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Realism and Romance: Allusion and Intertextuality in *Daniel Deronda*

In the previous chapter on ‘anticipations of modernism’ I tried to show that George Eliot’s use of myth and symbolism links her with modernist writers. Another feature of modernism is radical allusiveness and intertextuality, and in this chapter I shall suggest that Eliot also anticipates that aspect of modernist writing. Few writers were as passionately interested in literature as Eliot. Not only did she have an extensive knowledge of English literature but she also learned all the major European languages, including Greek and Latin, and appears to have read in depth the work of virtually all of the significant writers in these languages. Previous critics have discussed her allusions to such diverse sources as Greek tragedy, Dante, Milton, Goethe and even William Godwin.¹ However, many such studies of her writing have tended to view allusion as functioning passively rather than dialectically, and I shall suggest that there is a need for a wider critical perspective, one that goes beyond influence from or allusion to her literary predecessors but sees her fiction as interacting with the work of other writers in an almost dialectical spirit. The culmination of this is seen in *Daniel Deronda* since, as I shall try to show, it reworks aspects of texts by writers who had been crucial to her own development as a novelist.

Daniel Deronda stands apart from Eliot’s previous fiction in important respects, most obviously by opening *in medias res*, having an unresolved ending, engaging with contemporary life rather than being set fifty years or more in the past and perhaps most significantly by appearing to call into question the realism with which Eliot had been identified and moving closer towards the romance tradition. Yet as I pointed out in Chapter 6 Eliot herself denied that it was fundamentally different in approach from her previous fiction. Clearly if Eliot still perceived *Daniel Deronda* as belonging to the realist paradigm, critical interpretation has to try to account for what seem to be departures from realism, especially the links with romance. This raises the broader question of Eliot and realism, a much debated subject, especially in recent criticism in which she has been caught up in critiques of realism deriving from such critical and theoretical perspectives as structuralism and post-structuralism, neo-Marxism, radical feminism, post-colonialism. In particular, certain critics influenced by Roland Barthes have identified her work with the ‘classic realist text’, though this has been counterbalanced by criticism that detects a proto-deconstructive dimension in her realism.² As I have already argued, Eliot was never a naïve realist who sees narrative structure as isomorphic with the world and character

as merely reflective of the lives of real people. It is virtually certain that she would have agreed with G. H. Lewes's contention that 'Art is a Representation of Reality – a Representation which, inasmuch as it is not the thing itself, but only represents it, must necessarily be limited by the nature of its medium',³ and 'Representation of Reality' in the medium of fiction implies structure, selection, and interpretation. Indeed it has been argued that hermeneutics is fundamental to Eliot's thinking throughout her fiction.⁴

In her short theoretical essay, 'Notes on Form in Art', she sees structure in art and literature as inseparable from the mind of the artist since the mind always plays a mediating role and projects structure and meaning onto any artistic representation: 'Even those who use the phrase [form] with a very dim understanding, always have a sense that it refers to structure or composition, that is, the impression from a work considered as a whole.'⁵ It follows from this that literary realism must be a construction of the mind; yet both Lewes and Eliot would have seen this construction as being defensible on scientific principles since certain representations were equated with what Lewes terms 'falsism': 'Realism is thus the basis of all art, and its antithesis is not Idealism, but *Falsism*.'⁶ He dismissed Dumas's romances, for example, as 'not historical but hysterical'.⁷ Eliot's description of her novels as 'a set of experiments in life' testifies to the relation she sees between the realist novel and scientific practice: both have to be tested against experience and the world.⁸ Although theorists – influenced by the Saussurian doctrine that language is a system of mutually defining signs – have called into question both literary realism and science on the grounds that they assume that language can neutrally reflect the world, recent critiques of Saussurian and other anti-realist perspectives suggest that realism remains a live issue in modern literary theory.⁹ Eliot's use of allusion in a dialectical spirit shows that her form of realism is highly sophisticated in literary terms. One should, however, point out that Eliot was not confident that the human mind could ever grasp the fundamental nature or meaning of reality and often uses the word 'mystery' in a positive sense without, however, implying any religious point of view, as in her letter to Barbara Bodichon on Darwin quoted in Chapter 1. Her position on realism can perhaps be summarized as follows: the human conception of reality will constantly develop in relation to the emergence of new forms of thinking, particularly in the scientific sphere, and a responsible literary realism must also change and develop in consequence, but what reality is in any essential sense will remain a mystery.

Eliot was no doubt aware of critical debate surrounding realism in the Victorian period and of the argument that realism and the imagination were antithetic.¹⁰ Neither she nor Lewes, however, would have accepted that there was a fundamental division between realism and the imagination. He was particularly critical of what he called 'detailism'¹¹ in fiction, a merely photographic representation of objects in the world. This is closely connected with his view that in science – conventionally associated with a merely

empirical observation of reality – the imagination plays an integral role through the creation of hypotheses, which then have to undergo rigorous testing and experimentation. When in *Daniel Deronda* Mordecai's visionary thinking is compared with science – 'Even strictly-measuring science could hardly have got on without that forecasting ardour which feels the agitations of discovery beforehand, and has a faith in its preconception that surmounts many failures of experiment' (DD, 438) – the narrator is drawing on Lewes's comparison of scientific discovery with poetry and the imagination: 'to imagine a good experiment is as difficult as to invent a good fable ... The discoverer and the poet are inventors,'¹² In *Middlemarch* it is clear that Eliot was well aware that science had its roots in highly imaginative practices such as alchemy.¹³ The crucial difference is that scientific ideas have to be able to survive testing against reality or else possess explanatory power if testing or experiment is not yet possible, and all scientific theory is insecure as new theories may emerge making science a process in continual development, which could also be said of the novel as a form. As a novelist, Eliot can no more discard the work of her predecessors, even if its realism is flawed or based on ideas derived from romance, than science can discard its alchemical past or disown hypotheses that fail since science builds on these. Realism like science should continually move forward and exploit and incorporate what is of value in the modes of representation employed by previous novelists.

The realist novel had emerged from romance narrative, and new forms of romance continued to be an alternative to realism. In *Daniel Deronda*, I shall argue, Eliot does not move from realism to a romance mode but rather revises and adapts romance in order to enhance the scope of the realist novel. Both Eliot and Lewes recognized the literary power of romance. Although Lewes severely criticized writers of romance such as Dumas and Hugo, he praised highly the work of Hawthorne and Melville: 'What *romance* writer can be named with Hawthorne? Who knows the terror of the seas like Herman Melville? ... In vain Reason rebels. Imagination is absolute.'¹⁴ Eliot had earlier exploited romance in works like *Romola* and her short story, 'The Lifted Veil', and even in *Adam Bede*, a novel in which realism seems primary, the plot is partly drawn from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.¹⁵ The novelists Eliot would have considered her major predecessors had combined realism and romance in various ways. By creating an interplay between their modes of representation and her own, a new and more powerful form of realism could emerge, one which might perhaps do more justice to the power of the imagination than had been achieved in her previous fiction.

Who would Eliot have regarded as her major predecessors? I do not think there is much doubt that they would have been Scott, Austen and Dickens, all of whom combine realism with romance. It might seem an impossible task to bring together the work of three such different novelists (or four if one includes Eliot herself) with their distinctive modes of representation, but I shall argue

that this is Eliot's ambitious project in *Daniel Deronda*. Scott famously saw Jane Austen's type of novel as quite opposed to his own, and Eliot herself in her discussion of Dickens in her essay, 'The Natural History of German Life' clearly viewed his fiction as fundamentally opposed to the kind of fiction she herself would go on to write. Yet if the novel as a genre is to have any right to claim that its representation of reality is a major contribution to human understanding of the world, at some level the different forms of representation of these four novelists must be capable of being subsumed in such a way that they are not essentially opposed to each other. It is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to say that *Daniel Deronda* is an attempt, again perhaps anticipating Joyce, to produce something akin to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in terms of the novel, a synthesizing work of fiction that brings together and develops those aspects of the work of her predecessors that she admires while at the same time also adopting a revisionist attitude to other aspects which she regards as open to criticism from a realist viewpoint.

Daniel Deronda and Scott

Eliot's admiration for Scott is well documented. It is generally accepted that the European social realist novel emerged out of Scott. His creation of the historical novel in which character was shown as inseparably connected with a particular historical period and its concomitant cultural system influenced the social realism of the French novel, most obviously Balzac and Stendhal, and, later in the century, Russian fiction, particularly Tolstoy, and his combining of history with a narrative form based on romance influenced a different tradition of the novel, notably American fiction with Hawthorne whom Eliot greatly admired. Scott is therefore a crucial figure in the history of the novel, as Eliot surely realized. Although there has been previous discussion of allusion to Scott in Eliot's work,¹⁶ the relation of *Daniel Deronda* to *Waverley* in particular has not, I think, been commented on in any detail. In her earlier novels she adopts Scott's method of setting her novels in periods of the past that were still within living memory, akin to Scott's setting Scottish novels like *Waverley* or *Redgauntlet* in the mid-eighteenth century. In *Daniel Deronda*, however, the setting is the mid-1860s, less than ten years before the time of the novel's composition. But this is only a superficial departure from Scott's historical method, for the lesson to be derived from his historical fiction is that it is not only the past that needs to be understood in historical terms but a perspective that takes account of historicism as developed by Scott and others should also be used in order to interpret the present. History is thus always with us though it may be difficult to view the present with the requisite disinterestedness that one may demand of the historian. It is perhaps for this reason that Eliot, though

she desires to write a novel about her own contemporary society, nevertheless places the action of *Daniel Deronda* in the 1860s, which creates some degree of historical distance from her material.

A feature of many of Scott's novels is that the main character, Waverley being the most obvious example, does not have a dominating presence and is often less interesting in dramatic terms than other characters. Creating such a protagonist has some advantages, however, since it allows Scott to focus on a historical conflict such as that between Highlanders and Hanoverians in *Waverley* – a conflict that was a historical turning point and led directly to the emergence of a modernized society based on Enlightenment principles in Britain – with the hero being, as Georg Lukács argued, the means of bringing into relief the main issues and implications intrinsic to that conflict.¹⁷ Plot and characterization, however, mainly conform to romance narrative models. In *Waverley*, the historical novel Eliot is mainly drawing on in *Daniel Deronda*, Waverley is of a romantic disposition and is pulled in contrary directions, a device that allows the reader to know each side of a particular political and cultural conflict from within, rather than being presented with only one perspective. Both novels are in the bildungsroman tradition and have eponymous heroes. Deronda is, like Waverley, romantic in temperament – 'And, if you like, he was romantic' (*DD*, 439) – is reactive rather than active, the word 'shrank' continually being used to describe his responses to people and situations, and is caught between two different worlds. He is brought up to be a Christian gentleman, encouraged by his guardian Sir Hugo Mallinger to take up a public role in British society by going into politics, for example, but he becomes drawn into the world of Jews which is in many ways an alien world, adhering to customs and beliefs that look back to a pre-modern time.

Thus one might see Deronda's increasing attraction to Jewish life and the Cabbalistic ideas of Mordecai as similar to Waverley's attraction – through his family links with Jacobitism – to the world of the Highlanders, a culture that is dominated by both feudalism and Catholicism, which are in conflict with the modern world of commerce, capitalism, the Protestant ethic and representative government that was eventually going to lead to a modern democratic society. The clear implication of Scott's historical fiction is that there is no stopping Enlightenment social and economic thought – that is, modernity – becoming a force which will eventually dominate the world, with the result that older cultures based on different principles, such as that of the Highlanders, must finally succumb to its power. The world of the Highlanders is shown by Scott to be attractive in certain respects, but it cannot win in a struggle with modernity, and the novel takes the view that modernity is ultimately preferable. In *Waverley* the hero eventually recognizes that the Highland way of life with its pre-modern outlook cannot be allowed to win in a conflict with Hanoverian forces which will ultimately promote modernity, despite the romantic appeal of the Highlanders.

In *Daniel Deronda*, however, Eliot departs from that view by adapting her *Waverley*-type of plot so as to question modernity. Unlike Waverley who rejects Jacobitism despite his family connections with it, her hero chooses to go against his Christian and Enlightenment upbringing in order to identify himself with his Jewish cultural heritage. The view that Jews should assimilate into Western societies and identify with Enlightenment notions of progress – expressed by Pash in his debate with Mordecai in Chapter 42: ‘with us in Europe the sentiment of nationality is destined to die out ... The whole current of progress is setting against it’ (*DD*, 448) – is questioned by Deronda (‘A sentiment may seem to be dying and yet revive into strong life’), and he chooses to align himself with Mordecai’s proto-Zionist perspective and with his claim that establishing Jewish nationhood will serve the interests of humanity as a whole, though Deronda distances himself from literal belief in Mordecai’s Jewish mysticism. The universalism of Enlightenment thinking in both the social and economic spheres is set aside in favour of a cultural relativism that is not particularist – the ideal being Deronda’s grandfather’s concept of ‘the balance of separateness and communication’ (*DD*, 619) – since the Jews will act as an example to other peoples, and thus a new concept of universalism may emerge that will not be antithetic to difference. Despite Eliot’s admiration for Scott and her utilizing in *Daniel Deronda* of the typical plot of his historical fiction, there is therefore significant disagreement between them both politically and culturally. A critical edge to her view of modernity is evident in her last work *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, especially the chapter entitled ‘The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!’, where the narrator takes the view that the spread of European Enlightenment thinking through imperialism, capitalist economics and cosmopolitanism is promoting and hastening the erosion or dilution of specific cultures and the emergence of ethnically and culturally fragmented societies which lack cohesion and produce alienation. The Jews are valued and are an example because they have preserved their separate cultural identity despite physical dispersal, persecution, pressure to assimilate.

As Eliot incorporates a critique of Scott’s cultural politics in *Daniel Deronda*, she also revises his artistic method of characterizing his typical protagonists. Scott’s form of historical romance avoids exploring character in psychological depth, his interest lying mainly with political and cultural conflict, but one of the forces that Eliot as a realist brings to fiction is psychological power and complexity, and she aims to integrate those with the wider political, cultural and historical issues that Scott introduced into fiction. Whereas it can be argued that the combination of romantic temperament with passiveness that Scott creates in his characterization of Waverley is merely a device to allow him to explore the wider cultural conflict, Eliot’s similar combination in the case of Deronda is centrally related to the novel’s wider themes. Although in some ways Scott in his representation of the intellectually

and emotionally divided Waverley looks forward to the modern novel in which thinking and feeling would replace action in exemplifying character, Scott is not a psychological novelist and makes no attempt to dramatize Waverley's inner conflict in anything like realist terms. Eliot as a realist and psychological novelist creates *Deronda* as an intellectual, perhaps one of the first in English fiction: an introspective thinker rather than a man of action, reactive in his relationships with people, who is searching for meaning in his life. Thinking itself becomes dangerous for *Deronda* since at first he can find no reason for identifying with one form of commitment or vocation rather than another. Eliot dramatizes this condition in the scene on the river, before he saves Mirah from drowning, when he is on the point of experiencing a complete negation of any sense of self. He contemplates 'how far it might be possible habitually to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape' (*DD*, 160). Rescuing Mirah from drowning – the kind of action one associates with a hero of romance – is as significant in relation to himself as to Mirah as this eventually provides the foundation for partiality in his interaction with the world and shows that he can move beyond thinking to action.

Even if *Deronda* as a character is a major advance over pallid heroes like Waverley, many critics have judged him to be a failure in artistic terms, seeing him as idealized or lacking in felt life. This dismissal of *Deronda* as a character of interest is mistaken in my view, but its persistence may reflect the fact that nineteenth-century English realism lacked the technical resources to represent introverted intellectuals as powerfully as twentieth-century writers were able to do, twentieth-century novelists having benefited from such modernist techniques as stream of consciousness or a radical use of free indirect style, together with access to psychoanalytic discourse. This allowed them to represent the inner life and individual consciousness of introverted character types, especially intellectuals, with greater force of realism. But even if one takes that into account, perhaps what has distorted critical perception of *Deronda* has been the general assumption that he is intended by Eliot to represent an ideal, a view that will be subject to critique in this study.

Eliot certainly saw the historical understanding and interpretation that underlies Scott's fiction at its best as a powerful resource in the development of realist fiction as she understood it. However, *Daniel Deronda* suggests that she recognizes that romance in Scott is also a major source of artistic power, one that the realist novel should try to exploit. In grafting a romance narrative onto historical material, Scott had inspired later novelists such as Hawthorne to develop a romance-based fiction which allowed metaphysical or philosophical themes more direct expression and treatment by means of symbolism or allegory. In *Romola* Eliot had herself combined the historical novel with a romance narrative that had allegorical implications. Scott's romance plot had often complemented the historical conflict, as in Waverley's initial romantic

attachment to the passionate Jacobite Flora Mac-Ivor, which eventually gives way to a more sensible choice of Rose Bradwardine. One can see an echo of this plot in *Deronda*'s being drawn to two very different women and choosing to marry Mirah Lapidoth rather than the charismatic Gwendolen Harleth, with Eliot, however, again endeavouring to give the kind of psychological depth to *Deronda*'s emotional conflict that is lacking in Scott.

When Scott moved away from Scottish history to other periods, particularly the mediaeval period, the romance narrative tended to dominate as the historical representation was less vital than in his Scottish novels. *Ivanhoe*, Scott's most popular novel in the nineteenth century, was the first of these romance-dominated novels, and Eliot draws on it also in *Daniel Deronda*. There is direct reference to it in the text: '[The Meyricks] would at once associate a lovely Jewess with Rebecca in "*Ivanhoe*"' (DD, 165). Any summary of the *Deronda* plot reveals its obvious links to romance, with the hero being given away to a substitute parent when he is a child, being brought up in ignorance of his origins, rescuing a Jewish woman from drowning and then having his life changed through meeting a mystical Jew who happens to be her brother, discovering in a highly charged scene with his dying mother that he was born a Jew and then deciding to marry the Jewish woman and devote his life to the quest to found a Jewish nation. Yet it would be rash to conclude from this that Eliot is forsaking realism for romance. Scott's romance plot is useful to Eliot since it can be reworked in order that some of the assumptions underlying Scott's treatment can be subverted.

Ivanhoe is, of course, an especially significant text for *Daniel Deronda* because of its Jewish aspect. Scott's treatment of his Jewish characters, Isaac of York and his daughter Rebecca, is fairly enlightened by nineteenth-century standards, but his romance narrative is founded on the assumption that the hero will be a Christian and that if he has to choose between two women – a device often used in romance and one that Scott had also used in *Waverley* – one of whom is Jewish and the other English, that he naturally ought to choose the Englishwoman. This is radically revised in *Daniel Deronda*. Like *Ivanhoe* *Deronda* is attracted both to a Jewess and to an English woman, but he turns out to have Jewish parents and chooses to marry the Jewess.¹⁸ The implicit message of *Ivanhoe* is that the future belongs to England once the Saxons and Normans can transcend their conflict and discover a shared sense of Englishness. In *Daniel Deronda* the ideology implicit in Scott's romance narrative is undermined since the hero, though brought up to believe that he is English, decides to identify instead with his newly discovered cultural heritage. Scott's Jews in *Ivanhoe* seem unfortunate figures at the end of the novel when they leave England for an unpredictable future abroad, but Eliot's Jewish characters, *Deronda* and *Mirah*, are the fortunate ones as they leave England with a goal in life whereas it is the English, confined to England with little sense of spiritual purpose, who are the unfortunate ones.

Daniel Deronda and Austen

Jane Austen is as important a writer for Eliot as Scott, but there has been little discussion of connections between Austen and *Daniel Deronda*. As Eliot uses and revises Scott in the 'Deronda part' of the novel, she does the same with Austen in the Gwendolen Harleth part. Eliot admired and clearly learned from what Scott called Austen's 'exquisite touch' in rendering ordinary life and experience just as much as she admired and learned from Scott's power as a historical novelist. Both Austen's and Scott's very different forms of realism were equally essential to her fiction. Yet though Scott saw his 'Big Bow-Wow strain' and Austen's focusing on the detailed representation of domestic life as opposed approaches,¹⁹ romance underpins the narrative in the fiction of both novelists, though Austen's form of romance is derived from romantic comedy. It is the romance elements in Austen's narrative structure that Eliot revises in *Daniel Deronda*, since from Eliot's point of view there could be seen to be an incompatibility between the texture of Austen's fiction with its attempt at a detailed and persuasive representation of human experience and the fact that the structure that encompasses that representation and the underlying assumptions embodied in it are at variance with representing reality as Eliot saw it. *Daniel Deronda* may be read as an attempt by Eliot to overcome that incompatibility by being true to Austen's 'exquisite touch' but at the same time undermining the Austen romance plot and its implicit ideology.

The opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* which sets up the plot of that novel is probably the most famous sentence in English fiction: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.' In Chapter 9 of *Daniel Deronda* it is clearly alluded to: 'Some readers of this history will doubtless regard it as incredible that people should construct matrimonial prospects on the mere report that a bachelor of good fortune and possibilities was coming within reach' (DD, 76). This passage should alert the reader that the story of Gwendolen Harleth and the pressure on her to make a financially favourable marriage is a version of the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, and I think this is no accident. Another obvious connection is that like Elizabeth Bennet, Gwendolen has four sisters, though in her case they are half-sisters. As Mrs Bennet and her family face a ruinous situation if Mr Bennet dies and none of the daughters marries a rich man, so the Davilow family and Gwendolen actually have to confront such a situation after the death of her stepfather Mr Davilow and the subsequent loss of their investment income through speculation by their financial manager. Eliot takes Austen's romance plot and brings it into confrontation with her own commitment to a realist representation of the world.

Although the gravity of the Bennet family's situation is on the face of it serious, the form of romance within which Austen is working means that the reader need have no fears that the family might be in any danger. In Austen's

fictional world things turn out for the best for those who are morally worthy. This is not merely Austen following a romance narrative mode that excludes tragedy and demands a happy ending: romantic comedy is favoured by her for ideological reasons since to accept that morally deserving people could be ruined by mischance or a recalcitrant external reality would be to cast doubt on the existence of a just God and the presence of moral order in the world. No such assurances are present in Eliot's fiction. Elizabeth Bennet turns down Darcy's initial proposal on moral grounds (though based on a perception of him that turns out to be largely mistaken) without being in the least tempted by his wealth. Her moral steadfastness despite the existence of such temptation is rewarded when the stories about him recounted by Wickham, which she had previously believed, are revealed as false and he emerges as a man of the highest moral character, and though she has to suffer some guilt and humiliation for her earlier misreading of him, she gains an almost ideal husband and the threat of family ruin is averted.

Gwendolen Harleth's situation is very similar in that Grandcourt is on the point of proposing to Gwendolen when his former mistress Mrs Glasher appears before her. After hearing Mrs Glasher's revelations about Grandcourt's past, Gwendolen decides suddenly to go abroad to prevent any proposal taking place. Thus each heroine initially rejects her suitor, but Gwendolen's behaviour is much more psychologically complex, as Eliot is a psychological novelist in a way that Austen is not. It is not a conscious decision on her part to reject Grandcourt on moral grounds but more a spontaneous feeling with complicated roots that compels her to flee from this man. In *Pride and Prejudice*, when Darcy renews his suit and proposes to Elizabeth, she knows that Wickham's apparently damning testimony against him is a tissue of half-truths and lies so that he has been transformed in her mind; in *Daniel Deronda* when Grandcourt renews his suit and proposes to Gwendolen, she knows that Mrs Glasher's account is all too true: all that is altered is her situation, the family's wealth having been lost to speculation, so that accepting him or rejecting him can be only a choice of evils. Whereas Elizabeth marries an almost perfect English gentleman, Gwendolen marries a man who is a gentleman only in the most narrow class sense, without any of the spiritual content with which the term was associated in the past, and whose only pleasure in life is derived from a sadistic delight in dominating.

The most significant difference in treatment, however, is that whereas *Pride and Prejudice* ends with a happy marriage, as all Austen's novels do, Eliot's main focus in *Daniel Deronda* is on the relationship after marriage. Austen's novels, like romantic comedy in general, place courtship rather than marriage at the centre, and therefore intimate relationships between men and women are not represented. None of her main characters is ever shown as having a sexual relationship with her partner. Eliot's revision of Austen seeks to rectify such omissions. Marriage for Eliot is the central human relationship, and it is

this rather than courtship that she focuses on in *Daniel Deronda*. However, it stands apart from the rest of her novels not so much because the marriage between Gwendolen and Grandcourt is disastrous, at least for Gwendolen, but that the sexual overtones lead English fiction into new areas of experience, Eliot perhaps exploiting a new variety of romance for realist purposes, the 'sensation novel'. That Grandcourt is highly sexed is clear from his having had four children by Mrs Glasher. Gwendolen's neurotic response to Rex Gascoigne's lovemaking before she meets Grandcourt indicates her fear of intimate contact with a man. Since the mature Grandcourt is now incapable of any passionate or romantic impulse, all that is left to him is the sadistic pleasure of forcing a woman to submit to his will, and the more reluctant she is the greater his pleasure in making her submit. Gwendolen is 'reduced to dread lest she should become a mother' (*DD*, 736) and of course she would not feel such dread unless she was having sexual relations with Grandcourt. It should not take much imagination on the reader's part to realize the disgust that Gwendolen must feel at being forced to have sex with a man she loathes, and it is surely implied that consciousness of her disgust makes his sadistic pleasure all the greater; having in effect bought her he treats her like a harlot, echoing her surname. It is not explicitly stated why her hatred of him is murderous, leading to 'an imaginary annihilation of the detested object, something like the hidden rites of vengeance with which the persecuted have made a dark vent for their rage' (*DD*, 576), but her sexual degradation is surely to be understood as a major factor. Although Eliot as a Victorian novelist cannot of course develop this material, this aspect of the novel looks forward to another feature of modernist-influenced fiction: its representation and exploration of intimate relationships between the sexes.

Reworking the story of Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy through the relationship of Gwendolen Harleth and Grandcourt indicates the radical nature of Eliot's revision of Austen. For Eliot, Austen's concentration on 'the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush'²⁰ was a major advance for the novel, exploring reality at the molecular level as it were and thus complementing Scott's historically informed overview. But since for Eliot Austen's fiction was limited in certain important respects, it required revision. It is significant that though Eliot aspires towards the subtlety and irony of Austen's narrator and exploits Austen's development of free indirect discourse, she does not favour Austen's mode of narration in one notable respect. A basic difference in formal terms between Austen's treatment of the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship and Eliot's of the Gwendolen-Grandcourt relationship is that Eliot moves from one point of view to the other, whereas Austen as is her normal practice limits the point of view to her main character and uses Darcy's letter to disabuse Elizabeth of her mistaken impression of him. Austen's narrator does not focus on Darcy's consciousness whereas Eliot explores Grandcourt's. It is clear in Austen's fiction that reality is ambiguous and that people have different

viewpoints, but this does not lead her towards relativism or perspectivism. Thus, Mr Collins is a fool in absolute terms; there is no room for argument. Eliot's mode of narration, however, is designed to subvert such absolute judgements: Casaubon in *Middlemarch* is a Mr Collins-like character until Chapter 29, when the narrator turns on the reader for implicitly regarding Dorothea's point of view as the only one, the reader of course having been set up, and then switching the point of view from Dorothea to Casaubon. Eliot's world, as represented in her later fiction, is one of relativity of viewpoints, and this is reflected in the movement of the narration from one consciousness to another, whereas in Austen's fictional world truth and true judgement finally emerge despite liars like Wickham and the human predilection for self-deception. In *Daniel Deronda*, however, even Grandcourt's and Deronda's mother's points of view must be understood in their own terms, and though the narrator may view them very much in a critical light that judgement has no absolute authority: even the narrator cannot transcend point of view.²¹

Eliot transforms Austen's fictional world by incorporating into it history and psychology: that is, how both the human world and the self have been determined by particular forces and sets of circumstances. What Eliot can be interpreted as doing in *Daniel Deronda* is attempting to take Austen's literary achievement forward by combining it with her own formidable intellectual armoury in these spheres. Although Austen is brilliant on the psychology of perception, she has little interest in psychology as the exploration of why people have the particular character and personalities that they have, other than to suggest that upbringing and education are essential to the development of a disciplined character and a healthy moral outlook. She does not, however, deal with how her central characters' psychology has been determined by earlier experiences, such as defining moments in childhood, or by the social and cultural situation into which they are born. The fact that Elizabeth and Jane Bennet have spent much time with their uncle and aunt, the Gardiners, allows Austen to avoid having to account for why Elizabeth Bennet is the morally upright person she is despite having a silly mother, a witty but irresponsible father and some almost anarchic sisters. Eliot in *Daniel Deronda*, in contrast, presents Gwendolen's character as psychologically and socially determined. She is a stepchild who has been spoiled by her mother who did not remarry for love but for prudential reasons; neither her real father nor her stepfather, the latter described as 'unlovable' (*DD*, 17), has left much of an impression on her mind; she has lived a rootless existence; as a child she performed impulsive acts of egotism, such as refusing to get out of bed to fetch her mother's medicine when she was ill and strangling her sister's canary when it interrupts her singing; the limited culture of her class and its low artistic standards prevent her exploiting such assets as her musical talent.

With regard to history, Eliot's revision of Austen is apparent if one compares *Daniel Deronda* with an aspect of *Mansfield Park* that has been much discussed

in recent criticism of the novel. Following on Edward Said's essay 'Jane Austen and Empire', first published in 1989 and reprinted in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, critics have been much preoccupied with *Mansfield Park*'s relation to imperialism, which centres on the role of Antigua in the novel and the implications of Fanny Price's question to Sir Thomas Bertram about slavery. This has led to much historical research into the West Indian sugar trade and its reliance on slavery and biographical research into Austen's and her family's connections with them.²² Some post-colonialist criticism has read the novel as in effect allegorizing contemporary political debates on these subjects.²³ Previous criticism had virtually ignored this dimension of the novel: Claudia L. Johnson remarks that 'until very recently, the subject of slavery as it bears upon Austen's novels, has received little critical attention, probably due to the "time-honoured premise" that Austen would have been unconcerned with such subjects.'²⁴ Sir Thomas Bertram's residence in Antigua would thus have been seen as merely a plot device to remove him from England so that the events regarded as central to the novel could take place without his authority. Edward Said has described Austen's previous critics as 'negligent'.²⁵

Eliot would almost certainly have taken the view that the references to Antigua and slavery in *Mansfield Park* were not considered important by Austen as Eliot would not have seen her as a novelist concerned with politics or ideas,²⁶ but unlike Austen's 'negligent' critics I believe she regarded these references as significant: they would have been signs of a missing dimension in Austen's fiction if seen from Eliot's realist perspective. In the light of modern post-colonial and feminist criticism this view of Austen is of course highly disputable. In *Daniel Deronda*, however, what Eliot does, I would suggest, is to take what she would have seen as insignificant details in Austen and transform their significance. As in *Mansfield Park* the wealth of Gwendolen's family is derived from the West Indies: '[Gwendolen] had no notion how her maternal grandfather got the fortune inherited by his two daughters; but he had been a West Indian' (*DD*, 17). In contrast to *Mansfield Park*, the colonial aspect of *Daniel Deronda* and its relation to the family's wealth is thus made explicit. Said states that 'as Austen certainly knew', the sugar trade in the West Indies and slave labour were 'the results of evident historical processes'.²⁷ Eliot would have taken the view that what Austen's fiction lacks from a realist viewpoint is any emphasis on 'evident historical processes', and it is this that she incorporates into her novel as it is intrinsic to her form of realism. The money that supports Gwendolen's family and their upper-middle-class way of life is derived from the empire. Mrs Davilow later confirms that her father, like Sir Thomas Bertram, had been a plantation owner in the West Indies: 'Mrs. Davilow observed that her father had an estate in Barbadoes' (*DD*, 279). It is significant that she says this in the context of a conversation related to a rebellion in Jamaica: Grandcourt takes the imperialist view that 'the Jamaican negro was a beastly sort of baptist Caliban' while Deronda speaks up for Caliban: 'Deronda said

he had always felt a little with Caliban, who naturally had his own point of view and could sing a good song.' Grandcourt is associated with colonialism later when the narrator points out that if he 'had been sent to govern a difficult colony, he might have won reputation among his contemporaries' (DD, 507). These seem fairly obvious allusions to the scandal of the Governor Eyre affair, which resulted from the brutal crushing of a rebellion that took place in Jamaica in 1865. Gwendolen and her family are like Austen characters: they are quite uninterested in and ignorant of the source of their wealth, nor do they know anything about how that wealth is maintained through investments, thus their severe shock when Mr Lassman loses their fortune through ill-advised speculation. Thus what in Austen – as Eliot would have read her – appears to be merely a detail to which little or no significance is attached is developed in *Daniel Deronda* to reveal a relation between the life-style of Gwendolen and her family and historical forces such as colonialism.

Said in his essay on *Mansfield Park* sketches the historical background to British involvement in the Caribbean and the origins of imperialism as a powerful ideology that was to become a major force towards the latter part of the nineteenth century. More traditional critics, however, remain reluctant to accept post-colonial and political readings of Austen,²⁸ but while there may be debate about the role of colonialism in a novel such as *Mansfield Park*, there is no doubt that Eliot was knowledgeable about colonialism and that she fully intended to make it a significant element in *Daniel Deronda*. Indeed as Nancy Henry has argued in a recent study, *Daniel Deronda* represents a shift in Eliot's views regarding empire: in her earlier writings she was neutral in her attitude to the subject, but by the time of *Daniel Deronda* and her final work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, she is increasingly aware that imperialism is taking on the status of an ideology, and this incipient ideology – driven by hegemonic Enlightenment ideas and capitalism as a globalizing economic force and thus contrary to a cultural relativism based on separateness with communication – is subject to critique in these final works.²⁹

Daniel Deronda and Dickens

Eliot's fiction and her approach to the novel were much less influenced by Dickens than by Scott and Austen. Indeed because of her criticism of him in her essay 'The Natural History of German Life' there is a tendency among critics to see her fiction as fundamentally different from his: 'Eliot's scientific and philosophical intellectualism, allied with her emphatically realist fictional style, made her a different kind of novelist than Dickens.'³⁰ Aspects of her novels that are less admired, such as the complex legal plot of *Felix Holt* or the entangled genealogical connections that link Ladislav with Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*,

are sometimes described as 'Dickensian' with the implication that they are out of place in an Eliot novel. Interestingly, F. R. Leavis in his discussion of *Daniel Deronda* in *The Great Tradition* sees the Meyricks and the Cohens as 'elements in George Eliot that seem to come from Dickens rather than from life'³¹ and assumes without argument that influence from Dickens is *ipso facto* identifiable with artistic weakness. Yet it should be remembered that Eliot calls Dickens a 'great novelist' in 'The Natural History of German Life' even if she goes on to criticize him for a failure to represent adequately 'psychological character' and for a sentimentality at odds with realism.³² She would have been well aware that no novelist could capture within one work the diversity of life as powerfully as Dickens, and *Daniel Deronda* is almost Dickens-like in its scope and social reach. Furthermore, it is Eliot's most socially critical novel by a long way and, of course, Dickens was the exemplar of the novelist as social critic. These would have been good reasons for interacting with his fiction. Dickens also has strong connections with romance since he continues and develops the Gothic tradition of the novel as well as being the major influence on the 'sensation novel', most associated with Wilkie Collins. Not to acknowledge and engage with Dickens, as well as with Scott and Austen, in a work that attempts to encompass the novel as a genre would therefore be unthinkable.

As I pointed out above, Eliot refers directly to Scott and alludes clearly to Austen, but there is nothing as explicit with regard to Dickens. However, I shall argue that there is very strong evidence that *Daniel Deronda* makes considerable use of *Little Dorrit*, a novel almost unequalled in its scope and more scathingly critical of Victorian society than any of Dickens's other works, in ways that can be compared with the interaction with the Scott and Austen novels already discussed. Eliot had certainly read it and comments on it specifically in 'The Natural History of German Life'. It has been suggested that there are parallels between *Little Dorrit* and *Middlemarch* though without claiming conscious influence on Eliot's part,³³ but in *Daniel Deronda* I believe Eliot intentionally draws on *Little Dorrit* for revisionist purposes.

Both novels begin in a degraded European setting in which different nationalities and races are brought together by the power of money: the trading port of Marseilles and the gambling casinos of Leubronn. At the beginning of the first chapter of *Little Dorrit* there are 'Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, English' and numerous others 'come to trade', and in Leubronn those involved in 'the passion of gambling' are 'varieties of European type: Livonian and Spanish, Graeco-Italian and miscellaneous German, English aristocratic and English plebeian' (DD, 4). The people in Marseilles guiltily try to avoid the 'stare' and 'glare' whose source is a 'blazing sun upon a fierce August day', which leads to their 'taking refuge in any hiding place from a sea too intensely blue to be looked at, and a sky of purple, set with one great flaming jewel of fire'. Everything except lizards is 'oppressed by the glare' and strives to 'keep out the stare'. Leubronn is not represented in such a surrealistic style, but Gwendolen

Harleth at the gambling table is also oppressed by the implicitly judgemental 'gaze' of Deronda: 'The daring sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of a different quality from the human dross around her ... and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment ... Deronda's gaze seemed to have acted as an evil eye' (*DD*, 5–6). Echoes of Dickens's *Marseilles* are also apparent in Deronda's experience of Genoa, where he goes to meet his mother, though Genoa is generally represented much more positively. In *Marseilles* are 'staring roads, deep in dust' as it 'lay broiling in the sun one day' with a 'prison taint ... on everything there',³⁴ and in Genoa 'the noons were getting hotter, the converging outer roads getting deeper with white dust', and Deronda 'found himself contemplating all activity with the aloofness of a prisoner awaiting ransom' (*DD*, 534). Eliot may even imitate Dickens's playful and animistic style: 'the oleanders in the tubs along the wayside gardens looking more and more like fatigued holidaymakers ... while the encircling heights, crowded with forts, skirted with fine dwellings and gardens, seemed also to come forth and gaze in fullness of beauty after their long siesta' (*DD*, 533). Both works move between England and Europe and money-making and gambling, whether by financial speculation or at the roulette table, are represented as potentially corrupting forces. However, the major connections between the novels are in terms of character and plot.

The main male character in *Little Dorrit*, Arthur Clennam, is an introspective man, lacking in self-confidence, partly because of his unhappy childhood and his suspicion that there is something hidden and shameful in his family's past that his parents have not disclosed to him. He lacks the will to put pressure on Mrs Clennam – the woman he thinks is his mother but who turns out not to be – to provide answers. Deronda has similarities to Clennam in some respects, being also introspective, partly because his fear that there may be something shameful about his origins has accentuated his self-consciousness; he does not know who his mother is and cannot bring himself to question Sir Hugo Mallinger, who he thinks is his father but who turns out not to be. Clennam's romantic feelings are divided between two women: Pet Meagles, who is beautiful and eligible, and Amy Dorrit, who is socially unacceptable, having been born in the Marshalsea debtors' prison. Deronda also has divided feelings for two women, the beautiful Gwendolen Harleth, whom Sir Hugo tries to persuade Deronda to woo, and Mirah Lapidoth, socially unacceptable since she is poor and Jewish. Clennam lacks the will to court Pet Meagles and allows Henry Gowan, who regards himself as upper class even if he lacks the wealth necessary to support that status, to win her. Deronda fails to take further Sir Hugo's encouragement that he should try to win Gwendolen for himself: he does not make any effort to prevent an upper class gentleman, Henleigh Grandcourt, marrying her. Grandcourt and Gowan have much in common. The names Henry Gowan and Henleigh Grandcourt are similar, having the same initials and the same number of syllables. Both also become sadistic

husbands who make the lives of their wives a misery and treat their dogs in the way they treat women: '[Gowan] took no notice of a fine Newfoundland dog, who watched him attentively'³⁵; "I fear that Fetch was jealous, and wounded that her master [Grandcourt] gave her no word or look" (*DD*, 104). Clennam finally marries Amy Dorrit after undergoing the traumatic experience of being confined to the Marshalsea, thus finding himself intrinsically connected with her. Deronda similarly marries Mirah after discovering his Jewish heritage and is thus fundamentally connected with her.

As the Clennam and Deronda narratives are linked, so are those of Amy Dorrit and Mirah Lapidoth. They are at the moral centre of their respective novels. Both come from problematic families but nevertheless feel an overwhelming commitment to family duty and responsibility. Despite the shortcomings of their fathers, particularly severe in Mirah's case, they refuse to reject them at a personal level though opposed to virtually everything their fathers represent. They adhere to ideals that call into question the prevailing ideologies of their respective societies that are founded on individualism and materialism. At the level of plot there are several similarities between them. Amy loves Clennam but has no expectation that it is reciprocated; likewise Mirah is afraid her love for Deronda is unrequited. Both fear that the men they love may love someone else, Pet Meagles in Amy's case and Gwendolen Harleth in Mirah's. Both are loved by other men whom they do not love, which proves an embarrassment, Amy by the pathetic John Chivery, Mirah by the flamboyant artist, Hans Meyrick. Meyrick echoes Chivery by transcending disappointment and egotism and telling Deronda that Mirah loves him, in the same way as Chivery tells Clennam he is loved by Amy. Thus the rejected lovers precipitate both marriages. A minor similarity between the novels is that in *Little Dorrit* Amy, much to the consternation of her newly enriched family, preserves her prison dress because her prison identity is central to her sense of self. Likewise Mordecai, taken from his previous form of life to a new comfortable mode of existence with Mirah, with new clothes bought for him by Deronda, preserves his former clothes: 'I must keep my old garments by me for a remembrance' (*DD*, 496).

Gwendolen also parallels Pet Meagles in various respects: both are beautiful, attractive to two pairs of men. Pet is described as 'a spoiled child'³⁶ and the title of Book I of *Daniel Deronda* is 'The Spoiled Child'. However, Pet is rather passive and one dimensional and suffers stoically, whereas Gwendolen is neurotic, a supreme egotist, potentially murderous. Gwendolen might be seen as combining Pet with one of Dickens's most powerful psychological portraits in *Little Dorrit*, the proto-Dostoevskian Miss Wade who is psychologically damaged by her upbringing and like Gwendolen is capable of violence. Gwendolen's hatred for Grandcourt echoes Miss Wade's for Gowan: "I hate him," she returned. "Worse than his wife, because I was once dupe enough, and false enough to myself, almost to love him".³⁷ Another significant link is that Deronda's mother's confession that she concealed his parentage from

him echoes Clennam's supposed mother eventually confessing that she did the same to Clennam. Deronda's mother also has parallels with Mrs Clennam in that both believe their actions were right and reject guilt or regret even though circumstances compel them to confess.

A more general connection between both novels is that their plots are governed by a series of coincidences and improbabilities, elements that are characteristic of the romance rather than the realist tradition of fiction. These are recurrent features of Dickens's plots, though perhaps more prevalent in *Little Dorrit* than in most of his other novels. Although one can find coincidence and improbability in Eliot's earlier fiction – most obviously in *Silas Marner*, perhaps a special case as its narrative openly draws on myth and fairy tale – in *Daniel Deronda* it might be argued that they almost reach Dickensian proportions. Of course, in any novel made up of multiple plots which are eventually connected and intertwined, coincidence and improbability are virtually inevitable in the unfolding of the narrative. With Dickens this does not raise any formal problems as his novels transcend ordinary notions of realism, and as a Christian writer in some sense a plot driven by coincidence and improbability might suggest the existence of a metaphysical order that is part of the nature of things though this is only implicit and not spelled out. But in Eliot's novels, since she is commonly identified with a realist aesthetic and with religious scepticism, coincidence and improbability have been perceived by critics as a formal problem in her work because they are associated with an imposed patterning related to providence which, as Carol Christ puts it, is 'so strangely inconsistent with Eliot's commitment to realism', and in allowing 'that providence to rescue her more favored characters [Eliot] betrays a reluctance not only to abandon the idea of a benevolent providence but to confront the most tragic consequences of her own vision'.³⁸

However, the fact that Eliot incorporated significant elements of *Little Dorrit* into *Daniel Deronda*, including a plot in which coincidence and improbability play a significant part, suggests that she did not see Dickens's fiction as fundamentally opposed to her own: a revisionist approach to Dickensian coincidence and improbability was possible. Perhaps the main reason why she creates something like Dickens's panoramic plot is because of its power to penetrate virtually every aspect of society and because like him she believes ultimately in human connectedness though her views are purely humanistic. For Eliot coincidence and improbability are not intrinsically incompatible with realism and need not entail – *pace* Carol Christ – benevolent providence: they happen all the time because they are a statistical certainty. It is significant that Eliot by implication defends the presence of the improbable in *Daniel Deronda* on statistical grounds by quoting a saying of Agathon's referred to in Aristotle's *Poetics* in the epigraph to Chapter 41: 'It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen.'

If the improbable is not to undermine the credibility of realist fiction, however, it is essential it be handled with the kind of literary tact that Dickens

(and the romance tradition) can ignore because his mode of discourse is heightened, stylized and performative. Although a one-page summary of *Daniel Deronda* may make coincidence and improbability appear excessive by normal realist criteria, Eliot's reference to Agathon's saying suggests that her intention at least is to have them absorbed into the novel's realism: in other words, it is chance that Deronda should encounter Jews like Mirah and Mordecai and then turn out to have Jewish origins. Deronda in effect gambles that Mordecai may be right about his being a Jew, but the chance of his being a Jew is surely reasonable.³⁹ Since he does not know his origins his turning out to be a Jew is hardly a coincidence on a Dickensian scale, such as Estella in *Great Expectations* turning out to be the daughter of Pip's benefactor, Magwitch.

Perhaps the major criticism of Eliot's use of coincidence and improbability in *Daniel Deronda* is Carol Christ's point that it makes things turn out better than they might have, so that a benevolent providence – again associated with romance – might seem to be at work, with Deronda happy to accept his Jewish heritage and consequently being able to marry Mirah and commit himself fully to Mordecai's mission and Grandcourt's accidental death, though assisted by Gwendolen's inaction, freeing her from her nightmarish marriage. But the problem with this argument is that it implies that the author is false to 'reality' when there is no 'reality' separate from that created in the novel against which one can make such a judgement. Reality is, in effect, identified with the probable, but any conception of reality that excludes the improbable is surely flawed, as Eliot's epigraph implies. Since, as she states in 'Notes on Form in Art', any narrative will inevitably be 'a set of relations selected & combined in accordance with a sequence of mental states in the constructor', everything in a novel is under the control of the author: to have Deronda discover he is not a Jew would be as much an authorial choice as for him to be a Jew. To claim that his turning out to be a Jew and Gwendolen being freed from Grandcourt by his death are improbable and therefore lack credibility does not help because, as Eliot points out, improbable things happen. Arguably, narratives that eliminate improbabilities totally are not driven by realism – indeed strictly speaking the complete absence of the improbable and coincidence would undermine realism – but by a fear that coincidence implies authorial manipulation or a belief in providence and an immanent order in the world.

For Eliot, however, coincidence and the improbable are an integral part of the structure of *Daniel Deronda*, being associated with the role of chance in life, the gambling motif and Darwinian allusions in the text. One could also point out that to see Grandcourt's death as benevolently providential for Gwendolen ignores the fact that what she fears in effect comes about: she achieves freedom from Grandcourt by killing him, even if only passively. Deronda's interpretation of Gwendolen's account, excusing her of any culpability, is surely to be seen as somewhat convenient, a point I shall return to in the final chapter. What interests Eliot is how Gwendolen will cope with life after the

death of Grandcourt and Deronda leaving her, and the narrative is constructed in accordance with that. It could still be argued that Eliot was too ambitious in attempting to reconcile a revisionist version of Dickensian plot with its use of coincidence with her own form of realism in order to achieve something of the imaginative range and scope of Dickens's panoramic novels. However, her critics have perhaps tended to operate both with an untheorized concept of plausibility – how things tend to happen in the 'real' world – and with an objection to coincidence and the improbable on ideological grounds and have not recognized the deliberate interplay Eliot creates between *Daniel Deronda* and Dickensian fictional discourse.

As well as trying to adapt Dickensian plot and narrative structure in order to reconcile them with her form of realism, Eliot can be seen as revising Dickens at the level of characterization in *Daniel Deronda* in that she historicizes and psychologizes the character types she has drawn from him. For example, in *Little Dorrit* Amy Dorrit's selfless love is a given, part of her saintly nature: there is no indication where it has come from. Although Mirah is often seen as one of Eliot's most idealized characters, Eliot's intention is surely to go beyond Dickensian idealization. Mirah is historicized in that she is a product of her Jewish upbringing and the religious and moral values instilled into her by her mother and Jewish culture generally. In terms of psychology an interesting contrast can be made between Amy's and Mirah's reactions when they find out that there is another woman in the lives of the men they love. Amy's saintly disposition does not give way to jealousy. Mirah in contrast is consumed by jealousy, and the strength of her feelings suggests that Eliot's intention is to show that Mirah and Gwendolen exist on the same human level, whereas in *Little Dorrit* Amy and Miss Wade seem different in kind as characters. Mirah's and Mordecai's contrasting readings of the story of the Jewish maiden and the Gentile king in Chapter 61 also indicate that Eliot aims not only to undermine idealization of Mirah but also to introduce a more critical perspective on Mordecai and his idealism. His view of Mirah's reading of the story – that she has 'read too many plays, where the writers delight in showing the human passions as indwelling demons' and that she judges 'by the plays, and not by thy own heart, which is like our mother's' (*DD*, 629) – is clearly a projection of his ideals about women onto Mirah and thus, the narrator suggests, a misinterpretation of her at this point in the novel.

Conclusion

If my argument that *Daniel Deronda* is a novel that sets out to subsume and interact dialectically with the fiction of Eliot's major predecessors is persuasive, then this creates a different context for interpretation and critical judgement.

Although it might appear that Eliot is breaking away from the realism with which she is most associated and moving towards the romance tradition, I believe this would be a misinterpretation of the relation between *Daniel Deronda* and that tradition. Rather the romance aspects arise from Eliot's attempt to bring her own form of realism – which is informed by modern thinking in such areas as psychology, history, sociology, science and is therefore not static but must continually develop – to bear on the work of writers whose realism is both limited in certain respects and in some of its aspects compromised by being combined with romance. Eliot does not reject romance and clearly recognizes its literary power and imaginative scope. Realism will have greater force if it can harness some of that literary power and imaginative scope so that they can be incorporated and contained within realism as she understood it. The degree of artistic success achieved by *Daniel Deronda* has always been a controversial issue, but arguably many of the negative judgements could be said to derive from the application of inappropriate aesthetic criteria or a failure to take account of the novel's basic conception as well as the assumption that Eliot's fiction is rooted in the Victorian tradition and has little or no connection with literary modernism. Whether her attempt to create a synthesizing novel, realist in basis but encompassing the fiction of major predecessors who wrote in various romance modes, succeeds in artistic terms will be a matter of critical judgement. What is undeniable is that *Daniel Deronda* is one of the most ambitious novels written in the nineteenth century.