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The Post-Colonial Critique of Eliot: Is Edward Said Right about *Daniel Deronda*?

Fundamental to Eliot's ambition as a writer was her aspiration not only to make a significant cultural contribution as intellectual and artist but also to engage with the major issues of her time, as the writers she most admired, such as Milton or Goethe, had done. I have already discussed her critique of Darwinism, the Byronic and – in Chapter 9 – the ascendancy of 'mechanistic' thinking in regard to social questions. But among the issues she confronted which in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been of particular interest to literary critics and theorists are nationalism, identity, colonialism, race, imperialism, cosmopolitanism, which are of course all related to each other. Not only has this made her one of the most discussed writers among recent critical and cultural theorists, but her work may be seen as more pertinent to recent cultural debates than that of her literary contemporaries or even her modernist successors. She is, for example, a key figure for leading cultural theorist Amanda Anderson, who considers her at some length in her book *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*, a 'companion piece'¹ to her theoretical study *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory*. But while Anderson takes a predominantly positive view of Eliot, many post-colonial-influenced critics have tended to be negative in their views, often scathingly so. Her negative critics are right to recognize the importance of her writing to political and, especially, post-colonial issues, but in tending to see it as reflective of attitudes and assumptions they see as having their roots in right-wing ideologies that were powerful in the Victorian period, they do not give sufficient credit to Eliot as a significant thinker in her own right who cannot as easily be pinned down politically. Her ideas on subjects such as nationalism or colonialism deserve to be taken seriously in their own terms and may still have a contribution to make to current debates, as I shall try to show in the next few chapters.

Daniel Deronda and, to a lesser extent, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* have been the major focus of critical discussion in this area. Whereas previously critical controversy regarding *Daniel Deronda* centred on formal questions, such as the supposed split between the two plots, literary and cultural criticism of the past few decades has tended to concentrate more on the proto-Zionist theme and the political implications that derive from it. In some ways it is

easy to comprehend why this shift in critical interest has taken place as she is one of the few literary writers in the Victorian period who dealt in any depth with colonialism and imperialism. Recent critical discussion in relation to Eliot has thus tended to be dominated by political issues. In the next few chapters I shall consider whether political readings of Eliot by Edward Said and later post-colonial critics who have been influenced by him, particularly in relation to *Daniel Deronda* and *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, can stand up to scrutiny and especially whether neglecting the literary to concentrate on the political is a defensible critical strategy with regard to a writer like Eliot who, as I have argued, has the highest ambition both as an intellectual and as an artist.

If one were asked to vote for the work of literature that has had the greatest effect on the world – assuming that the Bible or the Koran and other religious texts were excluded from the category of literature – then *Daniel Deronda* ought to be a strong contender. A case can be made that without it the state of Israel might not exist, and Israel of course has been at the centre of contemporary history and politics since it was founded in 1948 and continues to be. It has been claimed that its publication led to a fundamental change in Jewish attitudes to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine – ‘to hundreds of thousands of assimilated Jews, the story presented, for the first time, the possibility of a return to Zion’² – and the major figures in Zionism, Herzl and Weizmann, were certainly well aware of it and may even have read it. Also crucial to the foundation of Israel was the Balfour Declaration – ‘without it the Jewish state could never have come into existence’³ – and it is likely that Balfour’s initial interest in the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine had been aroused by *Daniel Deronda*. It is perhaps significant that he visited Eliot in 1877, the year after the novel’s publication. Edward Said may have been aware of these facts and, as a Palestinian, his negative critique of *Daniel Deronda* in his writings on Zionism and the question of Palestine is understandable. Whether his critique is fair or persuasive is what I will address in this chapter.

Said’s view of *Daniel Deronda* as in sympathy with colonialism and Western imperialist attitudes to the East has considerably influenced current critical attitudes to it, particularly among post-colonial critics,⁴ but one finds his view reflected now even in books designed for the general reader, Deronda’s departure for the East being seen as ‘uncomfortably close to the imperial adventurism common among Englishmen of his time and class, who go off to the colonies to find a role and make a reputation’.⁵ *Daniel Deronda* is mentioned briefly by Said in his book *Orientalism*, generally associating it with an attitude to the Orient that reflects Western imperialist ideology, and he develops this argument in his essay, ‘Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims’. The obvious argument that could be used against Said is that Zionism in its nineteenth-century context is fundamentally different from European imperialism since Jews had once inhabited Palestine and had been driven out, and there was still a Jewish presence there, so that the major drive of early

Zionism was the desire for a cultural identity rooted in place for a people subject to different degrees of discrimination and oppression and not, as generally with European imperialism, economic exploitation. Said also accepts that in the late nineteenth century Palestine was already colonized: 'True, it was under Ottoman administration (and therefore already a colony)'.⁶

Yet such arguments are not in themselves sufficient to undermine Said's position, especially his claim that the Zionist Jews had been Europeanized and like European imperialists viewed Palestine 'as essentially empty of inhabitants, not because there were no inhabitants ... but because their status as sovereign and human inhabitants was systematically denied'.⁷ Said provides evidence that some early Zionists, such as Moses Hess, equated colonizing Palestine with colonialism more generally, which they saw as bringing 'civilization' to the Orient, and he claims that Mordecai, the proto-Zionist prophet in *Daniel Deronda*, uses similar language to Hess. Despite the important difference I have mentioned between Zionism and European imperialism in general, colonization clearly was common to both, with Zionism creating, as Said asserts, 'Jewish colonies in the land of their ancestors',⁸ and historically colonization almost inevitably leads to the existing population eventually being displaced or marginalized: 'Zionism essentially saw Palestine as the European imperialist did, as an empty territory paradoxically "filled" with ignoble or perhaps even dispensable natives'.⁹ Said's position is that any form of colonization that sees the existing population as on a lower human level as a prelude to displacing them is ethically unacceptable. As he points out, for colonists, 'There is no question of consulting the natives of the territory where the new society is to be given birth'.¹⁰ And, of course, if they were consulted beforehand, colonization would never happen. If one considers colonization historically, in virtually every case the existing occupiers have been seen as inferior by the colonizers and not 'as people having wishes, values, aspirations'.¹¹ For Said, this makes colonization intrinsically wrong, and such a view seems to be assumed in the post-colonial theory and criticism that Said's writings have greatly influenced.

Mordecai's speeches in the *Hand and Banner* tavern scene in Chapter 42 of *Daniel Deronda*, in which he urges the creation of 'an organic centre' for the Jews in Palestine and looks forward to their having a nation 'even as the sons of England and Germany' do, is regarded by Said as embodying Eliot's own proto-Zionist views. For him and for numerous other critics Mordecai is a mere spokesman for her. But looking at these speeches – especially in the light of the Jewish maiden and Gentile king episode at the end of Chapter 61, which reveals that Mordecai's idealism edits out inconvenient aspects of reality, and the critical angle on Mordecai which that scene implies – gives one a different perspective.¹² It is political rhetoric directed at a susceptible Deronda – 'it was to Deronda that he was speaking' (*DD*, 454) – not at the other members of the group, all of whom are familiar with Mordecai's ideas and disagree with them, and is meant to be seen as such. The culminating moment in his speech

advocating 'an organic centre' is his declaration: 'Difficulties? I know there are difficulties. But let the spirit of sublime achievement move in the great among our people, and the work will begin' (*DD*, 456–7). This rhetorical flourish is intended to prevent any discussion or consideration of 'difficulties', and the major difficulty must, of course, be the fact that European Jews would have to colonize the former land of their ancestors which now had a predominantly Arab population.

Eliot would have been familiar with the situation in Palestine as her friend, and almost certainly the principal model for Mordecai, Emanuel Deutsch, with whom she studied Hebrew, had been there in 1869 and had been powerfully affected by that experience; almost certainly he and Eliot would have discussed it. In a letter Eliot wrote to her publisher, John Blackwood, she indicates that she is well aware that if modern Jews are to have their own nation, it will involve colonization: 'There is a great movement now among the Jews towards colonising Palestine, and bringing out the resources of the soil' (*Letters*, VII, 109). It is significant, however, that Mordecai claims that if a Jewish nation were created in Palestine it would have an equal right to exist and similar standing to England and America as nations; once the Jews have 'an organic centre ... the outraged Jew shall have a defence in the court of nations, as the outraged Englishman or American' (*DD*, 456). The American example is particularly apposite as Mordecai makes clear when he points out that it is 'only two centuries since a vessel carried over the ocean the beginning of the great North American nation' (*DD*, 458), and Said himself links Zionism and the creation of America as a nation: 'Zionism (like the view of America as an empty land held by Puritans) was a colonial vision.'¹³ No doubt the reason for the comparison between Jewish nationhood in Palestine and England and America is that both the latter were created through colonization. In the case of England there were numerous invasions by colonizers – by the Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Normans – and America had been colonized by the English from Tudor times. Mordecai's rhetoric, however, passes over the 'difficulties' of colonization before England and the America emerged as 'great' nations.

In the various colonizations of England – a name invented, of course, by the predominant colonizers – the 'wishes, values, and aspirations' of the existing population were never taken into account as the invaders were mostly bent on subjugating them, even exterminating them, or driving them to the fringes of the country. Before the creation of a 'great North American nation', the existing inhabitants were generally seen as savages and treated accordingly, and they were subjected to even more oppressive treatment after the colonizers gained freedom from British rule, and at the time Mordecai is speaking the American economy had to a significant extent depended on the labour of African slaves who were also predominantly regarded as intrinsically inferior to those of European descent. All of this familiar prehistory to the founding of England and America as nations is left out of account by Mordecai, and for Said and

those critics influenced by him Eliot colludes in this omission of the likely consequences of any Jewish colonizing of Palestine. But I shall argue that this view is open to question: the comparison Mordecai draws with England and America as nations enables the reader to see beyond the rhetoric and reflect on the 'difficulties'.

Eliot was well aware of the price of colonization and specifically refers to it with reference to England and America in the final chapter of *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!'. The narrator, Theophrastus Such, gives special emphasis to the losers of history and does not seek to cover up what colonization entailed for the colonized in the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain, with the Anglo-Saxon colonizers 'gradually conquering more and more of the pleasant land from the natives who knew nothing of Odin, and finally making unusually clean work in ridding themselves of those prior occupants'. These invaders were 'our fathers' and they 'massacred Britons' (*ITS*, 145–6), and their descendants behaved similarly in regard to the 'Red Indians' in the colonization of America.

There is plenty of evidence in Eliot's writings, fictional and non-fictional, of her sympathy with displaced or colonized peoples, Jews, Gypsies, Irish and of her opposition to British colonialism in India. But, unlike Said, she does not view colonization from an absolutist ethical standpoint. Mordecai's rhetoric may cover up the 'difficulties' in the interests of communicating to Deronda his idealistic vision, but Eliot would not, I think, have believed that Mordecai was wrong to see England and America as 'great' nations, despite the price that had to be paid in human blood and suffering for their creation. Although the bloody consequences of the various colonizations in the past are acknowledged, nevertheless for Theophrastus history moved on and a country called England eventually emerged, developed and acquired 'a national consciousness', a 'sense of corporate existence', a distinct identity for a people descended from diverse ethnic groups that had previously tended to slaughter each other, and of course that nation produced Shakespeare, Newton and Eliot herself. Similarly, an idea of America emerged that brought together an even greater ethnic diversity and whose constitution can be interpreted as proclaiming that all of its people, even its 'Red Indian' inhabitants and those descended from slaves, are included in the nation, even if those who signed the constitution may have interpreted it differently.

Does this mean that for Eliot, in contrast to Said's ethically absolutist position, the price of invasion and colonization is sometimes worth paying? And if England and America are examples of colonization that could be seen as eventually having a 'good' outcome, what about counter-examples in which colonization had negative or even disastrous consequences? There is no indication in *Daniel Deronda* or 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' that the horrific consequences of invasion and colonization could ever be justified by possible future benefits, but Eliot's implied view is that to object to colonization

absolutely is to object to history itself, since migration and colonization have been ubiquitous. To ask whether colonization in itself is a good or bad thing is the same as asking whether history is a good or bad thing. The narrator of 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' sees the fusion of races as inevitable (agreeing with Julius Klesmer in the novel, who looks forward to it): 'The tendency of things is towards the quicker or slower fusion of races. It is impossible to arrest this tendency' (*ITS*, 285), and colonization cannot be excluded from that tendency.

Although Mordecai is convinced that the return of Jews to Palestine will be beneficial not merely to the Jews but to the whole of humanity, the story of the Jewish maiden and the Gentile king is again pertinent, since it raises questions about Mordecai as an idealist. And does the novel's epigraph not provide a warning that because of an anarchic tendency within human nature things could always turn out badly? Even if seldom referred to by critics, it would not be out of place as an epigraph to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul:
There, 'mid the throng of hurrying desires
That trample on the dead to seize their spoil,
Lurks vengeance, footless, irresistible
As exhalations laden with slow death,
And o'er the fairest troop of captured joys
Breathes pallid pestilence.

Daniel Deronda is notable for its open-endedness, and the contemporaneous reader, of course, had no knowledge as to what might result from Mordecai's prophetic vision and Deronda's decision to devote his life to the cause of creating a nation for Jews in Palestine. Things are even more problematic for the modern reader. It is clear from Said's writings and the writings of those influenced by him that views about the creation of the state of Israel and its aftermath have had an impact on critical judgement. From Eliot's writings in general it is apparent that she was sympathetic to some nationalist movements at least, seeing them as resisting globalizing economic forces with their homogenizing effects and imperialist forms of colonialism related to those economic forces. But whether she intended the proto-Zionist aspect of the novel to promote actively the cause of Jewish nationhood in any simple political sense is doubtful: this would be to remove the Jewish theme from its artistic context. Nancy Henry has stated that Eliot avoided becoming involved at a political level in efforts to further Jewish colonization of Palestine:

Eliot had no wish to align herself with the efforts of certain Jewish and non-Jewish Englishmen ... to establish colonies in Palestine ... She has often been taken as an advocate of the colonization of Palestine based on isolated readings of *Deronda*, but her reluctance to celebrate early signs of its actual occurrence

suggested that she distinguished between the idea of Jewish nationalism and the practices of religious (mostly Christian) colonizers.¹⁴

Whatever Eliot's intention, readers now cannot help but read the novel in the context of the situation in the Middle East and almost inevitably wonder whether she would have regretted the proto-Zionist theme if she could have had second sight and seen the consequences of a Jewish state coming into being in Palestine. Implicit in the novel, however, is the unpredictability of future events. It is the certainty of the messianic visionary, such as Mordecai, in the face of that unpredictability which gives him his power. Without that power as manifested in Mordecai it is doubtful whether Deronda would have discovered a sense of partiality that he had previously lacked and the ideal that stems from Mordecai's prophetic vision which Deronda becomes 'possessed' with: 'that of restoring a political existence to my people' (*DD*, 688). But the narrator maintains a sense of distance with regard to the visionary's claim to have second sight – "Second-sight" is a flag over disputed ground' – and goes on to introduce a more sceptical note, 'No doubt there are abject specimens of the visionary', reflecting that in whatever category one looks at there will inevitably be bad examples: 'One is afraid to think of all that the genus "patriot" embraces' (*DD*, 404). Nor does Deronda, though his aspiration is to be 'an organic part of social life' (*DD*, 308), abandon the rational or analytic intellect despite making a commitment to Mordecai's ideal of Jewish nationhood with its grounding in Jewish mysticism. However, he refuses to dismiss Mordecai's claim to the prophetic, though he himself 'was not one of those quivering-poised natures that lend themselves to second-sight' (*DD*, 403). But, like the narrator, he is aware of the possibility that Mordecai may be a poor or unlucky example of the visionary and that his ideas could therefore have unfortunate consequences.

Difficulties of interpretation are present from the start of the novel. It opens with a series of questions raised by Deronda on first seeing Gwendolen: 'Is she beautiful or not beautiful? ... Was the good or evil genius dominant in these beams?' (*DD*, 3). Is Mordecai a visionary who can be compared to great visionaries of the past, or is he mad? Mr Cohen with whom he lives tends to think he is mad: 'It was clearly to be understood that Mordecai did not come up to the standard of sanity which was set by Mr Cohen's view of men and things' (*DD*, 339). Of course, this may be more of a judgement on Mr Cohen than on Mordecai. In effect, Deronda has to make a decision about Mordecai even though the signs are ambiguous: is he driven by a good or evil genius? Deronda's doubts are powerfully presented: '[Mordecai] was more poetical than a social reformer with coloured views of the new moral world in parallelogram, or than an enthusiast in sewage; still he came under the same class' (*DD*, 435). His conviction that in Deronda 'he had found a new executive self ... might seem justifiably dismissed as illusory and even preposterous' (*DD*, 435–6).

Deronda in effect has to gamble that Mordecai's proto-Zionism is not merely fanaticism but an authentic form of idealism that could further the greater good of the world: 'Fanaticism was not as common as bankruptcy, but taken in all its aspects it was abundant enough' (*DD*, 435). Mordecai's vision may be on a higher level than that of European colonialists, but there could be no certainty, at the time the novel was written, as to how any Zionist project would turn out. Although 'great' nations such as England or America may have eventually emerged, after much struggle and turmoil, as a consequence of colonization, colonization has just as often had unfortunate outcomes, especially when it has been allied to imperialism.

If a Jewish nation is created and the Jews are winners, there will consequently be losers. For Said, Eliot – like other supporters of the Jewish colonization of Palestine – ignores the losers. Although Eliot is not specific in *Daniel Deronda* about the effect colonization of Palestine by Jews is likely to have on its predominantly Arab inhabitants, Mordecai refers to 'difficulties', and 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' reveals the unspoken subtext to his words by acknowledging that any form of colonization will have its price. Yet, as 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' also makes clear, without Jewish colonization of Palestine, for Theophrastus and no doubt for Eliot, there is a great risk of the Jews being the losers. Zionism was to a considerable extent a reaction to rising anti-Semitism in Europe, and if Jews were denied a nation that would allow them to escape it, then it would be the Jews who would lose. Theophrastus goes so far as to argue that without nationhood a distinct Jewish people would eventually disappear: 'Are they destined to complete fusion with the peoples among whom they are dispersed, losing every remnant of a distinctive consciousness as Jews?' (*DD*, 162). Again this makes colonization in a Jewish context different in kind from general European colonialism, as arguably both the Jews who wish to colonize Palestine to escape oppression and discrimination and to preserve their distinctive identity, and the existing Arab inhabitants of Palestine can be seen as potential losers. One is inevitably forced to choose – a recurrent theme in Eliot's fiction – and in this case Eliot's choice is for the Jews, but without Mordecai's certainty about the outcome and with full awareness of the 'difficulties' he tries to dismiss.

Said does not take account of the fact that winning or losing is a recurrent preoccupation in *Daniel Deronda*, creating ethical difficulties both at the level of the personal lives of the characters and at the political level. Deronda becomes a winner when he turns out to have been born a Jew, but this turns both Hans Meyrick and Gwendolen into losers: any hope that Meyrick had of winning Mirah disappears, and Deronda will now desert Gwendolen to pursue the vocation that Mordecai has created for him. In his letter to Deronda in Chapter 52, Meyrick applies an ironic perspective to causality that is relevant both to Deronda's good fortune and to the Zionist project. Meyrick tells Deronda that 'the most judicious opinion going as to the effects of present

causes is that “time will show”, which leads him to refer to ‘the present causes of past effects’ (DD, 549). Since one can never be sure of what ‘present causes’ will lead to in the future, causality in relation to the human mind in effect works backwards, being perceived to cause the past rather than the future. After reading Meyrick’s letter we see Deronda reading his own past differently in the light of the revelation of his Jewishness, bearing out Meyrick’s perspective. Conveniently, he can now view Meyrick’s love for Mirah as not real but only as a kind of fantastic game, taking the imaginative pyrotechnics of the letter as a sign of Meyrick’s lack of real feeling, not even considering that this self-display may be a means of covering up the pain of unrequited love. Eliot surely implies irony when Deronda concludes, ‘I can’t say that he is not active in imagining what goes on in other people – but then he always imagines it to fit his own inclination’ (DD, 554), as this could easily apply to Deronda himself.

Only a prophet convinced of the truth of his vision can project causality into the future, and as is apparent with Mordecai, this can have value in motivating and shaping human action. No doubt Eliot had little rational expectation that a series of unpredictable events would lead to a Jewish state being created in Palestine, but neither the narrator nor Deronda dismisses prophecy. How can one act to try to improve the world without the hope that prophecy provides? But there is always the risk that there will be losers as well as winners. As a post-colonial critic Said reads history backwards from the point of view of the losers, but I would argue that he distorts both *Daniel Deronda* and Eliot by assuming that they exclude and ignore the perspective of the loser. Indeed I would argue that Eliot is well aware that the ethical must not ignore the fact that judgements or decisions or choices, both in the personal and political spheres, will almost inevitably create losers as well as winners.

Eliot’s presumed indifference to the existing Arab population of Palestine who would be the potential losers if a Jewish state was created through colonization has led Said to associate her with colonialism and its assumption that Europeans have the right to displace non-European peoples: ‘Eliot was indifferent to races who could not be assimilated to European ideas’.¹⁵ But anti-colonialist views that are evident throughout her writing – as in her dramatic poem *The Spanish Gypsy*, which clearly criticizes the Spanish imperialist and exclusivist policy which led to the expulsion of Arabs and Jews from Spain, and her outright condemnation in her letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe of English ‘arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness’ towards ‘all oriental peoples’ (*Letters*, V, 301) – are unmentioned by Said. But perhaps of more significance is that Mordecai takes England and America as models in his concept of a nation. This suggests that the restored Jewish nation is not conceived by him as aiming to be racially or ethnically exclusive but like England and America hybrid in these respects. It may be that Eliot and Said are not too far apart at the level of their ideals, as Said’s was for the creation of a nation in Palestine in which Jews and Arabs could coexist on an equal basis.

Some critics have nevertheless gone much further than Said in their criticism of Eliot and *Daniel Deronda* and claimed that there is an 'insistence on racial essentialism'.¹⁶ 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!', however, suggests that Eliot did not see nationality in terms of racial or ethnic exclusiveness but in terms of 'a national consciousness', the Jews being admired for their 'distinctive consciousness ... what we may call the organised memory of national consciousness' (DD, 162). Eliot's implied position is that such a consciousness can be created among racially and ethnically diverse people with different sets of beliefs, as in England and America, even though the ideal, of course, may never be fully achieved. The narrator in *Daniel Deronda* is ironic in the 'Hand and Banner' scene about whether there is any longer pure English blood: 'In fact, pure English blood (if leech or lancet can furnish us with the precise product) did not declare itself predominantly in the party at present assembled' (DD, 440). The narrator of 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' is critical of English attitudes towards Jews and immigrants, questions the 'exclusiveness' of the Chinese and opposes immigration controls being introduced into England. Even though Mordecai may appear at one point to support Jewish racial separateness, as in his criticism of Jews who marry Gentiles, this is directed at Jews who have internalized Gentile contempt for them and who intermarry in order to be accepted. This is part of his argument that Jews need nationhood so that they can be free from such self-contempt and regain contact and connection with Jewish history, thought and tradition. And even for him it is consciousness rather than race that is fundamental: 'What is it to me that the ten tribes are lost untraceably, or that multitudes of the children of Judah have mixed themselves with the Gentile population as a river with rivers. Behold our people still' (DD, 456).

Even though the plot of the novel appears to turn on Deronda being a Jew in a racial sense, his Jewish origins would have meant little or nothing to him if his mind and feelings had not been prepared in advance by his meeting Mirah and Mordecai. Consciousness and choice are more important than race:

If this revelation had been made to me before I knew you both, I think my mind would have rebelled against it. Perhaps I should have felt then – 'If I could have chosen, I would not have been a Jew.' What I feel now is – that my whole being is a consent to the fact. But it has been the gradual accord between your mind and mine which has brought about that full consent. (DD, 642)

Various critics have even gone to the extreme of arguing that Eliot's proto-Zionism is a form of anti-Semitism as it is a means of ridding Europe of its Jews: 'In her approval of Deronda's new nationalist awareness, then, was she suggesting that Jews had no real place in the national societies of western Europe? One may easily argue that this was the logic of Daniel's position.'¹⁷ Such a view shows little understanding of Eliot's cultural relativism. It is also clear that Jews such as Gideon and Pash are not attracted by Mordecai's

proto-Zionist vision and appear happy to continue to live in England without denying their Jewishness. In 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' Theophrastus has no expectation that all Jews will support the ideal of Jewish nationhood any more than they did in Biblical times: 'Plenty of prosperous Jews remained behind in Babylon' (*ITS*, 163).

Eliot throughout her writings is suspicious of redemptive and providentialist thinking. Even if one accepts that England and America eventually became 'great' nations, the tone of the narrator in 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' indicates that this can provide no compensation for the Britons 'massacred' by Anglo-Saxons or the 'Red Indians' subject to 'extermination' (*ITS*, 146). At the end of *The Mill on the Floss*, though the countryside recovers from the dire effects of the flood – 'Nature repairs her ravages' – the narrator nevertheless points out 'there can be no thorough repair' (*MF*, 521–2). Nor does *Daniel Deronda* offer any guarantee that Mordecai's visionary idealism could not go badly wrong if translated into political action, and many like Said would argue that it has. Even if it succeeded and a 'great' nation that was inclusive eventually emerged that could incorporate the descendants of the unlucky losers, the suffering of the victims of history can never be transcended. This double perspective seems to me intrinsic to *Daniel Deronda*, both at the level of the personal and in terms of the novel's political dimension.

As to whether Eliot would have regretted writing a novel that has had the effect of promoting Zionism in the light of the state of affairs in the Middle East at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is quite possible that she would have. But any kind of action – even writing a novel – carries some risk, as Eliot was well aware; in *Middlemarch* her narrator asks rhetorically: 'Who shall tell what may be the effect of writing?' (*M*, 406). And though it may appear to many that Mordecai has turned out to be an unlucky visionary, Eliot may have agreed with Mao Tse-tung's (or more probably Chou En-lai's) much-cited response when asked about the lessons of the French Revolution, that 'it was far too early to tell'.