Scenes of Sympathy

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Part III

The Aesthetics
of Cultural Identity
When, in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), the aged Jew Mordecai seeks a man to fulfill his nationalist and religious ideals, he fashions the mental equivalent of what today would be called a personal ad. Acting on what Eliot describes as "a mature spiritual need akin to the boy's and girl's picturing of the future beloved," Mordecai seeks the image of his protégé throughout the world and, specifically, in the museum:

He imagined a man who would have all the elements necessary for sympathy with him; but in an embodiment while he was he must be a Jew, intellectually cultured, morally fervid... but his face and frame must be beautiful and strong; he must have been used to all the refinements of social life; his voice must flow with a full and easy current; his circumstances be free from sordid need; he must glorify the possibilities of the Jew, not sit and wander as Mordecai did, bearing the stamp of his people amid the signs of poverty and waning breath. Sensitive to physical characteristics, he had, both abroad and in England, looked at pictures as well as men, and in a vacant hour he had sometimes lingered in the National Gallery.

in search of paintings which might feed his hopefulness with grave and noble types of the human form, such as might well belong to men of his own race. (516)

"He must be a Jew ... but." The right man for the job will be the character the novel calls the "refined Jew"—the Jew whose background, education, and physical features "might well belong to men of his own race," or—this passage strongly suggests—might just as well not. Mordecai’s museum search recalls Eliot’s use of family portraits to describe Deronda’s appearance: "He was handsomer than any of them, and when he was thirteen might have served as model for any painter who wanted to image the most memorable of boys you could hardly have seen his face thoroughly meeting yours without believing that human creatures had done nobly in times past, and might do more nobly in time to come" (205). Though the absence of resemblance between Deronda’s features and those of Sir Hugo’s family tells of his lack of blood relation to them, it also seems to tell of an absence of relation to any ordinary human family: the description, granting readers the opportunity to fill in Deronda’s Mark features with their own designs (imagine for yourself "the most memorable of boys"), is in fact more specific than it appears: the vacancy that characterizes Eliot’s descriptions of Deronda invites the constitution of a subjectivity in effect already constituted—a space to be filled with images whose specific referents, hanging on the walls of the National Gallery, are assumed to be the cultured reader’s intellectual property. As model and, implicitly, copy, Deronda occupies a niche less in a specific family history than in an aesthetic imaginary, as a descendant of idealized types and portraits rather than particular individuals. Both passages, in fact, exemplify

1 Hugh Whittemore’s discussion of the manner in which the novel refers to abundance here, as his quotation from W. J. Harvey that Eliot had "a mind like the National Gallery" George Eliot and the Visual Arts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 9.

2 Eliot’s readers, sympathetic with the author’s estimation of the groundwork for sympathy with the Jews, might have no trouble assuming Deronda as an English gentleman first and a Jew only last. Eliot attempts to secure sympathy from English readers who sometimes believe that they have identified with a Jewish character. Prefacing the revelation of Deronda’s Jewish identity by an exploration of Deronda’s English self, however, provides the association of Englishness with individuality and Jewishness with copy Eliot’s manner.
the novel’s duck-rabbit, now—now you see—it—now you don’t—approach to Deronda’s appearance, evoking stereotypes only to cancel them in their attempts to describe the character whose distinctive feature will be his ability to do the same; to evoke a type, belong to a group, without being constrained by that membership. Their convolutions convey the sense of trying to represent what is, in Victorian readers’ mental portrait galleries as in Victorian novelistic representation in general, an impossibility: the Jew who does not look like one.

As Mordecai wanders through the National Gallery, he too becomes a hypothetical object of speculation: “Some observant persons may remember his emaciated figure, and dark eyes deep in their sockets, as he stood in front of a picture... But spectators would be likely to think of him as an odd-looking Jew, who probably got money out of pictures” (530). As attempts to imagine sympathetic “others,” Daniel and Mordecai figure in Eliot’s imagination, and for each other, as types and relationships to types. But Eliot’s use of the museum as a setting for these descriptions also portrays the idea of type, as a simplification and aestheticizing of character, on dis-

a reminder of our criticism of liberal ideas about how to treat England’s Jewish population, casts the idea that Jews should efface their identities as Jews as a new acceptance as individual. See David Feldman, Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 27.

Though she draws this contrast with “nativity,” Inderpal Grewal suggests that construction between them of Jewishness, from the shillings of white marble, and Egyptians ought to remind us that such ideas as “Whitewashing of Greek art,” “the purely one,” “participated in creating an ideal English subject, unquestioningly masculine but one who was recognized by a ‘new’ art and after whom they immediately recognized the ‘purity’ of classical Roman,” Home and Harem, Frontiers: Colonial Empire and the Creation of British Modernity (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 108. Grewal quotes Sir Henry Ellis on the Elgin marbles—“The possession of this collection has established a national school of sculpture in our country founded on the noblest models which human art has ever produced”—and refers to the “ideal young nobleman” to whose exertions the nation is indebted for it (119, quoting Ellis, Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles, 10, 215).

For a similar scenario of looking for an aesthetically pleasing “norm” in the museum: in a New York Times Magazine article on plastic surgery for women, who saw Dr. Joseph M. Rosen “how a surgeon decides on the shape of a given altered part.” Rosen replies, “I once asked him ‘Have you seen an ideal woman?’ ‘A woman who looks as though she had been designed by nature?’ ‘No, a woman who looks as though she had been designed by a sculptor. She would have to be as beautiful as a Greek statue.’” Charles Siebert, “The Cuts That Go Deeper,” New York Times Magazine, 7 July 1996, 40.
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play—revealing how, in the museum as in the novel, issues of race, like those of class and gender, are transmuted into the category of sensibility or taste. The museum here figures, as it did in the late nineteenth century and still does today, as a place in which artworks are not the only things on display: one in which visitors, extending their license to look and seeking to become spectacles themselves, serve as spectacles of and objects for one another. The art gallery in particular, whose visitors possessed (it was assumed) specific knowledge of the works they had come to see, provided a "key symbolic site for those performances of 'distinction' through which the cognoscenti differentiate themselves from the masses."—and, the passage cited above also suggests, the non-Jews differentiate themselves from the Jews.4 Those spectators "capable of recognizing and appreciating those works [of art] as such" would also "recognize" that Mordecai’s purpose in the museum must differ from their own; the examination to which he is subject is part and parcel of the museum’s contribution to the observation (as well as of) distinctions.5 The National Gallery functions here as a version of the “imagined community” of the nation as Daniel Deronda finally envisions it, a community in which a fantasy of shared sensibilities produces a heightened consciousness of social and cultural differences.6 Mordecai’s features, “bearing the stamp of his people,” block the evocation of sympathy his religious and national plans require. They also, for the spectators who characterize him, signify the limited scope of his observation: normally seeking an object, he embodies the embodi—projected on the Jews—to participate in the general cultural project of the nation. For Eliot and her hypothetical spectators, the Jew’s gaze is focused elsewhere; on his nation but not on theirs. Lacking the whiteness that signifies a wide-ranging sympathy (like that of the novel’s invisible omniscience), Mordecai necessarily lacks what Michael Ragussis calls “the practical power of the assimilated Jew.” “Deronda, however, possessing the qualities Mordecai lacks (or more accurately, lacking the qualities Mordecai pos-

5 Ibid., 163.
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sentiment, possesses that power, and incites the sympathy Mordecai’s project requires. For despite Mordecai’s search for features that suggest “Jewish birth” (511), he seeks a Jew who “might or might not” look like one, and Eliot’s narrator describes Deronda largely through references to historical, historic types and by negation: he is “not more distinctly oriental than many a type seen among what we call the Latin races” (533).

“Discrimination” is the term Eliot uses in the Philosophers’ Club chapter (chap. 41) for the ability to distinguish different degrees of Jewishness in its members—characters whose features are so marked that the narrator remarks, “even” Deronda, lately practiced in the kind of “discrimination,” can perform it (511). Establishing him as her unperceived and inquired observer on the scene—“Deronda was well satisfied to get a seat on the opposite side, where his general survey of the party easily included Mordecai”—Eliot supplements his knowledge with her own: “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.” But despite skepticism about the idea of “pure English blood,” the passage proceeds to establish a relationship between Jewiness and nationality for each of the club’s members: “Miller, the broad man... had at least grand-parents who called themselves German, and possibly far-away ancestors who denied themselves to be Jews; Buchan, the saddler, was Scotch; Pash, the watchmaker, was a small, dark, vivacious, triple-baked Jew; Gideon, the optical instrument maker, was a Jew of the red-haired, generous-featured type easily passing for Englishmen of unusually cordial manners... Only three would have been discernible everywhere as Englishmen” (581-82). This passage establishes Jewish identity, like all “discriminations,” as a matter of degree, what defines the discerning observer is the ability to perceive the Jewiness nationality conceals. While the club members emerge, in discussion as well as through observation, as different “types” of Jews, Eliot’s emphasis with respect to Deronda falls, somewhat unconvincingly, on his gracious ability to participate as one of the company: it is the task of manners to make him an equal, that is, because until he encounters Mordecai’s wishful vision, Deronda is the Jew even the most discerning of observers can’t discern: “He looked around him with the quiet air of respect habitual
to him among equals, ordered whisky and water, and offered the contents of his cigar case" (112). Indeed, despite Eliot’s disclaimer, “discrimination” is the mode of seeing on which this novel depends, both in its depiction of Jews as to be recognized as such and in its characterization of the Jew who is not. For though Mordecai’s purpose in the museum may not seem to its regular visitors likely to match their own, another can be said to differ greatly: seeking the image of his “beloved” in a gallery that expresses something of the nature of belonging to the nation—or of transgressing the museum’s function, but in fact understanding it all too well—Mordecai is also looking to discriminate, to find a cultural type (grounded from his memory of faces seen among the Jews of Holland and Bohemia, and from the paintings which renew that memory”) (531). (Mordecai might be considered mistaken for pursuing not what the museum intends its visitors to consider—the abstraction “man”—but rather an image he hopes will lead him to an actual man.) Though he and the narrator establish different markers for Deronda’s features—the one seeking some signs of Jewish identity, the other emphasizing the absence of such signs—both practice a mode of observation whose essential quality is a habit of noting the presence or absence of “Jewish” features.

The museum-goers struck by Mordecai’s incongruous presence, these passages invite us to imagine, must be the kind of discriminating observers he is; for all Mordecai knows, Deronda himself might be among them. Appealing to a consciousness of social types in those same readers who would share an image of Deronda’s “nobility,” the novel links the museum-goer’s sensibility not just to Mordecai but to the reader’s as well. For what Mordecai does in envisioning his beloved is what Eliot does in envisioning Mordecai, what Deronda does when he imagines the family he dreads discovering is Mirah’s, and what Deronda will later counsel Gwendolen to do: “take hold of your sensibility,” he tells her, “and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision” (509).

While the sensibility in question in this passage is that (Daniel is advising Gwendolen to let her conscience be her guide), seeing with one’s ears—

8 The ease with which Deronda discriminates suggests that his ability to make himself comfortable is perhaps the result of the members’ visible difference from him. As Lionel Trilling suggests in “Manners, Morals, and the Novel,” manners allow one to discriminate while appearing not to. The Liberal Imagination (New York: Viking, 1950), 206.

9 For the ease with which Deronda discriminates suggests that he follows the members’ conductable while perhaps the result of the members’ visible difference from him. As Lionel Trilling suggests in “Manners, Morals, and the Novel,” manners allow one to discriminate while appearing not to. The Liberal Imagination (New York: Viking, 1950), 206.
sentiment to the facts is an excellent description of the novel's moral and aesthetic mode. For when sensibility is a faculty, taste becomes a sense, and in this social and national context Daniel Deronda establishes discrimination (or "discernment") signifies not only the ability to classify according to race, class, and nationality but also a visceral response to any or all of the above. This is what it means for Daniel to see with his sensibility: "He saw himself guided by some invisible current into a slum street; he entered through a dim doorway, and saw a hawk-eyed woman, rough headed, and unwashed, cheapening a hungry girl's last bit of fancy; or in some quarter..."

As Eliot writes, confident in her readers' competence, such images are "the language in which we think" (247). Aligning sensibility with vision, identifying thought as a network of images, Eliot endorses the view with which, in this novel's cultural context, moral judgments slide into aesthetic ones. In such a context, that is, it is impossible not to think in images.

While Daniel generally escapes the examination to which the visibly Jewish are subject, the diffuse features that express his ethical nature—the "many-sidedness" of his sympathy—establish him as a recognizable cultural type. It is not, in other words, that he is an absence, a "nobody," but that his features are such that they make no difference to a sympathetic reader's imagination—indeed, the lack of difference they make is what defines that imagination as sympathetic. The description of the object of Mordecai's search no less than Daniel's later decision to dedicate himself to "his own hereditary people" renders explicit what is implicit elsewhere in Eliot's work (and what I have argued throughout this book): that sympathy, ostensibly grounded for Eliot in personal knowledge and identification, is performative.

9 Tellingly, in a passage lauding the working classes for their good behavior when visiting the museum, and the museum for its civilizing powers, an 1852 guidebook to the British Museum uses the term "sympathy" to mean "taste": "Verily this is an age of progress, and the conviction of this truth... that the sympathies of the rich and the poor..."

10 Possessed of "a fine person, no eccentricity of manners, the education of a gentleman, and a present income" (412)—Deronda resembles Conan Doyle's no-identity capitalist, the man with the twisted lip. Says Ezra Cohen, "I thought you might be the young principal of a first-rate firm" (442).
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nantly a matter of cultural identification, as the empathetic self seeks out a
particular awareness of social and cultural markers with which to sympa-
thesize. As Greeneboge says when the heroine of Deronda’s background, estab-
lishing credentials to sympathy more impressive, at that moment, than his
own, “You are just the same as if you were not a Jew” (875).

Though Jewishness ostensibly functions in the novel as a signifier of
difference, that is, it is the point of Deronda’s Jewishness to make, with all
the weight the narrative is bring to the subject, no difference; just as Gaskell’s Ruth is the fallen woman who is not “really” fallen,
Deronda is the Jew who must be “just the same” as if he were not. For this
reason alone, it would make no sense for Eliot to refer readers to any phys-
ical marker of his Jewishness. In considering this issue I necessarily refer to
Cynthia Cha’s 1978 essay, “The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading
Daniel Deronda” despite Cha’s insistence on the bodily nature of Jewish identity—“For Deronda not to have known he
was Jewish until his mother told him means... ‘that he never looked
down’” (222)—the most important feature of Jewishness as an aspect of
Deronda’s cultural and physical identity is its invisibility. 12

11 Acknowledging the insights of Lennard Davis and Steven Marcus, Chase writes: “For
Deronda not to have known he was Jewish until his mother told him means, in these terms,
‘that he never looked down,’ an idea that exceeds, as much as does magical metamorpho-
sis, the generous limits of realism.” “The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-
Reading Daniel Deronda” 93 (1978): 222.

12 In this he resembles the “invisible” Jew of the latter half of the nineteenth century, as
well as the one constructed by nineteenth-century liberal arguments: invisible unless he
chooses not to be. On the invisibility of Jews in Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth
Feldman explains that in nineteenth-century England Jews were “not recognized” by the
state as such; “they were disadvantaged as non-Anglicans and non-Christians.” “The ab-
sence of statutory recognition in Britain meant that structures of communal authority and
cohesion had to be manufactured entirely by Jews themselves.” David Fildman, Englishmen
and Jews, 23. See p. 27 for liberalism’s idea of the Jew, based on its identity as a “universalist, bourgeois
creed, concerned with the rights of individuals.”

Both Michael Ragussis and Christina Crosby note Eliot’s effacement—Christianization
and secularization—of Judaism in Daniel Deronda. See Crosby, The Ends of History (New
from Eliot’s portfolio of classically focused sympathizers (such as Dorothea Brooke, also likened to a museum piece) and from the Victorian novel’s medium of a liberal subject whose empathy and universality invest itself in an ability to identify with the narratives of others, Deronda must possess the ability to invest his self in other selves. Paradoxically, in order to identify himself with and as a Western culture’s core “symbol,” he must eschew himself figured in the solitude and blankness of the exemplary middle-class subject, his “representative subjectivity” — in David Lloyd’s words, a function of his ability “to take anyone’s place” — he is the figure “of a pure exchangeability.”

Yet by the end of the novel, this figure of pure exchangeability has become a national subject, willing to devote his life to helping his “hereditary people” (74) found a nation. This development, encompassed in a narrative that deduces Deronda’s consent to what he is said uncontroversially to possess — a Jewish identity — states him on both sides of a colonialist imaginary. It participates in a Lawrence-of-Arabia-like mode of cultural cross-dressing that is an expression of colonial power: an exemption from the identity boundaries that constrain others. At the same time, it idealizes emotional attachment and commitment at odds with such freedom: the narrator of Deronda’s “discovery” produces an identity deemed in entirely national terms. Cultivating in her readers the kind of national and cultural discrimination in which the narrator excels, Eliot constructs a Jewish hero who ostensibly exemplifies yet is himself clearly exempt from such discrimination, with an identity both global and narrowly national, discerning but not generally discernible.

In Daniel Deronda, Eliot projects her exemplary bourgeois subject into the context of late-nineteenth-century nationalism and contemporaneous debates about the relationship between the English and the Jews. The idea of nationalism allows her to play out in political and historical terms the
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collapse between sympathy and identity that occurs elsewhere in her fiction: in the idea of national identity, as at the end of many of Eliot’s novels, the limited field deemed sympathy’s proper sphere defines the self’s boundaries. If, as the novel seems to suggest, in the modern world there is no bourgeois subject without his or her developmental narrative, it also seems that the narrative that subsumes bourgeois identity must be a national one: the emotional and ethical coherence of the bourgeois self depends upon knowing to what nation that self belongs. And yet national identity is itself subordinated here to a high-cultural ideal within which the Jew can also be the model English gentleman, and the model English gentleman the Jew. Because of these contradictions—and because sympathy like national identity has power to the extent that it seems to emerge from within—sympathy in Daniel Deronda is less a function of self than a rationale for self-construction, a narrative from which identity emerges apparently unwillingly.14

It was as if he had found an added soul in finding his ancestry—his judgment no longer wandering in the meadows of impartial sympathy, but strolling, with the noble impartiality which is man’s best strength, the closer fellowship that makes sympathy practical—exchanging that bird’s eye reasonableness which soars to avoid preference and loses all sense of quality, for the generous reasonableness of drawing shoulder to shoulder with men of like inheritance. (814; emphasis mine)

Eliot devoted her artistic career to the expansion of her readers’ consciousness through sympathy. But the ethical compulsion to embrace difference in an attempt to recognize in the other “an equivalent centre of self” (as Middlemarch’s Dorothea formulation) gave way, in Daniel Deronda’s 14 On the Jew and the gentleman as similar figures of exchange see Catherine Gallagher, “George Eliot and Daniel Deronda: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question,” in Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel, ed. Ruth Bernard Rice (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 20-42.
decision “to identify myself, as far as possible, with my hereditary people” (74); to an explicit compunction to seek out someone: Daniel will live out his life as protagonist Gwendolen Harleth, not uneasily with no one he does not like, but with no one he is not like (see Gwendolen: “It came over me when I was a child I used to fancy sailing away into a world where people were not forced to live with any one they did not like” [760]. Somewhere before Wilde exposes Victorian sympathy’s exhausted state in 
The Picture of Dorian Gray, Eliot characterizes sympathy as a currency whose random expenditure requires emotional paralysis and inhibits action. Giving us in Deronda a character who not only fails to save Gwendolen Harleth but also fails to sympathize with her as well (his final advice to her is essentially, that she learn to sympathize with herself), Eliot reports, or at least severely qualifies, the interpersonal ideal her novels have come to represent.15

In 
Daniel Deronda, the attenuated self that tends to trouble participants in the sympathetic exchange appears as a single character’s sustained problem of self-definition. Deronda’s too diffuse extension of self defines a sympathy that, Eliot claims, characterizes sympathy’s demise. “My pleasureless, flexible sympathy had ended by falling into one current with that reflective analysis which tends to neutralize sympathy” [412]. In particular, this kind of sympathy suggests not just emotional paralysis but an inability to act (Deronda’s “...many-sided sympathy... hinders any persistent course of action.” Sympathy’s multiplication of selves leads, oddly, to a deficit; the capacity to sympathize with everybody renders Deronda a kind of nobody.

But the term “sympathy” serves as a confusing kind of catch-all here: in the phrase “that reflective analysis which tends to neutralize sympathy,” one kind of sympathy is said to cancel another. Deronda’s early sympathy is associated both with an exemplary personality and with a search for self that suggests he has not yet found his identity. In fact, the negative cast of Deronda’s pre-Mordecai emotional life—the free-floating sympathy Eliot calls a “meditative interest in human misery” that “passes for comradeship” [745]—heightens the need for the emotion that forms its necessary antidote and for the narrative of discovery that will serve as that emotion’s vehicle.

Replacing one brand of sympathy with another, the novel rejects Deronda's ability to identity universally in favor of the strong emotion that arrives, in a narrative of nationalism, to narrow his concerns. The sympathy Deronda possesses early in his life becomes passionate feeling when he finds the narrative in which he wishes to insert himself, one that allows him to define his identity in both individual and cultural terms and that he may imagine as thrust upon him rather than ambitiously sought after. "Since I began to read and know, I have always longed for some ideal task, in which I might feel myself the heart and brain of a multitude—some social captainship, which would come to me as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize" (819).

Deronda's Zionism is usually regarded as a development and expansion of his early sympathy. But in fact, the identity he "discovers"—a national and religious identity, as leader of his people—is a rewriting of the attenuated self he is attempting to escape. To this end the substitution of one form of sympathy for another, or, more specifically, the replacement of an effect of nonidentity with an effect of identity only because, in nationalism's: model of the self, the others with whom one identifies are precisely not "other." Nationalism draws in power from its ability to transform a certain kind of attenuated identity into identity's essence, saying "you are who you sympathize with." As Julia Kristeva writes, "in nationalism, 'I am' becomes 'I am one of them,' 'to be' becomes 'to belong.' "\(^\text{16}\)

The modernist tendency toward diffusion, anonymity, and anomie represented in the novel as an effect of imperialism, in the characters of Gwendolen and Grandcourt, and in the ever present metaphor of gambling is countered by a pull toward identity that, as if to ward off the "scattered" effect of internationalism, casts sympathy in the form of national identity, in effect collapsing any difference between the two.\(^\text{17}\) It is this collapse that Eliot, startlingly, dubs "practical." (In this sense, Deronda's desire to give a


\(^\text{17}\) Caroline Lesjack argues that the capitalist expansion for which the nation state serves as "motor" is also responsible for the sense of rootlessness and anomie from which Deronda...
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"centre" to his "scattered" people is the equivalent of locating a center for his own scattered identity. And not only is individual identity based on national identity, but the nation itself is imagined as a kind of socially cohesive entity requiring emotional organization.) By Daniel Deronda, what is represented as sympathy with the other turns out to be sympathy with the self. Becoming and at the same time discovering that he is "the other" with whom he sympathizes, Deronda provides a model of selective sympathy that Eliot wished would make it possible for her readers to sympathize with the Jews.18

"Then it is not my real name?" said Deronda, with a dislike even to this trifling part of the disguise which had been thrown around him.

"Oh, as real as another," said his mother, indifferently.

"The Jews have always been changing their names." (701)

The narrowing of Deronda’s identity into Jewishness may be said both to evade and to avoid the problematic topic of the Jewish body by simply leaving it aside. In fact, Eliot’s use of heredity and narrative in the construction of Deronda’s identity suggests that the Eliot national fiction is “genetically based,”19 and despite Chase’s claim that Daniel Deronda self-deconstructs, Eliot’s novel in fact produces what nineteenth-century and later nationalism requires: consent.


18 It should be pointed out that while many modern critics discuss Eliot’s effacement of Jewish identity in Daniel Deronda, this strategy did not universally succeed in persuading English readers to sympathize with the Jews. See the reviews collected in John Holmstrom and Laurence Lerner, eds., George Eliot and Her Readers (London: The Bodley Head, 1966), 122-58.

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is less significantly about Derrida’s discovery of his Jewishness than it is about what Eliot calls his “conscience to the fact” (89). As his mother chides, bitterly but justifiably, “You are glad to have been born a Jew.... That is because you have not been brought up as a Jew” (99). Daniel Deronda is the novel that makes Deronda “glad to have been born a Jew.”

Chase’s argument for the novel’s self-deconstruction depends on the way the logic seems to require Deronda to discover that he is Jewish, rendering his identity, in Hans Meyrink’s words, a “present cause of past effects,” and disrupting the fundamental tenet of narrative identity, linear causality (see Chase, Mordecai’s “coercive” identification of Deronda—the way in which Deronda seems to be a product of Mordecai’s vision—violates both Mordecai’s apparent recognition of Deronda and Paul de Man’s definition of identity as something known rather than constituted.20 Her interpretation might be said to work so well precisely because of its astounding literal-mindedness—one might also say essentialism—about Jews: a Jew must be circumcised; a Jew cannot become a Jew through conversion, and Eliot must have known these things; therefore the novel’s account of Jewishness is contravened by Judaism’s very nature. Wrote Chase, “Conversion precisely does not apply to Jewish identity, which is inherited, historical, and finally, born genetic,” according to Chase, Jewish identity cannot be the result of a speech act.21

20 The phrase “present cause of past effects” appears in a letter to Deronda (704) and is cited by Chase (“Decomposition of the Elephants,” 215). Chase’s argument is based on what she calls an “identity principle” articulated by Paul de Man, in which knowledge of identity is received passively rather than imposed (221). For Chase, at least a certain idea of identity is the product of a coercive speech act; conversely, the identity principle and the concept of identity as the product of a coercive speech act are defined by the identity principle (221). To Chase, “identity principle” is used somewhat paradoxically to mean “knowledge of identity” and “coercive speech act” (221). For Chase, identity cannot be the result of a speech act.21

21 Chase, “Decomposition of the Elephants,” 222. Chase’s “here” attributes any apparent racism to the novel. For some, however, the token is a subtle “universal” description of nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial theories, in which “the circumcision of the genitals is the outward sign of the intractability of the Jew within” (“Jew’s Body,” 204).
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Not only are these assumptions technically incorrect, however, but in fact speech plays a prominent role in both Eliot’s and Deronda’s imagining of Jewish identity. For instance, in Deronda’s own consciousness of his Mithra wants to take “a possession of that spirit which is

pedic era after a long inheritance of professed Catholicism to leave wealth and high place and risk their lives in flight, that they might join there own people and say, ‘I am a Jew’” (419). And Deronda himself must declare his Jewiness if anyone is to know about it, especially given his wish to marry Mirah. Somewhat crucially, whether one considers these statements to be speech acts depends on whether one considers Jewiness inherent in, or ultimately detachable from, identity, or considers identity-for-others constitutive of identity. In any event, Deronda’s consent to his Jewiness, like his mother’s repudiation of hers, represents Jewish identity as characteristically embraced, repudiated, or at the very least altered.22

For Chase, two “identity principles” are in conflict in the novel: identity as the result of recognition and its effect. But her own language suggests that these principles may in fact support rather than cancel each other. “On the one hand,” she writes, “Mordecai’s identification of Deronda is presented as a recognition, and for this reason his assertion of a claim on him has authority and appeal. On the other hand, Deronda’s assumption of the identity of Mordecai’s prefigured friend is shown to be a consequence of Mordecai’s act of claiming him. He be-

For a response to Chase that challenges her deconstructive method but reads Deronda’s body just as literally, see K. M. Newton, "Daniel Deronda and Circumcision,” in In Defence of Literary Interpretation: Theory and Practice (London: Macmillan, 1986), 197-211.

22 In response to Joseph Kalonymos’ s insistence that he “call [himself] a Jew and profess the faith of [his] fathers,” Deronda asserts: “I shall call myself a Jew .... But I will not say that I shall profess to believe exactly as one father has believed” (792). See Feldman, Englishmen and Jews, 23, on the idea that in Victorian England Jewish community “depended solely on voluntary association”—that is, on choice, the affirmation of identity.

As Ragussis notes, the idea that Judaism was “natural,” and that converting a Jew was therefore a logical impossibility, arose from the new “science” of ethnology in the mid-nineteenth century. Robert Knox wrote that the Jews were “unaltered and unalterable,” and that Jews could not be converted because “Nature alters not.” See Ragussis, Figures of Conversion, 26; Knox, The Races of Men: A Fragment (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1850), 206. Christina Crosby also discusses Deronda’s assertion of Jewishness, though her reading differs from mine and supports Chase’s (Ends of History, chap. 1).
comes what Mordecai claims he is. But this "becoming" in no way conflicts with Deronda's account of his coming-to-Jewishness as he tells Mordecai and Mirah, "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 had life then—if I could have chosen, I would not have been a Jew. What I feel now is—that we 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" (818).

Indeed, the consent of his "whole being"—body and mind—in recall to the construction of Deronda's identity, and the narrative that produces consent, activating readerly sympathy in the process, is arguably more crucial than the "fact" of Jewish birth. Deronda is a character who actively declares his national identity, Eliot produces in her hero an exemplary subject of late-nineteenth-century nationalist ideology. Accustomed early in his life to "a state of social neutrality" encouraged by "the half-known facts of his parentage," Deronda opts on the sentimental education that will provide "the sort of apprenticeship to life which would not shape him too definitely, and rob him of that choice that might come from a free growth" (220). And in that shapelessness, manifest in his ability to "[think] himself imaginatively into the experience of others" (570), he resembles nothing so much as the conventional liberal subject of the nineteenth-century novel. Just as important as—perhaps more important than—the knowledge of Deronda's maternal origin, that is, is the process by means of which he attains to and comes to embrace that knowledge, and by means of which what is cast as shapelessness gradually gives way to what he, and Eliot, want to call shape.24

23 Chase, "Decomposition of the Elephants," 221; my emphasis.
24 The novel, and my argument, may seem to leave the body behind by emphasizing consent. But the novel returns to the body—and returns the body to the text—by way of its emphasis on feeling. Eliot pointedly has Deronda pale with "what seems always more of a sensation than an emotion— the pain of repulsed tenderness" (697). And for Deronda nationality's key in an economy of both than something "nothing in his veins" (397); if Deronda's identity lies in some sense of both than something "nothing in his veins" (397); if Deronda's identity lies in some sense of both than something "nothing in his veins" (397); if Deronda's identity lies in some sense of both than something "nothing in his veins" (397).
In Daniel Deronda and in other writings, such as "The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!", Eliot blurs the difference between constructions of nation and race, suggesting that "racial" life springs from "nature" and blood. In the novel, she implies as well what Katherine Linehan calls a "genetically based ancient memory". But national identity in Daniel Deronda, as in the late-nineteenth century was made as well as found; constructions of national identity depended then as they do now on constructing the made as found. As E. J. Hobsbawm writes of "that characteristic formation of the nineteenth century, the nation-state," "the state not only made the nation, but needed to make the nation." Like Eliot, Hobsbawm conceives of Jewish identity as a paradigmatic version of nineteenth-century European nationalism: national identity, he writes, especially in the Hapsburg Empire and the Jewish diaspora, defined "not in a particular piece of the map to which a body of inhabitants were attached, but in the members of such bodies of men and women as considered themselves to belong to a nationality, wherever they happened to live." The phrase "considered themselves" bears directly on Eliot's account of Deronda's acceptance of his Jewish identity. Particularly toward the end of the century, when nationalist expansion and imperial conquest meant not only locating national subjects and institutions outside territorial boundaries but also frequently rearticulating a sense of national identity in those who could not be said to have been born with one, the Jewish desire for a nation might well be regarded as a model for the idea of defining the "national" component of one's identity. For at stake in late-nineteenth-century nationalism is the identification between the institutions that define the self and "identity"—that process whereby the particular subject internalizes a national law as to consent to its imperative in the form of consenting to his own deepest being—which Eliot and Hobsbawm encompass and thereby distance between ideas of family, race, culture, religion, and nation.

In Eliot's account of Deronda's acceptance of his Jewish identity, particularly toward the end of the century, when nationalist expansion and imperial conquest meant not only locating national subjects and institutions outside territorial boundaries but also frequently rearticulating a sense of national identity in those who could not be said to have been born with one, the Jewish desire for a nation might well be regarded as a model for the idea of defining the "national" component of one's identity. For at stake in late-nineteenth-century nationalism is the identification between the institutions that define the self and "identity"—that process whereby the particular subject internalizes a national law as to consent to its imperative in the form of consenting to his own deepest being—which Eliot and Hobsbawm encompass and thereby distance between ideas of family, race, culture, religion, and nation.

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and claims that a narrative describing the long-awaited result of a family history of repression and denial and, above all, of the mystical prompting of feeling should produce a subject fashioned in an impossibly coincidental blending of chance and choice. Nationalism's magic is, as Benedict Anderson writes, "to turn chance into destiny," creating "consent" for identities also authorized as "fact."

In Deronda, as I have suggested, bourgeois identity emerges from national identity. Aware of his ethical duty to others, Deronda does not actively pursue that duty until he perceives it to be part of his identity until he knows, or feels, who he is. And knowing who he is means knowing to what nation he belongs. At that point, what prepares the ground for and in fact finally constitutes his identity is a sympathy so unwillful as to present itself as the result of a series of fortuitous events, events that are not actively desired but that simply overtake the self.

In the context of late-nineteenth-century nationalist expansion and discussions of Jewish identity, what Eliot's exemplary sympathizer must possess is the ability to "be at home in foreign countries" (221) and to "understand other points of view" (224), a phrase in which "other" signifies "other nations." But in the context of the novel, "other" points as well toward Western culture's perennial other—the Jew—and to the mutually constitutive and phantasmatic roles played by body and mind in nationalist constructions. Exploiting the ambiguous roles of birth and consent, accident and purpose in the construction of national identity, Eliot conceives of a subject who, though born a Jew, must come to desire Jewish identity through the gradual assumption of a feeling of likeness and belonging. And, when this feeling arrives, this subject discovers—in a circular fantasy of complete sympathy in which the physical body gives empirical weight to the feeling of belonging—that he is that other Deronda's body is sympathy made manifest, identified in its essence with the social and cultural other. Hence his body, invoked by critics from Chase on as the place where the novel's realism founders, has in fact little to do with re-

28 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 12.
29 What after all is "consent" but a merging of the willed and the unwillful? The term implies choice, but according to an essentialist reading Deronda would have no choice.
Conceiving to the Fact

alone at all as the exemplary sympathetic body in all the ways I have sug-
ggested, it is the novel's most phantasmatic construction.) That with his ex-
emplary ability to sympathize, Deronda represents as well Eliot's ideal of
high culture—the very culture to which her own novels belonged, and
which they assisted in constructing. Thus the novel's "others" must remain
other, with the capacity to arouse repulsion and disgust; their role in the con-
struction of the hero's identity cannot be acknowledged. And thus Eliot's
narrative of sympathy with the Jews takes shape as a narrative in which the
obstacle of otherness vanishes. (Deronda's realization of his early attra-
tion to Mordecai's ideas disproves their source, for instance—"what was there
but vulgarity in taking the fact that Mordecai was a poor Jewish work-
man... as a reason for determining beforehand that there was not some spir-
itual force within him that might have a determining effect on a white-
handed gentleman?"—testifies less to an egalitarian spirit than to the appeal
of the romantic idea that "poverty and poor clothes" have, "in some re-
markable cases," accompanied "spirits" [571].) Deronda embodies an
absolute merging of self and other (merging suggested repeatedly by
Mordecai's insistence that Deronda must "be not only a hand to me, but a
soul—believing my belief—hoping my hope—seeing the vision I point to"
[557]), but this complete sympathy is possible only when identity has been
vacated of everything but the self's projections. A subject can become
"other," the novel's collapsing of sympathy and national identity suggests,
only when identity equals identity politics: when self and other merge be-
cause they are already merged into an imaginary unified identity.

The wish-fulfillment structure that for Chase deconstructs the novel's re-
alism may thus be seen as a consequence of a logic the novel shares with na-
tionalism, in which desire for a particular identity becomes a crucial compo-
nent of an identity said to be already possessed (what else might it mean to
"consent" to one's identity?). In a move that exposes the way the potential-
izing imagination assists in sympatetic realization, Deronda is described as
the realization of Mordecai's wish: "the outward satisfaction of his longing"
[550]. Deronda's apparent production as an effect of Mordecai's desire is thus
not most significantly (as Chase reads it) a violation of realism; it is rather an
exposure of the way sympathy turns happenstance into fate and makes
choices seem to be determined by the promptings of some unalterable
essence at the self's core. (Gwendolen, telling Deronda of Grandcourt's death
by drowning, uses a similar formulation: "I only know that I saw my wish
outside me” (196). In both instances, narrative is complemented or fulfilled by a picture that collapses narrative in the seemingly inevitable materialization of unconscious desires. If, then, in Chase’s words, “a reader feels” that “it is because Deronda has developed a strong affinity for Judaism that he turns out to be of Jewish parentage,” the narrative construction is less significantly “a deconstruction of the concept of cause” than a structural affirmation of the preceding theme of novel as result in feeling, especially “national feeling.”

Daniel Deronda lays the groundwork for a consent not at odds with physical identity, but rather in support of it. To make Jewish identity grow out of feeling and require consent, Eliot substantiates the myth of national identity on which nation-states would increasingly come to rely: the way in which, with the widening reach of empire, feeling increasingly becomes the ground of national identity. What, after all, is national identity but fellow-feeling, a sympathy whose organizing principle is the country to which (and the fellows to whom) one considers oneself to belong? Simultaneously “natural” and capable of “naturalization,” national identity is constituted as a sensibility in which, advantageously for the nation that wishes to command allegiance, the genealogical and the emotive or intellectual are suggestively confused. In John Stuart Mill’s language, fellow feeling both follows from and leads to all the givens of nationality—race, descent, language, religion, geography and history—and “without fellow-feeling, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist.”

With reassuringly circular reasoning, Daniel Deronda—like nationalism—implies that feeling is also a given, the sympathy that affirms identity is also its consequence.

32. Controversy over whether Jews should take the Christian oath in order to serve in Parliament provides an interesting example of the requirement for “consent.” As Feldman writes, “it was not until 1866 that the Parliamentary Oaths Act introduced a form of words for both Houses which required a conscientious speaker to believe in God but made no particular demand beyond this” (Englishmen and Jews, 46).
Rather than promoting sympathy as a means toward understanding difference, then—indeed, employing exactly that principle in Daniel's rejection of Grandad—the novel valorizes sympathy as an identification with and affirmation of similarity. In this way, Daniel Deronda may seem to naturalize or racialize sympathy: to suggest that Daniel's sympathy with Mordecai, like Mordecai's recognition of Daniel, is linked to the presence in both of Jewish blood (a version of the superstition discussed by Sander Gilman, that Jews will always recognize one another); indeed, sympathy may even to provide the key to the novel's idea of racial difference, if one agrees with Gilman's reading of the narrator's remark: "And one man differs from another, as we all differ from the Bosjemans, in a sensibility to checks, that comes from a variety of needs, spiritual or other." (33)

And yet by restricting Daniel's attraction to the more "refined" of Jews, Eliot reveals the weak point in this argument: it is not so much people of the same blood who will find one another as people of the same sensibility. In Daniel Deronda, the rewriting of nationality as sensibility enables the well-known scenario in which the novel divides Jews into two types, one degraded and one ideal, and insists that these cannot identify with and establish an identity in the latter but not the former. Daniel's discovery that he belongs to—the one of—the people with whom he most sympathizes substantiates the importance of taste (what Sir Hugo, nicely suggesting that the capacity to change identities is a matter of having the proper "passport," calls Daniel's "passport to life" [217]) in the formation of his identity: indeed, it subverts what the novel calls sympathy—"early habit of thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others" (570)—by making those others in whom Daniel finally decides to invest his feeling into projections of himself ("my hereditary people"). His newfound sympathy, as an expression of his identity, thus acts as a kind of quality control, "exchanging that bird's-eye reasonableness which soars to

33 Gilman, Jews' Body, 242. After he learns his history from his mother, Daniel has "a quivering imaginative sense of close relation with his grandfather" (747); elsewhere he reflects on his "inherited yearning" for Zionism (819). Linehan notes these examples ("Mixed Politics," 335-34).

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avoid preference and loses all sense of quality, for the generous reasonableness of drawing shoulder to shoulder with men of like inheritance” (814).

Deronda’s identity requires a grounding in feeling and intellect as well as in physical fact, then, not only because, despite its apparent naturalisation (the way, as Benedict Anderson puts it, “nation—-ness is assimilated to skin colour, gender, parentage and birth—-all these things one cannot help”),35 nineteenth-century nationalism increasingly required citizens to “consent to the fact,” but because for Eliot sensibility transcends nationality, rewriting both nationality and “race” in the service of the bourgeois mandate to sympathise, so that what is by definition constitutive of both—a sense of difference—ceases to exist.

Deronda’s discovery of and sympathy for Mirah also undercuts the argument that racial impulses underlie his attraction to Jews. Having returned from abroad yet still possessing no clear sense of vocation or duty, Deronda is a free-floating vessel of sympathy, Eliot’s ethical self stripped to its essentials: a not-yet-fully-formed bourgeois subjectivity awaiting, barnacle-like, the appearance of a figure to whom he may attach himself. He drifts in his boat, “forgetting everything else in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at” (229). An image appears that appeals to his discriminating sensibility: in toning the gondolier’s song from Rossini’s Otello, he suddenly sees “a figure which might have been an impersonation of the misery he was unconsciously giving voice to.” Similarly, the singing, we learn later, “entered her [Mirah’s] inner world without her having taken any notice of whence it came” (227). An idea of “racial” difference gives way to a fantasy of emotional likeness expressed through the vehicle of cultural identity, of playing the same role in a cultural narrative; Mirah, with her Christian looks and her desire to be accepted as an artist expresses the same assimilative impulse Deronda’s character does. And if cultural artifacts and narratives shape and give voice to what Deronda sees, they also shape his desire to continue looking. In a version of Mordecai in the museum, the vehicle of sympathy here is the cultured eye selectively seeing and seeking its beloved; this scene at once exposes the arbitrariness of Deronda’s art—-but also expresses the ramifications of transforming into a cultural narrative.

35 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 143.
Confronting the Fact

technique and shows how sensibility's projections transform arbitrariness into narrative. "It was only the delicate beauty, the picturesque lines and colour of the image that were exceptional," her "there was no denying that the attractiveness of the image made it likelier to last" (228). Seeing Mirah as both image and narrative, as a "harsh elegy," whose content is "to clear to him as an open case," Deronda begins, "unconsciously," to find narrative form for his own life as well.

"What I have been most trying to do for fifteen years is to have some understanding of those who differ from myself."

(Deronda, 692)

Deronda's unconscious selection of Mirah is matched by his rejection, at the same subconscious level, of his mother. Critics tend to take Eliot at her word when she names sympathy as Deronda's chief quality. Yet in interview after interview with Gwendolen and his mother, he appears stiff, stiff and unable to speak—stiffly despite his own and Eliot's pretensions to the contrary. Scenes of sympathy in this novel record not Deronda's emotional receptivity or effective counseling but rather Deronda as a horrified and helpless spectator to situations and individuals beyond his control, stiffly delivering moral precepts that bear more on his own situation than on anyone else's.

Deronda's encounters with Gwendolen and his mother are marred by a sense of the distance between these and Deronda's inability to bridge that distance through language. "I beseech you to tell me what moved you—when you were young, I mean—to take the course you did," he pleads. But the plea is undermined by the narrator's assertion that Deronda is "trying by this reference to the past to escape from what to him was the heart-rending piteousness of this mingled suffering and defiance." He assures his mother, "Though my own experience has been quite different, I enter into the painfulness of your struggle" (694). Differences in experi-

36 One exception is R. H. Hutton, writing in the Spectator, 10 June 1876. See Holmstrom and Lerner, George Eliot and Her Readers, 131.
ever supposedly make no difference to what the novel calls an "early habit" of sympathy and to the claim made throughout Eliot’s novels for the fungibility of suffering. But Daniel Deronda rejects this bourgeois ideal—the possibility that anyone can put themselves imaginatively in anyone else’s place—relying instead on increasingly specific kinds of experience to justify the channeling of Deronda’s sympathies in new and specific directions. "I have had experience which gives me a keen interest in the story of a spiritual destiny embraced willingly, and embraced in youth" (535) (to Mordecai, or, "He had lately been living so keenly in an experience quite apart from Gwendolen’s lot, that his present cares for her were like a revisiting of scenes familiar from the past, and there was not yet a complete revival of the inward response to them") (572).

The novel suggests that the liberation of Deronda’s mother from a belief in the inevitability of identity has its cost in feeling, making her an actress in every realm of life and rendering her unable to provide the maternal feeling her son requires. The Princess doesn’t just reject identity categories, but it, she rejects identities and the bonds that go with them: here (as mother and Jew and Dwenda) (as her self). But in fact she expresses the same sympathetic principle Deronda eventually does: the belief that a specific group identification is a prerequisite for sympathy. Hence her rebuff to her son’s sympathetic gestures (a rebuff that underscores the prominent position this novel holds in the history of identity politics): "You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man’s force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl" (694). Here Eliot discloses the different effects and consequences of what might anachronistically be termed identity politics for men and women in late Victorian England. Identifying as a Jew, Deronda can overcome the effects of prejudice and escape the bitterness of her mother’s rejection. But his mother is condemned for her lack of maternal feeling even as Eliot seems to sympathize with her grievances. The Princess’s detachment from her son causes the emotional vacancy he seeks to fill and requires him to locate a source of deep feeling elsewhere. Jewishness, "discovered" by Deronda at the secret of his identity, provides him with the sense of authenticity and identity he has felt lacking; it arrives with the charge of feeling missing in his family, and the assertion that all Jews are family (586) justifies the substitution.
Conceiving to the End

Michael Ragussis sees in Deronda a theatrical personality to match Gowndolen: "his entire life has been a kind of disguise or performance." Given the shame Deronda associates with the idea of performance, this resemblance might be said to account for his inability to sympathize with both women, their theatricality renders them overwhelmingly similar to him, and salvation appears as authenticity in the character of Mirah and in the Jews who offer Deronda a chance at a true identity. But to assert that Deronda's disguise ceases when he discovers his true identity is to ignore the performative associations of Jewish identity, especially the strong Victorian association between Jews and theatricality—which is to say that, for Deronda, the Princess may represent the possibility that the identity he discovers is no more authentic than the one he gives up. Indeed, given her offhanded remark, "The Jews are always changing their names," it may be more accurate to locate Deronda's Jewish identity not in the fact of his birth but in his anxiety about his origins and reconstruction of his identity, not in his own name but in the changing of his name.

Not only does the novel suggest the emptiness of Deronda's sympathy in relation to Gowndolen, it also suggests that he possesses a capacity for representation similar to his mother's, though in his case that capacity is like almost everything else about him: unintentional. While finding the Princess guilty of what the narrative calls "sincere acting," a nature in which "all feeling ... immediately passed into drama, and she acted her own emotions," Eliot also asserts that Deronda's voice, like his eyes, had the unintentional effect of making his ready sympathy seem more personal and special than it really was. What pass as sympathy for Gowndolen is the result of a "look" that, rather than substantiating his moralizing, offers second-hand instantaneously responsive to her. Despite this, however, Gowndolen is more than ready to make him her confessor. Their initial encounter prefigures the pattern: "The inward debate which she raised in Deronda gave to his eyes a growing expression of scrutiny, tending farther and farther away from the glow of mingled undefined sensibilities forming admiration ... The saving sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of different qual-

Ragussis, Figures of Conversion, 277.
It is a measure of what is conventionally called Gwendolen’s narcissism, and may also be viewed as the dynamic of the sympathetic exchange as Eliot imagines it here, that when Gwendolen responds to Deronda’s look rather than to his words, that she responds to is her own projection, her image reflected in his eyes. It is not that Deronda’s countenance fails to convey what he feels, for it shows his feeling all too clearly; rather, Deronda reflects her desire to “be what you wish” (672), with a gaze “Gwendolen chose to call ‘dreadful,’ though it had really a very mild sort of scrutiny” (226). “Often the grand meanings of faces as well as of words may be chiefly in the impression of those who look on them” (1214). And scenes of sympathy between Deronda and Gwendolen, too, emphasize the “looks” that register his sympathy as Gwendolen’s fantasy. Though a Foucauldian reading might stress the indistinguishability of Deronda’s sympathy for Gwendolen from his power over her (indeed, Deronda’s ability to observe a face described as “unaffected by beholders” (38) is a measure of his panoptic power the novel grants him), his power is less a function of his own actions than of Gwendolen’s eagerness to view him as an externalized conscience.38

Gwendolen is no less a projective figure for Deronda that he is for her, when, in the novel’s opening scene, he feels “coerced” to look at her, the term suggests his own conventional susceptibility to a feminine beauty he also fears. Hence his instantaneous avowal that coercion has taken the place of pleasure and desire: “What was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil, else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents?” (35). Both the replacement of aesthetic terms by moral ones in the famous opening lines of the novel (first “beautiful or not beautiful,” then “good or evil” (35)) and the subsequent movement of Deronda’s eyes

"At one moment they followed the movements of the figure, of the arms and hands... and the next they returned to a face which, at present unaffected by beholders, was directed steadily towards the game" [38].

show Deronda working to manage his desire for what he immediately deems an unsuitable object; it is the expression of that struggle that Gwendolen interprets as disapproval. And Gwendolen helps him replace desire with moral judgment by assigning him responsibility for her shameful feeling that he was "wringing her out and looking down on her as an inferior" comes from notions so much as her own sense that gambling lowers her position in a moral hierarchy. Gwendolen is often accused of an overly intense attachment to her theatrical personality, but the power the figures on Deronda suggests a desire to escape that theatricality to replace public drama with the greater intensity of private drama, the kind of interior or "closet" drama in which she and Deronda engage. 39

What happens in the closet drama is an exchange of subjectivities, but not in the ideal form the term "sympathy" leads some readers to expect. "What should be a moment in which identities merge" 40 is in fact a repeated opportunity for mutual projection, as Deronda and Gwendolen continually miss each other, each using the other as a screen for his or her own concerns and anxieties. Indeed, when confronted with Gwendolen’s agent need, Deronda most frequently notices, and Eliot most frequently calls attention to, the absence or insufficiency of sympathetic feeling in him—the same absence he notes in his interviews with his mother. (Deronda is acutely conscious of the gap between the sympathy Gwendolen expects and what he actually has to offer 191). The narrators separate observations about Gwendolen’s anguish and Deronda’s response to it maintain the isolation of each—something like separateness without communication.

Deronda’s interest in Gwendolen, like his concern for Mirah, is manifestly a function of his interest in his own situation, especially his anxiety about the indeterminacy of his identity. (When Deronda asks Gwendolen, by way of...)

39 On theatricality in Daniel Deronda, see Joseph Litvak, Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). While Daniel’s and Gwendolen’s misunderstandings are mutual, Eliot’s tendency to let the reader know the truth behind Daniel’s look suggests that Gwendolen’s misinterpretations allow him to maintain his inviolability.

40 Cvetkovich, Mixed Feelings, 147.
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therapeutic cure, "Is there any single occupation of mind that you care about
with passionate delight or even independent interest" (507), he ought as well
be speaking to himself: his recommendation that "the higher life must be a
region in which the affections are clad with knowledge," is exactly the cure
he discovers for himself (508). This is taking a personal, feeling role toward
her and then finding himself unable, or refusing to fulfill, he identifies
the mother who has similarly repudiated maternal feeling for him. Indeed, it
would appear that Deronda's failures of sympathy have more to do with
overidentification than with an inability to empathize: the factor he assigns
to language seems to spring instead from his own anxieties.

Deronda's inability to respond to Gwendolen increases with his interest
in, and knowledge of, his own situation; the more she needs him, the less
available he is. And by the time of Gwendolen's drowning it is clear that
sympathy for her has become an ethical obligation he acknowledges but
cannot fulfill: "He wished, yet rebuked the wish as cowardly, that she could
bury her secrets in her own bosom" (754). (Seeing Gwendolen once more
after meeting his mother, Deronda "seemed to himself now to be the only
fulfilling claim, and his more passionate sympathy was in abeyance"[752].
In the crucial scene after the drowning, he in fact hides his "look,"
"with its expression of suffering which he was solemnly resolved to undergo." The scene is remarkable for its generation of false
interpretations: "Their attitude," Eliot writes, "might have told half the
truth of the situation to a beholder who had suddenly entered." And as
Deronda grasps Gwendolen's hand, and "she interpreted its powerful effect
on her into a promise of inexhaustible patience and constancy" (755), the
distance between his feeling and her understanding is as great as the os-
tensible distance between their narratives.

The scenes of sympathy between Deronda and Gwendolen and
Deronda and his mother suggest other reasons as well for Deronda's si-
multaneous attraction to and desire to distance himself from both, as well
as for the way in which his sympathy for Gwendolen takes the form of
witnessing her distress, hinting at what Leo Bersani has called a "dysfunc-
tional" attachment to scenes of violence and suffering.41 Deronda cannot

41 Leo Bersani, "Representation and Its Discontents," in Allegory and Representation:
Essay from the English Institute, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
Concerning the Fact

Eliot claims that Deronda’s activities “on behalf of others” spring from a desire to distance himself from his own rage. In what related to himself his resentful impulses had been early checked by a mastering affectionateness. Love has a habit of saying “Never mind” to angry self, who, sitting down for the nonce in the lower place by-and-by, gets used to it” (218). In Deronda’s emotional pathology, that is, sympathy is anger transformed, his sense of injury takes the form of “a hatred of all injury” and an “activity of imagination on behalf of others.” But the sympathy that emerges from this process lacks passion; it is a “meditative interest in learning how human miseries are wrought” that, in Deronda’s Cambridge days, “passed for comradeship” (219). Anything more, it seems, threatens to undo Deronda’s “never mind” with an acknowledgment that he minds.

Deronda’s response to his mother renders in psychological terms a response at the level of cultural sensibility: as the actress Alcharisi, his mother represents a degraded cultural narrative that, paradoxically, challenges Deronda’s image of himself as a self-educated, self-originated identity: “Since I began to read and know, I have always longed for some ideal task, in which I might feel myself the heart and brain of a multitude—some social captainship, which would come to me as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize” (819). (It is worth noting that the novel exchanges Deronda’s fantasy of illegitimacy for the “fact” of Jewish birth, and that the attempt to elevate the latter does not cancel out the equalizing effects of the exchange.) The Princess’s story and profession (based on the life of the actress Rachel) locate her squarely not only in Jewish culture but in lower-class Jewish culture, but the emphasis of Eliot’s retelling is on the mother’s rejection of the son. When Deronda responds to his mother with “impulsive opposition” (690), psychology justifies a marking of cultural boundaries: the repudiation of the Princess’s cultural sensibility is recast as, and validated by,

42 Welsh discusses similarities between Gwendolen’s and Daniel’s stories in George Eliot and Blackmail, 298.
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the mother's abandonment of her son. It is as if "vulgar" Jewish culture rejects Deronda rather than the other way around. Gwendolen, whose theatricality and self-absorption echo the Princess's identification with other women would agonize both his English-gentleman self and his sympathetic one, not affecting the identity he wishes to claim but rather marking its absence. Indeed, Gwendolen and the Princess threaten not only the narrative of identity Deronda projects for himself but the idea of essential identity per se. The Princess rejects all given identities, especially Jewishness; Gwendolen, manifesting dissatisfaction with her own identity, seeks outward assurance and structure to construct a new one. Both, that is, express a desire and capacity for transformation, both display the malleability Deronda embeds yet wishes to reject. The self-knowledge that supposedly crowns his narrative and solidifies his identity—the knowledge contained in, and produced by, the affirmation "I am a Jew"—thus effectively saves him from another kind of self-knowledge: the kind that discloses the notion that he has any essential identity to discover at all. For Deronda, sympathy as a means of identifying identity makes an absolute denial of origins, a breaking of the self in ideal form; his embracing of Jewishness is not a discovery of what he already is but a means of escaping it. It is not so much that "Daniel's sympathy... is a function of his displaced social position," but that sympathy with Gwendolen and his mother, if he had any, would bring home to him the truth of his chosen identity both in his

On Gwendolen see Litvak, Caught in the Act, 182 and passim. On the "vulgar" Jewish context for the Princess and her narrative, see Carol Ockman, "When Is a Star Just a Star?" in Jew in the Text, ed. Nochlin and Garb, 121-39. For instance, Ockman writes that the theater, "hardly an elevated calling in the nineteenth century was a logical profession for those consigned by class or race to the lower echelons of society." (123)

45. Cvetkovich, Mixed Feelings, 153.

43. Rachel Brownstein speculates that Rahel Levin Varnhagen, introduced to George Eliot by Lewes, may have suggested to the author some ideas about Rachel: like the actress, Rahel "had espoused assimilation," and "had also believed that because she represented nothing intrinsically, she was free to stand for anything." In the idea of representing "nothing intrinsically," she would have been a far cry from the Dressian aesthetics Brownstein, Rachel: Rachel of the Comédie-Française (New York: Knopf, 1993).

44. Creel's, Mind Pettige, 111.
Concluding to the Fact

social displacement, the asserted nonidentity of the Jews) and deniers (as Eliot's attempt to reverse the image of Jewish degradation in Deronda's proud acceptance of his Jewish identity). Finally, Deronda chooses the alternatives between Gwendolen and his own mother by abandoning her. Having apparently transcended his anger, he paradoxically repay the women whose powerful alterity have wounded him by finding his identity in a religion and a nation in which women have no such power. For Deronda, asserting—better, asserting identity means affording the exclusory perspective on which definitions of identity depend.

And yet Deronda's spectatorship is a form of violence linked textually not only to Gwendolen's own "intentionless" violence against Grandcourt but also to the characteristic intentionlessness of sympathy and of his own sympathetic narrative. As if in bitter acknowledgment of the paralysis by which his early sympathy is defined, as well as by similarities to the woman who desperately requires his help, Deronda's confession of his inability to save Gwendolen is significantly echoed by—and significantly amplified—her confession of her failure to save Grandcourt. The parallel suggests at least one way in which the novel's two plots, often regarded as satisfactorily related, intertwine.

On two occasions, Deronda's guilt about his inability to help Gwendolen takes shape as an image of him standing by while she drowning. After the talk hint of her displacement of and guilt over Lydia Glasher, "She broke off, and with agitated lips looked at Deronda. The expression on his face pierced her with an entirely new feeling. He was under the baffling difficulty of discerning, that what he had been urging on her was thrown into the pallid distance of mere thought before the outburst of her habitual emotion. It was as if he saw her drowning while his limbs were bound." (509). In Deronda's view, the failure is not his but hers. Gwendolen's "drowning" seems from her inability to move beyond her own "habitual emotion." And in the scene before Grandcourt's death, when she urgently press upon Deronda her desire to be what he would like and he responds to her crisis with a profession of his uselessness, Deronda assigns responsibility for his inability to help her to the grander realm of language's inadequacy: "Words seemed to have no more rescue in them than if he beheld a vessel in peril of wreck—the poor ship with its many-lived anguish beaten by the inescapable storm." (672-73).
The literalization of these metaphors in Grandcourt's death gives meaning to them, not least by putting Gwendolen and Deronda figuratively in the same position. To stand by and watch someone drown, these parallels suggest, is to see one's wish outside oneself: to achieve one's desires without explicitly acting on them. "We cannot kill and not kill in the same moment" (72), writes Eliot early in the novel, attempting to distinguish between the multiple valences of feeling and the necessary decisiveness of action. But her novel proves her wrong. Standing by while someone drowns is an apt image for the action-in-inaction that defines both (Gwendolen's) mendacity implicit and (Deronda's) sympathy, watching someone drown is an image of a necessary abandonment of responsibility, of obligatory inaction rather than clearly defined refusal. The scene captures the ambiguity of Deronda's willed-unwilled identity formation, and of the disidentification his identification requires: it externalizes the emotional force of his rejection of Gwendolen and his response to his mother. As a spectator of Gwendolen's suffering—able to hear her confessions but not to save her—Deronda, like Gwendolen, remains suspended between violence and its absence even as Gwendolen does in relation to Grandcourt.46

If Deronda demonstrates less of his well-advertised ability to project himself into others' situations in his encounters with Gwendolen and his mother, with Mordecai and Mirah he needs no such ability but rather seems to experience an unwilled dissolution of self. Communication between Deronda and Mordecai transcends language and intention: "The more exquisite quality of Deronda's nature—that keenly perceptive sym pathetic emotiveness which ran along with his speculative tendency—was never more thoroughly tried. He felt nothing that could be called belief in the validity of Mordecai's impressions concerning him or in the probability, if any, of any effective issue what he felt was a profound sensibility to a cry from the depths of another soul" (553). Deronda's encounters with

46 The image of standing by watching someone drown also suggests the more generalized, cultural guilt implied by the novels references to the Inquisition. Killing and not killing simultaneously, that is, might be taken as a description of historical guilt about the English response to the expulsion of the Jews—guilt Daniel's representation exists partly to assuage. "The prelude to Daniel's acceptance of his inheritance as a Jew," Ragiusss writes, "comes with a return to what I have contended is for Victorian England the critical moment of Jewish history." Figures of Conversion, 281.
Mirah and Mordecai have none of the sense of failed sympathy that characterizes the scenes with Gwendolen and the Princess; rather, they demonstrate the power of the intuitive, the nonverbal, the unspoken but commonly held sentiment. This is the fantasy of shared sensibilities that constitutes “national feeling,” a fantasy whose capacity to turn disillusion into a conviction of shared genuinely Elton suggests when he writes of Deronda’s increasing sense of commitment to Mordecai as language that transforms, again through the use of visual metaphor, the idea of genealogical descent—“the lines of what may be called their emotional history reached” (683). [Reprinted from Gwendolen’s narrative, renounced interpretation of Deronda’s grasp, Mordecai is represented as a more accurate reader of the “sympathetic hand” than its owner: “The sympathetic hand still upon him had fortified the feeling which was stronger than those words of denial” (558).]

The narrative of Deronda’s discovery thus provides the justification, in sentimental, sympathetic, and romantic terms, for an identity politics that enables him to consent to what, it happily turns out, he already is. It subordinates his identity as self-inventing liberal subject, a figure whose ability “to discover purpose in apparently random details offers strongest proof of the subject’s autonomy” (557). For it transforms what he imagines Sir Hugo describing as a common “fanaticism,” and a somewhat less common “monomania” (568), into a series of “plainly discernible links”: “If I had not found Mirah, it is probable that I should not have begun to be specially interested in the Jews, and certainly I should not have gone on that loitering search after an Ezra Cohen” (573).

But the very “plainness” of the links betrays the identity-narrative’s self-serving quality: at its end, nothing that does not fit, like the “vulgar” Jews encountered along the way, remains. The sympathetic impulse, for Deronda, a necessarily narrative one, and its role of natural sympathy collapses the difference between finding an identity and choosing one. “And, if ever like, he was romantic. That young urge and spirit of adventure which have helped to create the world-wide legends of youthful heroes going to seek the hidden tokens of their birth and inheritance...
of tasks, gave him a certain quivering interest in the bare possibility that he was entering on a like track—all the more because the track was one of thought as well as action” (574).

What Deronda discovers when he discovers his origins is the ratification of his feeling by fact, and what he does when he discovers the fact is to ratify it with his feeling: the nature of his identity, in a manner historically characteristic of Jewish identity, remains intimately tied to the issue of acceptance or rejection. Like his mother in being a Jew, he chooses to differ from her by consenting where she has refused. In fact, in choosing Jewish identity he replaces Judaism’s matrilineal principle with a patriarchal and spiritual line of descent, embodying his grandfather’s wish rather than his mother’s. Replacing family with nationalist ideology, the novel replaces what it represents as an accident of birth and the emotional failure of family with what it construes as a more determined, determining structural bond; it gives Deronda a phantom, idealized family to compensate for the emotional failure of family. Accordingly to George Elliot, you can choose your relatives—or at least you can choose among them. The Princess highlights the invented nature of her son’s identity when she disrupts his sense that “Deronda” is, as he puts it, his “real name.” If, as Hobsbawm suggests, Zionism provides an “anomalous” example of the constructed or artificial nature of national identity, Deronda’s narrative of discovery does the same.48

What is revealed here is the capaciousness—the universal availability for projection—of the term “sympathy” in this novel. Deronda’s affectlessness passes for sympathy until something more like the real thing comes along; it constitutes a blank the discovery of his Jewishness—his “real” identity—will fill. Sympathy is, as Deronda is the name for an attenuation of self described both as a virtue—the result of travel and a Cambridge education—and as a malaise for which a dose of strong feeling provides the cure. It attaches identity to narrative and ties passionate feeling to specific cul-

48 Ironically, Daniel himself suggests that Mirah change her name from Cohen to pursue her singing career: “We could choose some other name, however—such as singers or—such as an Italian or Spanish name, which would suit your physique” (525).
Conceiving to the Fact

natural ideals, embodied in an idealized self, chosen to counter the degraded image Derrida has always associated fearfully with his birth; like a divining rod, strong feeling provides identity’s clues. And until this feeling arrives, bourgeois subjectivity—as in Derrida’s attempts to sympathize with Gwendolen—just a job, and an onerous one at that. But as in any attempt to resolve contradiction by division—here, the novel splits between “good” Jews and “bad”—such half remains traces of the other. Derrida’s idealized “good” Jews reflect the pressure of feelings and qualities rigorously excluded. While the split between “good” and “bad” Jews has lately provided evidence for charges of antisemitism in Daniel Deronda, the division is familiar enough in discussions of transgression, in which extremes of high and low, or nobility and degradation, offer an image of resolution for unresolved social conflicts. Deronda’s response to the novel’s “vulgar” Jews suggests the threat the unassimilated Jew represents for the assimilated one: as if granted a kind of magical, sympathetic power—the law of rebus—to give the other away. But in the ideal bourgeois subject, Derrida doesn’t have to sympathize with the Jews because his sympathy has become a function of his identity: simply put, he “is” one. Yet of course he is not. The character “Daniel Deronda” thus represents both the identity and the impossibility of Eliot’s liberal ideal. For, as I have suggested, the function of “race” (or “discrimination”) in the novel is to offset the difference Jews supposedly render, the function of biology or heredity is a finality its own. Making Deronda born but not raised a Jew, rendering his Jewishness invisible, Eliot strategically solves the problem of sympathy with the transgressive other by eradicating otherwise from the start. Derrida’s embodied sympathy with the Jews is a seamless boundary crossing, the transgressive transgression, that the fact of his birth represents. For the mechanics of birth effectively exhibit Derrida’s Jewishness astraceable, not his fault. At the same time, as the English gentleman who bears no visible traces of Jewish identity, he exemplifies Eliot’s high-culture ideal. For Eliot’s ideal bourgeois subject is significantly not the Jew who is generally

discernible as one, who has no choice; he is instead the gentleman who chooses to identify as a Jew ("I will call myself a Jew" [792]), the one for whom otherwise is happily assimilated through the desire and freedom the "passports" of culture and education make available. When, early in the novel, Eliot iterates her readers' emotion as "the most memorable of boys" the figure whom, they will later discover, is of Jewish descent, the encouragement to envision in her novel's most significant use of sympathy—its power—in ability to reach across Victorian England's iron chasuble of barriers—an image with which, as self-projection, they, and she, are already in sympathy. From the novel's beginning, the idea of cultural affinity serves to ward off the specter of difference.) As the Jew who is just the same as if he were not, Deronda expresses the assimilationist nature of Eliot's liberal representation her fantasy of sympathy with the Jews.

The cure for the difficulties attendant upon xenodermic sympathy—sympathy that makes you lose your identity, in which you discover that you resemble those you don't wish to resemble—thus turns out to be identity-sympathy: sympathy that enables you to choose your identity to identify with those who match your image of your best self. It is for this reason that sympathy in the novel takes shape as a fantasy of likeness: an identity politics in which differences between individuals are flattened out in favor of a reassuring fantasy of similitude. Wonderfully realized in twin images of Cohens, one degraded and one refined, Eliot's split representation of Jews amplifies the work done by Deronda's sympathy. As an embodiment of sympathy with the Jews, Deronda incorporates the degraded origin he has always feared, while the discovery of Mirah's "refined" brother Mordecai and the transformative work of Deronda's sympathy allows him to say "never mind" to it: he may simultaneously claim and distance himself from that origin. In this way, Deronda's family drama enacts in microcosm the general European anxiety about Jewish "contagion." Here again is the image: "he saw himself guided by some..." 

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50 As Christina Crosby writes, "To say 'I am a Jew' is significant not as a matter of personal identity, but as an acknowledgment of the law and of mankind's necessary corporate existence" (Ends of History, 20). 51 On the connection between the Jew and the city, see Gilman, Few's Body; on the connection between the city and ideas of contagion and contamination, see Stallybrass and White, Politics and Poetics of Transgression, 13$.
offical scout into a dingy sector; he crept through a dim doorway, and
saw a hawk-eyed woman, rough-headed, and unshaved, chaperoning a
hungry girl's last bit of fancy; or in some quarter only the more hideous
for being smarter, he found himself under the breath of a young Jew talk-
ary and familiar... and so on." Describing the search for Mirah's family,
Daniel cannot help but put himself in the picture. Mediated through the
blended image of cultural degradation and elevation signified by the
name "Jew" (and embodied in the figure of Mordecai), Deronda's sympa-
thy is the construction of his identity through a gradual process of
refinement, enabling a phantasmatic exchange of one aspect of identity
for another: good Jews for bad, that Cohen for the one.

And once this exchange has been completed, the novel's "bad" Jews dis-
appear—demonstrating that the energies that sustained their representation
was less due to antipathy than of the exercise of wittibility as a faculty,
a necessary part of the identity-shaping process I have described. For in
Daniel Deronda, as in any identity politics, identity means knowing whom
to sympathize with. Having served their function in the construction of
the hero's identity, Daniel Deronda's less-than-perfect Jews vanish into the
fictional universe whence they came.