George Eliot’s expressed interest in the Pre-Raphaelites dates since the early years of the Brotherhood, in 1851, when she visited the Royal Academy Exhibition. In 1852, as we have seen, she wrote to John Chapman that she was envious of an article appearing in the *British Quarterly* in praise of the Pre-Raphaelites (Haight 1968, 107). In 1854 she reviewed John Ruskin’s *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* in the *Leader*. The fourth of these lectures, according to Eliot, expressed Ruskin’s “latest ‘mission’ . . . the interpretation of the Pre-Raphaelite principles” and exalted the Pre-Raphaelites for their naturalistic and realistic details in their paintings (545). By 1856, she had internalized the Pre-Raphaelites’ perspective on landscapes, as she records in her Ilfracombe journal: “I have talked of the Ilfracombe lanes without describing them, for to describe them one ought to know the names of all the lovely wild flowers that cluster on their banks. Almost every yard of these banks is a ‘Hunt’ picture—a delicious crowding of mosses and delicate trefoil, and wild strawberries, and ferns great and small” (Harris and Johnston 272).

The various Pre-Raphaelite paintings Eliot used to guide her own portrayals of her fictive characters, especially in her work from 1856 to 1871, are briefly documented in recent scholarship. Joseph Nicholes, for instance, identifies John Everett Millais’s *Mariana* with images of Dorothea in *Middlemarch*; Andrew Leng notes the transformation of *The Awakening Conscience* in *Middlemarch*. Several other scholars have briefly noted the Pre-Raphaelite qualities in her novels. According to Gillian Beer, for example, Dorothea’s first portrait in *Middlemarch* is that of “a genuinely pre-Raphaelite Madonna” (102). Will’s thought of a “world apart, where the sunshine fell on tall white lilies,” is considered by Gordon Haight to be an allusion to Pre-Raphaelite poems and paintings.
Hugh Witemeyer traces the Pre-Raphaelite influence in Eliot’s novels more extensively, yet, like other critics, overlooks its presence in *Daniel Deronda*.

As Leonée Ormond has already remarked, George Eliot’s interest in the Pre-Raphaelites was both ongoing and developing: “George Eliot’s statements on the work of the Pre-Raphaelite group are entirely appropriate to the history of the movement. She began by writing of them as part of an exciting new trend, and by concentrating on the work of Hunt, arguably the member who most closely obeyed the rules of the brotherhood. Very shortly, however, she began to think of the painters separately, and to judge Pre-Raphaelite works on an individual basis. Her response to the work of Burne-Jones suggests that she had, at least by 1873, become less concerned with realism and more open to concepts of symbolism and mood creation” (2000, 313).

In this chapter I extend the scope of the Pre-Raphaelite presence in George Eliot’s fiction by demonstrating that her fascination with Pre-Raphaelite paintings continues in her last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, where images of Gwendolen may be perceived as narrative reconfigurations of paintings of women by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones. In addition, I also argue that the Pre-Raphaelites’ impact on Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* is significantly different from that on her earlier novels.

Part of this difference may be accounted for by the fact that Eliot met Edward Burne-Jones and Rossetti and became seriously interested in their work fairly late in her career. Indeed, it was only four years before beginning *Daniel Deronda* that Eliot first met Rossetti, when Burne-Jones brought him to the Priory in January 1870 (*Letters* 5:78). A mere four days after this meeting, she went to see Rossetti’s paintings, including *Pandora*, *Beatrice*, *Cassandra*, and *Mrs. Morris* (ibid.). The Jane Morris paintings were *Mariana* (1868–1870) and *La Pia dé Tolomei* (1868–1880) (Nicholes 104). Eventually, these paintings, which reflect Rossetti’s ongoing preoccupation with heroines from myth and literature, found their way into *Daniel Deronda*. Additionally, these paintings also represent a new direction in Rossetti’s art toward classical revival, espoused by other Pre-Raphaelites and most importantly by Burne-Jones. Eliot’s changed relation to Pre-Raphaelite art, then, may have resulted from her recent exposure to new individual paintings as well as to the group’s changing trends.

Indeed, Eliot’s shifting attitude and developing understanding of Pre-Raphaelite art is suggested by the renewed excitement she expressed toward Burne-Jones’s work, with which she had been familiar for a number of years through her frequent visits to his studio. Georgiana Burne-Jones records the intimate friendship that she and her husband enjoyed
Eliot's Pre-Raphaelite Gendered Imperialism

with Eliot, noting her husband's admiration for Eliot's work and for her intellectual power. Burne-Jones himself confirmed this admiration when he wrote in reference to her that "there is no one living better to talk to . . . for she speaks carefully, so that nothing has to be taken back or qualified in any way. Her knowledge is really deep, and her heart one of the most sympathetic to me I ever knew" (Georgiana Burne-Jones 2:4). In turn, Eliot lavishly expressed her appreciation of Burne-Jones's work on several occasions. However, after her 1873 visit to his studio (a year before she began to write Daniel Deronda) her enthusiasm toward him took a new turn. In a letter occasioned by that visit, she attempts to express the new understanding that she was forming toward his work:

It would be narrowness to suppose that an artist can only care for the impressions of those who know the methods of his art as well as feel its effects. Art works for all whom it can touch. And I want in gratitude to tell you that your work makes life larger and more beautiful to me—I mean that historical life of all the world in which our little personal share often seems a mere standing room from which we can look all round, and chiefly backward. Perhaps the work has a strain of special sadness in it—perhaps a deeper sense of the tremendous outer forces which urge us than of the inner impulse towards heroic struggle and achievement: but the sadness is so inwrought with pure elevating sensibility to all that is sweet and beautiful in the story of man and in the face of the earth, that it can no more be found fault with than the sadness of mid-day when Pan is touchy—like the rest of us.

I cannot help telling you a sign that my delight must have taken a little bit the same curve as yours. Looking, a propos of your picture, into Iphigenia in Aulis to read the chorus you know of, I found my blue pencil marks made seven years ago . . . against the dance-loving Kithara, and the footsteps of the Muses and the Nereids dancing on the shining sands. I was pleased to see that my mind had been touched in a dumb way by what has touched yours to fine utterance. (ibid. 2:31)

What occasioned this letter and sparked her enthusiasm is the quality of drama Eliot perceived in Burne-Jones's work. She considers his work classic enough to capture human drama in its most basic form and popular enough to speak to all human beings open to its effect, not just to technical experts. Eliot locates the particular appeal of Burne-Jones's art in his ability to position viewers in a vantage point from which it becomes possible to witness the larger forces of history colliding with individual struggles. From such a vantage point—which she associates with the "special sadness" of tragic knowledge—viewers "can look all
around, and chiefly backward,” gain “a deeper sense of the tremendous outer forces,” and presumably reach an understanding as to why a particular conflict ended up in disaster, as well as what one could have done to avoid being crushed by the larger forces of history. The relation between great drama and historical understanding that Eliot assigns to Burne-Jones’s work is also hinted at by her reference to *Iphigenia in Aulis*, her use of his “picture” as an angle to read this drama, and her discovery that this dramatic work has deeply touched them both. All this leads us to presume that Eliot sees Burne-Jones following in the footsteps of the great dramatist Euripides. Perhaps she considers both to be creating the kind of drama that exposes their subjects’ illusions and, in the process, paves the way for an audience to gain the historical understanding that their protagonists lacked. Perhaps she sees the tragedy of Agamemnon, humanized by the pen of Euripides, as a case of misreading history—a great king sacrificing his daughter under the illusion that political bonds in his society have a far greater significance than familial bonds.

If this reading of Eliot’s letter is tenable, then we may assume that Eliot emphasizes an understanding of Pre-Raphaelite art that extends her previous interest in forging a link between literature and painting in the direction of history. At this point she underscores the significant role historical knowledge plays in dramatic representations whether literary or visual. Evidently she regards as great those artists who depict human conflicts in ways that expose the control of mythical and magical forces on their subjects’ imagination, thereby clearing the way for people to understand how their own “inner impulses” can be aligned in congruence with the “outer forces” of history. Indeed, as I argue, Edward Burne-Jones represents some of the key concepts that Eliot develops in her last novel; specifically, his painting *The Wheel of Fortune* (1875–1883) (plate 10) is the locus of the Pre-Raphaelite effect on *Daniel Deronda*. I also contend that, more than Burne-Jones, Eliot is interested in the potential that historical understanding carries as a social corrective. Her mild criticism of his work as having “a strain of special sadness in it,” because it places a greater weight “on the tremendous outer forces” than on “the inner impulse toward heroic struggle,” is telling of her own view that historical understanding need not necessarily lead to tragic knowledge. Her own preference, she implies, is to approach historical understanding as a corrective to societal illusions and as a resource for averting tragedy. Her disagreement with Burne-Jones, then, is over the question of human agency. As we will see, she prefers to depict “the inner impulse toward heroic struggle and accomplishment” as having the potential to materialize, provided people are guided by historical self-understanding.

To be sure, this new role the Pre-Raphaelites play in her fiction does
not represent a complete break from their earlier one. As with her previous novels, so with *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot looks to Pre-Raphaelite painting techniques as sources for her narrative strategies and to their subjects as inspiration for her literary portraits. What is new about this stage in her writing is the level of complexity she introduces to her already successful ways of merging literature and painting. Furthermore, that complexity, as the narrator of *Daniel Deronda* indicates, is inevitable when history is added to the amalgamation. Indeed, the connection between storytelling and portrait painting is vividly illustrated in the novel when the narrator, having drawn a splendid image of Gwendolen in her archery dress, comments on that image as appropriate subject matter for a great painter.

Casting images of fictive characters as possible portraits by famous painters is, by the time of *Daniel Deronda*, a commonplace gesture in the novels of the period. What is atypical in this case is the narrator’s invocation of history as a necessary constituent of the link between storytelling and painting: “[I]t was the fashion to dance in the archery dress, throwing off the jacket; and the simplicity of her white cashmere with its border of pale green set off her form to the utmost. A thin line of gold round her neck, and the gold star on her breast were her only ornaments. Her smooth soft hair piled up into a grand crown made a clear line about her brow. Sir Joshua would have been glad to take her portrait; and he would have had an easier task than the historian at least in this, that he would not have had to represent the truth in change—only to give stability to one beautiful moment.”

Why does the narrator, who invites readers to imagine the image of Gwendolen they have just read next to a painter’s portrait of Gwendolen, feel compelled to address a historian’s handling of this same image? Clearly the narrator thinks that a painter alone cannot do justice to what the narrative has been conveying about Gwendolen and that the two of them, painter and historian, must put their quite different talents together if they are to capture the kind of storytelling the narrator is aiming at.

As the narrator indicates, capturing the image of Gwendolen and of the artistic ends assigned to that image by the narrative would also require the talents of a historian and the much more difficult task of representing “the truth in change”—one of the major achievements of Pre-Raphaelite art. In other words, it would take a historical sensibility to show how this particular image has been aligned vis-à-vis the “outer forces” of history at that particular moment, given that the ever-shifting rhythm of history subjects such an alignment to the changes of time. In obvious tension with the stability that a traditional painter would give to Gwendolen’s image, then, the narrator is also calling for a representation of the true value of that image, a truth that can be understood only as
fleeting, time bound as well as context bound, a “truth in change.” In Eliot’s view it is one thing to have a Pre-Raphaelite painter capture Gwendolen’s beauty at that moment, a beauty that radiates the confidence of a winner-to-be and the assurance of a beautiful woman about to make the two conquests she prizes the most—the championship of the archery contest and the heart of Grandcourt. It is quite another to contextualize Gwendolen’s beauty as the only resource available to her in a world that valorizes women on that basis alone or to align Gwendolen’s “inner impulse” for power with the “outer forces” of history that are compelling people in her world to grow and prosper at the expense of one another. Only a painter with an eye for history could contextualize Gwendolen’s beauty in such a way as to position viewers in a vantage point from which they could see that the same illusions (and misreadings of history) that sustain their own society’s struggles for power and prosperity along the lines of imperial conquest also support Gwendolen’s struggle for power and conquest. In a word, it would take Burne-Jones, not Sir Joshua, to capture Gwendolen’s beauty and to present this image as “truth in change.”

Joining Rossetti and Burne-Jones in their turn toward classical revival, Eliot depicts her protagonist’s thirst for power along the lines of legendary and literary heroines who provided classic examples of women obsessed with power. At the same time, she seeks to contextualize the representations of her heroine by casting Gwendolen’s thirst for power as the inevitable outcome of the forces controlling the world she lives in. As a result, Eliot’s aesthetic representations of women become socially pertinent to the readers of her novel who, at a time of an expanding British Empire, may reach an understanding of women as colonized others. Drawing on the aesthetic strength of Rossetti and the dramaturgic energy of Burne-Jones, Eliot transforms stereotypes of women into people who are shaped by the historical necessity that propels the underprivileged and unauthorized to acquire and wield power.

Eliot’s Narrative Theory and the Pre-Raphaelite Germ

Before examining Eliot’s representations of women, it is worthwhile noting that Eliot’s emphasis on a socially oriented aesthetic in her representations of characters in her last novel has been partly shaped by her ongoing and shifting relation to Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics. As I have already suggested, the Pre-Raphaelites’ impact on her work does not really lend itself to a clear-cut division between an early and a late one. The developing nature of a Pre-Raphaelite effect on her narrative theory
becomes most apparent in her steady efforts to build her narrative techniques around the Pre-Raphaelite notion of “the germ.” One of the most notable aspects of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, “the germ,” captured their commitment to an art that would seek above all else to convey the expression of intense emotions. As we have already seen, the short-lived, Pre-Raphaelite publication, *The Germ* (a title chosen out of sixty-five proposed names), originally subtitled *Thoughts Towards Nature in Poetry, Literature and Art* (only to be renamed *Art and Poetry, Being Thoughts Towards Nature, Conducted Principally by Artists*), extended the relevance of the germ to other arts, such as poetry and narrative fiction, in addition to painting. In effect, this publication promulgated a way of attaining the intersection between literature and painting through its focus on the representation of intense emotions. While Eliot seems to be more interested initially in developing the Pre-Raphaelite notion of the germ into an aesthetic theory of narration, she gradually extended her understanding of the germ and developed it into an aesthetic that integrated narrative technique with historical understanding and social critique.

Scattered throughout her letters and essays, a number of statements appear on Eliot’s understanding of the germ, some of which relate it directly to the Pre-Raphaelite publication, *Germ*. As with the Pre-Raphaelites, so with Eliot, the germ signified a locus of powerful emotions, an intense feeling originating in the artist’s encounter with the world and in turn shaping the artist’s work. Her early essay “Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar” (1855) connects the germ to the origins of a given work and defines this origin in terms of a “prevision” to the rest. An opera, she remarks, should not be “a mosaic, of melodies stuck together” but an “organic whole, which grows like a palm, its earliest portion containing the germ and prevision of all the rest” (102). Like the Pre-Raphaelites, she construes the germ in terms not only of the feeling that inspires the composition of a work but also of the emotion a work produces in the reader: “What one’s soul thirsts for is the word which is the reflection of one’s aim and delight in writing—the word which shows that what one meant has been perfectly seized, that the emotion which stirred one in writing is repeated in the mind of the reader” (*Letters* 5:374). In her essay “Notes on Form in Art,” she suggests that the most effective way of expressing these powerful emotions is by means of visual rather than verbal terms, that is, through an image: “Poetry begins when passion weds thought by finding expression in an image” (*Essays* 435). To experience the feeling that “stirred her in writing,” a reader would have to witness the germ of inspiration, note the image that functioned as the origin or visual “preview” of the entire novel, and follow this condensed version of an intense emotion as it unfolds fully throughout the novel.
Throughout her career, Eliot adjusted her notion of the germ by making it pertain to the effect an artist sought to produce in the audience. Thus, in her “Notes on Form in Art,” she points out that “the choice and sequence of images . . . are more or less not determined by emotion but intended to express it” (*Essays* 434–35). This audience-oriented conception of the germ might have preoccupied her as early as 1855, when she described the germ in her “Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar” essay in dramatic rather than static terms, embodying a collision of oppositional forces. Putting herself in the position of an audience, she witnessed in Wagner's operas “a gradual unfolding and elaboration of that fundamental contrast of emotions, that collision of forces, which is the germ of the tragedy; just as the leaf of the plant is successively elaborated into branching stem and compact bud and radiant corolla” (*Essays* 104). Years later, in her “Notes on the Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy in General,” she explicitly comments on the types of collisions embodied in the artistic germ of *The Spanish Gypsy*, mentioning oppositions such as “an adjustment of our individual needs to the dire necessities of our lot” and the “irreparable collision between the individual and the general” (Cross 31–32 n. 4.). In this respect Eliot suggests a conception of the germ already advanced by the Pre-Raphaelites, whose paintings focus on moral and psychological collisions, as in Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella* and *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* and Millais's *Huguenot* and *The Order of Release*, to mention but a few.

Eliot’s habit of discussing the genesis of her novels in her letters and journals provides a challenge for scholars to identify the germ of each of her novels in terms of a key image and to explore how this image unfolds through the narrative to encompass the entire novel. Two letters she wrote, one to John Blackwood and the other to Mrs. Cross in 1872 (four years before the publication of *Daniel Deronda*), recount an incident she witnessed as well as its profound effect on her. While in Homburg, she writes, she had come across a gambling establishment and had seen a young woman gambling amid a crowd of elderly people. Eliot was especially struck with the young woman’s face—that “young, fresh face among the hags and brutally stupid men around her” (*Letters* 5:314). The frequent occurrences of this scene and its transformations throughout the novel make the incident in Homburg a likely candidate for the artistic germ of *Daniel Deronda*. Prior to the writing of *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot’s favorite procedure had been to record moments of her artistic inspiration by infusing ordinary phenomena of everyday life with the extraordinary emotions they generated in the heart of an astute, passionate observer.

The incident in Homburg, with its focus on an ordinary face in the crowd, along with the accompanying powerful emotions it generated in
her, seems to follow Eliot’s characteristic procedure. But there is something new here. Far from assuming the position of a detached observer, Eliot describes this incident by situating herself in the double position of an observer and a social critic. At once describing and denouncing what she sees, she characterizes the participants as “completely in the grasp of this mean, money-making demon.” Perhaps aware that she is departing from her customary habit of observing rather than judging, she remarks, “I am not fond of denouncing my fellow-sinners, but gambling being a vice I have no mind to, it stirs my disgust even more than my pity. The sight of the dull faces bending round the gambling tables, the raking-up of the money, and the flinging of the coins towards the winners by the hard-faced croupiers . . . all this seems to me the most abject presentation of mortals. Burglary is heroic compared with it” (Letters 5:312). Already in its inception, the artistic germ of Daniel Deronda assumes the burden of delivering a social critique.

Gwendolen: The Goddess of Luck

Indeed Gwendolen’s youthful face concentrating on the movements of the spinning roulette at the onset of the novel seems but an isomorphic transformation of the young woman at Homburg. Transported into the novel, the event Eliot recorded in Germany turns into a timeless story of gains and losses. The timelessness of the theme is ensured by the overtones of luck and superstition that, as critics have noted, dominate the gambling scene. Like Fortune’s wheel, the spinning roulette blindly distributes gains and losses to the participants. Indeed, the roulette on which Gwendolen’s fortune depends seems to be but a transformation of Fortune’s wheel, magnificently represented in Burne-Jones’s Wheel of Fortune, a painting whose meaning, as we shall see, becomes the center on which the entire novel pivots.

Certainly, the gambling scene offers us a look at a world controlled by chance and happenstance, a world whose participants have surrendered their agency to the fortuitous turns of events. The narrator is quick to point out what happens when contingency becomes the governing law of human affairs: “[S]uch a drama takes no long while to play out: development and catastrophe can often be measured by nothing clumsier than the moment-hand” (6). Nevertheless, the participants in that drama are resigned to see themselves as pawns of a higher power, a power whose transformative magic can instantaneously give them a self-understanding unlike anything they had ever possessed. Indeed, it takes no time at all before Gwendolen begins to see herself as a woman commanding
supremacy and deserving worship: “She had begun to believe in her luck, others had begun to believe in it: she had visions of being followed by a cortege who would worship her as a goddess of luck and watch her play as a directing augury. Such things had been known of male gamblers; why should not a woman have a like supremacy?” (ibid.). Thus at the very beginning Gwendolen identifies with the goddess of luck whom Burne-Jones represented in his *Wheel of Fortune* as an “implacable goddess against the helpless mortal figures” (Wildman and Christian 52).

Burne-Jones took years to complete *The Wheel of Fortune* (1875–1883). It is quite possible that Eliot had seen early sketches of the painting or the eponymous watercolor painted in 1871 since she became acquainted with Georgiana and Edward Burne-Jones in February of 1868. Indeed Edward Burne-Jones’s words about the painting capture Eliot’s sentiment expressed in her last novel: “My Fortune’s Wheel is a true image, and we take our turn at it, and are broken upon it” (Fitzgerald 245). The figures of the slave at the top, the king in the center, and the poet below, all strapped to Fortune’s wheel, which she turns, oblivious and indifferent to their predicament, look vulnerable and helpless next to the powerful but blind goddess. The 1871 watercolor of the same title with the figure of Fortune blindfolded and placed within the wheel on which the figures of the slave, king, and poet are attached, represents Fortune herself as powerless as her victims. In another pencil drawing, “Study for ‘The Wheel of Fortune,’” (1872) Fortune is depicted with her eyes closed. “The artist here considers the equal potency of revealing the figure’s full profile, echoing the idealized beauty of her male victims, while rendering the sense of implacability by showing her with closed eyes” (Wildman and Christian 155). During her friendship with Edward Burne-Jones, Eliot visited his studio on numerous occasions between 1869 and 1876 (the publication of *Daniel Deronda*) when she would have seen the studies for *The Wheel of Fortune*, including the watercolor and the aforementioned study (*Letters* 5:246, 9:148).

No doubt Eliot would have most likely agreed with John Ruskin’s interpretation of *The Wheel of Fortune* in his “Mythic Schools of Painting” (delivered in May 1883), in which he extolled the “gradual and irresistible motion of rise and fall,—the tide of Fortune, as distinguished from instant change or catastrophe, . . . of the connection of the fates of men with each other, the yielding and occupation of high place, the alternately appointed and inevitable humiliation” (*Works* 33:293). Like the British Empire, Gwendolen’s life is swept by the “irresistible motion of rise and fall,—the tide of Fortune.” When we first meet her, she carries herself like “an awful majesty” (66); in the hands of her tyrannical husband, however, she later becomes a “galley-slave” (595). Yet her indirect
involvement in her husband’s death, her consciously unconscious decision not to help him while he is drowning, annihilates his “empire of fear.” Though Burne-Jones’s painting depicts a deterministic universe, in her novel Eliot demonstrates that people also play a crucial role in shaping their own destiny.

In Eliot’s notebooks of *Daniel Deronda*, among several entries on history, a quotation by Herodotus encapsulates the cyclical nature of historical movements, the inevitable fall following the rise of people and empires: “If you know that you and those who rule you are but men, then I must first teach you this: men’s fortunes are on [a] wheel which in its turning suffers not the same man to prosper forever.” Even a cursory look at Herodotus’s *History* reveals concerns quite similar to those Eliot voices in her criticism of the expansion of the British Empire. Indeed Herodotus’s lengthy narratives documenting the rise and fall of tyrants convey a call to reflection: In their tyrannical conduct toward their allied city-states, the Athenians must keep in mind that, even though their empire continues to expand triumphantly, no tyranny can ever remain immune to the whimsical turns of fate. A contextual study of his history further reveals that, at a time when the consolidation of the democratic polis had already taken place, Herodotus’s work also addressed the need to refigure the self. Lengthy descriptions of Asiatic manners and customs seek to fulfill a purpose integral only to discourses designed to promote self-understanding: To know themselves as Greeks, the Athenians must learn about the barbarian others. In Burne-Jones’s *Wheel of Fortune*, then, Eliot found a contemporary image from classical, medieval, and Elizabethan ages that also captured a Victorian anxiety. In the spirit of Herodotus, Eliot traces through history the turns of Fortune’s wheel. Like Herodotus, she uses the turning of Fortune’s wheel to adjust the story she tells to the contemporary demands of political advocacy. In *Daniel Deronda* she exposes the implications for both the political and social spheres that decisions on the expansion of the British Empire entail.

On the day following the gambling incident of the opening scene, Fortune’s wheel turns once again for Gwendolen, who finds her family impoverished as a result of a national (possibly international) gamble, the speculations of Grapnell and Company, which her mother tries in vain to explain to the outraged Gwendolen: “No, dear, you don’t understand. There were great speculations: he meant to gain. It was all about mines and things of that sort. He risked too much” (199). Here then we see Gwendolen on the other side of the spectrum—the successful gambler losing to a bigger gamble. Yet we may also read Gwendolen’s confusion and desperation as symptomatic of a collective anxiety about the British economy. Though we cannot ascertain that Grapnell and Company spec-
ulated in colonial investments, we may assume that was the case, since, soon after Gwendolen hears about her family’s financial disaster, we are told that Gwendolen “had no notion how her maternal grandfather got the fortune inherited by his two daughters; but he had been a West Indian—which seemed to exclude further question” (17).

Thus Eliot’s redrawing of Burne-Jones’s *Wheel of Fortune* casts Gwendolen to the vicissitudes of fortune; her supremacy shatters as quickly as it is established. Throughout the novel Gwendolen desperately seize opportunities that may restore her supremacy. In the process she becomes entangled in the colonialist mentality, which defines supremacy through material acquisition and the subjugation of others. Through Gwendolen and Grandcourt, respective representatives of the middle class and aristocracy, Eliot undermines the prevalent idea of British supremacy, the right to rule over others, and underscores its attendant catastrophic results. Eliot suggests Gwendolen’s colonialist bent by briefly sketching it in her early life and later developing it in her perspective on marriage. At home with her mother and her sisters in her “domestic empire” (32), she is often “an awful majesty” (66). Described from the start as “an empress of luck,” Gwendolen drives herself by the “hunger of the inner self for supremacy” (43) and “the possibility of winning empire” (52). The impoverishment of her family (due to someone else’s gambling) forces her to see Grandcourt’s renewal of courtship as her chance to get “a sort of empire over her own life” (247). Thus her motive for marriage becomes money, the most basic, imperialist incentive. On that momentous occasion in her life, she is confident about her playing “at the game of life,” fully conscious that she is “daring everything to win much” (299). However, her early conviction that Grandcourt would not have “the slightest power over her” (89) is soon smashed as Gwendolen discovers herself a victim in “her husband’s empire of fear” (364).

In both Gwendolen and Grandcourt we witness emotional rather than territorial imperialism, an attempt to expand one’s sovereignty by subjugating others. Thus in his courtship of Gwendolen, Grandcourt anticipates “the pleasure in mastering reluctance” (269). Similarly, Lydia Glasher, the mother of his children, whom he forsakes for Gwendolen, represents “his delight in dominating” (289). In fact, Gwendolen becomes his colony, which he masters by “the force of his own words. If this white-handed man . . . had been sent to govern a difficult colony, he might have won reputation among his contemporaries. He had certainly ability, would have understood that it was safer to exterminate than to cajole superseded proprietors . . .” (507). Certainly Grandcourt becomes a spokesperson for British supremacy on more than one occasion in the novel. When, for instance, the conversation at a social gathering turns to...
the Jamaican governor's brutal handling of the native insurrection, Grandcourt contemptuously responds, “the Jamaican Negro was a beastly sort of baptist Caliban” (279).11 Ironically, before his drowning, for which Gwendolen is partly responsible in her unwillingness to rescue him, Grandcourt relishes “the courage and confidence that belong to domination, and he was feeling perfectly satisfied that he held his wife with bit and bridle” (582). Like Croesus, the protocolonialist made infamous by Herodotus throughout Greece for having counted his blessings too early, Grandcourt is the subject of a catastrophic fall from prosperity. Laden with the rhetorical thrust of an argument, the private narrative becomes the carrier of a public statement against imperialist ideology.

As the novel progresses, we become aware that Gwendolen’s gambling and the sense of supremacy it fuels is paradigmatic of the colonialist ideology dominating the mid-Victorian years (preceding the publication of Daniel Deronda). Thus the germ of the novel encompasses not just Gwendolen’s future but also the contemporary, sociopolitical scene. Several historians have seen that period as crucial to the history of British expansion overseas. Bernard Porter, for instance, argues that in the early 1870s the popular mood in Britain became “more enthusiastic towards the extension of the empire for its own sake” (63), and he goes on to reflect that “Britain’s expansion into the world in the 1860s and ’70s was only partly territorial and political. Mainly it was economic and cultural” (65). Arguments in favor of territorial and cultural expansion are voiced in the writings of Victorian intellectuals such as John Ruskin and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and notable politicians such as Benjamin Disraeli, whose works Eliot knew quite well. Invariably these writers extolled the grandeur, power, and supremacy of the empire and argued for its consolidation, preservation, and expansion. So much so, in fact, that the idea of the supremacy of the empire is the sentiment that fuels most of the arguments in that era. In his “Future of England” (1869), for instance, John Ruskin exhorts “the more adventurous and ambitious” of young Englishmen to found “new seats of authority, and centres of thought, in uncultivated and unconquered lands” (Works 18:514). Similarly, Tennyson in 1872 in the “Epilogue to the Queen,” which he added to the new edition of the Idylls of the King, praises the “ocean-empire with her boundless homes/for ever-broadening England, and her throne/In our vast Orient and one isle, one isle,/that knows not her own greatness” (1755).

Disraeli’s famous Crystal Palace speech of 1872 seems to crystallize the sentiments of the time regarding British supremacy. Attacking Gladstonian separatist foreign policy and asserting the necessity of the colonies, Disraeli connects the concepts of British supremacy and power:
In my opinion no minister in this country will do his duty who neglects an opportunity of reconstructing as much as possible our colonial empire, and of responding to those distant sympathies which may become the source of incalculable strength and happiness to this land. . . . The issue is not a mean one. It is whether you will be content to be a comfortable England modeled and molded upon continental principles and meeting in due course an inevitable fate, or whether you will be a great country, an imperial country, a country where your sons, when they rise, rise to paramount positions and obtain not merely the esteem of their countrymen, but command the respect of the world. (Monypenny and Buckle 2:535–36)

Thus Disraeli connected individual ambition and self-fulfillment with the expansion of the British Empire.

Perhaps the force of these arguments on the supremacy of the British Empire, its rise, and its glory led Eliot to record in her notebooks the history of other empires that once luxuriated in their supremacy. Entries in her notebooks range from notes on the fall of the Athenian, Babylonian, and Persian Empires to that of the Roman Empire and include the Arthurian legend (the story of national glory and its disintegration) and the French Revolution and its disastrous aftermath (Baker Notebooks 1:15–40). Instead of joining her contemporaries in celebrating the rise and supremacy of the British Empire, Eliot adumbrates its inevitable fall in her last novel.12

In effect, as the novel progresses, Eliot demonstrates that colonialists, like gamblers, are betting mindlessly on future gains, but if history is any lesson, they too will ultimately lose.

Eliot’s Reconfigurations of Legendary and Mythological Women

In Rossetti’s Pia dé Tolomei (1868–80) (plate 11) Eliot must have seen yet another deplorable change of fortune. In this painting we once again find the wheel of fortune, this time in miniature, painted in the background. The subject is from Dante’s Purgatorio (Canto v, lines 130–36) about the wife who, confined by her husband in the fortress of Maremma, pines away and dies of malaria (or perhaps poison). Rossetti inscribed these lines from Dante’s poem in the frame of his painting:

Remember me who am La Pia; me Siena, me Maremma, made, unmade. This in his inmost heart well knoweth he With whose fair jewel I was ringed and wed.
Plate 11. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *La Pia de’ Tolomei*, 1868–1881. Oil on canvas, 41 1/2 x 47 1/2 in (104.8 x 120.6 cm), Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas. Reproduced by permission.
Eliot captures all of the elements and qualities of Rossetti’s *Pia dé Tolomei* in her representation of Gwendolen at the opening of chapter 54, where we find her a pitiful prisoner, “a galley-slave” (595) in her husband’s yacht. Like Pia, who was incarcerated in a tower, Gwendolen finds herself a prisoner in her husband’s luxurious yacht, ironically surrounded by the vast space of the sea and the sky, associated with unrestrained freedom:

MADONNA PIA, whose husband, feeling himself injured by her, took her to his castle amid the swampy flats of the Maremma and got rid of her there, makes a pathetic figure in Dante’s Purgatory. . . . We know little about the grounds of mutual discontent between the Siennese couple, but we may infer with some confidence that the husband had never been a very delightful companion. . . . And thus, without any hardness to the poor Tuscan lady who had her deliverance long ago, one may feel warranted in thinking of her with a less sympathetic interest than of the better known Gwendolen who, instead of being delivered from her errors on earth and cleansed from their effect in purgatory, is at the very height of her entanglement in those fatal meshes which are woven within more closely than without. (572)

Wiesenfarth sees Gwendolen’s condition at this stage as the result of the arrival of the diamonds on Gwendolen’s wedding day, which, he believes, “signals the beginning of her moral renewal through intense remorse and emotional anguish. She becomes an image of Pia” (xxxvii). Pia’s predicament, then, seems to represent that of Gwendolen. Unlike Pia, however, Gwendolen is both a victim and a victimizer, in this respect a victim of her own choices. In marrying Grandcourt, she becomes not only his victim but also the victimizer of Lydia Glasher (Grandcourt’s mistress and mother of his children). Ultimately, Grandcourt becomes Gwendolen’s victim, for she hesitates, or perhaps refuses, to come to his rescue when he is drowning. George Eliot then by modifying Pia’s story implies that the roles of the victimizer and victim, superior and inferior, colonizer and colonized are easily reversible, for oppression breeds desperation, which in turn fuels abusive power.

Both Gwendolen and Lydia initially become victims of a patriarchal society that overlooks and implicitly condones a man’s criminal and victimizing conduct. But Lydia herself, after becoming Grandcourt’s and Gwendolen’s victim, exercises her power by enclosing a letter with the diamonds that Grandcourt had originally given her and later asks her to relinquish to Gwendolen: “I am the grave in which your chance of happiness is buried as well as mine. . . . He would have married me at last, if you had not broken your word. You will have your punishment. I desire it

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with all my soul” (363). Thus Lydia at this point relishes the prospect of retribution.

In this scene, as Gwendolen opens the box of diamonds, she resembles Rossetti’s Pandora (1869), a mythological figure conventionally seen as the victim of her own unrestrained drive for self-aggrandizement, heedless of the dire consequences. Eliot had seen a drawing of this painting during her first visit to Rossetti’s studio, as we have seen. A year later Rossetti refers to her viewing of this drawing in a letter in which he enclosed the sonnets on Mary Magdalene and Pandora, adding a note “in case they add anything to the drawings” (Letters 5:78). Rossetti’s ambivalence toward his portrayal of the well-known myth is disclosed in his choice of J. Lemprière’s classical dictionary, which he used for his mythological pictures: “The woman was Pandora which intimates that she had received every necessary gift” (cited by Faxon 189). By opening the box Pandora lets a cloud of mischief escape, yet the focal point in all of the drawings and later paintings is on the box containing Hope. In this painting Rossetti seems to blend Christian and pagan mythology, for the light around Pandora’s hair, along with her vulnerable and wistful gaze, casts her into a martyrlike figure rather than into the alleged mythical wrongdoer. Like the painting, which merges the dialectical opposites of the victimized Christian martyr and the victimizing pagan goddess, the questions raised, but not answered, in the sonnet Rossetti wrote for the painting at once destabilize the mythological meaning of the painting that incriminates Pandora and highlight conflicting qualities, thus underscoring the era’s contradictory attitudes toward women:

What of the end, Pandora? Was it thine,  
The deed that set these fiery pinions free?  
Ah! wherefore did the Olympian consistory  
In its own likeness make thee half divine?  
Was it that Juno’s brow might stand a sign  
For ever? and the mien of Pallas be,  
A deadly thing? and that all men might see  
In Venus’ eyes the gaze of Proserpine?

What of the end? These beat their wings at will,  
The ill-born things, the good things turned ill,—  
Powers of the impassioned hours prohibited.  
Aye, hug the casket now! Whither they go  
Thou mayst not dare to think: nor canst thou know  
If Hope still pent there be alive or dead.
As in the case of several of the sonnets Rossetti wrote to accompany his paintings, the woman represented in the painting, in this case Pandora, remains silent even in her verbal rendition. The reader of the sonnet has replaced the spectator who gazes at Pandora but knows nothing about her thoughts concealed behind her wistful gaze. Yet the series of questions invites the reader to see Pandora beyond the stereotypical constraints that cast her as the source of evil, prompted by her supposedly thoughtless feminine curiosity. Casting Pandora as the victim of absolute authority, “the Olympian consistory,” Rossetti revises a mythological representation of a human impulse into an individual woman trapped in an oppressive society that continues to exploit her victimization. Pandora, Rossetti implies, has been held responsible for an action whose consequences she could not have foreseen. In this respect Gwendolen seems but Pandora’s individual manifestation.

It is interesting to note the transformation of this painting a few years later, a painting of which Eliot might have seen a sketch or a preliminary drawing. In this later painting, Pandora (1874–1878) (plate 12), the central figure appears as stupendously androgynous, devoid of her earlier feminine traits. Her strong shoulders and muscular arms (concealed by a feminine robe in the earlier version), as well as her direct, transfixed, and defiant gaze, unlike that of the earlier Pandora, conveys no remorse; instead, “the drapery and cloud of ‘ill borne things’ twist and writhe with a life of their own. Menace and frenzied movement have replaced the lethargic gloom of the earlier version” (Grieve in Parris, The Pre-Raphaelites, 309). Yet like the earlier version, this painting also captures contradictory qualities. The focus of the picture seems to be not on impending disaster but on the box, which now bears the inscription VLTIMA [MANET] SPES (Hope remains at last).

As in Rossetti’s painting, in Eliot’s redrawing the subject’s gaze becomes the focus of the scene when Gwendolen, like Pandora, opens the box (“the casket”) of diamonds, and the potential gift turns into terror: “It seemed at first as if Gwendolen’s eyes were spell-bound in reading the horrible words of the letter over and over again as a doom for penance” (303). Lydia’s letter becomes the most ominous detriment: “But in opening the case, in the same instant that she saw their gleam she saw a letter lying above them. . . . It was as if an adder had lain on them” (302). Eventually, the words of Lydia’s letter generate more mischiefs, as they “nestled their venomous life within her” (363). Like Rossetti, who sees in Pandora’s eyes “the gaze of Proserpine,” Eliot associates Pandora with Proserpine. Likewise, Lydia’s letter becomes the “grave” in which Gwendolen’s chance of happiness is buried, and indeed her marriage to Grandcourt seems but a version of Proserpine’s marriage to Pluto. It is
Plate 12. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Pandora*, 1874–1878. Chalks, $38\frac{1}{2}$ x $25\frac{1}{2}$ in (97.8 x 64.8 cm), Merseyside County Council, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight. Reproduced by permission.
entirely possible that Eliot had seen Rossetti's *Proserpine* (1873–1877) (plate 13). In a letter to W. A. Turner, Rossetti describes the subject of this painting: “The figure represents Proserpine as an Empress of Hades. . . . She is represented in a gloomy corridor of his palace, with the fatal fruit in her hand. As she passes, a gleam strikes on the wall behind her from some inlet suddenly opened, and admitting for a moment the light of the upper world; and she glances furtively towards it, immersed in thought” (Sharp 236). On the frame of the painting, Rossetti inscribed the English version of the sonnet “Proserpina”:

\begin{quote}
Afar away the light that brings cold cheer  
Unto this wall,—one instant and no more  
Admitted at my distant palace-door.  
Afar the flowers of Enna from this drear,  
Dire fruit, which, tasted once, must thrall me here.  
Afar those skies from this Tartarean grey  
That chills me; and afar, how far away,  
The nights that shall be from the days that were.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Afar from mine own self I seem, and wing  
Strange ways in thought, and listen for a sign;  
And still some heart unto some soul doth pine,  
(Whose sounds mine inner sense is fain to bring,  
Continually together murmuring,)—  
"Woe’s me for thee, unhappy Proserpine!"
\end{quote}

Although Rossetti wrote his own sonnet to accompany his painting, Alicia Faxon conjectures that he may have been inspired by a poem on Proserpine by Audrey De Vere (which he refers to in a letter to Allingham) with the haunting refrain:

\begin{quote}
Must I languish here forever  
In this empire of Despair? (Faxon 191)
\end{quote}

Unlike most of Rossetti’s sonnets, which present the subject’s experience from the viewer’s perspective, this sonnet captures the subject’s own voice and poignantly expresses her sorrow. Perhaps Rossetti’s imaginative projection in Proserpine’s plight originated in his intense passion for his beloved Jane, whom he also saw as a captive of her marriage. In the process he transforms a mythological stereotype into a victimized person whose plight was overlooked by Ovid and those following the classical version of mythology.
Plate 13. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Proserpine, 1874. Oil on canvas, $49\frac{1}{4}$ x 24 in (126.4 x 61 cm), Tate Gallery. Reproduced by permission.
Believing in rendering the truth in change, Eliot does not represent Gwendolen as a modern Proserpine in a single moment; instead, she draws parallels between Gwendolen’s disastrous marriage and Proserpine’s ordeal. Throughout the novel Eliot seems to paint Gwendolen’s portrait as Proserpine brushstroke by brushstroke. This painting reaches its completion at the end of the novel. Once again Eliot uses a classical myth for its modern relevance and modifies it considerably in an attempt to show the cultural contradictions it represents. Though scattered throughout the novel, the affinities between Gwendolen and Proserpine seem unmistakable. Like Proserpine, Gwendolen sees herself as an empress. Her family’s impoverishment, for instance, forces Gwendolen to see Grandcourt’s renewed courtship as her only chance to get a “sort of empire over own her life” (247). Like Proserpine, who is forced by Pluto into an “empire of despair,” Gwendolen, through her marriage, begins to reside in an “empire of fear” (364), a “painted gilded prison,” (504); thus she is reduced to an “obvious prisoner, with her husband barring the door” (510). Occasionally Gwendolen’s prison, like Proserpine’s “Tartarean grey,” is illuminated: “Suddenly from out the grey sombre morning there came a stream of sunshine, wrapping her in warmth and light where she sat in stony stillness” (503). Remorse and regret for her wrongdoing often become moments of spiritual illumination in her poignant ordeal: “[T]he vision of her past wrong-doing, and what it had brought on her, came with a pale ghastly illumination over every imagined deed that was a rash effort at freedom, such as she had made in her marriage” (576). At this point, in the abyss of despair, Gwendolen seems to have reached the understanding Deronda had earlier suggested: “Take the present suffering as a painful letting in of light” (388).

As the novel reaches its close, we see the final brushstrokes of Gwendolen’s portrait as Proserpine. Soon after Grandcourt’s drowning, when her mother arrives, Gwendolen leaves Genoa, which she perceives as a dreadful place. “For what place, though it were the flowery vale of Enna, may not the inward sense turn into a circle of punishment where the flowers are no better than a crop of flame-tongues burning the soles of our feet?” (646). Like Rossetti’s Proserpine, who in her despair wistfully recalls the “flowers of Enna” (where she was abducted by Pluto while gathering them), Gwendolen is here also associated with the mythological site—“the flowery vale of Enna.” And like Proserpine, who is kept away from her mother, Gwendolen has also been kept at a distance. Yet in this positive turn of the myth, she is finally reunited with her beloved mother after Grandcourt’s death. At this point, Gwendolen sees herself responsible for his death, thus becoming the victimizer of her oppressor.

The narrative threads documenting the imperialist theme of rise and
fall, gain and loss, find thematic closure with Gwendolen’s realization that one’s gain is made possible only through someone else’s loss. Her marriage to Grandcourt, along with the social prestige and the economic affluence such marriage signifies, gives her the very thing it has taken away from Mrs. Glascher and her children. Furthermore, she admits to Deronda her collusion, bringing to mind the imperialist’s mission: “I have thrust out others—I have made my gain out of their loss—tried to make it—tried” (386). Long before her realization, Deronda had exposed the logic of Fortune’s wheel and the participants’ complicity with that logic. He remarks to Gwendolen, “there is something revolting to me in raking a heap of money together, and internally chuckling over it, when others are feeling the loss of it. . . . There are enough inevitable turns of fortune which force us to see that our gain is another’s loss:—that is one of the ugly aspects of life” (284, my emphasis). Deronda’s remarks express his critique of the materialist ideology propelling the British culture. By extension, Gwendolen’s ability to take up that critique as a springboard from which to read and understand her own past may very well constitute an indication of thematic closure. “I wronged some one else,” Gwendolen says in reference to her marriage, “I wanted to make my gain out of another’s loss—you remember?—it was like roulette—and the money burnt into me. And I could not complain. It was as if I had prayed that another should lose and I should win. And I had won” (593). Gwendolen’s epiphany connects her once again to the imperialist paradigm that Eliot expresses through her reconfiguration of Edward Burne-Jones’s Wheel of Fortune.

Yet Deronda’s destiny heralds a new logic that breaks the rise/fall, gain/loss binaries maintained by Gwendolen’s predicament. His ambiguous heritage represents a stance on the world by someone who is at once both an insider and an outsider. Deronda’s stance emerges all too clearly in his devotion to Hans Meyrick, whose inflamed eyes prevent him from having a chance at a scholarship he desperately needs. Likewise, Deronda’s readiness to give selflessly questions the logic of the gain and loss paradigm: “This crushing trouble called out all Deronda’s readiness to devote himself, and he made every other occupation secondary to that of being companion and eyes to Hans, working with him and for him at his classics, that if possible his chance of the classical scholarship might be saved” (154). When Meyrick gets the scholarship and Deronda does not, the gesture of giving marks a space in the novel that remains unaffected by and exceeds the paradigm of the turning wheel, whose logic has managed to control all else. Furthermore, in his expression of solidarity, Deronda criticizes British supremacy that fosters racism.
The novel’s attempt to criticize notions of self-supremacy as so many justifications for racism finds analogue in Eliot’s personal struggles to speak out in her other writings against the prevalent attitudes of the times. In writing “The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!” included in *Theophrastus Such* (published three years after *Daniel Deronda*), Eliot must have been aware of the public impact of advocates of colonial expansion such as Charles Dilke, whose popular *Greater Britain* praised British supremacy and defined progress in terms of the exploitation of “backward” and “inferior” races, thus justifying racism. Other notable intellectuals shared his opinion. Henry James, for instance, in his reviews of travelogues in exotic lands where England had imperialist interests, adopts the “white man’s burden” discourse popular at the time and endorses racism. In his review of Sir Samuel Baker’s *Ismailia: A Narrative of the Expedition to Central Africa for the Suppression of the Slave trade, Organized by Ismael, Khedive of Egypt*, James remarks that the native population “consists of naked and blood-thirsty savages, and the beautiful trees on the lawn-like slopes are very apt to have one of these gentry lurking behind them” (733). Even Herbert Spencer, Eliot’s intimate friend, who disapproved of imperialism as “the unscrupulous greed of conquest cloaked by the blessing of British rule and British religion” (1:217), nevertheless (in a work ironically titled *The Principles of Ethics*) endorses racist attitudes in comments like the “lesser development” of sympathy in “the Negro who jeers at a liberated companion because he has no master to take care of” (2:28).

Indeed the discourse in such works reveals what Edward Said maintains in *Culture and Imperialism*: “[N]either imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like ‘inferior’ or ‘subject races,’ ‘subordinate peoples,’ ‘dependency,’ ‘expansion,’ and ‘authority’ ” (1993, 9).

Accounts of African exploration in the 1860s by explorers like David Livingstone, Richard Burton, and Winwood Reade (of which Eliot was aware) are also permeated by similar “ideological formations.” Such accounts abounded in sensational stories of African barbarism, savagery, and evil. According to Livingstone, for instance, Africans are “inured to bloodshed and murder, and care for no god except being bewitched” (Jeal 146). For Richard Burton in *The Lake Regions of Central Africa* (1861),
the African is inferior to the active-minded and objective . . . European. . . . He partakes largely of the worst characteristics of the lower Oriental types—stagnation of mind, indolence of body, moral deficiency, superstition, and childish passion” (490). In the same vein, Winwood Reade in *Savage Africa* (1863) spins tales of African cannibalism (54, 136).

We have seen that the gambling scene includes aspects of rationality and magic, reason and superstition. Faithful to its origin and center, the novel develops the gambling scene around the binaries of superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery. Yet these binaries do not remain neatly distinct, for the novel progresses by transgressing and blurring distinct boundaries, blending and weaving together concepts ordinarily considered as separate and distinct. We have seen that an aura of superstition permeates the gambling events, giving the scenes an otherworldly atmosphere. This same impression often recurs. Throughout the novel, facets of a primitive world protrude, rupturing its civilized, polished surface. Thus we may not be unjustified in speaking about Eliot’s struggle to cope with otherness and to decode her discursive blending of binaries as her way of problematizing the self by means of the other. When we accept the terms “colonizing and colonized” and “civilized and savage” as natural designations of the real, the only thing left to do may be to break the oppositions and show how one expression partakes of its opposite. As David Spurr maintains, “members of a colonizing class will insist on their radical difference from the colonized as a way of legitimizing their own position in the colonial community.” Paradoxically, they will also insist “on the colonized people’s essential identity with them—both as preparation for the domestication of the colonized and as a moral and philosophical precondition for the civilizing mission” (7). It may very well be that Eliot is willing to grant the qualities attributed to the colonized barbarian so long as those same qualities are also ascribed to the colonizing self. Eliot’s way of coping with the colonized others may be to bring them home to England. In this respect Eliot seems to articulate the tendency of modern literature and science of locating “the savage within us, in our historical origins and in our psychic structure” (ibid.).

This conflation may explain why Gwendolen’s character from time to time displays aspects of the demonic. “Roulette was not a good setting for her,” says Deronda in response to Sir Hugo’s inquiry about her: “[I]t brought out something of the demon” (304). In addition, when unable to justify his attraction to her, Deronda resorts to a discourse of sense perception that confirms Gwendolen’s alliance with something otherworldly: “Strange and piteous to think what a centre of wretchedness a delicate piece of human flesh like that might be, wrapped around with fine raiment, her ears pierced for gems, her head held loftily, her mouth
all smiling pretence, the poor soul within her sitting in sick distaste of all things! But what do I know of her? There may be a demon in her to match the worst husband, for what I can tell” (354). At once a fine representative of the rising middle class and a demon, Gwendolen is the site of a double set of qualities that most of the novel goes to great pains to keep separate and opposite. She is at once a calculating person, looking out for her self-interest, seizing the opportune moment to gain an advantage, and a cannibal, “a Lamia beauty” (7), a sorceress who supposedly lives by sucking children’s blood. Thus Gwendolen’s representation reveals Eliot’s awareness of the impossibility of distinguishing the domestic space from the colonial realm, a concept articulated by recent theorists on the colonial discourse (Gikandi 60). Gwendolen’s thoughts, as she reminisces about her past, partake of her ascent to aristocracy (representative of civilization) and her entrance into the diabolic (representative of contemporary attitudes toward primitive tribes): “a lure through a long Satanic masquerade, which she had entered on with an intoxicated belief in its disguises, and had seen the end of in shrieking fear lest she herself had become one of the evil spirits who were dropping their human mummary and hissing around her with serpent tongues” (652).

Such passages reveal deep-seated convictions exposing the complicity of the self with attributes assigned exclusively to the other. This explains why Eliot elsewhere tells the history of the Anglo-Saxon Christian in terms of the invading savage who massacres natives in the name of progress:

The men who planted our nation were not Christians, though they began their work centuries after Christ; and they had a decided objection to Christianity when it was first proposed to them: they were not monotheists, and their religion was the reverse of spiritual. But since we have been fortunate enough to keep the island-home they won for us, and have been on the whole a prosperous people, rather continuing the plan of invading and spoiling other lands than being forced to beg for shelter in them, nobody has reproached us because our fathers thirteen hundred years ago worshipped Odin, massacred Britons, and were with difficulty persuaded to accept Christianity, knowing nothing of Hebrew history. . . . The red Indians, not liking us when we settled among them, might have been willing to fling such facts in our faces, but they were too ignorant, and besides their opinions did not signify, because we were able, if we liked, to exterminate them. The Hindoos also have doubtless had their rancour against us and still entertain enough ill-will to make unfavorable remarks on our character, especially as to our historic rapacity and arrogant notions of our own superiority . . . but though we are a small number of
an alien race profiting by the territory and produce of these prejudiced people, they are unable to turn us out; at least when they tried we showed them their mistake. (Theophrastus 263–64)\textsuperscript{15}

In this passage Eliot seems to disclose what Deidre David believes are “the rhetorical and ideological moves that displace the unquestionable link between empire building and commercial profit into political fictions of a barbarism waiting at the gates” (1995, 7). Responding to the binaries of superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, endorsed by contemporary explorers in future colonies, George Eliot, like Herodotus, blurs the boundaries between the civilized and the savage, shows how one designation partakes of its opposite, and underlines the need to understand the self through the other.

Evidently Eliot sees otherness as a critical domain from which to refigure the self. Like Herodotus, she seems convinced that the initial conflation of self with other is a prerequisite to critical self-understanding and a first step to the process of refiguring the self. Gwendolen, the gambler, must see the “mean, money-making demon” in herself before she can transcend the logic of rise and fall or before she can position herself outside the imperatives of gain and loss that circumscribe the boundaries of her existence. Fluctuating between seemingly distinct categories, victim and victimizer, good and evil, Eliot seems to blend these categories through the classical myths she chooses and interprets. In representing a Victorian woman as versions of mythological subjects, she grants herself the license to freely criticize her culture’s contradictory attitudes toward women and to underscore the detrimental effects of oppression. Indeed, the novel begins with the question of good and evil, and the answer appears to depend on the viewer who poses it.

“Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams?” (3). A close reading of the novel’s opening questions reveals that it is Daniel Deronda’s gaze that ascribes contradictory attributes, the good and evil, to Gwendolen. Gwendolen’s youthful face concentrating on the movements of the spinning roulette becomes the focus of his gaze. Thus Eliot seems to endorse the traditional binaries of the male as surveyor and female as surveyed. In her discussion of this scene, Evelyne Ender contends that it “sets the stage for a specularization of the heroine. . . . Gwendolen can be said to ‘exist’ as surface projection of the images held in the gaze and in the mind of the men who shape her destiny: Deronda, Klesmer, Grandcourt and a more undifferentiated group (made up of Mallinger, Gascoigne and their likes)” (234). Yet Deronda’s inquisitive gaze in the opening of the novel does not
subdue Gwendolen’s “dynamic glance.” Moreover, although Gwendolen is acutely aware of the patriarchal dynamics of the gaze that cast a woman as the inferior of a man’s scrutinizing glance, she resists them and haughtily defies them. When her eyes meet Deronda’s, instead of averting them “as she would have desired to do, she is unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested—how long?” Driven by “an inward defiance” Gwendolen subverts conventional feminine behavior (6). In adopting the role of the spectator in the opening scene as well as throughout the novel, Gwendolen assumes a traditionally masculine prerogative. In this scene Gwendolen’s defiant gaze and her other facial features, as well as her lavishly green garments, recall Rossetti’s somewhat androgynous Astarte Syriaca (1877) (plate 14), the self-aggrandizing Assyrian goddess, an early malign version of Venus, whose unflinching gaze overpowers and disturbs the viewer. Certainly the reconfiguration of this primitive goddess, “the powerful ancient Semitic goddess of Syria-Palestine in the pre-Greek era,” as Gwendolen is extremely appropriate, for this goddess at once underscores Gwendolen’s primitive nature and is consistent with the Semitic subject of the novel (Barbara Bryant in Wilton and Upstone 159). Astarte Syriaca’s incongruous nature—she is both a priestess and a seductress—is also manifested in contemporary perceptions of women that Gwendolen’s character represents.

It is entirely possible that Eliot had seen preliminary sketches of Astarte, which Rossetti had started drawing in 1875. Like Astarte Syriaca, who appears in classical drapery of intense and lavish green hues, adorned with a girdle “in silver sheen,” as Rossetti describes it in the sonnet he wrote for the painting (3), Gwendolen is depicted as a “Nereid in sea-green robes and silver ornaments,” “a sort of a serpent now, all green and silver” (7). Struck by her dazzling appearance, the onlookers in the casino focus on Pre-Raphaelite features such as her “light-brown hair,” her “delicate nose with its gradual little upward curve,” which one of the Vandernoodt group finds “distracting,” and “her mouth—there never was a prettier mouth, the lips curl backward so finely,” which looks “so self-complacent, as if it knew its own beauty—the curves are so immovable” (8). A close look at Astarte Syriaca’s features—the luxuriant light-brown hair, the idealized rosebud mouth, the feminine nose with the “upward turn”—reveals the striking resemblance between the Assyrian goddess and Gwendolen. In her “sea-green robes and silver ornaments,” Gwendolen is repeatedly compared to a serpent, her alluring and irresistible beauty becoming a threatening attribute to the other gamblers in the casino, who see her as the “ensemble du serpent.” The “dynamic quality” of Gwendolen’s gaze seems identical to Astarte’s “all penetrative spell” (12) or the “absolute eyes that wean/The pulse of hearts” (7–8).16
Plate 14. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Astarte Syriaca, 1875–1877. Oil on canvas, 72 x 42 in (183 x 106.7 cm), Manchester City Art Galleries. Reproduced by permission.
No doubt, at least when Daniel first meets Gwendolen, what he defines as evil is Gwendolen's refusal to abide by conventional feminine strictures such as lowering her gaze when her eyes meet his or displaying traditionally feminine modesty. Unable to contain or explain his intense attraction to Gwendolen's fascinating beauty, Deronda labels it evil: “Was the good or the 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?” (3). In this context the choice of the word “beams” is also interesting, perhaps an allusion to the rays of light emitted by the sun and the moon above Astarte Syriaca’s head. Deronda’s unsettled response to Gwendolen’s beauty resembles the negative reactions of Victorian as well as modern critics to some of Rossetti’s representations of highly sexualized women like Astarte Syriaca. “In those unforgotten, unforgettable faces, so appealing in several senses,” Jerome McGann comments in Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “a disturbing male gaze turns to look back at itself, at us, men and women both. The event seems the more significant and moving exactly because it has hardly been recognized or translated as an important moment in the history of art” (154). In time Deronda’s gaze also turns “to look back at itself,” as we shall see.

In the beginning as well as throughout the novel, Gwendolen is represented as a self-aggrandizing femme fatale, like Astarte Syriaca, a malign version of Venus. And like the androgynous Assyrian goddess with her massive shoulders and masculine arms, Gwendolen is somewhat androgynous in her bold and defiant, conventionally masculine qualities. Like Rossetti, who depicts the Assyrian Venus as simultaneously attractive and lurid, feminine and masculine, throughout the novel the narrator presents Gwendolen as a “problematic sylph” reified by a culture that glorifies feminine beauty at once worshiping and condemning it.

Deronda’s fear of Gwendolen, translated at times into misogynist words, seems but representative of the patriarchal perspective of the day. Indeed his perspective on Gwendolen as “the demon” echoes one of Burne-Jones’s statements, capturing the gynophobic attitude of the day: “A woman at her best, self-denying and devoted, is pathetic and lovely beyond words; but once she gets the upper hand and flaunts, she’s the devil” (Lago 11). In adopting the role of the spectator, however, in the opening scene as well as throughout the novel, Gwendolen assumes a dominant position traditionally granted to men. Her transgression of patriarchal boundaries transforms her into a monster, a witch, a Medusa figure. As Nina Auerbach explains, “these serpent-women, terrestrial cousins of the hybrid mermaid in their secret transformations, their power over social life and its laws, exude a power that withers patriarchs. George
Eliot’s lamialike Rosamund and Gwendolen . . . all find their greatest triumphs in displacing male authorities” (8).

Certainly images of Medusa in her many disguises of serpents, lamias, and mermaids proliferate in Gwendolen’s depiction throughout the novel, bringing to mind what seems to be her iconographic, spectacular representation in The Beguiling of Merlin (1873–1874) (plate 15). This painting captures the catastrophic results of Nimue’s “spellbinding gaze,” depicted here as a Medusa figure, her hair entwined with snakes. We see Merlin, the sorcerer, lying at the enchantress’s feet, “transfixed by the spell she is reciting from his ancient book of charms” (Marsh 114). Harrison and Waters observe that the painting portrays an interesting reversal of traditional male and female roles. Nimue, her Medusa hair the focal point of her face, occupies “the main vertical plane usually a symbol of the active male, whilst Merlin lies passive, relaxed, his power ebbing away” (113). Ironically, in explaining the significance of the painting to Mrs. Gaskell, Burne-Jones saw himself as the victim (not the victimizer) of his lover, Mary Zambaco, whom he forsook after an extramarital affair with her: “Yet you did say it was a nasty woman the head of Nimue in the picture called ‘the enchanting of Merlin’ was painted from that poor traitor, & was very like—all the action is like—the name of her was Mary. . . . She was born at the foot of Olympus and looked and was primeval but that’s the head & the way of standing and turning . . . and I was turned into a hawthorn tree in the forest of Broceliande the spell is on him for ever—Arthur will come back out of his restful sleep but Merlin’s face can never be undone.”17

Referring to Burne-Jones’s comments about this painting, Poulson remarks that by identifying Mary Zambaco with Viviane and himself with Merlin, he absolved himself of moral responsibility: “[I]f Merlin’s love for Viviane was predestined, then so was Mary’s for him. . . . Zambaco is a force of nature, amoral, ‘primaeval’ ” (151). Depictions of woman as “elemental enchantress,” Jan Marsh explains, reveal attempts to fathom feminine mystery and to come to terms with otherness (1987 114). At the same time, the power that Nimue’s stance conveys, traditionally relegated to men, may also be construed as a transgression of conventional gender boundaries and therefore a threat to male identity.

Before her marriage to Grandcourt, Gwendolen relishes her power over him, believing in her “divine right to rule” (346), driving herself by the “hunger of the inner self for supremacy” (43). Though she loses that power after her marriage, she nevertheless looks powerful and intractable when, standing in the yacht, she towers over the drowning Grandcourt. Indeed her glance here becomes Medusa’s petrifying gaze: “I saw him sink, and my heart gave a leap as if it were going out of me. I think I did not move. I
Plate 15. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Beguiling of Merlin*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 73\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 43\(\frac{3}{4}\) in (186 x 111 cm), National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight). Reproduced by permission.
kept my hands tight. It was long enough for me to be glad, and yet think it was no use—he would come up again. And he was come. . . . It was all like lightning. ‘The rope!’ He called out in a voice—not his own—I hear it now—and I stooped for the rope—I felt I must—I felt sure he could swim, and he would come back whether or not, and I dreaded him. That was in my mind—he would come back. . . . And he cried again—and I held my hand, and my heart said, ‘Die!’ and he sank” (596).

The scene becomes an isomorphic verbal equivalent of The Beguiling of Merlin, Gwendolen (like Nimue) towering over Grandcourt, whose sinking figure reminds us of Merlin’s swooning, cowering glance. Like Merlin swooning under Nimue’s intense gaze, Grandcourt literally sinks under Gwendolen’s “dynamic glance.” In this respect Gwendolen’s glance becomes Medusa’s gaze. Yet Eliot has taken pains throughout the novel to show that Medusa’s destructive power is the product of an oppressive patriarchal society. By marrying Grandcourt, Gwendolen becomes the victim of his sadistic exercise of power—a prisoner without escape. This inequitable distribution of power, condoned by the Victorian legal system, becomes one of Eliot’s targets of scathing critique. After all, Gwendolen’s decision to marry Grandcourt, prompted by her desire to support her impoverished family, follows her discovery that she cannot earn an independent living, that her education has not provided her with such power.

As in Adam Bede, in her last novel Eliot concentrates on Medusa’s victimization and further demonstrates that the borderline between victimizer and victim, colonizer and colonized is a hazy one. Gwendolen becomes Grandcourt’s victimizer after having endured years of abuse. Whereas George Eliot’s novels at times seem to endorse the unequal dynamics of power represented by the gaze, most often they challenge such conceptions by presenting Medusa figures as representative of Victorian anxieties about the emerging roles of women or as paradigmatic of the culture’s incongruous perspectives on women. In the notebooks of Adam Bede Eliot records the tragic aspect of Medusa’s myth, an aspect often overlooked in traditional versions that present Medusa as a victimizer of men: “Her story is a tragic account of the acute jealousy of the ancient gods directed against all splendor and beauty in mankind. . . . According to another version of the story—one which the Roman poet Ovid followed—Medusa’s fate was yet more undeserved. The wild god Poseidon raped the incomparably beautiful princess in Athena’s temple. . . . Athena’s punishment, moreover, fell on the innocent victim, because she was powerless to punish the guilty god” (Wiesenfarth 153). Though traditionally seen as a victimizer, Medusa, in Eliot’s understanding, is the victim of absolute, oppressive authority and she is portrayed as such in various of her novels. Unlike Hetty and Maggie, however, who are also seen as Medusa figures and perish at the end of the
novel, seemingly for their transgressions of conventional gender boundaries, Gwendolen survives. Perhaps in her last novel Eliot suggests that if a woman is to survive in a highly competitive patriarchal world she must usurp authority and tradition and must, as she herself did, find the means to undermine oppression and extend those conventional gender boundaries that constrain her power and relegate her to the status of the underprivileged and unauthorized.

As the novel progresses, Daniel’s gaze moves beyond the established gendered categories, for he cultivates a nurturing friendship with Gwendolen beyond the superior/inferior binaries that erotic desire often establishes. Indeed the last exchange between them demonstrates the defusion of the unequal power relations, fostered by the traditional dynamics of the gaze. Bitterly inconsolable in response to Daniel’s announcement that he is to marry, Gwendolen exclaims, “I said I should be forsaken. I have been a cruel woman. And I am forsaken.” Deronda’s response thwarts traditional expectations: “He seized her outstretched hands and held them together and knelted at her feet. She was the victim of his happiness. ‘I am cruel, too, I am cruel,’ he repeated, with a sort of groan, looking up at her imploringly. His presence and touch seemed to dispel a horrible vision, and she met his upward look of sorrow with something like the return of consciousness after fainting” (690, my emphasis). Tremblingly wavering between the erotic and the empathic, this intense farewell scene destabilizes the traditional binaries of the gaze—subject/object, surveyor/surveyed, superior/inferior: “Sobs rose, and great tears fell fast. Deronda would not let her hands go—held them still with one of his, and himself pressed her handkerchief against her eyes. . . . She bent forward to kiss his cheek, and he kissed hers. Then they looked at each other for an instant with clasped hands, and he turned away” (690–91, my emphasis). Shattering the hierarchical gendered ambivalences of the gaze, this scene creates consummate reciprocity.

As her novels and letters reveal, George Eliot was keenly aware of contemporary fears of the social and sexual status of women, which seem to have culminated in the 1870s (the years of the composition of Daniel Deronda), when women’s suffrage and women’s rights became major issues. Edward Burne-Jones’s response to women’s changing roles seems to represent the patriarchal voice of the era. “It’s a pity to educate women, only spoils them takes away all their charm, to make them into tenth-rate men.” On another occasion, in a conversation with Thomas Rooke, his studio assistant, he articulates his opposition to women’s franchise: “Tiresome the modern woman is. I like women when they’re good and kind and pretty—agreeable objects in the landscape of existence—give life to it—and pleasant to look at and think about. What do they want with votes?”
The knowledge of contemporary patriarchal resistance to the women's equal rights movement compelled Eliot to expose her culture's gender incongruities in her own redrawings of stereotypical representations of women endorsed by a revival of classical mythological figures in Victorian fiction and painting. In revising mythological or gender stereotypes, Eliot sought to represent women as people, thus undermining the unequal dynamics of power that reduced them to objects. A letter to Mrs. John Nassau, dated October 4, 1869, explicitly records what her novels subtly convey—Eliot's strong and eloquent conviction in the importance of mutual understanding and respect:

But on one point I have a strong conviction, and I feel bound to act on it, so far as my retired way of life allows of public action. And that is, that women ought to have the same fund of truth placed within their reach as men have; that their lives (i.e. the lives of men and women) ought to be passed together under the hallowing influence of a common faith as to their duty and its basis. And this unity in their faith can only be produced by their having each the same store of knowledge. It is not likely that any perfect plan for educating women can soon be found, for we are very far from having a perfect plan for educating men. But it will not do to wait for perfection. (Letters 5:58)

Eliot's contradictory images of Gwendolen, representative of incongruous attitudes toward women, may also be construed as the era's struggle to cope with otherness, a way of problematizing the self by means of the other. At the very beginning of the novel, as we have seen, Gwendolen appears to others in the gambling as “a Lamia beauty,” a cannibal. Eliot masterfully captures deep-seated convictions and exposes the complicity of the self with attributes assigned exclusively to the other.

**Jewish Idealism versus British Individualism**

With the resolution of Deronda's ambiguous identity comes the consequent clearing of the confusion that the novel carefully sustains all along between self and other, civilized and uncivilized people, “superior” and “inferior” races. In the light of this determination, Jewish religion and culture no longer constitute a site for self-critique or a possibility for some alternative logic. Rather they become an alternative to British individualism, colonial expansionism, and Anglo-Saxon supremacy. The idealistic manifestations of the gambling paradigm appear through Mordecai’s vision of a Jewish homeland that does not entail the gain of one nation at the expense of another:
There is [a] store of wisdom among us to found a new Jewish polity, grand, simple, just, like the old—a republic where there is equality of protection, an equality which shone like a star on the forehead of our ancient community, and gave it more than the brightness of Western freedom amid the despotisms of the East. . . . And the world will gain as Israel gains. For there will be a community in the van of the East which carries the culture and the sympathies of every great nation in its bosom; there will be a land set for a halting-place of enmities, a neutral ground for the East as Belgium is for the West. (456)

At this point, the Jewish other is no longer a source of critique leveled against the British self but a locus for glorification. Contemporary cultural theorists like to use the phrase “benevolent racism.” Indeed some critics have accused Eliot of endorsing “proto-fascist ideas” (Myers 123) or of sublimating social conflicts to “universal” humanity (Cottom 30). More recently, critics have criticized the Zionist plot for fostering the very anti-Semitism Eliot seems to attack. Katherine Linehan, for instance, posits that “Eliot’s theoretically democratic racialism and nationalism are shaded by hierarchical views of higher and lower races and more or less advanced civilization” (325). Similarly, Susan Meyer maintains that “the novel is rife with anti-Semitism” (1996, 180). Such allegations, however, disregard Eliot’s response to the adverse criticism of the Jewish “element” of Daniel Deronda. In a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe in October 29, 1876, she defends her novel in terms of what it both criticized and affirmed, thus responding not only to Victorian but also to future critics:

But precisely because I felt that the usual attitude of Christians towards Jews is—I hardly know whether to say more impious or more stupid when viewed in the light of their professed principles, I therefore felt urged to treat Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain to. Moreover, not only towards Jews, but towards all Oriental peoples with whom we English come in contact, a spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness is observable which has become a national disgrace to us. There is nothing I should care more to do . . . than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow-men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs. . . . To my feeling, this deadness to the history which has prepared half our world for us, this inability to find interest in any form of life that is not clad in the same coat-tails and flounces as our own lies very close to the worst kind of irreligion. . . . It a sign of the intellectual narrowness . . . which is still the average mark of our culture. (Letters 6:301–2)
As this passage shows, Eliot’s primary intention in Daniel Deronda was to expose the hierarchical relations of social existence that organize human beings in terms of opposition and domination, a cultural logic that colonialism abroad and patriarchy at home is based upon. Nevertheless, the critical thrust of her novel is not without its affirmative counterpart, a vision that organizes human beings in terms of equality and cooperation.

Critics who denounce Eliot’s presumably anti-Semitic notions seem to assume that Eliot lacked a clear understanding of her own intentions. Yet Eliot clearly stated these intentions in the earlier letter and in Theophrastus Such. At the zenith of her career, she could “gamble,” take a risk with a subject that she knew would be highly controversial. In the same letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, she states that she had anticipated the negative criticism her novel received: “As to the Jewish element in ‘Deronda,’ I expected from first to last in writing it, that it would create much stronger resistance and even repulsion than it has actually met with. . . . But I was happily independent in material things and felt no temptation to accommodate my writing to any standard except that of trying to do my best” (Letters 6:301–2).

Anyone familiar with Eliot’s career knows about her acute sensitivity to adverse criticism, a sensitivity that George Henry Lewes protected by concealing letters with negative remarks about her work. Yet Eliot risked such criticism, for, as her other works reveal, she believed in fighting social inequities. In this case, she personally knew Jewish intellectuals who suffered discrimination. Emmanuel Deutsch, who served as the model for Mordecai, is a notable case. Furthermore, in accusing Eliot of anti-Semitism critics seem to overlook the contemporary Jewish response to the novel. David Kaufmann, for instance, celebrates the novel as a “glorious exaltation” (95), and other Jewish critics share his admiration (Martin 90–106).

Unlike her other novels, Daniel Deronda takes place in the previous decade. As such it addresses not one but several contemporary sociopolitical and aesthetic issues, some of which cannot possibly be fathomed by our own remote perspective. I have explored only a few of the strands of the novel’s multiplicity that involve the intersection of Pre-Raphaelite techniques, subjects, and preoccupations with sociopolitical issues. By evoking classical subject paintings, Eliot entered into contemporary debates on art, mythography, anthropology, historiography, colonialism, and legislation. As Daniel Deronda and her other novels reveal, she was aware that the contemporary interest in classical Greece and Rome dovetailed with colonialist and patriarchal ideologies. At a time when women’s status was gradually improving through legislative measures and the women’s movement, the turn to classical gender constructs
by influential intellectuals such as Walter Pater and John Ruskin expressed the contemporary resistance to women’s evolving roles.

Mythological representations of women in paintings as contemporary images further reinforced the belief in their universally inferior status and endorsed the double standard as “natural” rather than cultural. As Kestner has already demonstrated, “the history of classical-subject painting as it relates to women is a product of the rise of mythology and the fervor for the Greco-Roman world intersecting with the history of women’s political development in the nineteenth century. . . . The power of mythological pictorial ideograms of women as mad, abandoned, deceiving, sensuous, and intimidating derived force from the seemingly unchanging nature and continuous relevance of myth. Mythic eternity was a basis for resisting the progress of women” (1989, 32). Like John Stuart Mill, who in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) refuted arguments in favor of the eternal, universal, and natural status of women, Eliot in *Daniel Deronda* demonstrates the importance of cultural forces in shaping and changing gender constructs.

Eliot was perhaps willing to grant the qualities attributed to the colonized “barbarian” so long as those same qualities are also attributed to the colonizing self. Her way of coping with the colonized others may be to bring them home to England. Evidently in her last novel Eliot saw otherness as a critical domain from which to refigure the self; she seemed convinced that the initial conflation of the self with the other is a prerequisite to critical self-understanding and a first step in the process of refiguring the self. In this respect Eliot seems to articulate the tendency of modern literature and science to locate “the savage within us, in our historical origins and in our psychic structure” (Spurr 7).