the conversation, and provides various viewpoints – and leaves her readers to contemplate, either with themselves or with others.

I wanted to write my rabbinic thesis on *Daniel Deronda* to show examples of how the novel presents and explores issues that are relevant to today's Jews, but does not make a definitive "judgment" or resolution on those issues. My hope is that the examples of this in the following chapters demonstrate how *Deronda* could be a resource for modern Jews who wish for insight, perspective, or thought-provoking literature about Judaism.

Eliot's physical description of her Jewish characters, discussed in Chapter 1 of my thesis, raises questions about perceptions of character and appearance - as well as the acceptability of certain stereotypes about Jews. Her subtle references to "Jewish" appearances force readers to examine their own prejudices. It is almost impossible to tell whether the stereotypical comments about appearances or demeanor were Eliot's own, or whether she was mocking those who held them. Yet this ambiguity is, as I've mentioned, one of Eliot's crowning literary achievements, as it leads the reader into his or her own questioning. Daniel is described as beautiful and handsome, and his appearance vaguely European, perhaps Italian (a hint at his Jewish "foreignness") yet later he meets Jewish shopkeepers who are "dingy and unbeautiful." Throughout the book characters and the

narrator remark on others who are "distinctly Jewish." What can we infer from this? Our own responses, and the knowledge that we might know what she means, force us to confront our own prejudices.

In chapter 2 of the thesis, I look at how Eliot portrays the complexity of women's choices. The different female characters, and the way they relate to their family duties and religious roles, reflect the difficult and deep challenges that women have always had regarding personal choice and social responsibilities. Again, though Eliot herself lived an unconventional life for women of her time, she presents each female character with depth and complexity, and the women who choose unconventional freedoms are not portrayed more favorably than those who prefer traditional womanly roles. Eliot refuses to provide easy answers or definitive judgment, and her masterful skill at this ambiguity keeps the novel personal and relevant to each reader.

As Eliot examines both sides of the "woman" question, she also examines the various feelings and opinions that *Jewish* women in particular might have regarding the roles afforded to them in Judaism. Daniel's mother, seeing no place for herself in traditional Orthodox Judaism, chooses assimilation. The question of Jewish assimilation – and how much and in what way – is prominent throughout the novel, and is tied to issues of Jewish nationalism.

The age-old tension between Judaism as a religion or a nationality/race is closely tied to questions of Jewish features. If Judaism is a religion, physical appearance has little to do with one's Judaism; if Judaism is a race, then "racial" features are a significant part of the community's identification. In *Deronda*, the diversity in physical descriptions also serves as an entry into questioning about the diversity within Judaism – Jewish characters

range from uneducated shopkeepers to the secular and assimilated and to the inspired prophet. Chapter 3 treats the thoughts and arguments about Jewish nationalism and assimilation that come to the fore in a memorable debate at a London pub. Mordecai and Daniel participate in the discussion that reflects ideas from various Jewish contemporary thinkers. Though there is no action in this scene, the emotions of the characters and Eliot's remarkable foresight are riveting. The diversity of opinions displayed – some in favor of assimilation, some resigned to the current situation, and more – easily provides a springboard for further discussion and reaction.

Chapter 4 compares the Jewish male protagonists of the book, Mordecai and Daniel, with the one Christian clergyman, Gwendolen's Uncle Gascoigne. Mordecai and Daniel display intense spirituality and thoughtfulness – and are described specifically as prophets, while Gascoigne is the rector of a country parish. While Daniel continually questions his true place and his true identity, Gascoigne supports and represents an unquestioning belief in societal norms and the status quo. Though Gascoigne has the best of intentions, his desire to "not make waves" is, for Eliot, not enough in terms of social and moral leadership.

Stronger ideals and more inspired spirituality – such as that of Mordecai and Daniel – seems to be, to Eliot, necessary not just for one's own religious journey, but perhaps for all of Western society. In Chapter 5, I look at the way that Eliot uses specific religious references and images to describe her characters. Her use of Hebrew and even *kabbalah* is surprising, and adds a new level of meaning and interpretation to the plot.

The fact that *Deronda* is a piece of 19th century Victorian literature, written by a non-Jewish woman, is also a large part of why we should read *Deronda* today. Though

Eliot was not Jewish, she did lead an unconventional life, and studied religion intensely while making different religious choices throughout her life. I believe that her "outsider" status – as a woman with a career and an unconventional marriage situation – gives her insight and sensitivity to the way that Jews, as a minority, are perceived and relate to society at large. It is also the fact that *Deronda* is *different* from most other literature that modern Jews might read about Judaism – books that are general backgrounds to Judaism, spirituality guides, analysis of Israeli politics, cookbooks, etc – that makes it so appealing and, I believe, important. For me, this difference – the surprise of seeing Judaism discussed so relevantly and openly – in a 19th century Victorian classic – was one of the most intriguing and fascinating points about it,

The questions and contradictions that *Deronda* presents are not resolved, nor should they be – yet their value and the novel's draw lies in no small part in the penetrating articulation of these questions. Eliot's fiction, "brilliantly open as it is to unfulfilled possibilities and an almost infinite range of interpretation and action," is a useful tool for modern Jews wishing to expand their understanding and sympathy regarding current issues in Judaism and modern life. Through Eliot's characters, readers can appreciate "the enormous difficulty of choosing and acting on the "right" [solution]" (Levine 12).

Each of George Eliot's seven novels contains characters who struggle with his or her religious identity. Typical for English literature at the time, references to Judaism (excepting *Deronda)* are offhand and vaguely anti-Semitic. In *Middlemarch*, the vicar

Farebrother comments about the young Will Ladislaw, "So our mercurial Ladislaw has a queer genealogy! A high-spirited young lady and a musical Polish patriot made a likely enough stock for him to spring from, but I should never have suspected a grafting of the Jew pawnbroker..." In the same novel, Rosamund Vincy gossips about her neighbors: "No, by George! They are as rich as Jews, those Waules and Featherstones; I mean, for people like them, who don't want to spend anything. And yet they hang about my uncle like vultures, and are afraid of a farthing going away from their side of the family. But I believe he hates them all."

Eliot's final novel, *Daniel Deronda,* published in 1876, then, is all the more intriguing and surprising. Before Eliot, in general, "The Jew in English fiction took many shapes, but fundamentally he remained the same. The Jew was a foreigner, the repository and embodiment of all that was outside the established order of good. He fulfilled the mystical social function of scapegoat, on which was bound the sins of the community." (Trilling, *The Changing Myth of the Jew* 24). But *Deronda* is the "counter-myth" to all this, a proto-Zionist novel that presents Jews with realism, sympathy, and evidence of true knowledge of Judaism. That it was written by a non-Jewish Victorian woman remains one of the "curiosities of English literary history. (Himmelfarb 1)

Daniel Deronda explores ideas of personal choice, individual and group identity, and spirituality. The complexity of these issues is highlighted by the diversity of Eliot's characters and the sympathy with which she portrays each of them. One of Eliot's greatest literary strengths, especially in *Deronda*, "lies in her unwillingness to accept easy answers in either philosophy, ethnography, or her art, which was complicated by conflictual contemporary theories ..." (McKay 527)

Though Eliot lived an unconventional life for her time, with a successful writing career, love of scholarship, and relationship with a man who was not her legal husband, her interest in Judaism can never be fully "explained." She learned Hebrew, studied with the Talmud scholar Emmanuel Deutsch, visited Mainz synagogues, and read histories of Jews and Judaism. Her painstaking studies in Judaism and her deep interest in not only the religion, but also the contemporary life of Jews, is clear in *Deronda*. This striking anomaly in the canon of 19th century English literature had a lasting effect on many prominent Jewish thinkers. The nationalist feelings regarding a homeland for Jews, expressed mainly by Mordecai and Mordecai but also by other minor characters, were written twenty years before the First Zionist Congress (though Theodore Herzl, Eliezer ben-Yehuda, and Israel Zangwill all reported having read and been greatly influenced by *Deronda*) (Himmelfarb 141). The debates and discussions in the novel about Jews and nationalism, assimilation, ritual practice, and more are all tied to the themes of personal identity and belonging.

Daniel Deronda alternates between two main storylines. The novel opens with Gwendolen Harleth, a free-spirited, beautiful young woman, in a gambling parlor. She is there to escape making a tough decision about whether or not to marry a man – Mallinger Grandcourt - who would give her and her family financial stability but is cold and unfeeling in his behavior. Ominously, Gwendolen has learned of the existence of a woman (named Lydia Glasher) with whom he once had a love affair and children out of wedlock, yet whom he keeps out of sight in a remote coal-mining town. He visits them as infrequently as he can to give them money to survive on until the next visit, and warns them to not make any trouble for him. The woman revealed herself to Gwendolen,

throwing Gwendolen into a panic, and thus to the casinos in Germany. Gwendolen was not known for being overly concerned with morality before; the idea of love or marriage was extremely distasteful yet she thrives on the attention she gets from her charm and beauty: "To be very much pursued or hopelessly sighed for as a bride was indeed an indispensable and agreeable guarantee of womanly power; but to become a wife and wear all the domestic fetters of that condition, was on the whole a vexatious necessity." (32) Her family pushes her to consider marrying Mallinger Grandcourt, as he is very wealthy. After Gwendolen flees to Germany, she receives word that the financial situation of her family has worsened dramatically, and she returns home reluctantly to accept Grandcourt's proposal.

Although Daniel has a brief interaction with Gwendolen in the gambling casino, the novel does not return to him until Book II. Daniel has grown up as an introspective, thoughtful, and handsome child and the ward of Sir Hugo Mallinger (related to Grandcourt). As Daniel grows older, the realization that he does not know his real parents becomes painful. One day while rowing contemplatively on the Thames, he sees a young woman attempting to drown herself. He rescues her and brings her to the house of his friends (the family of his college roommate). The woman, Mirah Lapidoth, reveals that her mother died when she was young and her father is a no-good petty thief who forced her to sing on the stage, then squandered their earnings on gambling. She managed to escape from him, but despaired of her loneliness and poverty. Daniel quickly begins to fall in love with the beautiful, dark-haired, Mirah, who is modest and demure and strangely proud of her Judaism.

Daniel decides to help Mirah find her long-lost brother, who she believes may be in London. During his wanderings through the Jewish Quarter on this project, he befriends Mordecai, an ailing but highly educated young clerk in a small Jewish bookstore. Mordecai senses that not only is Daniel Jewish but that Daniel is the "disciple" he has been looking out to carry out his proto-Zionist vision: "There is a store of wisdom among us to found a new Jewish polity, grand, simple, just, like the old – a republic where there is equality of protection...Then our race shall have an organic center, a heart and brain to watch and guide and execute; the outraged Jew shall have a defence in the court of nations, as the outraged Englishman or American. And the world will gain as Israel gains. For there will be a community in the van of the East which carries the culture and the sympathies of every great nation in its bosom."

Meanwhile, Gwendolen is deeply unhappy with Grandcourt, who monitors and controls her every move. He knows that *she* knows about Lydia Glasher, yet never mentions it, instead using his knowledge as "potential blackmail" that would reveal Gwendolen's own immorality in marrying him. Gwendolen meets Daniel at occasional social events in London and appeals to his caring and thoughtful personality for help. Daniel gives her moral support and inspiration – " 'Look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne...Try to care for what is best in thought and action – something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot.'" Unsurprisingly, Grandcourt dislikes Daniel and prevents Gwendolen from meeting with him further.

Daniel continues to be mentored in Hebrew and Judaism by Mordecai, and falls deeper in love with Mirah. He then receives a letter from his birth mother, requesting a

meeting in Italy, which he accepts. At their meeting, he learns that she became an opera singer and married a wealthy count. When Daniel was born, she gave him to Sir Hugo, who was a friend and patron, in the hopes that Daniel would grow up " 'relieved of the bondage of having been born a Jew.'" (550). Daniel sees things differently, having fallen in love with a Jewish woman and the romantic Judaism of Mordecai (and Mordecai's vision). But Daniel's mother presents an alternative case for what Judaism meant to her: " 'I was to...dread lest a bit of butter should touch a bit of meat; to think it beautiful that men should bind the *tephillin* on them, and women not...You are glad to have been born a Jew. You say so. That is because you have not been brought up as a Jew. That separateness seems sweet to you because I saved you from it.'"

Gwendolen is also in Italy with Grandcourt. On a sailing venture, Grandcourt is accidentally drowned, and Gwendolen feels an overwhelming rush of guilt about his death – and her relief at it. Daniel attempts to console her, but he cannot wait to get back to London to tell Mirah that he is, in fact Jewish – and thus an eligible husband for her.

Gwendolen returns to England in mourning for her carefree days and sobered by all that has happened in the past year. Mordecai and Mirah, who have been reunited as long-lost brother and sister, and Daniel, who has married Mirah, embark on an adventure to "the East" to do what they can to further Mordecai's vision for the Jewish people.

The intertwined stories of Gwendolen, Daniel, Mirah, and Mordecai all touch on themes of personal choice, social acceptability (and assimilation in the case of the Jewish characters), group identity, nationality, and spirituality.

In *Deronda*, the issues of "cultural identity, exile, visions and history reverberate....on a personal as well as thematic basis. And it is this intermingling of the

personal with the 'larger destinies of mankind' which makes *Daniel Deronda* such a great and complex novel. (Baker, 157). A reading of *Daniel Deronda* and an exploration of a few of its themes can provide readers an opportunity to reflect on their own choices, ideas, and beliefs. Yet "the narrative goal of George Eliot's final novel is not to resolve dilemmas, but to persist in an endless interrogation of human dilemmas: separateness or 'difference' may be necessary to preserve and even enhance humanity; but this notion is deconstructed in the idea that, sexually and racially, we are all hybrids who are part of a common humanity." (McKay 348)

Chapter 1

"Appearances"

Daniel Deronda opens with a question about physical appearance: "Was she beautiful or not beautiful?" And furthermore, "what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams?" (3). The narrator probes the reader to think about the connections we often make or assume about a person's physical appearance and his or her character. Eliot takes this in a slightly different direction in *Deronda* through her portrayals of Jewish characters. The way that Jewish characters' appearances are described reveals the way another character – or perhaps Eliot herself – thought of Jews and their characteristics. The attention to "Jewish features" also highlights the fact that the Judaism is both a religion, and, especially in light of the nationalistic themes of the novel and Eliot's time, a "race."

Eliot's Jewish characters are diverse, and run the gamut from adored hero and heroine (Daniel and Mirah) to the ultimate villain (Lapidoth). Similarly, the novel contains descriptions of Jewish characters' appearances that range from almost hagiographic (Daniel's "seraphic face," for example) to ones that lead today's readers (and perhaps Eliot's as well) to cringe at the prejudice displayed. The diversity in physical appearances of the Jewish characters serves as a way for Daniel and for readers to explore their own assumptions about "Jewish features" and corresponding racial assumptions about Jews. Though Eliot does include physical descriptions of her non-Jewish characters, the Jewish characters are different, "since each of her Jewish characters was likely to be taken as a standard, an example of 'Jewishness' which is not

true of her Anglo-Saxons, who can vary in innumerable ways without being labeled as typical of their race." (McKay 503)

The physical descriptions are in keeping with the references throughout the novel to Judaism as either a race or part of a nationality. When Mordecai first sees Daniel, he eagerly asks "You are perhaps of our race?" (340). Mordecai himself was "sensitive to physical characteristics" and "sometimes lingered in the National Gallery in search of paintings which might feed his hopefulness with grave and noble types...such as might well belong to men of his own race." (418).

Herr Klesmer, the musician who first appears as a private tutor to Catherine Arrowpoint, is the first Jewish character described in depth (at this point Daniel has not yet been identified as Jewish). It has been suggested that Klesmer is modeled after either Franz Liszt or Anton Rubenstein. Eliot had met Rubinstein...at Weimar in 1854." (Dachslager 714). Klesmer's physical features are a "felicious combination of the German, the Sclave [Slav], and the Semite, with grand features...His English had little foreignness except its fluency; and his alarming cleverness was made less formidable just then by a certain softening air of silliness which will sometimes befall even Genius in the desire of being agreeable to Beauty." (39) That Klesmer's Semitic features are "mixed" with other European ones reflects the fact that he is a secular Jew, and similarly "mixed" or assimilated into European culture. Klesmer and the Princess Halm-Eberstein, both artists, are the most assimilated Jews in the novel. It is possible that their art serves *as* their religion - "...Klesmer is completely mobile culturally...Klesmer may be a type of Positivist chaplain, in whom art takes the place of religion." (McKay 511). While Eliot has painted Klesmer in the endearing image of a stern grandfather, who rightly critiques

Gwendolen but is gentle and kind with Mirah, the "alarming cleverness" seems stereotypical and derogatory – cleverness is "alarming," and certainly different than an "intellectual air."

Eliot frequently describes Klesmer in racial or national terms, rather than of individual personality. After hearing Gwendolen sing, Klesmer speaks "in an odious German fashion with staccato endings, quite unobservable in him before, and apparently depending on a change of mood, as Irishmen resume their strongest brogue when they are fervid or quarrelsome." (40) Klesmer serves as a study in physical and racial/national "characteristics," as though Eliot has an anthropological interest in him rather than a drive to understand his individual character. "

Klesmer's remarks are also made in racial terms. His critique of Gwendolen is a critique of English people, as she can only sing "a form of melody which expresses a puerile state of culture- a dandling, canting, seesaw kind of stuff – the passion and thought of a people without any breadth of horizon. There is a sort of self-satisfied folly about every phrase of such melody; no cries of deep, mysterious passion – no conflict – no sense of the universal." The contrast is striking with the visionary character of Mordecai and Deronda, who embody those three characteristics of "passion...conflict....sense of the universal [or at least a greater mission]." (41) This reinforces the idea that for Klesmer, music is his religion. Klesmer believes that a true musician should have the same qualities as a prophet (Mordecai) or religious leader (Daniel).

Is the way in which Klesmer is viewed Eliot's own interest in "Semitic types" or is it Gwendolen's, thereby exposing Gwendolen's shallowness and narrow-mindedness?

As Gwendolen makes preparations for her play-acting with Rex and her other cousins and siblings, she begins to imagine herself a great action, and dreams of how "she would become an actress like Rachel, since she was more beautiful than that thin Jewess." (45) The reference is to the stage name of Elisa Rachel Felix, an internationally renowned French-Jewish actress who often performed in London (Dachslager 715). Gwendolen's implied superiority – the distanced "that" of that "thin" Jewess – and the use of "Jewess" as a dominant characteristic certainly sound prejudiced to modern ears. Perhaps Gwendolen's remark here shows how Eliot wished to question negative prejudices. (Further evidence of this comes in the opening of the novel, after Gwendolen pawns her necklace, and her "dominant regret was that after all she had only nine louis to add to the four in her purse: these Jew dealers were so unscrupulous in taking advantage of Christians unfortunate at play!" (14) The pawnbroker is named Mr. Wiener). However, the earlier descriptions of Klesmer, given in overwhelmingly physical and racial terms, show that perhaps Eliot was not so clear in her own feelings toward Jews. Further descriptions of Klesmer seem almost obsessive regarding Judaism and religion, though, ironically, he is one of the least religious Jews in the novel. When Klesmer views Gwendolen and her friends' tableaux, he observes the scene in "serene contemplation, replying to all appeals in benignant-sounding syllables more or less articulate – as taking up his cross meekly in a world overgrown with amateurs..." (51).

At an archery party, Klesmer is described as distinctly standing out against all the other "English gentlemen pure." Those gentlemen are recognizable by their "easy style of his figure and clothing..." (89) which Klesmer, with his "mane of hair" and "trousers which were not what English feeling demanded about the knees" certainly does not have.

His "otherness" is physically recognizable, even though he is not at all religiously observant. His Judaism is that of a cultural prophet, rather than of an ethical guide such as Deronda and Mordecai. Other Eliot scholars have noticed her appreciation for art: "It is not Jewish art that is death-oriented...it is obsession with money that is lethal for future generations: culture and the fine arts are a redeeming force." (McKay 515). But in yet another turn, Klesmer is proud and open about his Judaism. When a dinner party guest muses that Klesmer might be a "Pole, or a Czech, or something of that fermenting sort, in a state of political refugeeism which had obliged him to make a profession of his music...and said – 'From what you said about sentiment, I fancy you are a Panslavist.'

'No; my name is Elijah. I am the Wandering Jew' said Klesmer, flashing a smile at Miss Arrowpoint and suddenly making a mysterious wind-like rush backwards and forwards on the piano." And yet his fiancée, the non-Jewish heiress Catherine Arrowpoint, immediately attempts to soften his bluntness with the explanation, " 'Herr Klesmer has cosmopolitan ideas...he looks forward to a fusion of nations.'" (213) As Klesmer dares the biased, narrow-minded aristocratic company to confront his Jewishness, the woman who loves him rushes to save him – and herself, as she is engaged to him - from self-inflicted isolation.

One possible ethical aspect to Klesmer's Judaism is that, like Mordecai's prophetic intuition which "knows" that Daniel is to be his successor, Klesmer seems to have an intuition for "good" people. While he mocks the people at the archery party by uncomfortably drawing attention to his Judaism, and is unfailingly blunt in assessing Gwendolen's singing abilities, he is paternal, gentle, and bemused by both the Meyricks and Mirah (430). Klesmer's frank assessment and Gwendolen's desire to appear good in

Daniel's eyes: " 'Would he [Deronda], without that, despise her for marrying Grandcourt? His possible judgment of her actions was telling on her as importunately as Klesmer's judgment of her powers...'" (293) further demonstrate the similarities between musicianship and ethical behavior. Both Klesmer's and Mirah's musicianship are positively tied to Judaism. When Daniel first hears Mirah sing, in the Meyricks' parlor, he "felt himself presently covering his eyes with his hand, wanting to seclude the melody in darkness..." (327) calling to mind the practice of covering one's eyes while reciting the Shema. In a piece entitled "The Natural History of German Life" that she wrote for *Westminster Review* (July 1856, LXVI, 51-70), Eliot wrote about her ideas on the synthesis of society, history, people, philosophy, and art: "Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellowmen beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People." (Baker 69) Klesmer's art *is* his religion, and, for Klesmer, this is a positive attribute. And though he is clearly Jewish, and seemingly proud of it, he has no inclination at all toward religious observance. Unlike the way she views Princess Halm-Eberstein's rejection of Judaism, Klesmer's secularism is not viewed negatively by Eliot.

As with Klesmer, whose Jewishness is described in physical terms, Deronda's first sighting of Ezra Cohen is a "face, unmistakeably Jewish....belonged to a young man about thirty..." (336). Deronda's "uniform pale-brown skin, the perpendicular brow, the calmly penetrating eyes" (164) are apparently recognizable only to Mordecai and Kalonymos as Jewish, though Mordecai might also be using his higher visionary powers for that recognition. The Meyrick girls recognize that there might be something foreign

about him, as they paint him as "Prince Camaralzaman" – a prince from *Arabian Nights*. Mordecai's own face is described as a "finely typical Jewish face....it might never have been particularly handsome, but it must always have been forcible....with its dark, far off gaze, and yellow pallor in relief on the gloom of the backward shop..." (340).

The anthropological way that Klesmer's mannerisms are described is called to mind when the Cohen children are described, in a similar "scientific" way: "...also a robust boy of six and a younger girl, both with black eyes and black-ringed hair – looking more Semitic than their parents, as the puppy lions show the spots of far-off progenitors." (343). When Deronda notices the Cohens giving the "thin tails" of the fish at their Shabbat meal to Mordecai, he muses that it must be "a 'survival' of prehistoric practice, not yet generally admitted to be superstitious." Further anthroplogical distancing occurs when Eliot describes the Cohen's dinner conversation about royal gossip and notes "the Jew is proud of his loyalty" (351). The conversation about royal gossip also highlights that the Cohens not only view themselves as assimilated, but are at the extreme other end of the artistic-cultural spectrum from Klesmer. It is unclear whether their class difference and/or assimilation is tied to the strange fact that Ezra Cohen does business with Deronda – the sale of the silver buckles – *after* he has recited Hebrew prayers and made Hebrew benedictions for his children, ostensibly signaling the onset of Shabbat. It appears that Deronda and Mr. Cohen do not actually exchange monies, as Deronda gives him a ring on pledge, and Mr. Cohen writes him out a ticket for it at the end of the meal.

Nevertheless, tension over this transaction exists in that "Deronda was aware that Mordecai had looked up again at the words implying a monetary affair..." (353) and Eliot uses this scene with Mordecai's grace-after-meals to show how "there could hardly

have been a stronger contrast to the Jew at the other end of the table [Ezra]. It was an unaccountable conjunction – the presence among these common, prosperous, shopkeeping types, of a man who...imposed a certain awe on Deronda, and an embarrassment at not meeting his expectations." (353). The scenes with the "shopkeeping types" juxtaposed with narrative descriptions of Salomon Maimon, Mordecai, or Mirah's goodness and purity, reflect the novel's many complexities and ambiguities regarding Jews and prejudices in general.

As with the descriptions of Klesmer, in which it is difficult to tell whether the prejudices expressed are Eliot's own or the projections of Gwendolen, the descriptions of the shopkeepers near Ezra Cohen show both tolerance and prejudice. Furthermore, it is unclear whether they are to be clearly separated or comfortably held together in the author's mind. Deronda decides to buy "that wonderful bit of autobiography, the life of the Polish Jew, Salomon Maimon," demonstrating both Eliot's knowledge of Jewish history and her high regard for it, but then in the next sentence she writes of "that nonchalance about sales which seems to belong universally to the second-hand book-business...even a Jew will not urge Simson's Euclid on you with an affectionate assurance that you will have pleasure in reading it..." (339). The phrase "even a Jew" and the implications about his eagerness to do deceiving business seems to be strangely juxtaposed with her regard for Salomon Maimon. Perhaps, though, this is in fact Eliot's deliberate technique – to juxtapose both her own wonder for Judaism with what she felt were common prejudices about Jews. Or, it is possible that she clearly saw differences amongst various culture classes of Jews and wished to point this out as well. Deronda himself experiences this mix of reactions in his first encounters with Ezra Cohen:

"Deronda...was rashly pronouncing this Ezra Cohen to be the must unpoetic Jew he had ever met with in books or life: his phraseology was as little as possible like that of that of the Old Testament; and no shadow of a Suffering Race distinguished his vulgarity of soul from that of a prosperous pink-and-white huckster...It is naturally a Christian feeling that a Jew ought not to be conceited." (345). Even after his first encounter with Mirah, Daniel reflects that "spite of his strong tendency to side with the objects of prejudice...his interest had never been practically drawn towards existing Jews, and the facts he knew about them, whether they walked conspicuous in fine apparel or lurked in by-streets, were chiefly of the sort most repugnant to him. Of learned and accomplished Jews he took it for granted that they had dropped their religion [like Klesmer]..." (180). He continues to work through his confusion, contrasting Mirah's "exquisite refinement and charm" with being in the Jewish quarter on "some dingy street...in some quarter only the more hideous for being smarter...under the breath of a young Jew talkative and familiar, not fastidious in any transactions with which they would favor him..." (181). This is the same Deronda who, in his final meeting with Kalonymos, defending any action which might have seemed unappreciative, declares, "...let me say that I should at no time have been inclined to treat a Jew with incivility simply because he was a Jew. You can understand that I shrank from saying to a stranger, 'I know nothing of my mother,'" (632) The "flip side" of Daniel's prejudices are voiced by Mirah as she tells Mrs. Meyrick her life story: "'One day...I overheard a gentleman say, 'Oh, he is one of those clever Jews – a rascal, I shouldn't wonder. There's no race like them for cunning in the men and beauty in the women...' it darted into my mind that the unhappiness in my life came from my being a Jewess, and that always to the end of the world would think slightly of me and

that I must bear it...", whereupon Mrs. Meyrick reassures her that *she* will not let Mirah be judged (188). Daniel's visit to the Cohens for Shabbat dinner causes a perceptible shift in his own inclinations toward them – and perhaps toward Jews in general. The Shabbat scene in the humble home makes him "almost ashamed of the supercilious dislike these happy-looking creatures had raised in him by daylight..." and realizes, seemingly for the first time, that their fake pearls and generally less-than-refined trappings "must surely be mere matters of chance and economy, and not due to the family taste." (348) – strange that this should be a revelation to him, as he is previously described as being sensitive to the downtrodden (though Eliot recognizes this: "Deronda...could not, more than the rest of us, continuously escape suffering from the pressure of that hard unaccommodating Actual....Enthusiasm, we know, dwells at ease among ideas...(p. 334)). However, it is often easier to cross class barriers intellectually than it is to do the same physically and/or emotionally.

Like the Meyricks are another middle-class family in the novel, though it is unclear whether they are slightly above the Cohens' in stature or finances or not – and whether that change in class status might be due only to their Christianity and not to their finances. While the Cohens' furniture and dress errs on the side of being overdone, the Meyricks' is obviously simple and therefore humble and, most significantly, the Meyricks appreciate good music and art: "there was space [in their tiny home] for a wide-glancing, nicely-select life, open to the highest things in music, painting, and poetry." (174). This is an almost direct contrast to the over-decorated, distinctly mercantilistic atmosphere of the Cohens and their shop. Descriptions of the Meyricks' home are filled with Christian images: "The small front parlour was as good as a temple that

morning...the walls showed a silent cloud of witnesses – the Virgin soaring amid her cherubic escort; grand Melancholia with her solemn universe; the Prophets and Sibyls...the Last Supper, mystic groups where far-off ages made one last moment; grave Holbein and Rembrandt heads; the Tragic Muse...Italian poets..." (183). In keeping with Klesmer's religion of art and the Meyrick's admirable devotion to music, the Christian figures are mentioned side by side with Italian poets and Rembrandt.

The Meyrick girls' discussion of religion with Mirah is generally benign and amusing, but reveals some deep-set reservations about the ultimate attitude of devoted Christians toward Judaism. Amy asks Mirah " '...*does* it seem quite right to you that the women should sit behind rails in a gallery apart?'" The Meyrick girls' express their benign confusion toward Judaism: " 'Perhaps it would gradually melt away from her, and she would pass into Christianity like the rest of the world...It is so strange to be of the Jews' religion now.'" (317). Upon hearing of Mordecai's existence and relation to Mirah, Mrs. Meyrick tells Daniel, " 'I am as glad as you are that the pawnbroker is not her brother: there are Eras and Ezras in the world; and really it is a comfort to think that all Jews are not like those shopkeepers who *will not* let you get out of their shops...'" (500).

Daniel's internal exploration of his own ideas is mirrored by his actual exploration of the neighborhoods of London that were inhabited by "common Jews." There he wonderingly contrasts his loft visions of "a beautiful maiden's relatives in Cordova elbowed by Jews in the time of Ibn-Gebirol..." with the "dingy shops and unbeautiful faces" that he sees. (335). Similarly, when Deronda is in Frankfurt and wanders into the Judengasse, his "imaginative stirrings" balance the "deaf and grisly tradesman...casting a flinty look at certain cards," and several more "dingy" men (321).

Eliot expands on Daniel's confrontation with his own prejudices versus how he might *like* to see himself, and how "enthusiasm...dwells at east among ideas, tolerates garlic breathed in the middle ages...it gets squeamish when ideals press upon it as something warmly incarnate..." (334). Through his encounter with Mirah and his entry into the Jewish world, Daniel is able to examine whether his values are able to withstand the "pressure of that hard unaccommodating Actual" (334). His musings in the Judengasse of Frankfurt also lead him to understand that "a little comparison will often diminish our surprise and disgust at the aberrations of Jews...whose lives to not offer a consistent or lovely pattern of their creed..." and to feel that "he was falling into unfairness and ridiculous exaggeration." However, Daniel continues to waver even throughout the service he attends in the Frankfurt synagogue, where he still notices "indifferent faces and vulgar figures" who go through the service as only a "dull routine" – without true religious feeling. (323).

Hans' encounters with and reaction to Mirah show a different side of his character than the cheerful, endearing roommate Deronda described early in the novel. Deronda pays Hans a visit some time after Hans has met Mirah, and finds Hans using Mirah as a model for his painting of Berenice "seated lonely on the ruins of Jerusalem. That is pure imagination. That is what ought to have been – perhaps was." (405). Berenice was a Judean princess, daughter of Herod Agrippa I, and she ruled or lived incestuously with her brother Herod Agrippa II, and became mistress of Titus (Vespasian's son). She is mentioned briefly in Acts 25. Though Hans is attempting a series of paintings based on her actual life, his one that uses Mirah as a model is a-historical. His setting of the "ruins" of Jerusalem suggests that Hans sees Mirah's Judaism as the rest of his family does:

antiquated, dead, and sure to disappear soon enough. His mother, puzzled by Mirah's attachment to Judaism, commented that if Jews " 'went on changing their religion...there would come a time when there would be no Jews to be seen,' said Mrs. Meyrick, taking that consummation very cheerfully.'" (330). Even Daniel had once "regarded Judaism a a sort of eccentric fossilized form which an accomplished man might dispense with studying..." but Mirah shows him that "Judaism was something still throbbing in human lives, still making for them the only conceivable vesture of the world." (318). Hans certainly does not recognize the vitality of Judaism or its importance for Mirah, and Hans' derogatory views of Judaism are representative of how shallow is his love for Mirah compared to Daniel's: When Daniel informs him that Mirah can only marry another Jew, Hans replies " 'That can't last...She will see no Jeww who is tolerable. Every male of that race is insupportable – 'insupportably advancing' – his nose...Nature designed Mirah to fall in love with me. The amalgation of races demands it..." (409).

Mirah's beauty is described extensively. Daniel's first glimpse, on the bank of the Thames, is of "a girl hardly more than eighteen, of low slim figure, with the most delicate little face, her dark curls pushed behind her ears...her look was something like that of a fawn or other gentle animal before it turns to run away...it came to him as an onyx cameo: the brown-black drapery, the white face with small, small features, and dark, long-lashed eyes." (166). Mirah's dark coloring and timid nature is of direct contrast to Gwendolen's fair hair and bold character. Like Daniel's own curly hair, Mirah's curls are noted repeatedly: When Daniel visits her the morning after her rescue, he notes "her dark hair curling in fresh fibrils as it gradually dried from his plenteous bath..." (182). They appear again when Mordecai is reunited with his long-lost sister: "Her hat fell backward

on the ground and disclosed all her curls. 'Ah, the dear head, the dear head,' said Mordecai...laying his thin hand gently on the curls." (513).

Other characters also appreciate Mirah's beauty – though with hesitations that are, of course, not seen with Gwendolen. During a party at which Mirah sings for parlor entertainment, one guest, Lady Pentreath remarks, "'Well your Jewess is pretty – there's no denying that. But where is her Jewish impudence? She looks as demure as a nun. I suppose she learned that on stage.'" (492). Daniel's step-mother, Lady Mallinger, has similar hesitations, commenting ironically: " 'I'm sorry she is a bigoted Jewess; I should not like it for anything else, but it doesn't matter in singing.'" (386). (Lady Mallinger is, in general, an amusing character when it comes to religion: When Daniel tells her about Mirah, Lady Mallinger feels "much interested in the poor girl, observing that there was a Society for the Conversion of the Jews, and that it was to be hoped Mirah would embrace Christianity; but perceiving that Sir Hugo looked at her with amusement, she concluded that she had said something foolish." (198)

Mirah's long-lost brother, Mordecai, also has a physical appearance that strikes Daniel immediately. As he wandered through the Jewish section, Daniel indulges in a strange line of thought: going through various Jewish catastrophes over the ages (the Crusades, the Inquisition, general pursuit) but in a way that evokes their drama and romance. Daniel first sees Mordecai during his first ramble around the Jewish section of London (Eastgate). Upon first glance, Daniel recognizes that "such a physiognomy [as Mordecai's] as that might possibly have been seen in a prophet of the Exile, or in some New Hebrew poet of the medieval time...." (339). Mordecai's own face is described as a "finely typical Jewish face....it might never have been particularly handsome, but it must

always have been forcible....with its dark, far off gaze, and yellow pallor in relief on the gloom of the backward shop..." (340).

Though the other "common" Jews of the Jewish section of London evoked repulsion in Daniel, he immediately recognizes some different character of nobility or prestige in Mordecai. The contrast is even more pronounced when Daniel finally sees Mr. Ram, who actually owns the bookstore: "...his very features – broad and chubby – showed that tendency to look mongrel without due cause which...may perhaps be compared with the marvels of imitation in insects..." (446).

Daniel contrasts Mordecai's character with that of the Cohens' at the Shabbat table: "It was an unaccountable conjunction – the presence among these common, prosperous, shopkeeping types, of a man who, in an emaciated threadbare condition, imposed a certain awe on Deronda, and an embarrassment at not meeting his expectations." (353) Eliot further confirms Daniel's feeling of Mordecai's "greatness" by associating Mordecai with one of the most brilliant thinkers in Judaism – Daniel muses that Mordecai is "getting his crust by a quiet handicraft, like Spinoza..." (417). One of Eliot's early projects was a translation of Spinoza. The Cohens, in contrast, regard him as charity and "workman, dominie, inspired idiot...and dangerous heretic" (420). Their inability to recognize his greatness reflects their own failings. Mordecai teaches Jacob Hebrew, and the contrast between the branches of the family is highlighted in an episode in which Jacob interrupts Mordecai's recitation of a Judah Ha-Levi poem in order to pick up "mountebank fashion...with his lips a bright farthing which was a favourite among his pocket treasures....it jarred him [Mordecai] horribly, as if it had been a Satanic grin upon his prayer..." and Mordecai exclaims " 'A curse is on your generation, child. They will

open the mountain and drag forth the golden wings and coin them into money...their heart shall be the tomb of dead desires that turn their life to rottenness.'" (423) The contrast between the Cohen family's values and Mordecai's values highlight's Eliot's interest in the complexity and challenges in Jewish diaspora life.

One afternoon, early in their relationship Mordecai and Daniel mutually spot each other and take a cab together back to the bookshop. After comparing their side-by-side appearance to Titian's painting "Tribute Money," Eliot continues: "Imagine...the sharply-defined structure of features reminding one of a forsaken temple...opposite to him was a face not more distinctively oriental than many a type seen among what we call the Latin races..." (438). Eliot's description foreshadows how Deronda will be the one to carry out Mordecai's dreams of a Jewish nationalist movement, and how important Daniel's physical features and bearing are in the success of that movement. Mordecai's health and physical features – his overwhelmingly "Jewish" face (whereas Daniel's is merely "Latin") would subject him to ridicule and prejudice before he was able to sufficiently describe or spread his message – or, as Mordecai says, "Scorn stood as interpreter between me and them" (441). Daniel's appearance is his "ticket" to the public.

One might expect that Mirah and Mordecai's evil father, Lapidoth, might have the most vile and repulsive physical description of anyone in the novel. When he surprises Mirah on her doorstep, she finds a face "now sallow and deep-lined...[with] that peculiar impress of impudent suavity which comes from courting favour while accepting disrespect. He was lightly made and active...[he was] a shabby, foreign-looking, eager, and gesticulating man, who withal had an effaceable jauntiness of air, perhaps due to the bushy curls of his grizzled hair, the smallness of his hands and feet, and his light walk."

(647). This description does not seem more offensive than the description of Mr. Ram or any of the other "common" Jews that Daniel sees while walking around the Jewish section of London.

When Daniel accompanies Mordecai to the *Hand and Banner* pub, he has the opportunity to survey several more Jewish "types." Daniel seems as though he is indeed using physical appearance to determine who at the pub is and is not Jewish: "Deronda was well satisfied to get a seat on the opposite side, where his general survey of the party...this group of sharply characterized figures, more than one of whom, even to Daniel's little exercised discrimination, seemed probably of Jewish descent...in fact, pure English blood did not declare itself predominantly in the party at present assembled." (461). Some of the representatives include "Pash, the watchmaker, was a small, dark, vivacious, triple-baked Jew; Gideon the optical instrument maker, was a Jew of the red-haired, generous-featured type easily passing for Englishmen of unusually cordial manners," and three others, Goodwin, Marrables, and Lilly, who "would have been discernible everywhere as Englishmen." The ideological differences expressed at the *Hand and Banner* derive from equivalent differences of opinion among various Jewish historians historians, mainly Zunz, Geiger, Jost, Sachs, and Graetz. Gideon, and the more cynical Pash, express assimilationist views that owe much to the historians Zunz and Geiger. Mordecai's ideas of a Jewish nationalist revival based on arguments of heritage, memory, race and a people's will, derive partly from Graetz and Sachs. The main source of Gideon's reforming assimilationist views was Abraham Geiger, who argued as Gideon did, that the Jews should 'worship in a rational way' and should get 'rid of all...superstition and exclusiveness." Eliot has matched this to Gideon's appearance that

Deronda found "easily passing for for Englishmen of unusually cordial manners." Lilly, who is physically completely assimilated, similarly characterizes the Jews' belief as "'the type of obstinate adherence to the superannuated.'" Pash, who is described the strongest in terms of racial features ("triple-baked Jew") expresses the most solidarity with Judaism (aside from Mordecai) and an edge toward non-Jews: "What I thank our fathers [Jews of past ages] for is that there are fewer blockheads among us than among other races. But perhaps you are right in thinking the Christians don't like me so well for it." Furthermore, Pash opposes religious reform that would ease the way for assimilation in other areas: "You pluck it up by the roots, strip off the leaves and bark, shave off the knots and smooth it at top and bottom...it will never sprout."

Several Jewish characters instantly recognize Daniel's features as Jewish. A man in the Frankfurt synagogue asks Daniel about his parentage, but Daniel, still very early in his exploration of Judaism and his relationship with Mirah, "coldly" shakes him off (323). Deronda's "uniform pale-brown skin, the perpendicular brow, the calmly penetrating eyes" (164) are apparently recognizable to Mordecai as Jewish, though Mordecai might also be using his higher visionary powers for that recognition. When Daniel first meets Mordecai in the bookshop, Mordecai almost instantly asks him "You are perhaps of our race?" (340). Mordecai has visions of the person who will be his spiritual successor, and the descriptions of this person blend in with Mordecai's actual perception of Daniel. Eliot describes Mordecai's dream character: "...a face became discernable; the words youth, beauty, refinement, Jewish birth, noble gravity...gathered from his memory of faces seen among the Jews of Holland and Bohemia..." (419).

Not everyone recognizes Daniel's Jewish features: the Meyrick girls recognize that there might be something foreign about him, as they paint him as "Prince Camaralzaman" – a prince from *Arabian Nights*. Daniel himself realizes early in his life that there is "something different" about his features from the rest of his family, but this concerns him more in the fact that he is adopted rather than any possibility of Judaism in his background.

Daniel's beauty is a crucial part of his relationship with other people, as his endearing and attractive physical appearance seems to make him instantly beloved to almost everyone. His physical appearance is also a crucial part of his own self-understanding, as it has always thrown into question his true identity. Throughout the novel, Eliot emphasizes both Daniel's beauty and his physical *difference*, and ties them both to qualities in his character. When the young Daniel wandered among the family portraits and realized that none of them resembled himself, Eliot notes that "still he was handsomer than any of them" (146). Daniel's curls, like Mirah's, are often emphasized throughout the book. He comes fully into focus when Eliot describes him rowing on the Thames, just before his rescue of Mirah: "...there is something of a likeness, too, between the faces belonging to the hands – in both the uniform pale-brown skin, the perpendicular brow, the calmly penetrating eyes. Not seraphic any longer: thoroughly terrestrial and manly; but still of a kind to raise belief in a human dignity which can afford to acknowledge poor relations." (164).

Daniel is universally regarded as exceedingly handsome, and the main "difference" with his non-Jewish family and peers is that he has curly hair and a slightly darker skin tone. The novel is, of course, a romance – as such it makes sense that the hero

and heroine should be good-looking. Daniel's darker skin tone and Englishman's dress and manners enable him to seem to some characters as no more than "Latin," perhaps "passing" for an Italian. Daniel learns that his real name is Charisi, not Deronda, and Kalonymus informs him that Daniels grandfather "mingled all sorts of learning, and in that he was like our Arabic writers in the golden time." There was a historical Judah Alcharisi (sometimes spelled Al-Harizi) who translated Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*. Deronda finds that not only is he a Jew, but he is a Sephardi Jew. Assigning Daniel Sephardi heritage may have been a way from further disassociating him from the "grubby shopkeepers" of London's Jewish section. Contemporary readers may have been more readily able to accept a character with ties to a mystical golden age of Arabic Spain rather than one who is associated with the stereotypical shopkeeper's Yiddish and Germanic customs.

Whether Daniel, and thereby Eliot, are working through their prejudices through these juxtapositions, or whether they see classes and groups of Jews that should be separated, is unclear. Similarly, both Deronda (and perhaps Eliot) are working through the complex tension of particularity and universalism that seem to be combined in the portrayal of Judaism in the book. Deronda articulate this confusing tension early one, in the Meyricks' parlor, when he explains, "Our religion [Christianity] is chiefly a Hebrew religion; and since Jews are men, their religious feelings must have much in common with those of other men...still it is to be expected that a Jew would feel the forms of his people's religion more than one of another race – and yet' – here Deronda hesitated in his turn – 'that is perhaps not always so.'" (329). Deronda's thoughts seem to confuse

religion, race, and the extent of differences between Jews and everyone else. His hesitation further signifies his confusion.

Eliot's diverse portrayal of Jewish physical appearances as she describes various Jewish characters invites questioning about assumptions that are prescient even today. The age-old tension of whether Judaism is a religion or a nationality/race is closely tied to questions of Jewish features. If Judaism is a religion, physical appearance has little to do with one's Judaism; if Judaism is a race, then "racial" features are a significant part of the community's identification. In *Deronda*, the diversity in physical descriptions also serves as an entry into questioning about the diversity within Judaism – Jewish characters range from uneducated shopkeepers to the secular and assimilated and to the inspired prophet. Their appearances often reflect not only their station but their inner qualities: the uneducated shopkeepers are a bit "grubby," while the inspired prophets (Daniel and Mordecai) have faces that somehow display their inner depth. As both Daniel and the reader encounter the various faces of Judaism, former prejudices and assumptions are faced as well, and always countered by the diversity that is presented throughout the novel.

Chapter 3

Women in *Deronda*

As Mirah and the Meyricks sit chatting about Mirah's life in the Meyricks' parlor, the young Amy, "who was much of a practical reformer," innocently asks, " 'Excuse me, Mirah, but *does* it seem quite right to you that the women should sit behind rails in a gallery apart?'" The presence of the question suggests that Eliot recognized the inequality regarding women in Judaism. The presence of this complex issue in a novel in which simultaneously urges tolerance and appreciation for Judaism creates a deeper, richer work than one which might have simply glossed over imperfections. In fact, Eliot chastised Harriet Beecher Stowe for this very flaw: ([in her regular column in the *Westminster Review* LXVI October 1856] "She criticizes Mrs. Stowe for being too indulgent and unrealistic in the presentation of the Negro character. Mrs. Stowe's artistic defect is 'the absence of any proportionate exhibition of the Negro character in its less amiable phases...Mrs. Stowe alludes to demoralization among the slaves, but she does not depict it.'" (Baker 76).

Mirah's response is mild and brief: " 'Yes, I never thought of anything else...I like what I have always seen there, because it brings back to me the same feelings – the feelings I would not part with for anything else in the world.'" (317). Though this opening by Amy could have been an opportunity for Eliot to present a more extensive defense of some of these "backwards-seeming" practices (Amy also inquires about the practice of the men wearing their hats during the services), the comment is unsatisfactorily (to the reader) dismissed. Mirah's reason for total acceptance seems due

not only to her generally demure and obedient manner but also to her admitted ignorance of her own religion.

" 'Had you no teaching about what was your duty?'" Mrs. Meyrick asks her, to which Mirah responds: " 'No...he [her father] did not follow our religion in New York...but because my mother used to take me to synagogue, and I remembered sitting on her knee and looking through the railing..." (187) so Mirah's own upbringing did not include actual instruction in religious rites, laws, or beliefs. In New York alone with her father, Mirah recalls that " 'our landlady was a Jewess and observed her religion...I read in her prayer-books and Bible...for these books seemed a closer companionship with my mother....In that way I have come to know a little of our religion, and the history of our people, besides piecing together what I read in plays and other books about Jews and Jewesses...'" (187). It seems that for Mirah, loyalty to Judaism is connected to loyalty to and remembrance of her mother, rather than any deep theological or national convictions.

Almost as though to support precisely this connection, the Princess Halm-Eberstein accuses Deronda's "little Jewess" with whom, she assumes he must have fallen in love, to be enamored of Judaism *because* she knows nothing about it. While Daniel describes Mirah as, despite having been brought up without Jewish education, having " 'clung with all her affection to the memory of her mother and the fellowship of her people,'" his mother rebuffs: " 'Ah! Like you. She is attached to the Judaism she knows nothing of,'" (584). Eliot's own relationship to Judaism, of course, was completely the opposite of both the Princess and Mirah. Judaism was neither forced on Eliot nor was it a sustaining tie to earlier love and happiness, and a means of cultural belonging. Rather, she became interested of her own volition and was drawn to it entirely by her scholarly

enterprises. Her explorations of Jewish language, history, and theology encouraged her interest. Elsewhere in the novel, adherence to religion without understanding of it is portrayed negatively. When Daniel visits the synagogue in Frankfurt, he is momentarily inspired by the liturgy, "but with the cessation of the devotional sounds and the movement of many indifferent faces and vulgar figures before him there darted into his mind the frigid idea that he had probably been alone in his feeling, and perhaps the only person in the congregation for whom the service was more than a dull routine." (323). The Cohens, too, are contrasted sharply with the pious Mordecai who appears to be more personally inspired in the Shabbat blessings than the rest of the family (353) who are all too eager to get on to the business portion of the dinner. Since the narrator seems to disapprove of other characters who have a shallow relationship with Judaism, it is surprising that Mirah, who is otherwise portrayed as the "perfect" and ideal heroine, would have little to say in theological terms about Judaism. However, this trait does lend Mirah a very strong sense of "duty" and loyalty. Mirah's appreciation of her mother implies that she herself will be a good mother and therefore an ideal candidate for Daniel's wife.

That Eliot, who herself had such a deep intellectual appreciation for and articulation of Judaism, would create a heroine who has little of this knowledge herself, demonstrates the complexity of Eliot's writing. Though Daniel feels little sympathy for his mother, and resents her rejection of motherhood, the Princess makes a strong point about Mirah and Daniel's adherence to Judaism without fully understanding it – almost an accusation of naïve idealism. The diversity of the Jewish characters, from the Cohens and Mirah who hold Judaism to be of utmost importance but fall short in observance, to

the assimilated Jews of the *Hand and Banner* to the pious Mordecai – show the complexity of Judaism itself. Even the success of the novel as a romance, in which characters invite alternating sympathy and judgment from the reader, comes from the slight imperfections and balances presented in the protagonists. One of Eliot's greatest strengths, especially in *Deronda*, "lies in her unwillingness to accept easy answers in either philosophy, ethnography, or her art, which was complicated by conflictual contemporary theories; and she was aware that power relations between races were inextricably interwoven with those of class and gender..." (McKay 527)

The two scenes in which Daniel meets his mother have the sense of a court case or defense hearing, in which Daniel's mother presents her case for "abandoning" her son, with "passionate self-defence in her tone" (549). The "abandonment" gives Daniel a connection to Mirah, as Mirah was periodically abandoned by her father, too. The contrast with Mirah's father, paints Daniel's mother in a much more sympathetic light (today's readers might judge his mother with considerable more sympathy – as choice in birth options is somewhat more accepted or at least open for discussion).

Though Mirah willingly accepts ideas of duty and devotion, the Princess Halm-Eberstein (and Gwendolen) show how those ideals can easily slide into the realm of "bondage." The Princess wished to escape from the bondage of both an arranged marriage and Judaism, two realms which she may have conflated, especially as they were both forced upon her by her father. Daniel also seems to have conflated the two reasons he is angry and confused – both that his mother did not raise him herself, and left him always questioning his true parentage, and that she took it upon herself to "choose my birthright" as that of a Christian gentleman. (550).

The Princess responds movingly first to the accusation against her failings as a mother:

" 'Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster. I am not a monster, but I have not felt exactly what other women feel – or say they feel, for fear of being thought unlike others...you mean that I ought to say I felt about you as other women say they feel about their children...I feel many things I can't understand." Eliot leaves the final "verdict" ambiguous, "since at times George Eliot seems severe against the Princess, and her denying Daniel of his birthright is seen as 'robbery,' but at other times – having herself rebelled in her youth against her father's yoke in religious matters – George Eliot seems to endorse the Princess's resistance to her father's uncompromising and narrow interpretation of her duties as a Jewish woman..." (Levine 518). Eliot herself did refuse to attend church services with her father beginning in 1842 (when Eliot was 22), and instead became drawn to historical-based religious studies, diving into translations and studies of various philosophers.

Eliot's scholarly research in religion might be tied to her belief in the importance of appreciation for diversity and expanding one's world. At the end of *Deronda*, Gwendolen is forced "to recognize the existence of a world outside her own self... as 'the world seemed getting larger round poor Gwendolen, and she more solitary and helpless in the midst...she felt herself reduced to a mere speck...getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving.' (875) Her arrival at even a minimal awareness of the limitations of her ego has been assisted by her contact with the other existence – Deronda." (Baker 167). In *Deronda*, the process of Daniel's education in Judaism – from indifference to mild revulsion to total loyalty –

shows how an appreciation of the "other" can be the beginning of a deep, redemptive love, both for another person and for an entire culture.

This concern with reaching beyond oneself is what " lies at the heart of *Daniel Deronda* and which George Eliot's concern with Hebraism finally achieved. In teaching her contemporary reading public about a despised group she does...widen the scope of the English novel 'reaching out...to something more profound and universal than any novel based on the merely English social scene could achieve' (Daiche1071). ...

The novel's overwhelming concern with the importance of the universal, and widening one's perspective, adds to the surprise of the Princess's accusations of Judaism – that Judaism itself has a stiflingly narrow worldview for women. When Daniel states that "What I have been most trying to do for fifteen years is to have some understanding of those who differ from myself," his mother replies that this interest is the opposite of his grandfather, who was, in her eyes, only concerned with molding her into " 'the Jewish woman'....I was to feel everything I did not feel, and believe everything I did not believe. I was to feel awe for the bit of parchment in the *mezuza* over the door; to dread lest a bit of butter should touch a bit of meat; to think it beautiful that men should bind the *tephillin* on them, and women not, - to adore the wisdom of such laws, however silly they might seem to me...I wanted to live a larger life, with freedom to do what every one else did...you are glad to have been born a Jew. You say so. That is because you have not been brought up a Jew. That separateness seems sweet to you because I saved you from it." (553).

The Princess's points against her Jewish upbringing are all the more touching because of their accuracy: it is not a false anti-semitic stereotype that men bind *tephillin*

and women do not, and the anxiety over the most minute details of kashrut causes vigorous debate within Jews today as well. The power of the passage is due to a number of factors, including the realistic portrayal of feminist complaints in Judaism and the narrative complexity and dexterity of including this empathic "alternative view." This can be seen as "the signally illuminating scene in all of George Eliot's fiction, the point where she allows all that she values, all the ideas and beliefs embodied in her fictional worlds, to be questioned without qualification...for this one woman, love is bondage, the appropriation of others for a 'larger self.' ...She is not to be rescued into *their* world. The dangers of the very myths that animate Deronda and his creator are exposed by [Princess] Alcharisi, for whom they have been binding chains on her nature." (Levine 133).

The Princess is adamant that Daniel will never fully understand her, not only because he was not raised Jewish but also because he is a man. It seems that for the Princess, the constraints of Judaism and womanhood are inextricably tied, perhaps to the extent that she conflated the two: "You may try – but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out – 'this is the Jewish woman; this is what you must be; this is what you are wanted for; a woman's heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small, like Chinese feet, her happiness is to be made as cakes are, by fixed receipt.' That was what my father wanted. He wished I had been born a son; he cared for me as a makeshift link. His heart was set on his Judaism." (554). (Gwendolen also seems frustrated by the social constraints of her gender, yet her complaints are of a much more shallow and almost flippant nature; her chief articulation of this is that women can't go exploring the way men do: "We women can't go in search of adventures – to find out the

North-West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like the flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining." (117) Furthermore, Gwendolen's desire for freedom is not portrayed as an understandable right but rather as a fault of excessive self-absorption. Her complaints against female obedience are generally portrayed unsympathetically and negatively in the novel).

The Princess contrasts Mirah, who "is the archetypal Jewess and fulfils her desires; those of traditionalist values and the warmth of a family life, which she herself missed as a child. She is not, and does not wish to be liberated." (Baker 214). Mirah rejects Daniel's attempts to have her change her last name for professional reasons: "But, I assure you, you must not be called Cohen. The name is inadmissible for a singer. This is one of the trifles in which we must conform to vulgar prejudice. We could choose some other name, however – such as singers ordinarily choose – an Italian or Spanish name, which would suit your *physique*.' To Deronda just now the name Cohen was equivalent to the ugliest of yellow badges.'" Yet Mirah refuses. Her loyalty to Judaism moves Daniel, and her pride in her own identity is admired by Daniel, the Meyricks, and probably many modern readers. Yet there is a crack in Mirah's perfection, or perhaps in Judaism. In addition to the scenes in which Mirah is unable to defend the practice of separating women from men beyond the defense of "tradition," and admits having never thought much of any other possibilities, Mirah does not know the actual Hebrew to her mother's lullaby. She sings the melody to Daniel, but regrets that "I don't sing real words – only here and there a syllable like hers – the rest is lisping. Do you know Hebrew? Because if you do, my singing will seem childish nonsense..." (329). Mirah's defense, of

course, is that she heard this song only as young child – but, puzzlingly, Mirah seems to have no desire to actually further her Jewish education: "If I were ever to know the real words, I should still go on in my old way with them..." (330). Her attachment to Judaism is based on sentiment, love for her mother, and an overwhelming sense of duty and obedience – that it is not her right or within her power to leave her tradition and background. Mirah's sense of duty is presented positively in contrast to Gwendolen's desire for personal freedom. However, Princess's reasons for leaving Judaism, and motherhood, are presented realistically and empathetically, and Mirah's ignorance of Judaism can offer no real counter or defense.

This tension is all the more striking when *Deronda* is compared with one of Eliot's earlier novels, *Adam Bede* (1859). Dinah Morris is the heroine of *Adam Bede* and she eventually marrying Adam himself. She is a woman preacher, though the fact that she is a Methodist is more alarming to the people of the small, rural village in which the novel takes place: " 'But I've heared as there's no holding these Methodisses when the maggit's once got I' their head: many of 'em goes stark starin' mad wi' their religion. Though this young woman's quiet enough to look at, by what I can make out; I've not seen her myself.'" (*Bede* 14). Dinah's quiet, effective, heartfelt preaching, combined with the good deeds she does throughout the community, quickly win her over to the townspeople. Dinah's demeanor seems similar to that of Mirah – both are demure, modest, seemingly unaware of their physical attraction, and described as having a simpler, plainer type of beauty than the striking beauty of Gwendolen (or, in this novel, a girl named Hetty, who falls into trouble with a ne'er-do-well gentleman). While Gwendolen and Hetty have golden curls and flashing blue or green eyes, Dinah has a

more subtle beauty: "...she seemed above the middle height of woman, though in reality she did not exceed it – an effect which was due to the slimness of her figure and the simple line of her black stuff dress. The stranger was struck with surprise as he saw her approach and mount the cart – surprise, not so much at the feminine delicacy of her appearance, as at the total absence of self-consciousness in her demeanor...there was no blush, no tremulousness, which said, 'I know you think me a pretty woman, too young to preach,' no casting up or down of the eyelids, no compression of the lips...there was no keenness in the eyes; they seemed rather to be shedding love than making observations...It was one of those faces that make one think of white flowers with light touches of colour on their pure petals. The eyes had no peculiar beauty, beyond that of expression; they looked so simple, so candid, so gravely loving, that no accusing scowl, no light sneer could help melting away before their glance.'" (pp 21-22). Mirah has this same demure beauty: "...of low slim figure, with a most delicate little face...poorly dressed, melancholy women are common sights; it was only the delicate beauty, the picturesque lines and colour of the image that were exceptional..." (166). Mirah and Dinah are similar characters in that they are demure, modest women who have a strong sense of morality, unfailingly do "the right thing" throughout the novels, and are portrayed as admirable role models. Yet Dinah differs from Mirah not only because she is a strong *female* religious leader, defying traditional roles, but also because she is able to clearly articulate her religious beliefs. The second chapter includes Dinah's first sermon to these townspeople, in full, spanning several pages. Dinah's sermon is specific in theological terms, though delivered in a way so as to be understandable to her audience. She quotes from a popular hymn, displaying her knowledge of Christian literary sources:

" 'Dear friends, come and take this blessedness; it is offered to you; it is the good news that Jesus came to preach to the poor. It is not like the riches of this world, so that the more one gets the less the rest can have. God is without end; His love is without end – 'Its streams the whole creation reach/So plenteous is the store; Enough for all, enough for each/Enough for evermore.'" (p. 31) – from "Thy Ceaseless, Unexhausted Love" by Charles Wesley, written in 1762 and published in *Short Hymns*. Throughout the novel, Dinah is seen reading the Bible.

The main opposition to Dinah's preaching comes from her aunt, who fears that it will get in the way of her marrying a nice man. Dinah is perfectly capable of defending her choice of profession, and how a woman might take on the unusual role: "" 'We can all be servants of God wherever our lot is cast, but He gives us different sorts of work, according as He fits us for it and calls us to it. I can no more help spending my life in trying to do what I can for the souls of others, than you could help running if you heard little Totty crying at the other end of the house; the voice would go to your heart, you would think the dear child was in trouble or in danger, and you couldn't rest without running to help her and comfort her..." (*Bede* 80)

Though apparently Methodism allowed for greater freedom of women than Judaism in England at that time, it is the way that Dinah is able to articulate her motivations and her reasons that is striking when compared with Mirah's response – " 'I never thought of anything else'" (317) to Amy Meyrick's question about separate seating in synagogues. Though Daniel (and even Hans) eagerly take up studying Hebrew under Mordecai's tutelage, Mirah, though she spends much of her time taking care of Mordecai between her singing engagements, does not seem to engage in any similar enterprise.

It is unclear whether the contrast between the three women – Mirah, the Princess Halm-Eberstein, and Dinah - and their relationships with their faith solely reflects differences in their character or whether the contrast is also an understanding that women should play a very different role in Judaism than in Christianity. It is also impossible to tell whether Eliot approved or disapproved of the lessened, more restricted role for women in Judaism (as she portrays it in *Deronda*, especially as compared to the character of Dinah Morris). Eliot's own attitudes toward women's "roles" in society, and whether she can be viewed as a feminist, is the subject of much critical literary speculation. Eliot's skill as a novelist keeps her own views opaque, and it is very difficult to tell whether the views expressed in the novel – either by characters or by a narrator – are her own, or met with her approval, or whether they are simply those that might be circulated 'in society': "George Eliot employs to great effect...a technique termed 'erlebte Rede' and known in French as 'le style indirect libre.'...As readers we then oscillate between an emotional identification with a character and an obliquely judicious response to their situation." (Oldfield 81)

It is questionable whether Eliot's own background and personal situation can shed any light on which views and characters Eliot most identified with or agreed with in her novels. However, since Eliot *did* in fact breach the societal norms of her time, both in her profession and in her living situation, it is too tempting to *not* at least bear this in mind when appreciating the complexity and variety of the women in her novels. Eliot had experience with and herself "tried out" several different streams of Christianity: her father's low-church Anglicanism, her neighbors who were Baptists, an evangelical phase in her late adolescence, and finally a group of Unitarian friends who encouraged her

scholarly endeavors in philosophy and the history of religion. These friends, who included the Bray family, introduced her to a circle of intellectuals and free-thinkers. She spent her early adulthood caring for her sick father, which left her plenty of time for reading. Eliot read widely: Shakespeare, Milton, Rousseau, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Goethe, Saint-Simon, Lamartine, George Sand, Dickens, and Disraeli, among others (Himmelfarb 53). Her father died in 1849, when Eliot was 30. Her friends, the Brays, then introduced her to their London set of intellectual, literary friends, and she began publishing at the *Westminster Review*.

Through this literary publication, and the social circle involved with it, Eliot met George Henry Lewes, also an essayist and literary critic. Lewes seemed to have encouraged Eliot's intellectual interest: while he worked on a biography of Goethe, Eliot translated Spinoza's *Ethics*, and read Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Heine, and Schlegel (Himmelfarb 58). Her travels with Lewes also might have sparked her interest in Judaism. On a trip to Prague in 1858, she and Lewes visited the Jewish burial ground and the old Synagogue, and on later trips abroad they sought out other synagogues (Himmelfarb 63). Her position as assistant editor at the *Westminster Review* eventually put her in touch with Emmanuel Deutsch, who submitted an article on the Talmud to the magazine. Eliot was impressed with the article, published it, and continued to be in close contact with Deutsch, who advised her in her reading and undertaking of both Hebrew and Talmud. (Himmelfarb 68)

Lewes' first wife had an affair, and Lewes left her, though he could not divorce her (because he had agreed to care for her children who were born out of wedlock). Though Lewes and Eliot fell in love and lived together from 1855 – 1878, they were

never married because of that technicality. This, combined with Eliot's career as assistant editor of *Westminster Literary Review*, put Eliot under enormous social pressure and judgment. Eliot valued religious faith and morals deeply, yet she was also highly self-educated in philosophy, having read Strauss, Charles Hennell, Feuerbach, and translated Spinoza herself. This blend may have helped her find her own balance: "...Feuerbach's cardinal antithesis of an inner truthful 'essence' and an imposed outer 'form' would become crucial. She was about to enter into a relationship that could never be formalized as a marriage, but was as sacred as any formal bond. She was also about to begin a career as a novelist in which she would show that the truthfulness of ordinary experience could never be contained in the half-truths of formulaic narrative structures." (Dolin 24). Lewes' and Eliot's relationship was problematic: "Lewes, of course, could go about unrestricted, but Marian was unable to visit anyone in society or receive visits from respectable women, a situation only finally broken down by her fame in the 1870s, when she was sought out even by royalty." (Dolin 25). Though Eliot had her own career, and agreed to an unconventional living arrangement out of the passion of her love, she did "feel the need to prove its seriousness: its solemnity and essential respectability...she took it upon herself to live out...a new kind of respectability – an open avowal of honesty and decency of conduct, in which her behavior, unconventional and bringing upon her the stigma of respectable people, was elevated to a higher duty....Not being invited to dinner had its undoubted advantages as well. Marian Evans Lewes, freed from 'petty worldly torments, commonly called pleasures' (*Letters,* iii. 367), was enormously productive." (Dolin 26). She first used the pen name 'George Eliot' while publishing short stories (later compiled in *Scenes from Clerical Life*) in the literary journal *Blackwood's*

Edinburgh Magazine. Yet she and Lewes decided to reveal her true identity to the public when a rival author tried to claim her work (Dolin 30).

Eliot began to see a man named John Walter Cross – the Lewes' banker – just a year after Lewes died. She married him less than two years after Lewes' death, though she died only a few months after their wedding.

Eliot's life, like her novels, contained tensions and ambiguity between "...the rebellious woman – the incipient paramour – and the respectable woman – the future Mrs Lewes, as she would insist on being addressed; the independent intellectual of advanced views and the emotionally dependent daughter, sister, partner, whose 'need to be loved' was overpowering; and the speculative modern, bold in the risks she took with her art, who nevertheless preached moderation, caution, and duty to the past." (Dolin 38). Indeed, though Eliot herself lived an unconventional life, with her self-motivated studies in philosophy and religion, and her acceptance of an unorthodox romantic relationship, her heroines are often women who value humility, good deeds, solid religious faith, and family loyalty. Her anti-heroines – Gwendolen and Rosamund Vincy among them – are women who only seek self-gratification and pleasure, who are egotistical, and are often infatuated with their own beauty and its power (Eliot was described by Trollope as: 'not, as the world in general is aware, a handsome, or even a personable woman. Her face was long, the eyes not large nor beautiful in colour...She has been compared to the portraits of Savanarola and Dante...' (Bloom 18)).

The tensions in Eliot's own life support the tensions and ambiguity in her literary portrayals of female characters, especially in their relationships to their faith. She recognized that personal circumstances, and one's own needs for love and creativity,

might lead one to have to understand those values on one's own terms. The deep tensions of Eliot's novels accurately portray the complexity of women's decisions in real life: "There are a number of ways in which one might seek to understand George Eliot's reluctance, or inability, to deliver up unequivocally feminist messages. These start with her aversion to producing the kind of writing which, given the double standards...would ensure that she was judged *as* a woman in literary terms...More than this, George Eliot was deeply mistrustful of creating idealistic exceptions...despite women's yearnings to be someone, or to do something which reaches beyond the circumstances in which they find themselves, she is continually aware that her responsibility is to portray them in the 'imperfect social state' in which they actually lived." (Levine161). Furthermore, "George Eliot sees that the typology so necessary to her realistic enterprise is a male tradition, and that it allows women no freedom to act *in* history. That seeing is represented, however ambiguously, in the appearance of the Princess Leonora Alcharisi...she certainly has 'no place among the types' because she has chosen against types..." (Levine 132)

The Princess ultimately feels that she must make amends of sorts, and reveal herself to Daniel, because she feels that her death is close and she seems vaguely frightened at the prospect of perhaps meeting her father again – " 'My father may have God on his side...My father's threats eat into me with my pain.'" (560). After the death of her husband, since she had no other children, "she [Princess] is sick and lonely and far away from the surroundings in which she was brought up. The forces of tradition, obligation, duty, and heredity have proved in the end too strong, entrapping her like a Greek demon." (Baker 218). The moral message is hard to miss: her flight from her true

family and background left her alone in the end, when one most wants and needs company.

Yet the vigor of her case against Judaism, and its striking prescience regarding dilemmas that still exist in Judaism today – whether attention to ritual detail can overshadow the larger moral message, the separate, delineated roles for men and women in orthodox communities, and the problems of not understanding the liturgy of a service in Hebrew – underscores appreciation and empathy for the Princess's dilemma, and her decision. Her heartfelt confessions about motherhood, too, are of a strikingly modern note – and one cannot help but be reminded that Eliot herself had no children, though whether this was due to social circumstances, physical inability, or personal choice, is unknown.

Mirah and the Princess Halm-Eberstein present "both sides of the coin" – with the former, blind religious loyalty, while with the other, almost complete religious abandonment. Both women suffer greatly in their choices: Mirah's devotion and sense of loyalty, rather than escaping as early as possible, lead her to be dragged around by her villainous father to the point where she attempts suicide; the Princess finds freedom but experiences tragic remorse at the end of her life. Two other women in *Deronda*, Gwendolen and Lydia Glasher, also stand in contrast to each other, in respect to marriage. Gwendolen is under immense pressure to marry, and to marry well. Her father has all but completely abandoned the family, and she has four younger sisters. The women depend on the charity of their uncle, but even he has experienced recent financial strain and Gwendolen must either take a job as a governess – or accept the offer of marriage from the wealthy Mr. Grandcourt. Gwendolen's hesitancy in accepting the offer

is due both to her anxiety about the constraints of marriage, and the dismal prospect of being tied to one person for the rest of one's life, as well as her indifference to Mr. Grandcourt's appearance and personality. Furthermore, and episode with Mrs. Glasher frightened Gwendolen into further postponing the decision.

Mrs. Glasher, Mr. Grandcourt's ex-lover, stands threateningly – whether actually physically present or not – as a warning to Gwendolen. Though Mrs. Glasher and Mr. Grandcourt had three children together, he abandoned his promise to marry her, though he continues to send an allowance. Mrs. Glasher surprised Gwendolen secretly in a glen, in the midst of a hunting party, and revealed to her not only her existence but also the extent of Mr. Grandcourt's cold-heartedness – she is banished to a coal village and ordered not to appear in public. Eventually, the financial situation of her family propels Gwendolen to accept Mr. Grandcourt's offer. The paradox is heartbreaking: if Gwendolen does not accept the marriage offer, she and her family will be penniless, and greatly reduced in social station. However, another woman who *did* previously get involved with Mr. Grandcourt, and was wronged by him, is in the exact same position. Gwendolen is haunted by all this, as the example of Mrs. Glasher "came to her with the shadowy array of possible calamity behind it – calamity which had ceased to be a mere name for her; and all the infiltrated influences of disregarded religious teaching...the brilliant position she had longed for, the imagined freedom she would create for herself in marriage...all were immediately before her; and yet they had come to her hunger like food with the taint of sacrilege upon it...that unhappy-faced woman and her children – Grandcourt and his relations with her – kept repeating themselves in her imagination like the clinging memory of a disgrace, and gradually obliterated all other thought..." The

danger that Gwendolen faces, utterly dependent on her husband who has already proven to be severely lacking in compassion, is that her marriage will lead her to the same position as Mrs. Glasher (or worse, due to the revelation that Gwendolen knew about Mrs. Glasher and yet married Grandcourt anyway). As Gwendolen lies awake at night, her dreams of "the brilliant position she had longed for, the imagined freedom she would create for herself in marriage, the deliverance from the dull insignificance of her girlhood" are countered by the example of Mrs. Glasher. Gwendolen will be severely limited by her circumstances as a woman with no independent means as well as Mr. Grandcourt himself, despite the illusion of her "choosing" to marry him.

Gwendolen's marriage ends unhappily, and she is left both without her deserved allowance and despondent over her unhappy situation. However, the Princess Halm Eberstein's decision to pursue independence and her own career, similarly leave her alone and unhappy at the close of the novel. This does not mean that the novel is overall an unhappy one – it is, in fact, a great romance, as Mirah and Daniel find both each other and an inspiring mission for their lives. The dreams of Mordecai will, in fact, be carried out. But perhaps Eliot creates an even more compelling drama in the complexity of her "opposing" characters, such as the Princess and Mirah, and Gwendolen and Lydia Glasher, who demonstrate the ambiguities and unresolved dilemmas of life. Eliot's ability to weave the women's stories together, and to create a novel that contains both uplifting inspiration, romance, and yet also deep questioning, speaks her to skill. Referring to the job of a literary critic, Lionel Trilling wrote that it was not so much to clarify or interpret than to recall literature to "its first essential imagination of variousness and possibility, which implies the awareness of complexity and difficulty." (Trilling 10). In *Deronda*, the

female characters indeed present complex and difficult questions, though "the narrative goal of George Eliot's final novel is not to resolve dilemmas, but to persist in an endless interrogation of human dilemmas" (McKay 348).

The female characters and their representative values are all the more intriguing when one considers that *Deronda* was in fact written by a woman, who was not only a professional writer who had to use a pseudonym because of contemporary attitudes toward women writers, but who also lived an unconventional life: highly educated in philosophy and religion, assistant editor of a major literary publication, childless and in an unorthodox romantic relationship. Yet an analysis of the women in *Deronda* suggests that the novel portrays more positively the women who display "conservative" values: Mirah and the Meyricks value family, religious devotion, modesty and humility, and properly observed social norms for their gender. This contradiction demonstrates how well Eliot understood and portrayed the complexity of women's lives – or of life in general. This same ability to write "beyond oneself" - which Eliot specifically encourages throughout *Deronda* - is reflected in Eliot's ability to portray Judaism, which was not only *not* her own religion, but one that she would have had little actual contact with. Her own intellectual and religious journey " had taken her from the conventional low-church Anglicanism of her family, to the rigorous Evangelicalism of her youth, and finally to the agnosticism or, as some thought it, the atheism of her mature years. Her 'unbelief,' moreover, derived not from the humanistic positivism of Auguste Comte...but from the more aggressive assault upon religion in general, and Christianity and Judaism in particular, by such heretics, renowned on the continent, as David Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Spinoza, whom Eliot had not only read but translated." (Himmelfarb 6)

Women "go in pairs in George Eliot's novels...and versions of the dark and light woman (Dorothea and Rosamund) or the angel and the whore (Dinah and Hetty) are constantly turning up. But Eliot also deliberately destabilizes these oppositions, in superficial ways and in more profound ways...Eliot's aim is to break across the defining antithesis of the debates on the woman question: conservatism versus feminism; private sphere versus public sphere; education for wifehood and motherhood versus education for work..." ((Dolin 162). Perhaps Eliot's ability to imagine the various possibilities and complexities of life – both in her portrayal of women and in her portrayal of Judaism – that were different than her own personal circumstances will inspire readers to value that variety and complexity. The questions and contradictions that *Deronda* presents are not resolved, nor should they be – yet their value and the novel's draw lies in no small part in the penetrating articulation of these questions.

Chapter 3

The "Hand and Banner" Pub

The complicated idea of separateness with universalism is a dominant tension throughout the novel - and in Judaism since emancipation (from the late 18th to the early 20th century across Europe). In the case of Judaism's separateness, "the implication in *Daniel Deronda* is that the Jewish sense of separateness in the Diaspora while learning from others, together with their envisioned union amongst their own nearly-allied Semitic peoples, would again produce a uniquely rich form of hybridity, to be reflected once more in future Jewish culture." (McKay 461). Eliot further explores this idea through her various Jewish characters and their varying degrees and ideas about assimilation, observance, nationalism, and intermarriage. Daniel, in his interactions with all of these characters, absorbs their differing views – yet "the narrative goal of George Eliot's final novel is not to resolve dilemmas, but to persist in an endless interrogation of human dilemmas: separateness or 'difference' may be necessary to preserve and even enhance humanity; but this notion is deconstructed in the idea that, sexually and racially, we are all hybrids who are part of a common humanity. (McKay 348) As Daniel struggles to find not only his true origins, but also his place in the future and what he will "do" with himself in life – his own identity combined with his sense of purpose for the common good - "Eliot thus balances the need for individual (or national) identity against human unity" (McKay 389).

While the characters of *Deronda* navigate this idea through the twists and turns of the plot, Eliot also explores this idea in an "intellectual" chapter that seems to stand

independently from the plot. Daniel accepts an invitation from Mordecai to attend a "philosopher's club" meeting that is held at a local pub called the *Hand and Banner*. The vigorous debate at this pub, which both Deronda and Mordecai participate in, is the entirety of Chapter 42 in Book VI: *Revelations*. Nothing is revealed about the Cohens, or Deronda's parentage, or his romantic interests – in fact, if the chapter were removed, the plot would not be affected. What the reader does gain is an understanding of the complex questions regarding Judaism post-Enlightenment, as well as Mordecai's grand, if somewhat problematic, vision for the revitalization of the Jewish people. The number of perspectives that Eliot includes, sympathetically, reflects her remarkable understanding of and appreciation for the complexity of a Judaism that was still emerging from emancipation and Enlightenment. While independent of the overall plot of *Daniel Deronda*, the debate scene from the Hand and Banner instead focuses for Daniel (and the reader) the questions present in contemporary Judaism, Mordecai's philosophy on Jewish nationalism, and the way that Daniel will eventually carry out Mordecai's vision.

In the pub, various participants debate issues of assimilation, Jewish nationalism and the possibility of a Jewish state, liberalism and ritual in Judaism, and the extent of contemporary anti-Semitism. With all of these issues is the larger question of particularity and universality. The plot of *Deronda* explores this question further, through, for example, Daniel's English upbringing but Jewish inner essence, or whether Jews should be thought of as more similar to or different than good Christians. The issue "is perhaps an unresolved tension in the novel." (McKay p. 506). The debate at the club examines the tension of particularity and universality – and individuality versus commonality - explicitly through the questions of Judaism post-emancipation.

The men in the small club are "shabbily dressed" and "pure English blood (if leech or lancet can furnish us with the precise product) did not declare itself predominantly...certainly a company select of the select among poor men, being drawn together by a taste not prevalent even among the privileged heirs of learning and its institution..." (460). Both Daniel and Eliot appreciate that the men, though poor and not privy to the higher learning institutions of English gentlemen, value intellectual rigor and stimulation perhaps more than those who do have the benefit of elite educations. Whether this is due to their Judaism – which has long valued learning for its own sake – or is meant to be a coincidental characteristic, is unclear.

Mordecai and each of his companions voice different Jewish responses to life in quasi-emancipated Diaspora. England's Jewish question "was very different from that of Germany or even France...How could Jews – or, for that matter, Catholics or Dissenters – be fully accredited citizens of a state with an established church?" (Himmelfarb 28). The mid-century Jewish population in England was about 35,000. (Himmelfarb) Respectable and affluent Jewish families such as the Rothschilds, Goldsmids, and Montefiores were beginning to gain prominence and wide acceptance in English society. For example, in 1837, Moses Montefiore was appointed sheriff of London and knighted, and in 1841 granted a baronet title. In 1847 Lord Rothschild elected to Parliament but could not take his seat, because he could not take the oath of office that voice allegiance to the Church of England. Some Jews, such as Benjamin Disraeli and David Ricardo, made little secret of their Jewish "race," but formally converted to Christianity for the greater opportunities it afforded. The citizenship/naturalization bill in 1826 abolished the religious component of the oath, so that Jews could vote in elections (provided they met

property qualifications) - but they still could not be elected to many universities and Parliament, as they still required the oath. Bills were presented in 1828 and 1830, calling for abolishment of this oath. (Himmelfarb 28-30). Disrael contributed to the debates over the oath, paradoxically insisting that England was indeed a Christian nation, and for that very reason it should welcome Jews who were, after all, "the authors of your religion..." (Himmelfarb 35). In 1858 the House of Commons and House of Lords adopted different oaths; the House of Commons' oath did not have a religious component. Lionel Rothschild then became the first Jewish member of Parliament. In the pub, Gideon appreciates the new changes: "...I don't approve of our people getting baptized...and now we have political equality, there's no excuse for a pretence of that sort." (465).

The changing situation of Jews in England and throughout Europe stimulates the participants' entire debate at the pub. The ideological differences expressed in the debate "clearly derive from equivalent differences of opinion among the historians [Zunz, Geiger, Jost, Sachs, Delitzsch, Munk, Steinschneider and Graetz]" (Baker 143). Gideon and Pash's pro-assimilation arguments that the Jews should liberalize and reform their habits and rituals so that they are more in accord with the surrounding culture is similar to the way that early Jewish Reform leaders called for modifications in services, celebrations, and rituals. These Reform leaders, such as Geiger an Holdheim, emphasized *Wissenschaft* as an aspect of Judaism and they anticipated that "the scientific study of Judaism to reveal flexibility and change in Jewish tradition" (Meyer 202), therefore justifying their current reforms. In contrast, Lilly's complete disdain for the Jews' "obstinate adherence to the superannuated," might reflect a contemporary trend to the Reformers' *Wissenschaft*: that of German Protestant scholars, the most famous of

whom was Julius Wellhausen. These scholars revisited the doctrine of supersessionism – that Christianity had ultimately replaced Judaism – by describing "Pharasaic" Judaism – meaning, rabbinic Judaism that led to Judaism as it was practiced until the current day – as "being concerned exclusively with the law, to the detriment of genuine spirituality" so that Jewish law "takes the soul out of religion and spoils morality." Wellhausen and other scholars "proved" that they could attribute the legal sections of the Pentateuch to the post exilic period, "making it the product of later Judaism, not of the Ancient Israel whose prophetic morality was inherited by Christianity..." In Wellhausen, and Lilly's, line of logic, "the emancipation of the Jews would have to lead to the extinction of Judaism." (Meyer 203). Though it is ultimately unclear, the lack of any definitive "Jewish" physical characteristics assigned to Lilly make it unlikely that he is Jewish. In contrast to the "triple-baked Jew" Pash or the "Jew of the red-haired type" Gideon, Lilly is a "pale, neat-faced copying clerk, whose light-brown hair was set up in a small parallelogram above his well-filled forehead..." (461).

In contrast to both Gideon's and Lilly's stances, Mordecai's vision promotes a strong Jewish identity, free of assimilation, and a national revival. It includes arguments based on heritage, memory, race and a people's will. Many of Mordecai's ideas can be traced to the historians Graetz and Sachs (Baker). The epigraph, translated in the first paragraph, for the chapter is from Leopold Zunz:

> "If there are ranks in suffering, Israel takes precedence of all the nations – if the duration of sorrows, and the patience which they are born ennoble, the Jews are among the aristocracy of every land – if a literature is called rich in the possession

of a few classic tragedies, what shall we say to a National Tragedy lasting for fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and the actors were also the heroes?" Mordecai will build on this argument in his own speeches at the pub, simultaneously defending the current downtrodden state of the Jews, which has led to the social and spiritual condition of the "grubby" shopkeepers of the ghetto, but acknowledging, with words such as "aristocracy" and "national treasures" that there once was greatness. Furthermore, Mordecai will grandeloquently describe how the possibility for future greatness remains.

The debate begins with a generalized discussion of "change," and while Lilly argues that since change is necessary for development and progress, it is almost inherently good, Deronda argues that "there will still remain the danger of mistaking a tendency which should be resisted for an inevitable law that we must adjust ourselves to..." (464). Mordecai further cautions that though he believes in growth and that "the life of a people grows...it absorbs the thought of other nations into its own forms...it is knit together and yet expanded..." it is important that this is not taken to the point that "memories may be stifled...or memories may shrink into withered relics..." (464).

Gideon enters the debate with his catchword of *rationality*: "...I'm a rational Jews myself...I am for keeping up our worship in a rational way..." (465). The inspiration for Gideon's view seems to have been Abraham Geiger, who argued as Gideon did, that the Jews should 'worship in a rational way' and should get 'rid of all...superstition and exclusiveness."

A section of Eliot's manuscript notes for *Daniel Deronda* is titled "Geiger" (Baker 147). Abraham Geiger, one of the German pioneering "reformers" of Judaism,

stressed "the universality of the Jewish ethic....[Geiger] praises Jewish settlement in the Diaspora as illustrating the ability of the Jews to assimilate with other nations and cultural groupings" (Baker 147). With a thorough education in philosophy as well as rabbinics, Geiger felt "the need to destroy an antiquated Judaism so that a new one could arise from its ruins and the desire to preserve an inner emotional connection with the Jewish legacy" (Meyer 91). He was deeply influenced by David Friedrich Strauss (Meyer 92) – whose *Life of Jesus* Eliot had translated found meaningful. Gideon's preference for "rational worship" reflects Geiger's belief that "where personal observances were devoid of spirit, where they did not elevate the soul, he found no reason to argue for their continuance. They were not, to his mind, eternally binding divine commandments." (Meyer 96). Geiger's concept was that of the "spirit of Judaism" that relied on the ancient traditions and textual sources, yet could be "expressing itself anew in every age, progressing in religious and moral awareness..." and remaining "bound....as a link in the chain..." (Meyer 93-94).

While Geiger professed that "We [Jews] feel fully German...but our heart does not cease to beat warmly for our coreligionists in all lands" (Meyer 97), Gideon affirms "the old maxim, 'A man's country is where he's well of.'" (465). Yet Geiger and Gideon seem to differ on the subject of intermarriage. While Geiger "affirmed the reluctance of Jews...to encourage mixed marriages and so favored the alternative of easier conversion for the Gentile partner" (Meyer 97) Gideon seems pleased that "there's been a good filtering of our blood into high families" (466).

Yet Gideon has to admit that this path will lead the Jews to "melt gradually into the populations we live among" – putting him in the same mindset as the Meyrick girls

who hope that Mirah's Judaism "'would gradually melt away from her, and she would pass into Christianity like the rest of the world...It is so strange to be of the Jews' religion now.'" (317). Like the Meyricks (especially Hans), Gideon has no problem with the idea of intermarriage, and sees it as beneficial for the Jews.

Mordecai evenly answers Gideon's argument for rationalism with a response that might have still been appreciated by Geiger, who had no wish to see Judaism "melt" away: " 'Is it rational...to say 'I know not my mother or my father, let my children be aliens to me, that no prayer of mine may touch them'....[to] let him hold the energy of the prophets, the patient care of the Masters [Talmudic scholars], the fortitude of martyred generations, as mere stuff for a professorship...'" (466-67). Pash, more cynical and far less educated than Mordecai, expresses similar sentiment: " 'You pluck it up by the roots, strip off the leaves and bark, smooth it at top and bottom...it will never sprout.'" (471).

The conversation then turns to Jewish nationalism. For Geiger, "the Jews have a special religious spirit and, in turn, man has a particular gift which only he possesses...Geiger stresses the universality of the Jewish ethic and explains Jewish nationalism as a necessary means for the introduction of the Jewish religion to mankind as a whole...the function of Judaism for Geiger is not nationalistic." (Baker 146) Several characters not only argue against any reasoning for Jewish nationalism, but use it as an opportunity to mock the idea of Jewish "chosenness." Miller leads off with his statement that "We're all related through Adam...so I mean no offence when I say I don't think any great things of the part the Jewish people have played in the world..." followed by an amusing retelling of a "curious old German book" he has that tells of the Jews' "bad

odour" and how certain tribes have "the right arm a handbreadth shorter than the rest," etc (468) – though it is difficult to tell whether Miller (or his book) are dispelling or promoting these ideas. Though Mordecai tries to drop the topic, positing that it "is a vain question...whether our people would beat the rest of the world. Each nation has its own work, and is a member of the world, enriched by the work of others..." he cannot help but still admit that "Israel is the heart of mankind..." (468). Furthermore, Lilly's response, that " 'They're not behind any nation in arrogance...they are the type of obstinate adherence to the superannuated. They may show good abilities when they take up liberal ideas, but as a race they have no development in them,'" (468) pushes Mordecai into the longest speech of the evening. It serves as a declaration of his vision and "it was to Deronda that he was speaking." (470).

Mordecai reminds his listeners of the immense suffering and persecution of the Jews. With all their oppression, "what wonder," Mordecai asks, "that multitudes of our people are ignorant, narrow, superstitious? What wonder?" (469). Yet, Mordecai believes, "...the soul of Judaism is not dead. Revive the organic centre: let the unity of Israel which has made the growth and form of its religion be an outward reality. Looking towards a land and a polity, our dispersed people in all the ends of the earth may share the dignity of a national life...which will plant the wisdom and skill of our race so that it may be...a medium of transmission and understanding." (470).

Though Pash and Gideon interrupt with further protests about the irrationality of Jewish separateness, Mordecai defends the idea of choseneness: " ' I say that the effect of our separateness will not be completed and have its highest transformation unless our race takes on again the character of a nationality....let them say, 'we will lift up a

standard, we will unite in a labour hard but glorious like that of Moses and Ezra, a labour which shall be a worthy fruit of the long anguish whereby our fathers maintained their separateness, refusing the ease of falsehood...and the world will gain as Israel gains. For there will be a community in the van of the East which carries the culture and the sympathies of every great nation in its bosom..." (472). (Throughout the novel, Mordecai builds on his idea of how Jewish separateness is necessary for the unity of mankind. In a private discussion with Daniel, Mordecai instructs that "the Shemah, wherein we briefly confess the divine Unity...made our religion the fundamental religion of the whole world, [embracing] the ultimate unity of mankind...The nation which has been scoffed at for its separateness has given a binding theory to the human race..." (802)).

Deronda interjects to agree that "as long as there is a national remnant of national consciousnesss...there may be a stirring of new memories..." before Mordecai continues, elaborating on his vision for "a new Judea, poised between East and West...Let us contradict the blasphemy and help to will our own better future and the better future of the world – not renounce our higher gift...but choose our full heritage, claim the brotherhood of our nation, and carry it into a new brotherhood with the nations of the Gentiles.'" (475). With this, Mordecai is utterly spent, and the evening (and chapter) end quickly. No more of what is said at the pub (if anything) is reported.

Eliot's apparent special interest in and appreciation for contemporary Jewish concerns can never be completely "explained," though "When she explained her motivations in writing *Deronda*, George Eliot focused on the present social problems of English anti-Jewish prejudice and ignorance of Judaism, rather than on the future hope of a Jewish nation. She wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe that she represented the Jews

sympathetically to correct ignorance, adding that 'towards all oriental peoples with whom we English come in contact, a spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness is observable which has become a national disgrace to us"...Jewish nationalism was important to her insofar as it seemed a positive current among the negative trends, the devaluing of standards in England that threatened what she felt was best about the nation." (Cambridge Companion) Daniel himself seems to be a model of this intellectual journey – he declares to his mother, "What I have been most trying to do for fifteen years is to have some understanding of those who differ from myself" (552).

The debate in the Hand and Banner begins in discussions about nationalism, and whether the idea still carries weight, so it is possible that "the remarkable proto-Zionist vision of the novel represents an interpretation of the Jewish past and a projection of the world's future in light of reviving nationalist movements." (Levine 155)

Deronda was published in 1876 – 18 years before the Dreyfus Affair, and 21 years before the First Zionist Congress, so "to Eliot's Victorian reader the mission on which Daniel embarks can only remain uncertain, incomplete, given the historical reality that there was no Jewish homeland in the 1870s. Any 'solution,'...for the Jewish people as for the English woman, must lie outside the bounds of current realist fiction." (Levine 178). The fascination of this pub scene lies not only in Eliot's prescience regarding contemporary debates on Jewish solidarity, but also in its enduring relevance in modern Jewish debate.

The articulation of the disparate views in the pub reflects the debates in questions in Judaism post-Enlightenment. However, in all that is discussed at the Hand and Banner - how much to "liberalize" and/or update religious ritual, acceptance or disapproval of

intermarriage, the pros and cons of assimilation, whether Judaism is mainly a religion or a nationality/race, and the benefits of each – Eliot refuses to provide easy answers. Though the novel is the most sympathetic to Mordecai, as he is a main protagonist and Daniel follows Mordecai's vision, Eliot does not portray the alternate views unsympathetically. This is similar to the way that Eliot's portrayal of women favors those who display conservative values of family, modesty, and humility – but she is far from entirely unsympathetic to Gwendolen or the Princess Halm-Eberstein. Eliot's fiction, "brilliantly open as it is to unfulfilled possibilities and an almost infinite range of interpretation and action," is a useful tool for modern Jews wishing to expand their understanding and sympathy regarding current issues in Judaism. Through Eliot's characters, readers can appreciate "the enormous difficulty of choosing and acting on the "right" [solution]." (Levine 12).

Chapter 4

The Role of Religious Leadership

Though *Deronda* is centered around Daniel's encounters with Judaism, the novel does contain a prominent Christian clergyman as well. Gwendolen's Uncle Gascoigne is the main paternal figure in her life, since her father, a military captain, all but abandoned his family. A close look at Gascoigne as a Christian and church leader highlights the contrast with the Jews and Judaism also portrayed in the novel. A focus on Gascoigne's temperament – his easygoing and pragmatic approach to life, his reasonableness, and his support of the social status quo – offsets the opposite qualities in Daniel and Mordecai.

Gascoigne is a rector, and has two children of his own – Rex, who is about Gwendolen's age, and Anna, who is slightly younger. He is married to Gwendolen's mother's sister, and has taken on the role of guardian and provider for the abandoned women. After the opening scene in the casino, and Gwendolen's hasty return to her family, Eliot informs the readers that Gwendolen, her mother, and sisters had been living in a house known as Offendene that was provided for by Gascoigne. While Offendene was small and modest compared to Gascoigne's estate, Gascoigne is described as more than generous, even providing Gwendolen with a horse to ride.

Gascoigne's generosity with the horse shows something more than simple big-heartedness. Gascoigne is also a rational, practical man who takes his "fatherly" duties seriously. Mrs. Gascoigne privately objects to Gascoigne's gift of the show horse, as their own daughter only rides a small "nag." But Gascoigne had a specific use in mind with the horse: " 'My dear Nancy, one must look at things from every point of view. His girl is

really worth some expense: you don't often see her [Gwendolen's] equal. She ought to make a first-rate marriage, and I should not be doing my duty if I spared my trouble in helping her forward...I feel for the girl...'" (30) Anna, Gascoigne's own daughter, is not only younger than Gwendolen, but is not as beautiful or charming, and Gascoigne feels that, especially at this time, the horse would be of better "use" with Gwendolen.

According to Gascoigne's congregants and parishioners, "...The worst imputation thrown out against him was worldliness: it could not be proved that he forsook the less fortunate, but it was not to be denied that the friendships he cultivated were of a kind likely to be useful to the father of six sons and two daughters; and bitter observers...remarked that the colour of his opinions had changed in consistency with this principle of action." (25) It seems that his parishioners are unused to this trait in their rectors: at Offendene one evening, a cabinet door "mysteriously" flies open, seriously frightening Gwendolen. When Gascoigne suggests that it was the sudden vibration from the piano that opened the cabinet door, Eliot notes, "this readiness to explain the mystery was thought by Mrs. Vulcany [a guest] unbecoming in a clergymen, and she observed in an undertone that Mr. Gascoigne was always a little too worldly for her taste." (53)

Gascoigne's tendency toward practicality may come from "the fact that he had once been Captain Gaskin, having taken orders and a dipthong..." (24). Yet this trait, hardly offensive to most, does not seem to have dimmed his appeal, at least in Eliot's opinion: "if any one had objected that his preparation for the clerical function was inadequate, his friends might have asked who made a better figure in it, who preached better or had more authority in his parish? (24) Regarding a "better figure in it," Gascoigne's good looks are described in detail through Gwendolen's approving eye:

"One of his advantages was a fine person...there were no distinctively clerical lines in the face, no official reserve or ostentatious benignity of expression, no tricks of starchiness or of affected ease: in his Inverness cape he could not have been identified except as a gentleman with handsome dark features, a nose which began with an intention to be aquiline but suddenly became straight, and iron-grey hair." The tone suggests that, to the parishioners, Gascoigne's appearance and manner establish him as "one of them."

While Gwendolen often equates beauty with character, the Rector is also favorably portrayed as having "a firm mind, grasping its first judgments tenaciously and acting on them promptly, whence counter-judgments were no more for him than shadows fleeting across the solid ground to which he adjusted himself..." (122) The Rector does not seem to want to think too deeply about the truly difficult questions of life. He prefers a gentlemanly reasonableness and to follow the "rules" of proper social society.

Two examples in the novel portray this "gentlemanly" reasonbleness. As soon as Gwendolen moved into Offendene, Mrs. Gascoigne began to worry that Rex would fall in love with Gwendolen. Mr. Gascoigne, ever practical, attempted to dismiss this fear: " 'It is the wiser plan to take it for granted that cousins will not fall in love. If you begin with precautions, the affair will come in spite of them. One must not undertake to act for Providence in these matters, which can no more be held under the hand than a brood of chickens..." (31) Yet Rex did in fact fall hopelessly in love with Gwendolen, and even attempted to inform her of his love, which she coldly rebuffed. During an attempt to further impress her, Rex followed Gwendolen on a hunt. His horse was not as good as hers, and on a jump he fell and severely injured his ankle. Gwendolen, true to her character, did not even stop momentarily. Gascoigne reasseses Gwendolen after Rex's fall and her abandonment of him, and when Gwendolen laughs at hearing of Rex's convalescence, he replies: " 'You are a pretty young lady – to laugh at other people's calamities,' said Mr. Gascoine, with a midler sense of disapprobation than if he had not

had counteracting reasons to be glad that Gwendolen showed no deep feeling on the occasion..." (67) Though he has been nothing but approving before, he now tells her that riding is unladylike: "'Yes, seriously, Gwendolen,' said Mr. Gascoigne, in a judicious tone of rational advice to a person understood to be altogether rational, 'I strongly recommend you...to be spoken of as 'the young lady who hunts' by way of exception, would give a tone to the language about you which I am sure you would not like." (67) Though Gascoigne is trying to sound reasonable, his chief motive is to keep Gwendolen away from Rex – he does not really think that Gwendolen herself is rational. Gascoigne acts *as if* Gwendolen were rational, making the scene amusing.

Despite his chastisement, Gascoigne seems to retain fondness for Gwendolen, and tells his wife, " 'There is no harm in the girl. It is only that she has a high spirit, and it will not do to hold the reins too tight. The point is to get her well married..." He looks forward to the party at the Archery Club not just because of the prospect of Gwendolen meeting Grandcourt Mallinger: "The good understanding between them [Gwendolen and Gascoigne] was much fostered by their enjoyment of archery together: Mr. Gascoigne, as one of the best bowmen in Wessex, was gratified to find the elements of like skill in his niece..." 84). Gwendolen, for her part, is aware of his favor, and "was the more careful not to lose the shelter of his fatherly indulgence..." (84)

As for Rex, Gascoigne appeals to his son's own reasonability to dissuade him from running away to Canada to soothe his broken heart. Through methodic Socratic questioning, 76-77), Gascoigne takes Rex through the logic of the situation until Rex decides to follow his father's advice and return to school. Rather than encourage Rex

with promises of future love or the unsuitability of Gwendolen, Gascoigne seems to think mainly in terms of what is practical.

Yet the Rector is not practical or rational to a degree of coldness. In a revealing incident, when Gwendolen bluntly acknowledges that she must be married sooner rather than later and could do no better than to accept Grandcourt, "...the Rector was a little startled by so bare a version of his own meaning from those young lips. He wished that in her mind his advice should be taken in an infusion of sentiments proper to a girl, and such as are presupposed in the advice of a clergymen, although he may not consider them always appropriate to be put forward. He wished his niece parks, carriages, a title...but he wished her not to be cynical – to be, on the contrary, religiously dutiful, and have warm domestic affections." (125) This portrayal of Gascoigne's distaste for complete materialism and cynicism (and the unusual emphasis on his position as a Rector) shows another dimension to his blend of morality with rationality. In this instance, Gascoigne senses that he does, in fact, want to recognize a moral dimension beyond that of social norms. However, he might not know how to instill that value in his family.

Gascoigne's moral practicality is exemplified when, due to downturns in the general economy, he loses a great deal of money – to the extent that the Harleths must move out of Offendene and find another way to provide for themselves. Eliot notes how "Mr. Gascoigne's worth of character, a little obscured by worldly opportunities...showed itself to great advantage under this sudden reduction of fortune. Prompt and methodical, he had set himself not only to put down his carriage, but to reconsider his worn suits of clothes, to leave off meat for breakfast, to do without periodicals..." (235)

With this change in fortune and circumstance, Mr. Gascoigne attempts to find Gwendolen a position as a governess in order to earn her family some income. Rather than be subjected to such indignity, Gwendolen decides to marry Grandcourt Mallinger, in spite of the knowledge of his previous marriage. It is unclear exactly how much Mr. Gascoigne knows about Mallinger's past, though a hint is given that he does have a few misgivings about Mallinger: "To the Rector, whose father...had risen to be a provincial corn-dealer, aristocratic heirship resembled regal heirship in excepting its possessor from the ordinary standard of moral judgments...Grandcourt...was to be ranged with public personages...but of the future husband personally Mr. Gascoigne was disposed to think the best Gossip is a sort of smoke that comes form the dirty tobacco-pipes of those who diffuse it: it proves nothing but the bad taste of the smoker. This was the view of practical wisdom; with reference to higher views, repentance had a supreme moral and religious value..." (122-23) Gascoigne's tendency toward practicality and rationality seems to also lend him a quieter nature, and a desire to keep the peace rather than incite drama. This hesitancy to act, while entirely understandable, could suggest a mild moral cowardice.

Further hints of this aspect in portraying Gascoigne appear when Mallinger's marriage with Lydia Glasher does come to light, after his drowning, and the details of the will are explained. Mr. Gascoigne "remembered...that he himself...had received hints of former entangling dissipations, and an undue addiction to pleasure...but he did not lower himself by expressing any indignation on merely personal grounds, but behaved like a man of the world who had become a conscientious clergyman...: 'When a young man makes his will in health, he usually counts on living a long while. Probably Mr. Grandcourt did not believe that this will would ever have its present effect.'" (663) It is

difficult to tell whether Eliot commends Gascoigne's self-control and desire to see the possible good in everyone, or whether she is despairing of Gascoigne's desire to smooth over any ruffle, no matter the moral injustice.

Gascoigne is a clergyman of extreme rationality and practical sense. His sense of moral rectitude is tied to a sense of social propriety. He does not have the scholarly bent of Casaubon or Daniel, or the prophetic mystical sense of Mordecai, or the religious curiosity of Dorothea. Unlike Dinah, the preacher of *Adam Bede*, it is difficult to imagine Gascoigne going far out of his way for a mission of social justice or charity. And unlike the parson and rectors of *Middlemarch* or the various characters of *Scenes from Clerical Life* , Gascoigne "smiled pleasantly at the foible of a taste which he did not share – at floriculture or antiquarianism for example, which were much in vogue among his fellow-clergymen in the diocese: for himself, he preferred following the history of a campaign....Mr. Gascoigne's tone of thinking after some long-quieted fluctuations had become ecclesiastical rather than theological...what he would have called sound English, free from nonsense: such as became a man who looked at a national religion by daylight, and saw it in its relations to other things...."

This descriptive excerpt connects Gascoigne's worldview to one that might be representative of the general "English" worldview presented in *Deronda* as contrasting the "Jewish" perspective. In *Deronda*, "on the whole, Jews are favourably contrasted with the growing philistinism and consumerism of British culture. The suggestion is that England still has much to learn from Judaism, whose loss would be dangerous to an imperial mind-set that, increasingly, views others as objects that are only important in terms of their economic value." (McKay 343). The novel begins in a gambling casino,

"...in a contemporary harsh, decadent world, from which 'Old England' has vanished. It ends with Manoa's elegy from the conclusion of *Samson Agonsites* – as if the Philistines who populate England and the casinos of the Continent had been destroyed and the children of light were triumphant in their cleansed promised land." (Levine 130)

While Mr. Gascoigne is portrayed favorably, this materialism might be seen as the flip side of his practicality and rationality - especially as he is supposed to be a religious and spiritual leader. He always "does the right thing," but he does not seem to have a sense of people's souls or any true spiritual inclination in the way that Mordecai and Daniel do. Tellingly, when Gwendolen is allowed to visit her family, in the midst of her marital misery, Gascoigne is utterly blind to Gwendolen's unhappiness. Instead, he urges her to encourage Grandcourt to go into politics to increase their public standing. (486) One of his main appeals as a clergyman is his good looks, as appraised by Gwendolen – also representative of a sort of materialism and shallowness in his parishioners and acquaintances.

Mordecai, by contrast, does not have the authoritative, commanding good looks of Gascoigne. But he does seem to have a spiritual intuition, and an ability to "see" deep into people's hearts and understand their true natures. Though Mordecai is not a rabbi, he is a spiritual leader and inspiration for his pub group, and, of course, for Daniel. Gascoigne does not feature as prominently in the novel as Daniel or Mordecai. Yet his presence – though gentle and benign – demonstrates what Eliot might have seen as a bland English disassociation from true religious feeling and inspiration. In this way, "the idealistic vision of Jewish nationalism...appears as an antidote to opportunities for deceit made possible by dislocations in European culture as represented by both Gascoigne and

Lapidoth. The women in the novel – Mirah, Gwendolen, and Daniel's mother – are the sometimes complicit victims in this corrupt system of exchange.... Eliot suggests that the promise of new beginnings inherent in nationalist movements might redress some of European culture's deepest corrosions (Levine 154). It is as though "...Eliot decided that humanity needed a type of 'spiritual police,' something which might be effected by the profoundly numinous mores of Judaism, with its demands for human altruism and its vision of ultimate redemption, as well as its tolerance and distaste for proselytizing tendencies" - (McKay 531) at least as Eliot saw it.

Most of Eliot's novels explore Christian and church leadership in some way – though some of this might be due to the fact of clergy involvement in rural government during her time. Yet, apparently, as her later novels tend to involve more exotic characters, "Eliot increasingly saw English society as withered and to be escaped from. In *Romola* she went for inspiration to Hellenistic Florence; in *The Spanish Gypsy* she went to Christian Arabic Spain...By turning to Jewish mystical thought and German Jewish historians she went beyond the confines of her tradition and offered an alternative mode of explanation of "the chequered area of human experience." (Baker 879).

Mr. Gascoigne is portrayed favorably as a well-meaning and generous man, who, with a gentleness and foresight, tries to help Gwendolen and the rest of his family as best as he can. Yet in the hints of disapproval of his rationality and practicality, readers can also see what is *not* part of Gascoigne's character: a deeper sense of spirituality and connectedness that *is* present with Daniel and Mordecai and their Judaism. Mr. Gascoigne cannot see Gwendolen's pain, he is not overly concerned with deepening his theological beliefs or understandings, and his greatest desire seems to be simply to keep

peaceful appearances. Gascoigne's surprise at Gwendolen's cynical reasoning to marry Grandcourt, and his wish for a more religious sense, reflects that he has a good, moral heart – yet he has become distanced from that and cannot see how to encourage that sense in others. If Gascoigne is representative of English religious leadership and an English religious sense in general, then his mild mannered rationality shows the negative side of too much emphasis on rationality combined with materialism.

Eliot also may have been making a point against some of the academic trends at the time: "Her conversion, not to Judaism but to a respect for religion in general and Judaism in particular, was all the more notable because it involved a repudiation of some of the most powerful ideologies of her time: the belligerent irreligion and anti-Judaism of the Young Hegelians, the attenuated, syncretistic religion of the Postivists, and the secular humanism of enlightened, 'advanced' liberals." (Himmelfarb 154).

As a clergyman, Gascoigne may be benign, but for Eliot, he is not "enough." His rationality is boring and spiritually unfulfilling, especially when compared to the way Daniel is able to inspire and reassure Gwendolen, or Mordecai's inspired pub speech or mystical conversations with Daniel. His subtle presence serves as a gentle contrast to the Judaism of Daniel, Mordecai, and their friends (such as Kalonymos), who not only keep the moral status quo, but push it to greater heights.

Chapter 5

Biblical Allusions

A direct contrast to the practical, almost a-spiritual religious leadership of Mr. Gascoigne is Mordecai, Mirah's long-lost brother and Daniel's spiritual guide and mentor. The descriptions of Mordecai's vision for the Jewish people verge on the prophetic. Daniel, too, is described as a sort of prophet – although one with a much more active redemptive role. Both Mordecai and Daniel, in their respective "prophetic" roles, highlight the typological and allegorical aspects of the novel. The comparisons of Mordecai and Daniel to the Israelite prophets also point to the "exile" that several characters experience in *Deronda*. These typological associations, and the "issues of cultural identity, exile, visions and history reverberate throughout *Daniel Deronda* on a personal as well as thematic basis. And it is this intermingling of the personal with the 'larger destinies of mankind' (875) which makes *Daniel Deronda* such a great and complex novel." (Baker 157)

Daniel first encounters Mordecai in Ram's bookshop. Daniel steps in while wandering around the Jewish section of London, looking for any clues to Mirah's past. Mordecai mans the desk there, which allows him to study his books and sit quietly, as he is seriously ill with consumption. He lives with the Cohens, and they regard him "with much goodwill as a compound of workman, dominie, vessel of charity, inspired idiot, man of piety, and (if he were inquired into) dangerous heretic." (420) Mordecai believes that Daniel is Jewish, apparently based on Daniel's physical appearance. Though Mordecai asks – "You are perhaps of our race?" – Daniel, at this point, does not know his

heritage and feels uncomfortable. However, as Daniel befriends the Cohens, he is drawn into a deeper relationship with Mordecai, one that blends the roles of friend, teacher, mentor, spiritual guide, and prophet/leader and successor.

In contrast with Mr. Gascoigne's good looks, Mordecai presents a haunting figure: "...his emaciated figure, and dark eyes deep in their sockets...he commonly wore a cloth cap with black fur round it...but spectators would be likely to think of him as an odd-looking Jew..." (418) His appearance also directly contrasts Daniel's, as the two of them stand in profile on Blackfriar's Bridge. While Mordecai has "...the face of a man little above thirty, but with that age upon it which belongs to time lengthened by suffering, the hair and beard still black throwing out the yellow pallor of the skin, the difficult breathing giving more decided marking to the mobile nostril, the wasted yellow hands conspicuous on the folded arms..." Daniel has "a face not more distinctively oriental than many a type seen among what we call the Latin races: rich in youthful health, and with a forcible masculine gravity in its repose..." (438). The contrast highlights the need and appropriateness of Daniel's "successorship" to Mordecai's vision. Mordecai's sallow, yet arresting, appearance might be disconcerting to Mr. Gascoigne's parishioners, who justified Gascoigne's position with the thought that no one "looked better" in the pulpit.

In further contrast to Mr. Gascoigne, who "had become ecclesiastical rather than theological", Mordecai is passionate and mystical in his relationship to his religion and the divine. This passion, and the way it is conveyed, evoke prophecy: "Mordecai's mind wrought so constantly in images, that his coherent trains of thought often resembled the significant dreams attributed to sleepers by waking persons in their most inventive

moments; nay, they often resembled genuine dreams in their way of breaking off the passage from the known to the unknown. Thus, for a long while, he habitually thought of the Being answering to his need as one distantly approaching or turning his back towards him..." (419)

Mordecai's attraction to bridges can be linked to the "Jewish belief [that] rivers and bridges have added significance because of their association with the journey of the soul...." (Nurbhai 52). It is at bridges over ridges, in mystical tradition, that there is "the symbolic meeting place of the teacher with the pupil, where the transference of the soul takes place" (*Encyclopaedia Judaica,* X, 610-11 and VI 19-20). It is possible, then, that Eliot intended for "Mordecai [to see] the vision of Deronda as the ideal vessel for the perpetuation of his beliefs while standing on Blackfriars bridge, the vision becoming reality when they meet on the same bridge, and carrying deep prophetic implications for Mordecai: 'Mordecai lifted his cap and waved it – feeling in that moment that his inward prophecy was fulfilled' (DD p 422)". In the novel, that particular bridge has a regenerative relevance which unites spiritual rebirth with the movement of the soul from teacher to pupil." (Nurbhai 52)

And "even when he [Mordecai] was bending over watch-wheels and trinkets...his imagination spontaneously planted him on some spot where he had a far-stretching scene; his thought went on in wide spaces..." (419).

After meeting Mordecai, and hearing how Mordecai believes that he must have found a successor in Daniel, Daniel pauses for a "reality check." He imagines how Sir Hugo would sensibly analyze the encounter – " 'A consumptive Jew, possessed by a fanaticism which obstacles and hastening death intensified, had fixed on Deronda as the

antitype of some visionary image, the offspring of wedded hope and despair...fanaticism was not so common as bankruptcy, but taken in all its aspects it was abundant enough.'" (450). Daniel himself acknowledges that "While Mordecai was waiting on the bridge for the fulfillment of his visions, another man was convinced that he had the mathematical key of the universe which would supersede Newton" (450).

Yet Daniel does not dismiss him, partly because of Daniel's generous nature and partly because of his "early habit of thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others" (451). Daniel decides to give Mordecai's sanity the benefit of the doubt, and more – Daniel wants to hear and learn more from Mordecai. To encourage Mordecai's story of his own past and vision for the future, Daniel admits: "I have had experience which gives me a keen interest in the story of a spiritual destiny embraced willingly, and embraced in youth." (440)

Later in the novel, Mordecai reveals that his true name is Ezra – which leads to Daniel's realization that Mordecai/Ezra is Mirah's long-lost brother. Both names, Ezra and Mordecai, symbolize the roles that he plays in *Deronda*. As "Mordecai," he unknowingly helps Mirah (by helping Daniel) as she enters better society, much as the ancient Mordecai helped Esther navigate court society. The biblical Ezra was a prophet of the first Exile (586 C.E.), and this Ezra can easily be seen as speaking prophetically of the need to return to Israel.

Mordecai, through both his physical condition and his spiritual guidance, serves as an embodiment of Jewish people in Exile. In the *Hand and Banner*, Daniel is awed by Mordecai's speech and pathos: "Before him stood, as a living, suffering reality, what hitherto he had only seen as an effort of imagination..." (470). Through all of *Deronda*,

"Mordecai has a partly realistic and a partly functional role...His function is an educative one – to make Daniel and George Eliot's readers aware of Jewish history and aspirations and to widen the readers' imaginative sympathies....The contrast between his physical weaknesses, and the strength of his humanity and faith, despite the alien environment, make him representative of the visionary and Zionist elements of Jewish life and thought..." (Baker 202)

Daniel, like Mordecai, can also be seen as a type of prophet. Mordecai recognizes him as a "deliverer," and, even before Daniel's physical appearance in the shop, has the (prophetic) feeling that ""The deliverer's footstep must be near – the deliverer who was to rescue Mordecai's spiritual travail from oblivion, and give it an abiding place in the best heritage of his people" (420). The added role of "deliverer" to Daniel as a prophet invites comparisons with Moses, who delivered the Israelites from Egypt into Israel. Daniel's entire personal "history – his birth amongst Jews, his exile as he grows up in England, and then his journey to Palestine – parallels ancient Jewish history, and has affinities with the story of Moses." (McKay 522). Like Moses, who was adopted into a wealthy household (of the Pharaoh), "Life was very delightful to the lad, [Daniel] with an uncle who was always indulgent and cheerful...and whose place was one of the finest in England, at once historical, romantic, and home-like: a picturesque architectural out-growth from an abbey..." (145). He lives in happy oblivion of the fact of his adoption until the highly symbolic age– the age of bar mitzvah – when thoughts first begin to stir in his head regarding his parentage: "Since the age of thirteen Deronda had associated the deepest experience of his affections with what was a pure supposition, namely, that Sir Hugo was his father..." (452)

The connection between heritage and religion is mentioned subtly as Daniel realizes that his uncle might not really be his uncle: "The first shock of suggestion past, he could remember that he had no certainty how things really had been, and that he had been making conjectures about his own history...and again there came a mood in which his conjectures seemed like a doubt of religion, to be banished as an offence, and a mean prying after what he was not meant to know of..." (148) An understanding of one's identity is strongly connected to one's belief in religion, and both are informed by an understanding of family and heritage.

The identification of Daniel with the biblical Moses grows stronger when Daniel discovers and rescues Mirah. Though some of the elements of the biblical story are rearranged, their presence invites comparison. The rescue takes place in a river, as Moses himself was once rescued. Daniel notices Mirah on the shore, and something about her sparks his interest: "He had no right to linger and watch her; poorly-dressed, melancholy women are common sights; it was only the delicate beauty, the picturesque lines and colour of the image that were exceptional, and these conditions made it the more markedly impossible that he should obtrude his interest upon her...." (166)

When Moses saw the burning bush in the desert, the remarkable thing is that Moses *did* turn to look at it. Burning bushes are quite common in the dry brush of the Sinai desert. The miracle is that Moses took the time to fully notice the bush, and to notice the fine detail: that it burned but was not consumed. As Eliot notes, "poorly-dressed, melancholy women are common sights," but Daniel noticed the ever-so-important details of this "burning bush" that made him take note.

Another similarity is the desire on both Daniel and Moses' part for an escape from worldly duties, and a hesitancy about joining in the action, despite their good hearts and intentions: "...Deronda of late, in his solitary excursions, had been occupied chiefly with uncertainties about his own course....the new image of sorrow [Mirah] easily blent itself with what seemed to him the strong array of reasons why he should shrink from getting into that routine of the world which makes men apologise for all its wrong-doing...why he should not draw strongly at any thread in the hopelessly-entangled scheme of things." (167). Moses, too, initially "shrinks" from God's call to him.

As Daniel rows down the river, "He looked out for a perfectly solitary spot where he could lodge his boat against the bank, and, throwing himself on his back...could watch out the light of sunset and the opening of that bead-roll which some oriental poet describes as God's call to the little stars, who each answer 'Here am I'" (167) – the same response that Moses has in Exodus 3:4 when God calls twice to him. On Daniel's row back, he sees Mirah again, this time preparing to drown herself – and he rescues her.

Daniel's personal redemption of Mirah – saving her from suicide – can be seen as a foreshadowing of the way he will be chosen by Mordecai to be a redeemer of the modern Jewish people. When Daniel rescues Mirah from her suicide attempt, he brings her directly to the Meyricks' house, as he feels the warm female environment will be socially appropriate and soothing. Eliot portrays the Meyrick girls sitting around the parlor just prior to Daniel's entrance, when Mab Meyrick sighs, "I wish something wonderful would happen. I feel like the deluge. The waters of the great deep are broken up, and the windows of heaven are opened." (176). In the very next moment, Daniel enters with Mirah. This reference to Genesis 7:11 comes from the middle of the story of

Noah, whom God has chosen to save the animals and redeem humanity. This allusion could be seen as indicating several things: that, through his redemption of the modern Jewish people, Daniel will save *all* humanity – a concept which fits the novel's understanding of how the Jews can be a redemptive force for British society; or that Daniel, too, has been chosen by God for this task, and not simply by Mordecai; or that the introduction of Mirah into the novel, and Daniel's subsequent journey with Judaism, will be a momentous event far beyond the reach of their little family.

In *Impressions of Theophrastus Such,* a collection of Eliot's essays published in 1879, Eliot commented that in *Daniel Deronda* she attempted to show "...the Jews not merely as worthy of sympathy, but as having within them a spiritual energy through which mankind may one day be saved and made whole." (Nurbhai 107). In this way, too, "...Deronda comes to represent the idea of a complete individual representing not just a complete nation but a centre of universal perfection. He is the messianic individual assuming macrocosmic proportions, and embodiment of the kabbalistic idea that totality could be manifest in a perfect individual." (Nurbhai 107)

As Moses leads the Israelites from their exile in Egypt to the threshold of Israel, Daniel – through Mordecai's oversight – will become the redeemer of the modern Jewish people, who are also in exile in the Diaspora. Daniel and the diaspora Jews are not the only ones in exile in the novel: Gwendolen, too, is described as being in exile. Her exile is initially described in physical ways. She is first seen as the novel opens not at home – or even in England – as she is in a gambling casino, on her own, attempting to escape from deciding whether to marry Grandcourt. This is the first personal exile of sorts. Furthermore, her mother and everyone else around her dote on her "as if she had been a

princess in exile" (19). Gwendolen may be a princess in exile because the Harleths have never had a home to call their own: their father's long absences made them rove "from one foreign watering-place or Parisian apartment to another, always feeling new antipathies to new suites of hired furniture, and meeting new people under conditions which made her appear of little importance..." (18). It is far better, Eliot notes, to have a solid physical place to call home: "A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable different amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood." (16) Gwendolen's need for a physical home mirrors the Jewish people's need – as Mordecai outlines in detail in the *Hand and Banner* pub - for their own land.

Both Gwendolen and the Jewish people can be seen in a spiritual exile, as well. The absence of the physical home can be seen as intimately connected to the spiritual exile. Gwendolen feels isolated and alone from everyone: "The little astronomy taught her at school used sometimes to set her imagination at work in a way that made her tremble: but always when some one joined her she recovered her indifference to the vastness in which she seemed an exile...." (55) In the *Hand and Banner*, Mordecai explains that the physical exile – "the dispersion was wide, the yoke of oppression was a spiked torture...the exile was forced afar among brutish people, where the consciousness of his race was no clearer to him than the light of the sun to our fathers in the Roman

persecution...what wonder that multitudes of our people are ignorant, narrow, superstitious? What wonder?'" (469) – led to the separation of the modern Jews from their intellectual and cultural roots. Mordecai sees the national unification of the Jews, and the establishment of their home in Israel, as way to "let the central fire be kindled again, and the light will reach afar...as a republic where the Jewish spirit manifests itself in a new order founded on the old, purified, enriched by the experience our greatest sons have gathered from the life of the ages." (474).

Gwendolen's story is tied to Mordecai and Daniel's (and the "Jewish part" of the novel) stories by the shared experience of exile. The "absence of purpose to Deronda's life is a kind of spiritual exile...that links him with the Wandering Jew..." (*Eliot, Judaism, and the Novels* 163). As Gwendolen longs to be independent, free from any ties to duty or responsibility, Daniel seeks his heritage out, longing for a past to call his own: "This is the underlying motif of the novel: the quest for identity – the identities; most obviously, of Deronda and Mirah searching for their parents and heritage, but also Gwendolen searching for her true self. Lacking the roots, memories, and 'sweet habit of blood' that come with one's own homestead, she seeks an identity independent of kin and kind...This is to be her fatal weakness: a narcisissm that comes from a spurious sense of identity, a self that is entirely self-contained, self-fashioned, self-willed – and, ultimately, self-destructive. (Himmelfarb 77) The personal "exiles" of so many characters personifies and individualizes the exile of the Jews.

Gwendolen and Mr. Gascoigne embody slightly different aspects of a similar problem. Gwendolen is openly concerned with money and appearances, rather than personal relationships, while Mr. Gascoigne certainly is seen as having the best of

intentions and acting in a charitable and loving manner. But the mentions of his absence of spirituality or any type of passion hint at something amiss – especially when compared with Mordecai's fervor and Daniel's deep capacity to love and "thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others." It is perhaps this absence that blinds Mr. Gascoigne to Gwendolen's pain in her marriage to Grandcourt. *Deronda* suggests that an infusion of spirituality and invigorating morality might wake modern society out of its materialistic patterns, and this perhaps "contributed to George Eliot's endorsement of Jewish ethics...She also wished to demonstrate that the theosophy of a despised ethnic group might be of profound ethical value to the world...ruthless individualism and competitiveness, and greed for money even at times beyond its use and exchange value...in the ruthless desire of various characters to profit from the losses of others...are counteracted by a Hebraic emphasis on the fact that we are all part of one another, destined for reintegration." (McKay 416)

Through Daniel's choice of Judaism, which means that he will leave behind his life of comfort and ease in Hugo Mallinger's estates, Eliot suggests that all of society could benefit from considering spirituality and relationships over materialism: "This idea of consciously choosing something beyond the self that lives in memory and that enlarges our lives and gives us the power to acknowledge and then to reconcile the ideal and the demonic within us must be recognized, accepted, if the world is not to become our imprisoning hell." (Cambridge Companion 134) Their choice will mirror Mordecai's hope that Jews themselves will choose to follow in Daniel's footsteps and reconnect with that heritage over the materialism that they have absorbed from exilic conditions. As

Mordechai says in the *Hand and Banner*, "The sons of Judah have to choose that God may again choose them…" (Levine 134)

Conclusion

Why should Reform Jews today read *Daniel Deronda* ? Why this novel, and why Eliot?

Deronda presents and discusses Jewish issues in an open and inviting way. Eliot's refusal to provide easy answers, or resolve difficult questions, is one of her greatest achievements. It also means that the novel can serve as a springboard for further discussion and personal introspection. I believe that few other authors can present such various possibility and complex issues with the depth and pathos that Eliot does. The fact that this is fiction is perhaps part of what lends this depth and pathos – Eliot is not presenting "issues," she is portraying *people*, who are inevitably more complex than one side of an issue. People are often conflicted and hold several different views at once –as Eliot's characters seem to do. Readers that identify with these characters' struggle may gain valuable insight and perspective on their own feelings and opinions.

The beauty of Eliot's prose is also a strong incentive to read *Deronda*. The serious use of language is arresting and invigorating, and can pull readers into a deeper thought process. When one has to carefully read a sentence or two slowly, in order to understand the full meaning, the reader ends up devoting more time to the thought being expressed – which is useful if it is a discussion about something complex such as religious identity or a woman's choices in her relationships and career. Even aside from arguments why Reform Jews or modern Jews should read *Deronda*, the chance to read deeply satisfying prose might be reason in itself.

With Reform Judaism's emphasis on diversity and including a wide number of views, *Deronda* is especially appropriate. Eliot's views on religious meaning and its relationship

to the individual's search for self-expression are insightful and provocative; they are refracted through a wide spectrum of character types. Characters in *Deronda* can be seen as various responses to struggles with assimilation, organized religion, religious diversity, religious leadership, family relationships, and the growth of personal religious identity. As these are all strikingly prescient issues in American Judaism today, reflection on the characters and how they are portrayed in the book could help provide insight.

As discussed throughout this paper, *Deronda* presents many questions, but few answers. Eliot skillfully avoids any final "judgment" on characters, and readers cannot tell whether Eliot approves or disapproves of certain actions – or whether the "right" choice was made. Was Gwendolen wrong to be free-spirited? Was she justly "punished" in her marriage with Grandcourt – and was his drowning further "punishment" for her knowledge of Lydia Glasher? Or is Gwendolen's situation a commentary on the unfairness of women's choices at Eliot's time (and sometimes even today)?

Is Mirah to be admired for her demure nature and willingness to please? Is Daniel's mother, the Princess Halm-Eberstein, to be despised for her abandonment of both Judaism and her son? Or does Eliot portray Mirah as a relatively flat, uninteresting character – and the Princess as a model of a strong woman who made a brave decision?

Is Judaism best represented by Daniel's "nobility" and Mordecai's prophecy, or by the beggars, shopkeepers, and uneducated Cohen family of Eastgate? Is Klesmer's assimilation to be admired? If so, what about the Princess Halm-Eberstein's assimilation? If hers is not – does Eliot agree or approve that there are different social norms for men and women?

These are just a few examples of the questions that *Deronda* provokes, but does not answer. I believe one of the greatest qualities of the novel is that it does *not* answer these questions. In this open-endedness, readers can engage with their own assumptions and opinions, and more importantly, with the ideas of others who have read the novel as well.

I believe that this novel, and other great literature, can serve as an important tool in consciousness-raising and community-building for Jews today. We have many tough questions to address, such as the ones mentioned in the first paragraph. Great literature can be an entryway to discussing those questions. Readers can engage with the novel in a way that allows discussions about issues that are extremely personal.

It is also my hope that discussions that stem from Eliot's novels could also raise the question of "canon" in terms of a Reform rabbi's toolbox. What sources do and should Reform rabbis consider when writing sermons or teaching? Including various aspects and references of culture – classic literature included – can expand both the rabbi and her congregants:

"Why read the classics?...in order to live in a wider world. Wider than what? Wider than the one that comes through the routine of our material lives and through the paper and the factual magazines...wider also than friends' and neighbors' plans and gossip; wider especially than one's business or profession. For nothing is more narrowing that one's own shop...Anybody who wants access to human life and its possibilities – to thoughts and feelings as they occur natively or by deep reflection – must use another channel. One such channel can be cut by using classics of literature and philosophy...the effort gives us a vast store of vicarious experience; we come face to face with the whole

range of perception that mankind has attained...it is like gaining a second life." (Barzun 416).

Perhaps through *Deronda*, today's Reform Jews will be inspired in several ways. Daniel's enthusiasm for Judaism, and his passion to learn about his own heritage – even though it is an "undesirable" one in his contemporary England – is striking. Through Daniel's journey to Judaism, readers may find comfort and inspiration in seeing what made Daniel – and perhaps Eliot – fall in love with Judaism.

Furthermore, Eliot is undeniably one of the greatest writers in English literature. Few of us can describe a hillside as beautifully as she can, let alone articulate complex arguments about Judaism – and life. Through her words, though, we may find our own thoughts and feelings, and therefore have the means of better communication of our own opinions and ideas. An example is the way Eliot describes a synagogue service that Daniel attends. He can understand the intent of the melodies and prayers, but not the words:

"The most powerful movement of feeling with a liturgy is the prayer which seeks for nothing special, but is a yearning to escape from the limitations of our own weakness and an invocation of all Good to enter and abide with us; or else a self-obvious lifting up of gladness...that such Good exists; both the yearning and the exultation gathering their utmost force form the sense of communion in a form which has expressed them both for long generations." (322)

Finally, as Reform Jews in particular, I believe we should continually strive to be as inclusive as we can with our community. Great literature, and especially a novel such as *Deronda*, can help us consider the perspectives that are not our own:

"To the carrying out of the job of criticizing the liberal imagination, literature has a unique relevance, not merely because so much of modern literature has explicitly directed itself upon politics, but more importantly because literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty." (Trilling).

The beauty of Eliot's work in *Daniel Deronda* inspired me throughout rabbinic school. As with all of Eliot's characters, her "Jews have a certain credibility too; it does not too much strain the imagination to say, "Jews are like that," and Jews as well as Gentiles have found some reality in them... There is a genuine, inner, intimate quality about much of *Daniel Deronda*..." (Trilling, the Changing Myth of the Jew 33). This novel has much to offer Jewish readers today, and I believe that its relevance, literary aesthetic, and skillful probing of deep questions makes it an invaluable resource in contemporary Judaism.

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