

GYPSIES AND JEWS: GEORGE ELIOT'S USE OF "RACE" IN  
THE SPANISH GYPSY AND DANIEL DERONDA

by

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## Abstract

As a public intellectual and eminent novelist, but also as a woman who transgressed the social and sexual mores of the Victorian age, George Eliot held a privileged but precarious position in her English society. This “borderline” position offered her a unique vantage point from which to critique the patriarchal values that underlay many of the social, scientific, and intellectual discourses of her time. While Eliot acknowledged a basis of biologically inherent differences between individuals and groups, she also understood the role of culture or circumstance in the shaping and altering of character traits. Based out of her own experiences, Eliot contested the idea that biologically-based differences, however fixed and immutable they seemed, should form a basis for discrimination.

In her later fiction, in particular, Eliot creates characters whose biological and cultural identities are indeterminate and blurred. It is through the development of these characters that Eliot attempts to reclaim “borderline” identities as sites for the development of exceptional traits and characteristics. The Spanish Gypsy (1868) is often viewed as a prototype for the themes and ideas developed in Daniel Deronda (1876). In both works, Eliot’s protagonists are borderline characters; Fedalma and Deronda are of unknown parentage and are privileged wards who pass for members of the dominant social group, yet each is alienated from that dominant group by some perceived inherent difference or “otherness.” In both stories, the nature of the protagonist’s “otherness” turns on “race.” These borderline characters, through a combination of circumstances that arise from perceptions of inherent difference, develop exceptional moral and social characteristics. The characters are exceptional both in that they deviate from norms and in terms of their relative superiority to those norms, thus calling into question the hierarchy of biological types which

underlies or founds the dominant social order. In both these works, which combine race and gender concerns, Eliot subverts literary conventions as well as cultural expectations in order to sympathetically challenge her readers' understanding and move them past the prevailing cultural beliefs that she recognized as restrictive to the moral and cultural progress of her society. In both works, there is a difficult and perhaps irresolvable tension between the biological determinism and cultural forces that operate on the protagonists -- a tension that reflects the conflicts that Eliot had to overcome in her own life and career as an exceptional woman.

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## **Dedication**

To the great loves of my life –  
my husband, Douglas,  
and our son, Alexander.

## Introduction: Gypsies and Jews in George Eliot's Later Fiction

*There are in Daniel Deronda the figures based upon observation and the figures based upon invention. This distinction, I know, is rather a rough one. There are no figures in any novel that are pure observation and none that are pure invention. But either element may preponderate, and in those cases in which invention has preponderated George Eliot seems to me to have achieved at the best but so many brilliant failures. (James 165)*

In his 1876 review of George Eliot's last novel Daniel Deronda, Henry James draws attention to what he sees as failures in characterization and a resulting lack of artistic unity in the novel. According to James, the work suffers from what he refers to as its "Jewish burden"(165) -- the more "inventive" but less compelling Jewish characters and plot that make up half of the novel.

James, like other generally admiring critics, lauded Eliot's presentation of the English characters, especially Gwendolen Harleth, the spoiled woman-child and unlikely heroine of the English half of the novel who provided the most compelling reading for Eliot's contemporaries. Yet Eliot's sympathetic portrayal of modern Jews -- and particularly her heroic privileging of the "borderline" racial character of Daniel Deronda -- proved unsettling to her contemporaries who approached the English novel with very particular ideas of form and subject and judged it with strict, yet subjective, criteria.

On the one hand, Victorian critics approached any new fiction with "the unquestioned assumption that art presses closely upon life, both emotionally and intellectually" (Carroll 2) and thus they applauded realistic representation of detail in character, sentiment and action. On the other hand, however, they also desired affirmation of their own understanding of such detail, and judged the value of the realism from their own particular social, cultural, and

moral perspective which was predominantly white, middle-classed, and male. While Henry James was perhaps an exceptional critic by nature of his own burgeoning and ultimately successful attempts at novel writing, most of Eliot's contemporary critics were nonetheless, like James, educated, white men who occupied positions of relative power and superiority underpinned by contemporary ideas about race, class and gender.

Writing under a male pseudonym and with an unprecedented mastery of realistic representation, Eliot's earliest fiction seemed not only to respect the literary criteria of her critics but also to confirm many cultural values and beliefs. The short stories in Scenes of Clerical Life (1856) and Eliot's first novel, Adam Bede (1859), realistically depicted the moods and expressions of local characters while affirming familial bonds, religious teachings, and a patriarchal traditional heritage known, shared and understood by her readership. However, even in these earliest works, keen readers such as John Blackwood, Eliot's publisher, detected signs of unorthodoxy, particularly in some unconventional situations and melancholy characterizations. In an 1857 letter responding to Blackwood's concerns, George Eliot (the yet disguised female writer, born Mary Ann Evans) defended her literary methods: "My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way cast to call forth tolerant judgement, pity, and sympathy" (GEL 2:299).<sup>1</sup> This early response to criticism of her artistic efforts emphasizes Eliot's purposeful defiance of literary conventions but also synthesizes the philosophical and moral basis for *all* Eliot's fiction to follow.

With the revelation of the unconventional woman behind the pseudonym and the

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<sup>1</sup> All references to George Eliot's original letters and notes are from George Eliot: Life and Letters (Ed. J.W. Cross. 1885. 3 vols. Boston: Dana Estes & Co., 1968) and The George Eliot Letters (Ed. Gordon S. Haight. 9 vols. New Haven: Yale UP, 1978). Hereafter these sources will be abbreviated as Life and GEL respectively.

publication of her second novel The Mill on the Floss (1860), Eliot's critics became engaged in debates about the unorthodoxy of both the author and her fiction. Such debates were aggravated by a succession of first-rate fictional works that nonetheless exhibited dramatic departures from conventional forms and subjects and culminated in sympathetic and heroic privileging of racial protagonists in The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda, the two works to be discussed in this study. For many of Eliot's Victorian critics, both The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda represented extreme, though not entirely unprecedented, departures from the cherished themes, characters, and forms of Eliot's earliest fictional works. The Mill on the Floss had posed an early challenge to thematic expectations, particularly with its tragic conclusion for the unconventional but sympathetic heroine, while Romola (1863), historically set in fifteenth century Italy, exemplified a dramatic shift away from the bucolic characters of the English countryside. In Middlemarch, generally considered Eliot's masterpiece, Eliot experimented with a multi-plot form to explore complex psychological and social themes in a near- contemporary English setting. The Spanish Gypsy (1868), a book length poetic drama set in Inquisitorial Spain, and Daniel Deronda (1876), a dual-plot Bildungsroman that extends past its contemporary English setting into a foreign and distant future, exhibited further departures in subject and form. In both of these later works, the once-familiar themes of family relations and cultural heritage are strained, literary conventions are further upturned, and foreign characters and outcasts of society -- the gypsy and the Jew -- are given rank with, if not a moral superiority to, the Christian and the Englishman.

This thesis broadly argues that through her "borderline" racial protagonists in these two later texts Eliot subverts literary conventions as well as cultural expectations in order to

move her readers past the prevailing values and beliefs that she recognized as restrictive, and even destructive, to the moral and cultural betterment of her society. This study begins with an overview of some of the Victorian reviews of Daniel Deronda as a means of highlighting the extent to which Eliot's use of "race" in her fiction unsettled her contemporary audience, and, to a large extent, continues to be a problem to the modern student of her work. Based on the premise that the idea of race mattered as much to George Eliot as it did to her critics, this study explores Eliot's unique use of race in The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda.

In these texts, Eliot's protagonists, ignorant of their racial heritage until a critical moment in their young adulthood, occupy a "borderline" position as inherently "marked" yet privileged members of the dominant society. In each case, the markings are neither simply nor clearly those of visible or physiological difference; rather, Eliot's gypsy and Jewish protagonists are marginalized by a combination of cultural and biological circumstances, thus blurring and complicating the existing ideas of opposition between privileged and subordinated members within a dominant society. As considered by Kristen Guest, the "borderline" other differs markedly from that of an "absolute" racial "other" who has been the source of many literary, cultural and post-colonial studies:

Unlike the colonial subject who is racially and culturally distinct from the colonizer, the "borderline" other shares significant physical attributes with the dominant population. In western culture in particular, dominant and marginal groups often participate in a common cultural and linguistic context and may even share a related racial heritage. Despite their similarities, however, it is partially through the definition and exclusion of marginal groups that the

dominant population consolidates its power. As a result, marginal group can neither be dismissed as “irredeemable savages” nor comfortably assimilated to prevailing norms. The central problem with the “borderline” case in mainstream culture is therefore that, unlike the racial other of colonial discourse, marginal ethnic or social groups in a European context are problematic “others” whose participation in western culture vexes attempts to define them in oppositional terms. (109)

In Victorian times, “borderline” others included such diverse groups as the poor, the insane, criminals, as well as Irish, Jews and, arguably, gypsies. Of interest in Eliot’s later works is that the gypsy and Jewish protagonists are “borderline” individuals first by their mysterious and ambiguously defined origins which, for each, marks his or her position in the dominant culture as one of ambivalence; though exemplary individuals, they are viewed with suspicion by many members of the dominant society. In each story, the subsequent revelation of the protagonist’s “borderline” racial heritage complicates his or her assimilation into the dominant society and unsettles prevalent notions of cultural and biological difference.

In many ways, the “borderline” positions of these characters reflect Eliot’s own status in Victorian society: an exceptional intellect and artist, she was also viewed with suspicion by many of her contemporaries in an age when women were generally considered “naturally” inferior to men. While anonymity or a pseudonym hid the mystery of her sex from the public, the revelation of the woman behind the writing disrupted many of the cultural and biological beliefs of the dominant society. This thesis argues that through her use of “race” and particularly through her use of borderline racial protagonists, Eliot exposes and contests many of the tenets of cultural and biological determinism as she saw them being applied to

subjugate women and other groups within a patriarchal social system.

Chapter One of this thesis explores how Eliot's moral and aesthetic vision evolved out of her gender-based concerns as a public intellectual in Victorian society. As a public intellectual, Eliot was exposed to and immersed in the leading cultural and scientific discourses of her day. These discourses identified women and the so-called "lower races" (along with criminals and idiots) as "naturally" inferior to middle and upper class, educated white men and were advanced through natural science generally and Darwin's evolutionary theory in particular. Eliot's experience as a subject of phrenology, a pseudo-science that was directly related to evolutionary theory, exemplified for her the conflicts inherent in and between discourses of biological and cultural determinism as well as the shortcomings of scientific method as the authoritative means for understanding fundamental human characteristics and differences. In response to these concerns, and as an attempt to address them in a manner appropriate to her intellectual background and moral disposition, Eliot began writing fiction. In her later fiction, many of Eliot's earliest concerns about the conflicts between biological and cultural determinism are explored through her use of "borderline" racial protagonists. In both The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda, the purposeful blurring of biological and cultural considerations is informed by Eliot's initial and long-standing objective for all her fiction – to gain a sympathetic understanding for all "struggling, erring, human creatures" (GEL 3:111).

Chapters Two and Three focus, respectively, on The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda. The Spanish Gypsy has often been considered as a prototype for Daniel Deronda, and this thesis considers the related thematic concerns of the two texts. Textual considerations include how Eliot uses the sympathetic and heroic appeal of a borderline

racial protagonist to challenge many cultural and biological claims about gender and “race” as they were being used and abused within a patriarchal power structure. Eliot’s representations of the gypsy and the Jew in the respective texts is informed by her literary, historical and cultural understanding and exemplifies both an intellectual and personal opposition to claims of biological and gender determinism that were espoused in her time. Through alterations and subversions of both subject and form in each text, Eliot reclaims the stereotypically feminized emotions of love, pity, and sympathy as much needed universal emotions to deal with the moral failings and ultimate degeneracy of a social system based on oppression of its less privileged members.

In The Spanish Gypsy, Eliot’s female protagonist, Fedalma, is called upon to fulfill a role of social leadership; however, given the ruthlessness of patriarchal claims – both biological and cultural -- Fedalma can only achieve a qualified victory which comes at a disproportional emotional cost. Daniel Deronda is a fuller and more complex experiment with the moral failings of patriarchal social systems, and its contemporary setting and characters make the novel a particularly pointed critique of Eliot’s time and society. Daniel is a male protagonist who both embodies and develops, out of his borderline position, some stereotypically female characteristics (selflessness, sympathy for others, and a near maternal compassion for oppressed and suffering individuals, particularly women), which eventually aid in his moral and personal victories within and outside the dominant culture. Through Daniel’s sympathetic understanding of oppressed groups and individuals, the reader is also given profound insight into the inverse situation in which women struggle and suffer in their attempts to counter or appropriate positions of power typically associated with men. In both texts, there is an unresolved thematic tension that turns on Eliot’s

blurring and subversion of gender characteristics and roles, in combination with her use of “race” considerations.

Chapters Two and Three also consider the complex interplay of subject and form in these later works. The Spanish Gypsy (1868) marks a foray into the genre of dramatic poetry with a form and a subject that has its roots in classical tragedy. Daniel Deronda, with its dual plotline and doubling of protagonists, inverts and disrupts many of the conventions of the English bildungsroman on which the novel’s movement seems to be premised.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will argue that Eliot’s use of race allows her to address a difficult and perhaps irresolvable tension between the biological determinism and cultural forces that she had to overcome in her own life and career as an exceptional and “aberrant” woman. Her attempt is rooted in the privileging of a racial “other,” according her or him with a sensitivity, insight, and moral authority – much like her own -- that surpasses that of members of the dominant and patriarchal society.

What Henry James and other nineteenth century reviewers of Daniel Deronda saw

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<sup>2</sup> Although beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that the disruption of literary forms in Eliot’s later works may be a reflection of the influence of German literary traditions. While Eliot’s proficiency in German and her vast reading and knowledge of German literature and philosophy is well-documented in her published notes and journals, the influence of German literary traditions evident in Eliot’s fiction was largely lost upon her contemporary readership and today remains an understudied but potentially fertile area of in George Eliot scholarship. Eliot’s studies and appreciation of German writers such as Schiller, Hegel, and Goethe would necessarily have immersed her in the debates about the German bildungsroman and about the meaning and connotations of the German word “bildungs” itself. Similarly, Eliot was familiar with the “bourgeois tragedy,” the most popular form of German drama in the nineteenth century and one practiced by Goethe, Wagner and Hebbel. The “bourgeois tragedy,” like the tragedy of The Spanish Gypsy, is an exploration of kinship and individual love in which threats to a bourgeois domestic order are played out in a “feminine” (daughter or wife) opposition to the father figure in the drama. For a general overview of German philosophical debates about the bildungsroman form, see “Bildungsroman, 1766” (The Literary Encyclopedia at [www.LitEncyc.com](http://www.LitEncyc.com), 13 November 2002). For a detailed history of the critical discourses surrounding the form over a 200 year period, see Todd Kontje’s The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993). For a comprehensive study of German tragedy, see Gail K Hart’s Tragedy in Paradise: Family and Gender Politics in German Bourgeois Tragedy 1750-1850 (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996).

as a breach of artistic unity and failure in characterization had much to do with cultural and social expectations about the realistic novel. However, these expectations were also related to Eliot's status as a woman who upturned societal conventions and expectations of feminine behaviour even as she held a place as a leading intellectual and eminent novelist. The public acknowledgement of Eliot's intellectual and artistic prowess before the revelation of the unconventional woman behind the pseudonym had, very early on, left many of Eliot's critics in the awkward position of admitting to her exceptional talent while at the same time trying to uphold their own beliefs about male superiority in intellect and art. After the lifting of the pseudonym, even Eliot's most admiring critics began to qualify their praise with the claim that her writing was indeed exceptional *for a woman* and recurrently responded to new works with what would become a formulaic combination of "reverence and reservation" (Carroll 32). Daniel Deronda was one more novel in a progression of exemplary fiction that put "new and difficult demands" on the reader (32), especially through Eliot's considerations and use of "race," particularly Jewishness, in a contemporary English setting. Rather ironically, then, it was through somewhat unified claims of racial and cultural superiority that many Victorian critics attempted to challenge both the work and its author.

While many of today's readers are compelled to admit that the Jewish plot is often plodding and the Jewish characterizations over-elucidated and resultantly stiff, the many attacks on the Jewish plot in Eliot's time are disturbing both for their racism and their hostility towards Eliot personally. Many reviews begin with a pointed comment on Eliot's failed literary efforts with the novel and follow up with concerns about Eliot's interest in and considerations of contemporary Jews. For example, to an unsigned 1876 Spectator

reviewer, no book by this “great author” has “ever seemed so laboured,” even “forced” and “feeble” at times, a characterization most evident in response to Daniel and the other Jewish characters (CH 365-6).<sup>3</sup> Another reviewer applauds Eliot for her grasp of character psychology even as he remains “dissatisfied with the Jewish episode” on the grounds that it has not “sufficient connexion (sic) with broad human feeling to be stuff for prose fiction to handle,” the “Jews being a curious people” (CH 374).

The latter comment, as willfully ignorant as it is racist, brings to the forefront the existing and disparate perceptions of contemporary Jews against which Eliot was reacting. Eliot’s sympathetic portrayal of English-Jews and especially of a Jewish hero, through the character of Daniel, was indeed a departure from the literary stereotypes with which Victorian readers would have been most familiar – namely Shakespeare’s Shylock and, closer to home, Fagin -- the irreligious, alien, atavistic, and venal Jew-villain of Charles Dickens’s 1847 novel Oliver Twist. In terms of the actual and varied lives and conditions of English-Jews, particularly those who held fast to their Jewish heritage, Eliot’s readers were far less familiar and were interested in only in so much as they could see and thus distinguish, generally along class lines, such Jews from themselves. Eliot’s readers were thus wary of the spectre raised, by Daniel in particular, of the gentlemanly and scholarly Jew, who by nature of his invisibility in both class and racial terms, could, if he so chose, pass comfortably as an Englishman. This type of Jewish character was not based on literary stereotypes, but rather on the actual existence of modern figures such as Benjamin Disraeli -- the Jewish-born Englishman whose early conversion to Anglicanism served as a public

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<sup>3</sup> All references to Victorian reviews of Daniel Deronda are taken from David Carroll’s comprehensive collection George Eliot: The Critical Heritage (The Critical Heritage Series. New York: Routledge, 1971). Hereafter, references to this text will be abbreviated CH.

and legal disavowal of his Jewish heritage, thus allowing him to pursue a lengthy and successful career in British politics (starting in 1837 and culminating in his Prime Ministership in 1878).

While Disraeli's social mobility had considerably upset the issue of absolute difference for many of his English contemporaries, Eliot opposed not the man and his position so much as his persisting beliefs in the superiority of the Jewish race. It is clear that Eliot had something of Disraeli's situation in mind in her drawing of Daniel. Eliot's text rejects the notion of "passing" as an Englishman in favour of distinct racial identity and racial pride, while also exemplifying the ideology of conversion as a tyranny from which the Jewish people need to be set free.<sup>4</sup>

Such portrayals were, however, ill-received by Eliot's critics. In one of the most unsympathetic reviews of the novel, the critic accedes that Eliot has "fallen below her usual height" and complains that the reader "never feels at home"; the author is "ever driving at something foreign to [the reader's] habits of thought" (CH 376-377). Most offensive to the reviewer is Daniel's rejection of English privilege and his embrace of his racial heritage:

[W]hen a young man of English training and Eton and University education,

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<sup>4</sup> As suggested by Patrick Brantlinger, Eliot uses "Jewish history and racial pride as a way to critique the narrowness of English nationalist history and racism," but also as "a romantic cultural and political analogue for the difficulties she encountered throughout her career as a woman" (256). Eliot's efforts in gaining unconditional access to a career withheld on the basis of prejudicial assumptions allowed her to sympathize with others in similar positions. One such person was the Jewish scholar Emmanuel Deutsch, Eliot's Hebrew language teacher and close friend from 1867 until his death in 1873. Deutsch was Eliot's most likely contemporary model for Daniel Deronda's Jewish mentor, Mordecai; like Mordecai, Deutsch was fatally ill, dreamt of travelling to the East, and died on route during a journey to Palestine.

Less frequently commented upon by Eliot's biographers is the fact that Deutsch's career as a transcriber at the British Museum was impeded by prejudice. A respected journalist and scholar, he was nonetheless, "passed up for recognition and promotion" because he was a Jew. (Baker 133). Thus, unlike Disraeli, whose conversion allowed him access to positions otherwise withheld from Jews, Deutsch suffered the consequences of remaining openly Jewish.

and up to manhood, of assumed English birth, so obliging also as to entertain Christian sympathies, finishes off with his wedding in a Jewish synagogue, on the discovery that his father was a Jew, the most confiding reader leaves off with a sense of bewilderment and affront. (CH 377)

Summing up his disparaging comments, the reviewer connects Daniel Deronda with an earlier work: “Of course in the design of Daniel Deronda we are reminded of the part played by Fedalma in The Spanish Gypsy. Fidelity of race stands with this author as the first of duties and virtues, nor does it seem material what the character of the race is” (CH 379). The reviewer’s concerns with Eliot’s use or misuse of racial fidelity, particularly through Daniel’s betrayal of his English upbringing, are exemplary of many of the Victorian reviews and highlight the readers’ expectations of a conventional ending – that is, one which upholds the cultural expectations of the dominant society.

In both The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda the possibility of a conventional romantic ending is upset by the protagonists’ acceptance of racial and cultural claims that are beyond those of the dominant society. However, contrary to the assertion that “the character of the race” is not “material” to the author of these texts, Eliot’s choice to focus on the gypsy and the Jew does indeed matter. Considerations of the extent to which Eliot uses particular Victorian cultural and historical understandings of these individual “races” - gypsy and Jew - is critical to this study and will be considered more fully in discussions of the individual texts, but it is worth stressing here some broader similarities of these “borderline” racial groups that highlight their centrality to Eliot’s thematic intentions.

Throughout European history, the gypsy and the Jew have both and alternately been upheld as the most ambivalent marker of a racial “other.” This ambivalence is grounded in

their physical proximity and physiological similarity to members of the dominant culture, as well as in their varying levels of acceptance and rejection of dominant cultural values. Unlike colonial subjects whose biological and cultural inheritance was seen, by Victorian observers, to be fixed in distant but defined geographical spaces, gypsies and Jews existed throughout western history as homeless people who occupied peripheral spaces in the many dominant societies in which they lived and moved. Historically,

Both were pariah groups, assumed to be antisocial, and often accused of being enemies of mankind. Throughout their histories in Europe they had been wanderers. Their host nations periodically forced them to leave countries they had assumed to be their homelands. (Semmel 104)

And yet, despite periodic expulsion and diaspora, both groups continued to uphold their racial and cultural autonomy and to gather strength to their numbers. The cohesion of these groups (through particular cultural beliefs and binding traditions) was at once exemplary of and threatening to the values of many a host nation or society and thus repeatedly complicated efforts of containment or assimilation.

Additionally, whereas overt physiological differences (such as facial features or skin colour) were part of a scientific discourse that marked the colonial subject as inescapably “other,” both the gypsy and the Jew often shared physiological similarities with members of their host nations, thus complicating attempts to define them as biologically and fundamentally different or inferior. In the absence of incidental, particular, or stereotypical “racial” attributes (such as the wagons and brightly coloured costumes of the gypsies, or the gathering of men in skull caps near a Jewish synagogue), a gypsy or a Jew, could and might infiltrate and disrupt the cultural domain of the dominant society. The disruptive, and

potentially dangerous, physical and physiological proximity of the borderline “other” is a cultural notion that Eliot plays upon with her borderline protagonists in her later works and one which unsettled readers of both The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda.

In the case of Fedalma in The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel in Daniel Deronda, the borderline protagonists, ignorant of their racial heritage and brought up in the dominant culture, dramatically exemplify the idea of threatening invisibility in a borderline “other.” Eliot’s use of borderline races, gypsies and Jews, parallels, subverts and exemplifies, in broader cultural terms, the personal conditions and experiences of the borderline protagonists. Like the borderline races they come to represent, the protagonists, before the revelation of racial heritage, share an ambivalent cultural and biological position in which they can neither be defined in purely oppositional terms nor be fully assimilated into the dominant culture.

Notably, many of the Victorian responses to both The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda exemplify these troubling concerns with regard to the borderline protagonist and his or her racial affiliation: the revelation of a previously-hidden racial heritage, which should have allowed the reader to define, oppose if necessary, and ultimately contain the character, does nothing of the sort. Rather, the displacement of the protagonist into another society and culture destabilizes conventional and culturally-reproduced strategies of containment that would allow the dominant society to maintain its position of relative superiority. The only recourse left to the critic, if he was speaking as a privileged member of the dominant society, was to attack the author for her failed literary efforts: as noted by Reina Lewis in her considerations of Eliot’s contemporary reviews, “[t]he unwelcome elements of hereditary determinism and scientific theory made [The Spanish Gypsy] a bad poem and a failed

romance just as they were held to blight Daniel Deronda” (225).

And yet, it must be noted that the historical placement, the romanticized setting, and the formal distancing of Eliot’s dramatic poem seemed to soften the immediate cultural threat of Eliot’s use of race. In contrast, Daniel Deronda, with its contemporary setting, characters, and concerns, encouraged a broader and more dynamic critical discourse. For example, in opposition to the many markedly hostile responses to the novel were the fewer, though no less important, enthusiastic and laudatory reviews by Jewish readers, from within England and elsewhere. While non-Jews claimed that Jews were not interesting, compelling, or worthy enough to warrant broad human interest, Jewish reviewers applauded Eliot’s careful study, realistic portrayals, and sympathetic understanding of contemporary Jewish conditions. They were also able to articulately and accurately deduce the root cause of the many negative reviews of the novel: as one Jewish reviewer succinctly states, “To make a Jew the hero of a story, or even to endeavour to enlist the sympathies of the reader in his favour, was contrary to the canons of fiction” (CH 407). In other words, within literary boundaries defined by the hegemonic English society, Eliot’s subject did not fit the accepted forms of the realistic novel.

While the affirmative responses by Jewish readers rescued Eliot from a sense of ultimate defeat and despondency, Eliot had herself anticipated the English resistance to her use of race and to the Jewish parts of the novel, recording in her journal after the first three books of Daniel Deronda had been serially published, “The Jewish element seems to me likely to satisfy nobody” (GEL 6:238). That Eliot could and did persevere with what she knew to be a very contentious and difficult argument in her novel exemplifies the heartfelt urgency of her concerns. In a later 1876 letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Eliot defines some

of these concerns:

As to the Jewish element in *Deronda*, I expected from the first to last in writing it, that it would create much stronger resistance and repulsion than it has actually met with. But precisely because I felt that the usual attitudes 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 the Jews, but also 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, if it were possible, 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.” (GEL 6:301)

“Sympathy and understanding,” “nature and knowledge,” “imagination” and “a vision of human claims” – such associations are the basis of Eliot’s artistic and philosophical position in her presentation of Jews in *Daniel Deronda*, but they are also her response to the “spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness” which she saw operating in her society at large with regard to both race and gender and felt in her own borderline experience as an eminent but suspect female intellect and artist.

Insomuch as Eliot’s use of borderline racial protagonists in her later works posed problems with relation to literary conventions and broader cultural beliefs, her own borderline position (as an unconventional woman and exceptional artist), had for a longer

time unsettled and disrupted many of the prevalent gender claims of her time. The briefest look at Victorian reviews of Eliot's fiction as a whole affirms Kristin Brady's statement that "no male writer has been analyzed in terms of gender to the extent that George Eliot has been" (2). The reviews of Daniel Deronda are perhaps unusual in their prevalent concerns about the "race" subject rather than the gender of the author, but at least one of Eliot's contemporaries was able to make, if obliquely, the connection between "race" and gender in Eliot's later works. In an unsigned 1881 obituary (later revealed to be written by Leslie Stephen), the reviewer summarized the charges that had been laid upon George Eliot by many Victorian readers of Daniel Deronda:

The poor woman was not content simply to write amusing stories. She is convicted upon conclusive evidence of having indulged in ideas; she ventured to speculate upon human life and its meaning, and still worse, she endeavoured to embody her convictions in imaginative shapes, and probably wished to infect her readers with them. This was, according to some people, highly unbecoming in a woman and very inartistic in a novelist. (CH 467)

Considered in light of modern feminist literary criticism which claims that Eliot's gender had much to do with what she wrote, how she wrote and how that writing was received, Stephen's assessment of Eliot's talents and related shortcomings is particularly perceptive for its time. As Dorothea Barrett suggests in her 1989 study of Eliot and her fiction, "It is easy to criticize George Eliot for failures in ventures which other novelists do not attempt" (154). With particular reference to Daniel Deronda, Barrett adds that this seminal work "crosses more boundaries, and is therefore more strained, than any other George Eliot novel" (154).

Taking up on such considerations, this thesis explores Eliot's unique use of race in her later works is exemplary not only of a crossing of boundaries, but also of a shifting, disrupting and blurring of boundaries in such a way as to explore but not to solve the vexing problems of biological and cultural determinism that Eliot encountered in her own life. Furthermore, strained as Eliot's later works may be, the interest they generated and continue to generate, are testimony to the exceptional intellect and talent of the artist as well as the profundity of her human concerns. Eliot's incontestable impact as an artist, and the quality that set her above both her critics and other artists of her day, is perhaps best understood through what John Keats, the romantic poet, described as "Negative Capability":

...the quality [that forms] a Man of Achievement...& which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason...(1105)

As an acclaimed female intellectual and artist, George Eliot wrote out of a position that was at once privileged and precarious. On a personal level, Eliot knew and understood herself to be at various and particular times in her life, situated within, on the periphery, or completely outside different intellectual, literary and social circles. In other words, the "borderline" condition – that of the individual who can neither be opposed nor assimilated in absolute terms – was Eliot's ongoing personal experience and one which found its most complex fictional form in the racial protagonists in The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda – works which expose, to use Henry James' words, "brilliant failures" in subject and form.

### Interdisciplinary Parameters and Methods of This Study

While Eliot's unique use of "race" in The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda is the basis for this study, the art in this case cannot be separated from the artist, or the intellectual from the woman. Thus, this study will consider Eliot's literary efforts in the context of her non-fiction writings, her posthumously published notes, letters, and journals and socio-historical accounts of both her personal beliefs and those of her society. Eliot's non-fiction writing progressively exposes her developing intellectual positioning as well as her emotional and moral considerations of biological and cultural determinism. Her notes and journals offer insight into her choice to write sympathetically about "borderline" racial characters -- the "gypsy" and the "Jew"-- and further exemplify the underlying complexity of these choices. The work of recent cultural and literary historians further aids in elucidating the uses of these racial tropes in both historical and literary terms.

Because this thesis attempts to place Eliot's intellectual and artistic expression in its historical determination, I come back to the Victorian reviews of Eliot's fiction at several points in my discussion. These reviews are, for the most part, based on close readings that pay special attention to textual detail. Moreover, as primary historical documents they provide a valuable overview of the cultural and aesthetic concerns that informed Eliot's general readership and intellectual contemporaries. Finally, because the literary critics are most often white, English and male, they express an opinion from the hegemonic group of which, I will argue, Eliot is writing both for and against.

The Victorian journals, which carried the literary reviews of Eliot's work, also contained essays covering a wide range of intellectual, philosophical and scientific subjects. In this public forum, studies and advances in the discourse of biological science were open

to debate, modification, and extrapolation by various players including such men as Herbert Spencer, John Mill, Francis Galton, T.H. Huxley and Charles Darwin. Given the complex and shifting configurations of the discourses that arose out of evolutionary science, I have limited my primary considerations of biological claims of the nineteenth century to one seminal text – Darwin’s Descent of Man (1871). Darwin’s text offers the most objective nineteenth century considerations of human differences, yet nonetheless exposes the pervasive and prejudicial claims of superiority by the educated, European men who, in Victorian times, dominated discourses of race and gender. Additionally, because the publication of Darwin’s text falls between that of The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda, it exemplifies some of the most current theories and pressing concerns about human differences as they would have been understood and appropriated by Eliot. I defer to the secondary works of more recent cultural critics to elucidate the centrality of Darwin’s writing in broader Victorian discourses of biological determinism and its relation to the specific study of phrenology that placed Eliot firmly in these discourses.

In my considerations of “race” throughout this thesis, I acknowledge the complexity and ambiguity of the term and its referents. That the term “race” is misleading at best, and a misnomer or “fiction” at worst, has been the consensus of many late twentieth century historians and cultural critics. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues in “Race,” Writing and Difference, given the historical referents for “race,” the term and its derivatives remain problematic misnomenclatures:

When we speak of “the white race” or “the black race,” “the Jewish race” or “the Aryan race,” we speak in biological misnomers and, more generally, in metaphors. Nevertheless, our conversations are replete with usages of race

which have their sources in the dubious pseudoscience of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (4)

Gates's reference to "dubious pseudoscience" is a general reference to some of the misguided sociological applications of biological and evolutionary claims in the Victorian era. In an essay on nineteenth century ideas of race and gender, Nancy Stepan makes a similar point, noting that "'racial dissimilarity'" in the conventional phenotypical sense proves to be more banana peel than stepping stone:" historically, she suggests, "'racial dissimilarities'" have not only been artificially used, they are themselves artificial" (27).

To get around the terminological problems of "race," Theodore Allen proposes that historians and cultural critics use the term "racial oppression": "By considering the notion of 'racial oppression' in terms of the substantive, the operative element, namely 'oppression,' it is possible to avoid the contradictions and howling absurdities that result from attempts to splice genetics and sociology" (28). In the following chapters, I will attempt to differentiate between "racial oppression" and differences of "race" as they would have been inscribed in the discourses -- sociological, scientific, and otherwise -- and understood by Victorian society. However, the difficulty in using "racial oppression" in discussing Eliot's use of race in her later fiction is that Eliot, a Victorian intellectual keeping pace with the "scientific" thought and discoveries of her day, was both shaped by and resistant to the biological determinism and essentialist differences that defined both "races" and the sexes. Thus, in references to "race" in writings by Eliot and her contemporaries, I will follow the lead of Reina Lewis in Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation, and classify "race" as "a term that signifies a historically variable process of racialization -- the process by which groups or individuals come to be

ascribed a racial identity -- and not as a word that simply denotes a given, innate, static neutral classification" (2). Significantly, Eliot's unique use of race in her later fiction exemplifies an uncomfortable blurring of a "process of racialization" with a "given" and "innate" classification and highlights Eliot's own unsettled but somewhat enlightened position in Victorian discourses of cultural and biological determinism.

According to Henry Louis Gates, "race" remains "the ultimate trope of difference" between "cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems" because

...it is so very arbitrary in its application. The biological criteria used to determine "difference" in sex simply do not hold when applied to "race."... in such a way as to *will* this sense of *natural* difference into our formulations.

(author's italics) (5)

In the following discussions of Eliot's fiction, I will consider historically determined "biological criteria" in the constructions of both "race" and gender. But while in agreement with Gates about the difference of biological *valuations* of "race" and gender, my own position is that in looking at the cultural and biological determinism that undermined the understanding of the terms in Victorian times, the terms are far less separate than we perceive them today. Nancy Stepan summarizes this connection in her considerations of nineteenth century biological discourses: "In short, lower races represented the 'female' type of the human species and females the 'lower race' of gender" (Stepan 40).

Insomuch as Eliot could consider biological determinants as "real" markers of sexual and racial difference, she could not accept the socially-debilitating consequences that arose out of such differences. In The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda Eliot questions prevalent Victorian ideas of racial and gender inferiority through the use of borderline

racial protagonists – one a gypsy, the other a Jew. While “race” may be the “ultimate trope of difference,” both the “gypsy” and the “Jew” elude definitions of absolute “otherness” or difference making them particularly apt choices for Eliot’s considerations and critique of cultural and biological determinism in her later fiction. With such assertions in mind, the following discussions will focus on Eliot’s borderline placement in nineteenth century discourses of cultural and biological determinism and then on Eliot’s use of the gypsy in The Spanish Gypsy and the Jew in Daniel Deronda as contentious but apt analogues for Eliot’s concerns about gender determination.

## Chapter One: George Eliot's Borderline Position in Victorian Society

In an 1872 essay, Edward Dowden made the now famous distinction between Eliot's "historical" self and her "second self" – the author of the novels who is "perhaps more substantial than any mere human personality encumbered with the accidents of flesh and blood and daily living" (CH 321). Dowden's comments called attention to the "impertinent observation and criticism" of many Victorian reviewers whose vexations, Dowden realized, arose from their prejudicial notions about Eliot's "historical self" and from their recurrent efforts to separate "the moral soul" of the art from its "artistic medium" (322). As Dowden notes further, Eliot is "artist as much as teacher" and

When a work of art can be understood only by enjoying it, the art is of a high kind. The best criticism of Shakespeare is not that which comes out of profound cogitation, but out of immense enjoyment; and the most valuable critic is the critic who communicates sympathy by an exquisite record of his own delights, not the critic who attempts to communicate thought. In a less degree the same is true of George Eliot. There is not a hard kernel of dogma at the centre of her art, and around it a sheath or envelope which we break and throw away; the moral significance coalesces with the narrative, and lives through the characters. (322)

Of interest here is Dowden's displacement and conflation of the literary critic with Eliot herself. Inasmuch as Dowden's emphasis is away from Eliot's "historical self," his argument rests on an understanding of Eliot's "second self" (the artist) as having a history of its own. The great artist is first a great critic of the human condition and is at once able to communicate delight with and sympathy for one's fellow-creatures.

Taking up Dowden's considerations of Eliot as a great critic, this chapter traces the development of Eliot's moral and aesthetic vision starting with her position in public intellectual discourses rather than with her artistic vocation. It suggests that Eliot's personal and intellectual concerns raised moral contradictions for her that she eventually believed could best be addressed by writing fiction. By shifting the historical window to consider Eliot's "second self" as public intellectual rather than artist, we can see how the complexity of Eliot's borderline position, which she experienced as both intellectual and novelist, developed and changed over time and how it eventually came to inform her use of "race" and borderline protagonists in her later fiction.

From her early translations of Strauss's and Feuerbach's critical analyses of Christianity through to her work as editor and essayist for the Westminster Review, Eliot participated in and contributed to the leading intellectual debates of her time. She was thus receptive to and knowledgeable about arguments that challenged accepted cultural "truths" or ideological certainties. By the time she began writing fiction in 1856, the natural sciences were established as the authoritative discourse on man's nature and place in the universe. As both a woman and a public intellectual, this discourse, particularly in its conclusions about women's different and limited intellectual capacities, presented problems for Eliot.

While Eliot accepted the rationality and objectivity of the scientific method on which evolutionary theory was based, her critical intellect combined with her personal experience made her skeptical of studies that categorized definitive human differences at the expense of the mysteries of personal circumstance and individual emotional responses that arose out of such circumstances. One such study, with which Eliot had direct experience, was phrenology – the study of head size and skull shape as a supposed indicator of mental and intellectual

capacities. As a subject of phrenological study, Eliot was made aware of the extent to which scientific method could be used as a basis for justifying and maintaining a traditional social order which was dependent on the subjugation of women and “lower races.”

While the inferiority of women and “lower races” had, of course, been established by long-held cultural beliefs, evolutionary science empirically linked the two sub-groups (along with children and idiots) lending a renewed authority to tradition. In phrenology, as with evolutionary science in general, notions of women’s inferior mental capacities were bolstered by diverse and ongoing physiological comparisons of women to “lower races” and to past states of civilization. Such comparisons were synthesized in Darwin’s seminal work, The Descent of Man (1871). Darwin’s work, the most far-reaching and objective account of the physiological differences between groups and individuals, purported to find that men, in all societies, were possessed of larger and stronger bodies as well as more highly developed intellectual capacities than women. Women’s smaller and weaker bodies, compromised further by reproductive functions and capacities, translated into different and somewhat limited mental capacities. In comparing the mental capacities of men and women, and different “races” or levels of civilization, Darwin was also able to assert, with some degree of confidence, that women’s mental characteristics were similar to both those of children and “lower races.”

Although Darwin was inclined toward caution when addressing the potential sociological implications of such comparisons, some rather incautious assertions are yet present in his writings and, as such, his observations, like those of many other Victorian scientists, seemed to offer a virtual prescription for ongoing sexual discrimination. For instance, in a chapter outlining the secondary sexual characteristics of man, Darwin observes

that man, largely owing to his greater size and strength, “is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman, and has a more inventive genius.” Darwin adds that man’s “brain is absolutely larger, but whether or not proportionately to his larger body, has not...been fully ascertained” (557). In a related vein, Darwin stresses the association of female physiology to juvenile human forms, noting that children “resemble the mature female much more closely than the mature male” and that the formation of a woman’s skull “is said to be intermediate between the child and the man”(557).

Although Darwin does not develop the psychological implications of woman’s purportedly more juvenile physiology, his observations and statements are in keeping with broader scientific theories circulating in his time. As Cynthia Russett points out, such theories (propounded by a wide range of Victorian scientists) stressed that inasmuch as women shared physical characteristics (smaller bodies and heads) with children, they were also likely to remain childlike in emotional character, “weak-willed, impulsive, perceptive, markedly imitative rather than original, timid, and dependent” (54).

Further emotional characteristics were seen to arise from women’s reproductive capacities. In a chapter entitled “Difference in the Mental Powers of the Two Sexes,” Darwin asserts that woman’s biological maternal instincts underlie her predominantly emotional disposition:

Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness... Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it *is* likely that she would often extend them towards her fellow-creatures. Man

is the rival of other men; he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness. (563)

Notably, woman's "tenderness" is subsumed by man's "ambition" and even his "selfishness," for out of man's selfishness arises the most distinctive, and incontestable, difference between the sexes -- the propensity for men to exemplify genius and attain eminence:

The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man's attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination or merely the use of the senses and hands. If two lists were made of the most eminent men and women in poetry, painting, sculpture, history, science, and philosophy, with half-a-dozen names under each subject, the two lists would not bear comparison. (564)

That women's intellectual capacities were and would largely remain (given the fixed biological and sexual conditions of difference) lesser than those possessed by men is a proposition Darwin further supports by comparing women to "lower races":

It is generally admitted that with women the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man, but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation. (563-564)

In comparing women to both children and "lower races," while upholding intellectual eminence as the key marker of difference between the sexes, Darwin's writing affirms many

prevailing Victorian notions of both gender and cultural hierarchies in which the civilized, white male stands at the apex.

Drawing unfavourable comparisons between women's emotional characteristics and men's intellectual capacities and extending those comparisons to "lower" (non-European, largely non-white) races was not novel to Victorian discourses of race and gender. Rather, Darwin's theorizing confirmed many long-held cultural beliefs about the similarities between women and lower races. As Nancy Stepan argues in a recent essay on nineteenth century science, the evolutionary theory that connected women and "lower races" had its roots in distant history: "women [had] long been connected with other social groups represented 'metaphorically as 'other' and 'inferior' in Western culture and were socially 'disenfranchised' in a variety of ways." Thus, she points out, Aristotle likened women to slaves "on the grounds of their 'natural' inferiority" (42). Inasmuch as the established racial view of the Middle Ages had its basis in "the binary opposition between blackness and whiteness"(42), the differences between men and women were likewise understood in binary oppositional terms. Men had long been characterized as powerful, active, brave, logical and rational, while women, in turn, were viewed as weak, passive, timid, illogical, and emotional.

Notably, in such a litany of split and oppositional characteristics, "one pole of these dualities [had] been accorded and socially sanctioned as having superior value" (Perry and Whiteside 7). The social context that guided nineteenth century scientists was one in which "the white, European affluent class males were at the peak of the evolutionary hierarchy (Perry and Whiteside 6) *and* such men were, of course, the ones doing the studies that affirmed little more than the validity of their social position. Thus, despite Darwin's objectivity and cautious qualifiers, his conclusions about the mental differences between men

and women, and between higher and lower races, repeated an all too familiar Victorian litany.

Additionally, Darwin's conclusions about the physiological differences between men and women, particularly in head size and skull shape, lent credence to earlier and ongoing phrenological studies. Before Darwin's writing in The Descent of Man, phrenologists had made the most authoritative studies of the size and shape of the head as an indicator of brain size and corresponding mental capacities. Phrenology, which combined many of the same ideas later synthesized by Darwin, was a science with which Eliot had direct experience when, in 1844, she had her head studied and her mental constitution classified.

Though today considered a pseudo-science, phrenology was sanctioned by leaders in the scientific community throughout the better part of the nineteenth century. The study originated with the writings of Franz Josef Gall in the 1790s and the practice began to gain credibility in the 1820s when phrenologists started "to focus on differences in the shape of the skull of individuals and groups" (Shuttleworth 124). In much of the phrenological literature of the nineteenth century, "women and lower races [were often] compared directly on the basis of their skull formation" and similarities were "proven" through studies of head shape, head size, jaw structure and jaw protrusion (Stepan 46). In addition to its perceived anthropological value, phrenology also had a broad-based popular appeal as "an explanatory structure for the experience of internal division" and as "a social philosophy" that "offered a new system of classification" (Shuttleworth 128). Because this classification was based on "innate endowment" rather than "rank and privilege," phrenology sometimes confirmed rather than denied the "mental equality of the sexes" (128-129), thus holding a particular appeal for women who had access to its practitioners.

Phrenology was reaching the peak of its popularity in the mid-nineteenth century when Eliot had her head measured. The so-called science was familiar to Eliot's earliest circle of acquaintances and was practiced by her close friend Charles Bray who had taken a cast of her head in 1844. From the measurement of her "very large" skull, Bray ascertained that "[i]n her brain-development, the Intellect greatly predominates" and "In the Feelings, the Animal and Moral regions are about equal; the moral being quite sufficient to keep the animal in order and in due subservience" (qtd. in Brady 20). Bray's phrenological findings, while confirming that Eliot's head was indeed large, affirmed little more than what he already knew about her. In fact, Eliot herself made little of the experience until ten years later, when Bray's assessment was reconsidered in light of Eliot's romantic involvement with George Henry Lewes, a married man, and her decision to live openly with him.

We know from The George Eliot Letters that Bray shared his phrenological data regarding Eliot with George Combe, the Scottish popularizer of phrenology. At Bray's invitation, Combe was allowed to measure and analyze Eliot's head and, initially, he concurred with Bray's findings and conclusions. However, when it was revealed in 1854 that Eliot was living with Lewes, Combe was "forced to admit that phrenology had failed to read her character" (Haight, GEL 8:xvii); in Combe's own words "her conduct, with her brain, seems to me like morbid mental aberration" (qtd. in GEL:8 xvii). Combe's pronouncement in combination with Bray's dismay at Eliot's altered and societally-reprehensible circumstances led Eliot to reconsider her own assumptions about the value of phrenology and the theoretical basis on which it was founded. Combe's reassessment of Eliot's mental constitution illustrated to her how readily the practitioners of scientific theory, especially in

its vulgarized forms, abandon the pretence of value neutrality and objectivity when that pretence no longer provides clear answers to more complicated, value-laden questions.

By 1855, both Eliot and Lewes had “shied away from accepting the contention that cranial bumps revealed unalterable aptitudes and dispositions” while Bray, for his part, accused them both of abandoning a scientific “physiological basis” for explaining human conduct and character (Semmel 33). By Bray’s own admission, he and Eliot had “violent quarrels” about the scientific validity of phrenology and “she taunted him more than once both for his commitment to phrenology and for his retrograde ideas about women” (Brady 21). In several letters of the time, Eliot expressed her disdain at the prejudice underlying phrenological classification. In an 1857 letter to Sara Hennell she writes that there is “so much sectarian feeling” in the adherence to “phrenology” that “the associations of the word [phrenology] are not agreeable to me” (GEL 2:402). To Charles Bray in the same year she writes that “every one who knows what science means must also agree...that there can be no social science without the admission [that]...true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex” (356).

Eliot’s understanding of individual human beings as complex phenomena in which inherent traits were difficult to distinguish and separate from larger circumstances would be explored in her later fiction, but it was also a theme she began to address shortly after her 1854 phrenological reassessment. The conflict that Eliot perceived between the competing influences of culture and biology on human behavior led to her writing, in quick succession, two significant essays that were published anonymously in The Westminster Review.

In an 1854 essay entitled “Woman in France” Eliot used phrenology to introduce an argument about the intellectual differences between accomplished French women and their English counterparts:

What were the causes of this earlier development and more abundant manifestation of womanly intellect in France? The primary one, perhaps, lies in the physiological characteristics of the Gallic race: - the small brain and vivacious temperament which permit the fragile system of woman to sustain the superlative activity requisite for intellectual creativeness; while, on the other hand, the larger brain and slower temperament of the English and German are, in the womanly organization, generally dreamy and passive. (40)

Despite her references to phrenological interpretation, in the same essay Eliot also considers two non-biological factors that contributed to the intellectual abilities of French women: the ability and willingness to marry based on mutual compatibility and the broader opportunities for women, largely through the “the influence of the *salons*” (42), to engage freely in intellectual discourse with men. Significantly, these arguments reflected Eliot’s most immediate personal experience: at the time she was writing her essay, Eliot was living with Lewes in a relationship based on mutual compatibility, and she had also gained significantly from participating in intellectual circles predominantly made up of men. Based out of her own experience, the crux of her essay lies in its appeal for a widening of personal and social opportunities for women as a way of providing a partial remedy for the intellectual inequalities between the sexes.

In these arguments, Eliot recognizes that biological conditions may well determine our psychological make-up, thus Gallic women are born with “small brains” and

corresponding “vivacious temperaments,” just as “[a] certain amount of psychological difference between man and woman necessarily arises out of the difference of sex” (38). On the other hand, however, she also recognizes the role played by institutions and cultural practices in shaping opportunities for redressing the effects of inherited conditions, and she chastises commentators who fail to recognize the importance and irreducibility of both sides of this dynamic.

These ideas are pursued in a second essay, published in 1855, entitled “Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft,” in which Eliot writes:

On one side we hear that woman’s position can never be improved until women themselves are better; and, on the other, that women can never become better until their position is improved – until the laws are made more just, and a wider field opened to feminine activity. But we constantly hear the same difficulty stated about the human race in general. There is a perpetual action and reaction between individuals and institutions; we must try and mend both by little and little – the only way in which human things can be mended. (185)

In this essay, Eliot calls for a more relational understanding of character and circumstances than she sees in the predominant biological and cultural discourses of her time and her focus is on similarities between individuals and groups rather than on perceived inherent differences. When this focus is lost, Eliot believes, the possibility of improving conditions for women is impeded:

Unfortunately many over-zealous champions of women assert their actual equality with men—nay, even their moral superiority to men—as a ground for

their release from oppressive laws and restrictions. They lose strength immensely by this false position. If it were true, then there would be a case in which slavery and ignorance nourished virtue, and so far we should have an argument for the continuance of bondage. But we want freedom and culture for woman, because subjection and ignorance have debased her, and with her, Man. (185-86)

Arguably, Eliot's preference for moderate rather than revolutionary reform is indicative of her borderline position in both intellectual and political circles. As editor of The Westminster Review and as a contributing essayist, Eliot was a respected member of a privileged intellectual class. However, as a female intellectual whose sex was hidden from the larger public by anonymity and by the assumption of a male, or neuter, literary persona, Eliot's position was also precarious. Thus she embodied a similar form of conflict to the one she perceived in the tension between individuals and institutions. That she believed this tension was best relieved little by little further reflects her privileged but precarious position in intellectual circles; she could afford to wait for gradual change and thus her decision not to become actively involved in direct political causes. The importance of these considerations is evident in Eliot's sometimes contradictory position on "the woman question"—Victorian discourses and debates on enfranchisement and education for women.

In an 1853 letter Eliot states, "Enfranchisement of women" only makes creeping progress; and that is best, for woman does not yet deserve a much better lot than man gives her" (GEL 2:86). A further letter highlights Eliot's awareness of her exceptional and privileged position in relation to other women. In an 1857 letter to the Brays, Eliot writes:

“Conscience goes to the hammering in of nails” is my gospel. There can be no harm in preaching that to women at any rate. But I should be sorry to undertake any more specific enunciation of doctrine on a question so entangled as the “woman question.” The part of the Epicurean gods is always an easy one; but because I prefer it so strongly myself, I the more highly venerate those who are struggling in the thick of the contest. (GEL 2:396)

Eliot did venerate many of her lifelong friends (such as Barbara Bodichon, Harriet Martineau and Mrs. Peter Taylor) who publicly espoused feminist ideals. Throughout her life, Eliot wrote often, and always with great affection, to these women. In an 1867 letter to Taylor, Eliot writes: “I do sympathize with you most emphatically in the desire to see women socially elevated, educated equally with men, and secured as far as possible with every other breathing creature from suffering the exercise of any unrighteous power” (Life 3:14). Such sincere regard for “those struggling in the thick of the contest” is characteristic of Eliot’s understanding of her own distance from that contest and, as such, of her borderline position in relation to other Victorian women. Through her sympathy for those who struggling to improve conditions for women, on the one hand, and her preference for the “part of the Epicurean gods” on the other, Eliot blurs and complicates the existing ideas that defined the difference between privileged and subordinate women in Victorian society.

Because of her borderline status within her predominantly male intellectual community and within the political milieu of the “woman’s question,” Eliot felt herself to be at various and particular times in her life, situated within, on the periphery, or completely outside the circles and social groupings with which she was associated. In other words, the conflict of the borderline individual – one who can neither be opposed nor assimilated in

absolute terms – was Eliot’s personal experience. The complex emotional and intellectual conflict of Eliot’s personal experience required some other form of expression than discursive essays or political critique. The proper vehicle for articulating her borderline experience -- her unique, incomplete but untethered understanding of complex human phenomena -- was fiction. It was only through fiction that Eliot could do justice to what she recognized in herself and others as the “mystery” of personal experience.

Eliot’s belief in the “mystery” of lived existence (coupled with her skepticism toward the sectarian application of scientific knowledge) is the guiding principle of her earliest literary efforts. In an 1857 letter to her friend Sara Hennell, Eliot writes, “I feel every day a greater disinclination for theories and arguments about the origins of things in the presence of all this mystery and beauty and pain and ugliness that floods one with conflicting emotions” (GEL 2:341). A similar sentiment informs her initial response to The Origins of Species. In a letter to Barbara Bodichon in 1859, Eliot remarked on her skepticism regarding the value and validity of evolutionary theory in the face of life’s larger “mystery”:

We have been reading Darwin’s book on the “Origin of Species” just now: it makes an epoch, as the expression of his thorough adhesion, after long years of study, to the Doctrine of Development.... So the world gets on step by step towards brave clearness and honesty! But to me the Development Theory, and all other explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes.

(GEL 3:227)

Eliot’s remark that Darwin’s work “makes an epoch” acknowledges its significance even as she begins to criticize its relevance from a moral perspective founded on a position

that is tantamount to religious faith. The irony evident in Eliot's phrasing of "step by step" progress towards "brave clearness and honesty" indicates her belief that the movement toward the full explication of origins and human development is ultimately less important than the "mystery that lies under the processes." Indeed, as Reina Lewis points out, all of Eliot's texts are informed and energized by her sense of this "mystery" (199).

The "mystery that lies under the processes" is a phrase that describes a phenomenon that by definition cannot be contained or explained by scientific methods. This phenomenon is analogous to the ambiguity inherent in Eliot's borderline position in Victorian society -- a position that confronts the virtue of clarity with the value of mystery. Such a position also presents an emotional contrast to intellectual or ideological certainty. Charging forth "bravely" toward ultimate "explanations" does not require is not a way of acting that is oriented to the appreciation of mystery, nor does such action require or allow space for emotional reflection.<sup>5</sup>

Eliot's understanding of the "mystery underlying the processes" describes the experience that compelled her to cultivate her "vocation" as a moralist through writing fiction. It explains also why she did not continue on the path of public intellectual and essayist, nor take up political battle as an activist. These activities did not afford sufficient scope for her moral philosophy. Since Eliot believed that the relationship between individual and institution could only be mended slowly, the best way to persuade others to her belief was by representing the complexity and intractability of individual circumstances, whether these circumstances are biologically or culturally determined or whether they are beyond the

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<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that concepts of emotional vulnerability, pity and sympathy are conspicuously absent from the list of praiseworthy masculine qualities catalogued by Darwin in *The Descent of Man*. Rather, Darwin returns rather forcibly to the necessary social value of sympathy in his final conclusions of his later text.

scope of human understanding. Fiction writing presented Eliot with the means of sympathetically addressing the conflict between those aspects of life we cannot control and those aspects that we can, between hereditary conditioning and moral agency, between intellectual and emotional responses to the complexity of lived experiences.

Eliot expresses these aims of her art most resolutely and sincerely in a letter to Charles Bray in 1859:

If art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experience that *opinions* are a poor cement between human souls; and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is, that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures. (Eliot's italics) (GEL 3:111)

Insomuch that Eliot's moral philosophy was at the centre of her art, she was also well aware of the precarious line between philosophic commentary and artistic creation. In an 1866 letter to Frederic Harrison, Eliot makes this point:

I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching, because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it ceases to be purely aesthetic, -- if it lapses anywhere from picture to the diagram, -- it becomes the most offensive of all teaching. (GEL 4:300)

This grave and measured seriousness with regard to her vocation is further delineated in an 1878 letter:

“My function is that of the aesthetic, not the doctrinal teacher, -- the rousing of nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the

prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic man, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge. It is one thing to feel keenly for one's fellow-beings; another to say, "This step and this alone, will be the best to take for the removal of particular calamities" (Life 3:268).

Eliot's understood her art as her vocation and as such it provided her with a framework of meaning that both incorporated and transcended her personal circumstances, and connected her more closely with a larger social body. Given Eliot's focus on the interrelation between personal significance within a larger social group, it is not surprising that she would appropriate the theory of organicism (which characterized both geological and biological science in the nineteenth century) as a way of giving form to her artistic vision. Reina Lewis writes that Eliot had an interest in organicism as "a theory of the interdependent growth and development of organisms (individual and collective, plant and human), [which] stresses the interdependence of the parts on each other and on the whole" and further notes that "in many ways, it is the culmination of [Eliot's] vision of organicist development as the solution to the theme of personal will versus social and moral responsibility that structures her fiction over a number of years" (199). The sense of calling or fitness of parts within a larger social body is reflected in the form and the content of all Eliot's fiction. In an 1962 essay, Bernard Paris makes a similar point when he remarks that Eliot's fictional characterizations are rooted in her personal beliefs about the individual's ties to his or her society:

The moral lives of George Eliot's characters - their sense of duty and rectitude, of personal significance and spiritual satisfaction - are very largely

determined by the extent to which the social experience of the race and the will of society have shaped their attitudes, and by the degree to which they feel themselves to be part of a corporate existence which is greater than themselves. (16)

The borderline protagonists in The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda share a “sense of duty and rectitude” and the need for personal fulfillment -- a need that is, to varying degrees, heightened, challenged or threatened by both biological and cultural claims from the dominant society that attempts, but ultimately fails, to define and contain them. Both Fedalma in The Spanish Gypsy and Deronda in Daniel Deronda are called upon to contribute to a “corporate existence which is greater than themselves.” Complicating matters, however, is the fact that the “social experience of the race” and “the will of society” are not one and the same for the borderline protagonist of these later texts.

In Daniel Deronda, for example, Daniel is portrayed as an inherently sensitive and loving man who is constrained, as privileged ward of the dominant society, from acting on sympathetic feeling until the revelation of his Jewish heritage places him outside the society of his upbringing. In The Spanish Gypsy, the conflicts between inherent and conditioned character traits, between private and public roles, between self-fulfillment and self-sacrifice, are equally unsettling and problematic and they derive ultimately from the conflict Fedalma experiences between her gypsy heritage and the claims of Spanish society. In both texts, the revelation of a biological affiliation with a marginal racial group reveals and compounds the protagonist’s borderline position, and thus compels both protagonists to seek meaningful societal action outside the cultural bounds of the dominant society. It is this attempt to

balance the idea of inherited characteristics – biological, cultural, or both -- with external or circumstantial influences that results in the thematic tensions in Eliot's later works

Eliot's fiction, as it develops over time, highlights her emotional and intellectual responses to a shifting but increasingly aggravated sense of her borderline condition, but this response is neither absolute nor conclusive. While many of her contemporary observers saw her as a "freak of nature, a monstrous anomaly in whom feminine and masculine traits waged a destructive war (Brady 3), Eliot herself understood the borderline position as one that was at once privileged and precarious, and as such an ideal position from which to encourage sympathetic understanding of both the self and other in hegemonic discourses.

## Chapter Two: The Exceptional Woman in The Spanish Gypsy

In her 1856 essay “The Antigone and Its Moral” George Eliot writes that the source of tragedy in Sophocle’s drama lies in the “antagonism of valid claims” (263). In The Antigone, the dramatic struggle is between the individual will of Antigone, the female protagonist, and the laws of social order represented by Creon, Antigone’s uncle and the ruler of Thebes. Significantly, the conflict that Eliot considers to be central in The Antigone exemplifies her own struggle as a borderline individual in Victorian society. As a public intellectual and as an artist, her efforts at self-fulfillment often came into conflict with prevailing cultural beliefs about women and their place in the social hierarchy. This conflict of the exceptional woman, particularly one chosen for ambitious endeavours, is one of the central themes taken up by Eliot in The Spanish Gypsy (1868).

In The Spanish Gypsy, Eliot tells the story of a woman who must renounce the claims of conventional womanhood (specifically love and marriage) in order to accept a higher calling of social and political leadership. In this lengthy poetic drama set in the time of the Spanish Inquisition, the heroine, Fedalma, is a woman of unknown parentage who has been raised as the ward of Spanish nobility. The story proper begins on the day before she is to marry Don Silva, duke of a Spanish fortress town near the Moorish border. On this day, Fedalma secretly leaves the palace to explore the city and is drawn by music toward the town square where she proceeds to dance among the common people. Her dance is stopped, however, when her eyes meet those of Zarca, a gypsy chief and a captive of the Inquisition who is being led in shackles through the square. On her return to the palace, Fedalma is rebuked by Silva for her public performance amongst the common people. When Zarca escapes his captors and later that evening comes to Fedalma, he reveals himself to be her

father and convinces her that it is her duty to join him in leading the gypsy people to a new homeland. Fedalma accepts this duty, albeit with great reservations about leaving her betrothed, and returns with Zarca to a gypsy encampment on the outskirts of the town. Don Silva, in his love for Fedalma, follows them and unwittingly helps the Zincali and their Moorish allies to storm his own citadel. When he discovers his mistake, Don Silva kills Zarca and at the end of the story, Fedalma and Don Silva are tragically separated. Don Silva resolves to redeem himself by committing to the oppressive reign of the Inquisition, while Fedalma, having accepted her fate, leaves the Spanish shore with her fellow-gypsies who, in the absence of Zarca, are expressing signs of possible mutiny.

Fedalma's fate is at once ennobling and tragic. She is the chosen saviour of her people and is able to accede to a role of social leadership, but not without the grave sacrifice of her love for Don Silva and without the certainty of future success in her calling. Her fate is thus in keeping with the themes of classical tragedy. For example, like The Antigone of which Eliot had written in her 1856 essay, The Spanish Gypsy focuses on the conflict between the protagonist's personal desires and the cultural claims of a patriarchal society. Much like Sophocle's Antigone, Fedalma opposes repressive cultural laws and in doing so threatens the social hierarchy of the dominant society. Further, as with Sophocles' tragedy, Eliot's dramatic poem ends with tragic consequences for the noble and heroic protagonist.

Written entirely in blank verse, The Spanish Gypsy is an ambitious work which combines both the themes and formal versification of classical tragedy. As George Steiner remarks in "Verse in Tragedy," [f]or more than two thousand years the notion of verse was nearly inseparable from that of tragic drama"(154). Verse, argues Steiner, is "more exact than prose, more self-contained" and "at once simplifies and complicates the portrayal of human

conduct” (156). The Spanish Gypsy, particularly with its versification and appropriation of classical tragic form, is perhaps Eliot’s most unique and ambitious attempt to represent, but not to resolve, the conditions of the borderline character, particularly the exceptional woman whose talents and ambitions lie beyond culturally-sanctioned norms of female behaviour. Such a representation is akin to what Richard Sewall calls the “tragic vision”:

...the tragic vision is not a systematic view of life. It admits wide variations and degree. It is a sum of insights, intuitions, feelings, to which the words “vision” or “view” or “sense of life,” however inadequate, are most readily applicable. (4)

In The Spanish Gypsy, Eliot’s “tragic vision” is informed by her intuitive sense of her own borderline position in Victorian society. Like Eliot, Fedalma occupies a borderline position that both heightens and complicates her desire for self-expression and for harmonious communion with a larger social body. Unlike Eliot, however, the conflicts of Fedalma’s borderline position are aggravated to such an extent that her willfulness and desire for freedom (the same traits that make her heroic) ultimately result in her doom.

Like much of Eliot’s poetry published between 1868 and 1874, The Spanish Gypsy has been largely overlooked by twentieth century critics who tend to view her novels as most exemplary of her artistic talents and moral philosophy. This is an unfortunate oversight. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer points out, Eliot’s poetry and dramas are “particularly remarkable achievements...because they contain, in tensely compressed forms, a full range of the conflicts George Eliot was inclined to suppress in representations of herself” (179). In The Spanish Gypsy, Eliot represents, exaggerates, and blurs the broadest range of conflicts between the inherent and culturally produced forces that operate on her borderline

protagonist. The complex interplay of inherited conditions and external forces forms a difficult and perhaps irresolvable tension in the work yet nonetheless poses a particular and forceful challenge to the parochial and patriarchal assumptions that underlay nineteenth century ideas about gender and race differences. Thus, by leavening the work with specific nineteenth century notions of racial differences and biological determinism, Eliot creates a uniquely contemporary *female* tragedy.

In her notes on "The Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy," Eliot writes that the idea for the work came to her when viewing a picture of the Annunciation, believed to be by Titian:

It occurred to me that here [in the Annunciation] was a great dramatic motive of the same class as those used by the Greek dramatists, yet specifically differing from them. A young maiden, believing herself to be on the eve of the chief event of her life -- marriage -- about to share in the ordinary lot of womanhood, full of young hope, has suddenly announced to her that she is chosen to fulfill a great destiny, entailing a terribly different experience from that of ordinary womanhood. She is chosen not by any momentary arbitrariness, but as a result of foregoing hereditary conditions: she obeys.

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Here, I thought, is a subject grander than that of Iphigenia, and it has never been used." (Life 3:32)

It is in these notes (posthumously published in 1884) that several important details about Eliot's thematic intentions with The Spanish Gypsy are revealed. First, the notes clarify Eliot's decision to write something in the form of "the Greek dramatists," but also something new and different from them. Second, in her reflections on the biblical story of the Annunciation, Eliot sees something at once ennobling and tragic in Mary's renunciation of

“the ordinary lot of womanhood.” Third, Eliot specifically identifies Iphigenia (the sacrificed daughter of Agamemnon) as a grand subject of tragedy. In classical tragedy, the hero is most often a man of high social position – a great king or leader such as Agamemnon, Oedipus, or Creon – and his conflict is generally one in which he attempts to uphold his high position. Significantly, Eliot’s focus is not on the high-stationed male protagonist of classical drama, but rather on the lesser-placed -- but no less tragic -- female protagonist.

The hero (or heroine, as the case may be) of Greek tragedy is one who because of some character trait or “flaw” (often an over-weening pride) in combination with circumstance and fate, makes personal choices that ultimately result in his (or her) fall from grace. For Eliot, as for many of her contemporaries, the notion of fate (or the will of the God or the gods), had been replaced by something akin to conditions of biological and cultural determinism, or what Eliot refers to in her notes as “foregoing hereditary conditions.” It is also in her notes that Eliot states she required “the opposition of race” to give weight to her heroine’s renunciation of “the expectation of marriage” (Life 3:32). The fact that she chose the gypsies as the race best suited to meet that requirement helps illuminate her thematic purposes in The Spanish Gypsy.

In the nineteenth century, the lawlessness and vagrancy of gypsies in England made them an “intolerable affront to the values of modern civilization” (Behlmer 231) while the unique culture and mysterious history of the gypsy people simultaneously made them a source of increased anthropological interest. One of the most widely read, though broadly criticized, nineteenth century study of gypsies, was The Zincali (1842) by George Borrow. Borrow’s picaresque socio-historical study of the Zincali (Spanish gypsies) originated from his philanthropic mission to disseminate copies of the Bible translated into Romany among

the gypsies. While he failed to make many converts, his “upward of twenty years” (9) spent amongst the gypsies provided him with great insight into the gypsy way of life. Borrow uses historical documents, personal encounters and anecdotes, and a close study of their language (Romany) to narrate the gypsies’ remarkable history.

Eliot’s notebooks reveal that she read Borrow’s text closely and from it gathered the essential elements for the historical setting of The Spanish Gypsy (the fifteenth century conflict between Spanish-Christians and subordinate religious and cultural groups) as well as many defining characteristics of the gypsy people. In tracing the history of the gypsies, Borrow notes that the Spanish gypsies “have at all times, since their first appearance in Spain, been notorious for their contempt of religious observances” of the dominant society. With no religion except fidelity to their own people (their “love of the ‘blood’”) (9), they were impossible converts, yet “the Inquisition looked upon them with too much contempt to give itself the slightest trouble concerning them” (90). Borrow argues that the Spanish Inquisition, fueled by avarice and envy, left the gypsies alone while focusing its persecution on the Jews and Moors-- the Jews being a threat in terms of “their great riches and learning” and the Moors for their “superior industry” (91). In Eliot’s notes on her story’s conception she states that she could not use the Jews or the Moors to exemplify the inherited conditions of her protagonist “because the facts of their history were too conspicuously opposed to the working out of [her] catastrophe.” By this she means that the Jews and the Moors also contributed directly and significantly to the development of European culture and civilization, whereas the gypsies had no such claims, and no pretense to any such claims. In fact, the gypsies preferred to not identify with European civilization. Eliot’s protagonist, biologically affiliated with a group exempted from the claims of civilized society, is thus

appropriately positioned to make unique and different claims about her own powers, talents and abilities.

In addition to appropriating some of Borrow's history of the gypsies in Spain, Eliot makes use of many of Borrow's romantic observations of gypsy culture and character traits. Most importantly, The Spanish Gypsy captures Borrow's sympathetic yet ambivalent view of gypsies as both aberrant and exceptional people. Borrow's attitude toward the gypsies is marked by impulses of sympathy and enchantment on the one hand, and derision or censure on the other. Borrow writes of the gypsies as "a privileged people" (22) who are as a whole, strikingly beautiful and bodily strong (25-26), and who are furthermore exemplary by nature of the antiquity of their race despite centuries of persecution and diaspora (44): "Perhaps nothing speaks more forcibly for the antiquity of this sect or caste than the tenacity with which they have uniformly preserved their peculiar customs since the period of their becoming generally known" (44). Conversely, however, Borrow does not discredit, either by example or by personal observation, the more stereotypically pejorative views of gypsies that have defined this group in history and literature. For example, Borrow prefaces The Zincali with the immediate qualifier that his study "contains little that is edifying to a moral or Christian point of view"(8). He uses a sixteenth century petition against the Spanish gypsies to show how some less savoury cultural habits of the gypsies have remained uniform over time. In this petition, written to Philip the Third, the writer categorically describes gypsies as liars and cheats, heretics and atheists (93-95), "a people who cause scandal" and "are prejudicial to morals and common decency" (97), and who are not only "idle and useless" (99), but have "sucked the vitals of the state" (100). Borrow's observations and interviews with contemporary gypsies often confirm the views put forth in this historical document and

he ends his study with the conclusion that “the position which the Gitanos [Spanish gypsies] hold [and held] in society in Spain is the lowest, as might be expected” (141).

This summary of gypsy culture and characteristics in many ways, but incompletely, explains Eliot’s choice of “gypsy” as the oppositional race in The Spanish Gypsy. While their distinguishing characteristic is fidelity to other members of their race, the fundamental condition represented by the gypsies is their rejection of and freedom from the cultural constraints that define European history. Thus, in so far as “being gypsy” can be an inherited condition distinct from cultural influences, it represents the purest opposition to the society of Catholic Spain in which Eliot’s protagonist, Fedalma, is raised. Additionally, however, the apparent lack of ambition with regard to the power or wealth of civilized nations makes them a race more to be watched than feared. In other words, the borderline condition of the gypsies is one of profound ambivalence: they can neither be dismissed as unthreatening to cultural norms nor comfortably assimilated into the workings of the dominant society. It is just this sort of ambivalence with which Eliot accords her gypsy protagonist in The Spanish Gypsy, but she does so both through a blurring of visible marks of difference and through a emphasis on cultural conditions that ultimately make Fedalma’s exceptionalism, or difference, strikingly visible.

At the beginning of The Spanish Gypsy, Fedalma’s position in society is simultaneously privileged and precarious. While not an immediate threat to the political economy of the dominant society, she still warrants close watch by its leaders. As a privileged ward in Don Silva’s home and as his betrothed, Fedalma is referred to by the common people as “Lady Fedalma.” Yet, Fedalma is also a “dark” woman of unknown parentage who is known to spurn the religious observances of the Catholic Church, and the

Holy Fathers in the Spanish city derisively concur that “the Duke’s wedding her/[will be a] union of light and darkness” (227). Notably, in these early descriptions of Fedalma, the “darkness” accorded to her seems to be a reference to both her mysterious origins as well as to some indeterminate or ambiguous difference of complexion. According to Borrow’s observations of the gypsies, gypsies “are darker or fairer according to the climate” of the country in which they dwell, though they are generally darker than most Europeans (14).

Significantly, Fedalma’s external or physical traits are typically described in abstract terms, thus further blurring the line of absolute difference from normative society. For example, in her first appearance in the drama she is described in physical terms no more specific than “a figure lithe” with “ripened arms” and “regal head” (245). Though she is suspected to be “infidel,” and most likely Jewish, (227), her racial heritage initially remains a mystery to both herself and others; as Don Silva declares, before he knows the secrets of her birth, she “[h]as been baptized and nurtured in the [Catholic] faith” and she “bears no marks/ That tell of Hebrew blood” (258). Notably, “marks” of “Hebrew blood” go similarly undefined throughout the text, thus at once emphasizing Eliot’s skepticism about a purely biological basis of human differences and focusing attention back to the cultural conditions that form individual character. Like the borderline race of gypsies that Fedalma comes to represent, she cannot be defined as “other” on the basis of mere appearance. Rather, Fedalma is initially a suspect individual precisely because of her ambiguous and ambivalent position in relation to the dominant social group.

In The Spanish Gypsy, Eliot’s description of the oppressive nature of the Spanish Christian society is her first attempt to exaggerate the cultural forces that operate on her protagonist. Significantly, the specific historical context of Eliot’s story is one in which *all*

people of dubious heritage (racial, religious or otherwise) are threatening to the social order and, thus, liable to persecution. The story is set in the Spanish territory of Andalusia -- "Moorish long ago" but in the late fifteenth century "Catholic is the trembling air" (203) -- is a world in which "God works by armies" (207), both at home and abroad, and the purging of the Mosques "makes Christian bells," "spurs," and "swords" (217). Opposing the oppressive policies but fearing the power of the society's leaders, most of the secondary characters in The Spanish Gypsy are new but uncommitted *conversos* to the Catholic faith; like the Jewish innkeeper -- a "[w]arranted Christian -- else how to keep an inn,/ Which calling asks true faith?" (210) -- they convert not out of conviction but out of fear for their life and property. It is in this context of fear and paranoia, that the Catholic leaders represented in the drama are able to justify their greed, corruption and oppressive policies.

That Fedalma's problematic relationship with the Catholic faith is initially rumoured rather than shown through direct action emphasizes how the borderline individual complicates the abilities of the dominant cultural forces to exert their powers. Of Fedalma, the common people *say* that "Father Marcos says she'll not confess/And loves not holy water" (227). Fedalma herself initially *thinks* rather than *acts* in a directly oppositional manner to the church. For example, she knows that Father Isidor is "her enemy":

She knew it and defied him; all her soul  
Rounded and hardened in its separateness  
When they encountered... (250-51)

In her sentiments, Fedalma is not unlike most individuals in the society who justifiably fear and silently oppose the unrestrained powers of the society's leaders. She knows, as do others, that Isidor to be the most tyrannical representative of the upholders of the Catholic faith. As

the poet Juan speaks of him, Isidor “‘is known/From all the black herd round’”; “‘he seems less a man/ With struggling aims, than pure incarnate Will,/ Fit to subdue rebellious nations’” (222). Because Fedalma is subject to suspicion and scrutiny, she shares the lot of the common people and has an implicit sympathetic alliance with them. Though her love for Don Silva is great, she identifies not with the upholders of the Catholic faith, but with the marginalized and persecuted people of the common society.

Fedalma’s sympathy for the people, as we later learn, informs her desire to connect with them more closely, as she does when she dances in the town square. Significantly, however, Fedalma’s sympathy for the common people is only part of the reason for her dance. In Fedalma’s dance (which also marks her first appearance in the play), Eliot appropriates Borrow’s descriptions of gypsy woman to emphasize Fedalma’s inherent “gypsy” characteristics. Borrow observes that, contrary to stereotype, gypsy women are freer from licentiousness than “any race in the creation” (9). Throughout his study he highlights the fidelity of gypsies in marriage and within their social order, and while he notes that the gypsy woman shares her culture’s love of lawless independence (54), he concludes that there are “perhaps no females on earth” who “are, and have ever been, more chaste in their own persons, though at all times willing to encourage licentiousness in others, from a hope of gain” (75), particularly through public dancing.

In her conception of Fedalma’s dance, Eliot draws on Borrow’s observations of both the “licentiousness” of the gypsy performance and the moral rectitude of the dancer herself. Having secretly left the palace (“to see the world”(265) as she later tells Don Silva), Fedalma is drawn into the open Placa by the increasing sound and tempo of music that “must not be wasted, but must rise/ As needed climax” (240). She parts the “fired”(241) crowd and

proceeds to dance as an audience of Spaniards, Moors, and Jews alike watch in rapt amazement. As her dance reaches its climax, they shout exultantly, “forgetting poverty/ In the rich moment of possessing her” (249). In a dance that combines “feeling and action into one”; Fedalma is at once “ardently modest” and “sensuously pure”; she embodies “virgin majesty” and “harmoniously bodied soul” (246). The paradoxical qualities that Eliot accords her protagonist are somewhat in keeping with Borrow’s notes on the gypsy women and thus seem to be a visible manifestation of Fedalma’s inherent biological or racial heritage: as Fedalma afterwards tells Don Silva, “I did not mean to dance” but “did the deed /Being moved to do it” (265). Conversely, however, the purpose of Fedalma’s dance differs fundamentally from that of the gypsy woman who dances outside her immediate social group primarily for the purpose of material gain.

Fedalma’s dance, as she later attempts to explain it to Don Silva, had arisen out of her longing to intimately connect with and to be a representative of a larger community of a free, joyous, and sympathetic-minded people:

...The joy, the life

Around, within me, were one heaven: I longed

To blend them visibly: I longed to dance

Before the people – be as mounting flame

To all that burned within them! (265)

In many ways, Fedalma’s dance – both the actual performance and her own explanation of its meaning and significance – has important parallels to Eliot’s public performance in art.

Fedalma’s dance is at once an expression of her inherent traits or talents as well as an attempt to gain personal fulfillment outside the culturally and biologically ascribed codes of feminine

behaviour. Like Eliot's fiction, Fedalma's dance exemplifies how inherent talents and cultural conditions can combine to create a calling that produces the highest form of artistic expression – that is, one that inspires human connectedness and broad social sympathies. Like Eliot's art, Fedalma's dance encourages a sympathetic, harmonious universal experience, but in doing so must reflect or constitute the claims of less privileged or subordinate groups in the society.

Additionally, however, because the artist is a woman, the performance is yet subject to the ambivalent interpretations and often distrustful criticism of a patriarchal audience. As Eliot's personal experience had shown her, the revelation of an unconventional woman behind the art could forcefully disrupt patriarchal and cultural claims. In The Spanish Gypsy, Fedalma's dance blurs the opposition between herself and others and sympathetically connects her to a larger social group but also makes her unique character visible.. This visibility comes at a price, as proves to be the case first when her dance of joy is interrupted by Zarca's appearance, and second when it is questioned by Don Silva.

Fedalma's dance, which begins with her inherent human desire to "blend" with a larger community, is interrupted by the procession through the square of the gypsy prisoners, led by Zarca, and it is in the moment that she witnesses this procession that Fedalma's destiny changes: "her fate is sealed" (84) Fedalma finds herself held by Zarca's gaze, which seemed to her "the sadness of the world/ Rebuking her [with]...sorrows unredeemed/ Of races outcast, scorned, and wandering" (250) or, as she later recounts it, his gaze was one which "spoke not hatred" but "bore the pain of those who never could be saved" (283). However, Fedalma does not speak to Zarca at this time. Rather, she returns to the palace where she is set upon by Silva who has heard reports of her performance in the Placa. More dismayed

than outraged, Silva upbraids Fedalma for her public display: "A maiden nurtured as rare flowers are....flung yourself out on the dusty way/ For common eyes to see your beauty soiled!" (265). Fedalma defends herself by expressing the restlessness that has always haunted her: it is like the time Silva had instructed her "not to uncage the birds": "I meant to obey:/But in a moment something -- something stronger,/ Forced me to let them out" (264). She had felt a similar sentiment at the sight of the chained gypsy prisoners: "O horrible,/ To be in chains! Why, I with all my bliss/ have longed sometimes to fly and be at large"(274).

In opposing Silva, Fedalma opposes the cultural restraints on her inherent instincts. But when Zarca comes to her later that same night and reveals to her that she is a gypsy, he also rebukes her for the public display of her "talents"; he is angered to have seen "The daughter of the Zincalo make sport/ For those who spit upon her people's name" (297). Thus Fedalma's desire to express the joy she feels in life and her sympathy for others is opposed by both her future husband and her father, by both the upholder of cultural claims and of biological claims on her womanhood. In both cases, it is an underlying patriarchal interpretation that attempts to define and thus contain the expression of Fedalma's inherent desires and talents. In this way, again, Fedalma serves as a parallel to Eliot herself, whose literary talents and unique artistic expression were repeatedly challenged by patriarchal critics wishing to uphold and maintain their position of gender superiority.

By highlighting the patriarchal beliefs that underlie both the cultural and biological claims of gender and race, Eliot makes a salient point about the ways in which these claims, while valid to the men who hold them, combine to challenge the borderline protagonist and force her to react in a way that is not satisfactory to herself or to the ultimate goals of either claimant. Silva expects Fedalma to find fulfillment through love and marriage (which

includes a restriction on her connection with the common people or a larger sympathetic community). But while Fedalma herself desires personal fulfillment through love and marriage, Don Silva's claim on her is ultimately weaker than the claim that Zarca subsequently makes on her, particularly when he speaks to her of the gypsy "faith":

Fedalma: (*bitterly*). The Gypsies' faith?

Men say they have none.

Zarca: Oh, it is a faith

Taught by no priest, but by their beating hearts:

Faith to each other: the fidelity

Of fellow-wanderers in a desert place

Who share the same dire thirst, and therefore share

The scanty water: the fidelity

Of men whose pulses leap with kindred fire,

Who in the flash of eyes, the clasp of hands.,

The speech that even in lying tells the truth

Of heritage inevitable as birth,

Nay, in the silent bodily presence feel

The mystic stirring of a common life

Which makes the many one: fidelity

To the consecrating oath our sponsor Fate

Made through our infant breath when we were born

The fellow-heirs of that small island, Life,...(303)

Whereas Silva can offer Fedalma love and comfort, Zarca's claim is based on "a mystic stirring of a common life," which speaks forcibly to her inchoate desire for freedom and association with those who share this desire. She is awakened by a feeling of sympathy or fidelity with those whose share a bond of a "heritage inevitable as birth." Fedalma is moved by Zarca's claims not because, as he later tries to convince her, she was "born to reign" or that she is above "the petty round of circumstance/That makes a woman's lot" (309) but because she cannot return to the happiness of her life as a ward of the Spanish court once she learns of her true identity.

Because of the circumstances of her life and upbringing (her borderline position in the doctrinal and oppressive Spanish society) Fedalma's sympathies are expanded in such a way that she is made all the more sensitive to the calling of a higher, nobler social duty than that which would be allowed in a marriage to Silva and its necessary corollary, the silent acceptance of the dictates of an oppressive and corrupt social system. In other words, her acceptance of the calling is not the result of ambition but rather, as she later states, the submission to an "unknown need" that had previously made her "restless even in [her] bliss" (399). This "unknown need" is an inherent *human* need for freedom, individual expression, and fulfillment within an existing social order. For Fedalma, the combined result of biological determinants and her privileged protected and ultimately restricted position as a ward of the dominant society lead to an ever-widening sympathy for others who are fettered by oppressive social systems. However, this outward movement of sympathy – now dependent on Fedalma's acceptance of her father's bond – brings with it further conflict.

Notably, Fedalma's acceptance of her father's claim on her is characterized not by humble submission nor by grand visions of the larger good but rather by a concern as to

whether her sacrifice will ultimately lead to an improvement in the gypsy lot, and most interestingly, in the lot of the gypsy women who experience the suffering of their race most keenly:

O father, will the women of our tribe  
 Suffer as I do, in the years to come  
 When you have made them great in Africa?  
 Redeemed from ignorant ills only to feel  
 A conscious woe? Then – is it worth the pains?  
 Were it not better when we reach that shore  
 To raise a funeral-pile and perish all,  
 So closing up a myriad avenues  
 To misery yet unwrought? My soul is faint –  
 Will these sharp pangs buy any certain good? (313)

In this speech, Fedalma acknowledges the exodus of the gypsies to a new homeland in Africa may redeem the “ignorant ills” wrought by the oppressive Spanish regime, but without necessarily relieving gypsy women from the oppression of their own patriarchs. It is women who ultimately pay the price for heroic deeds, yet without necessarily receiving their benefits. Zarca responds with an evasive justification regarding the value of the tragic hero:

Nay, never falter: no great deed is done  
 By falterers who ask for certainty.  
 No good is certain, but the steadfast mind,  
 The undivided will to seek the good:  
 ‘Tis that compels the elements, and wrings

A human music from the indifferent air.  
 The greatest gift the hero leaves his race  
 Is to have been a hero. Say we fail!  
 We feed the high tradition of the world,  
 And leave our spirit in our children's breasts. (313)

Zarca's rhetoric is persuasive. It moves Fedalma to unclasp and throw down the belt of jewels given to her by Don Silva and to renounce the yearnings of ordinary womanhood. Thus the tragic die is cast. In order to be an exceptional woman, Fedalma is compelled to vanquish her feminine yearnings, and with them her "half-hearted" borderline condition:

Yes, say that we shall fail! I will not count  
 On aught but being faithful. I will take  
 This yearning self of mine and strangle it.  
 I will not be half-hearted: never yet  
 Fedalma did aught with a wavering soul.  
 Die, my young –joy – die, all my hungry hopes...  
 I will seek nothing but to shun base joy.  
 The saints were cowards who stood by to see  
 Christ crucified: they should have flung themselves  
 Upon the Roman spears, and died in vain –  
 The grandest death, to die in vain – for love  
 Greater than sways the forces of the world!  
 That death shall be my bridegroom. I will wed  
 The curse that blights my people. Father, come! (314)

Significantly, and in keeping with the outcomes of classical tragedy, the choices made by the heroine have tragic repercussions for other characters in the story: Don Silva kills Zarca when he realizes that he has been deceived into abandoning his hereditary station and his duty to protect his city. The murder of Fedalma's father by her lover aggravates Fedalma's ultimate tragedy: she can neither reunite with Don Silva nor can she abandon her calling to lead the gypsy people to a new home. The Spanish Gypsy concludes with Fedalma accepting the "sublimar pain" (398) of leading the gypsy people to a new home. "Great Fate," she says, makes her "heiress of this woe" (399). With the death of her father, and indications of a gypsy mutiny afoot, Fedalma knows that the dream of a homeland for the gypsy race will likely die. She looks forward with "[n]o dread but clear assurance of the end" (448).

In a recent feminist reading of The Spanish Gypsy, James Krasner suggests that the concluding events of the poem are an analogue for the problematic status of female literary ambition in the nineteenth century (56). This reading is not inconsistent with the fact that in The Spanish Gypsy Eliot purposefully juxtaposes choices in which the heroine is damned no matter which path she takes, that of "ordinary womanhood (Life 3:32) or that of fulfilling a "great destiny" outside the bounds of traditional womanhood. Significantly, however, Fedalma does not choose freely, but rather is "chosen," to pursue her ambitious endeavour. As Eliot writes in her notes on the text, her heroine, as "a result of foregoing hereditary conditions" is "chosen to fulfill a great destiny" (Life 3:32). Fedalma's ascension to a role of social leadership is to be understood as a vocation, a calling, while the "foregoing hereditary conditions" include a complex interplay of her inherent, or "gypsy," traits and the cultural

conditions that force these traits to surface, to become visible. It is this visibility of normative female difference, represented through Fedalma's dance that is subject to patriarchal censure.

As previously discussed in the introduction to this study, with the revelation of the woman behind the pseudonym, Eliot was exposed to gender-biased critiques of her work that were simultaneously laudatory and censorious. The Spanish Gypsy was recognized at once as an ambitious new foray into yet another male-dominated arena of literary production and many critics concurred with the reviewer of The Spectator who called it "undoubtedly much the greatest poem of any wide scope and on a plan of any magnitude, which has ever proceeded *from a woman*" (qtd. in Haight 405). Other critics, however, could not reconcile the heroic efforts of the female protagonist to the tragic form of the work. This lack of reconciliation is evident in several reviews that are peculiar in what seems to be a purposeful misreading of both the characters and Eliot's thematic intentions.

Throughout the reviews, there are repeated claims that Don Silva is the "real" hero of the drama, and these claims simultaneously refuse to view Fedalma's plight sympathetically or to accord her any heroic dimension. For example, The Westminster Review (July 1868) recognizes that the work embodies contemporary themes but criticizes Eliot for failing to show how "the aim of all culture and all training should be to free us from the yoke of authority":

...in our opinion, the cultured Fedalma should live, and not the untutored Zincala who pays the mere barbarian's homage to authority. Submission is noble; but there is something nobler than mere blind submission." (189)

The reviewer concludes that in The Spanish Gypsy, “we feel, not the strong power of man, but the force of circumstance; not the freedom of the human soul, and the unspeakable blessings which flow from it, but only the crushing influence of fate” (190). Though sympathetic to Fedalma, the reviewer fails or refuses to see the patriarchal claims that define and limit her desires both inside and outside the community of her upbringing, and hence they fail to comprehend how her tragic fate is unavoidable.

The Atheneum reviewer finds Fedalma “a less human and less consistent character than Don Silva.” In a more sexist vein, the reviewer objects to Fedalma’s sentiment of “fealty to her race -- less a product of nature than of custom and education” as an abstract ideal “which of all influences are usually the least capable of defeating the mastery of love over a woman’s heart” (855). As a result, Fedalma’s sacrifice is implausible and unheroic and “never...rises to the strength and dignity of a tragic passion” (855). Similarly, The Nation (1868) reviewer diminishes Fedalma’s character while praising Silva as “the hero of the poem.” Don Silva is a “generous nobleman” who exemplifies “the growth and fusion of a personal and egotistical consciousness in the sense of generic and national honour, governed and directed by his religion, his Christ, his patron saints, [and] his ancestors” (13). In contrast, Fedalma is tritely summarized as a “very lovely and perfect creation” whose “filial instincts” are “so irresistible that she surrenders herself to her new strange destiny” and “wanders forth into outlawry” with “the beggarly Zincali” (13). In comparison to Don Silva, “Fedalma, the plebeian, certainly suffers less” (14).

Ironically, many of these reviews exemplify the very same patriarchal assumptions that Eliot is contesting in her dramatic poem. Despite Eliot’s careful and detailed considerations of the corrupt nature of the cultural forces that operate on her protagonist,

these Victorian reviews emphasize the belief that the mere fact of Fedalma's sex relegates her to a less than heroic, and therefore less than tragic, position in the story. In other words, they assume Fedalma would and should naturally choose the "lot" of "ordinary womanhood,"

In response to both the mixed and the more laudatory reviews of The Spanish Gypsy, Eliot writes to her publisher just after the drama had been serially published:

I am vexed by the non-success of the serial edition...[although] I have [also] been of late quite astonished by the strengthening testimonies that have happened to come to me, of people who care about every one of my books, and continue to read them – especially young men, who are just the class I care most to influence. (GEL 4:397)

In Middlemarch, the novel begun shortly after the 1868 publication of The Spanish Gypsy, Eliot returns to the theme of how patriarchal traditions influence and diminish the significance of a woman's desire to fulfill a vocation that transcends the lot of "ordinary womanhood," which of course is a patriarchal notion in its own right. With its near-contemporary setting, its multi-plot form and its complex web of male and female relationships, Middlemarch also speaks forcibly to the "young men" that Eliot hoped to influence through her writing. Through her portrayals of ideal young men (such as Tertius Lydgate, whose ambitions are no less thwarted by tradition than the aspirations of the novel's heroine Dorothea), Eliot challenges the traditions of the English patriarchy even as she portrays those traditions determining the conduct of the male characters in the text. In her last novel, Daniel Deronda Eliot challenges the tradition more radically still, and speaks even more strongly to the "young men" she most sought to influence.

Chapter Three: Daniel Deronda and The Hidden Jew

“Was she beautiful or not beautiful?” In the introductory sentence to the opening scene of Eliot’s last novel Daniel Deronda, the reader’s gaze is directed by mysterious eyes at the figure of a young Englishwoman, Gwendolen Harleth, at a gambling table in a resort town of undisclosed location. Gwendolen’s concentration is interrupted and her luck changed by the critical gaze of a young “dark-haired” man. She loses her money, the game ends and the chapter concludes with her questions (giving voice to her perturbation, and perhaps to a hidden desire): Who is that “dark-haired man?” and “Is he an Englishman?” (8-9).

From the outset, Daniel Deronda is premised on profound uncertainty – uncertainty of character and action, place and time, subject and form. The story starts in medias res and the initial questions posed by the story’s two main characters, Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth, highlight concerns of physical appearance, moral and emotional ambivalence, race, class, gender and nationality that are not satisfactorily answered in the novel’s complex non-linear form. The initial ambivalence that surrounds both Daniel and Gwendolen (ambivalence about who they are and the circumstances that have brought them together) introduces the reader to the thematic complexity of the story to follow. As Barbara Hardy notes, Daniel Deronda, like all of Eliot’s novels, “is a love-story, it is a profound psychological study in human relationships and individual growth, it is a challenging moral argument, and it is an analysis of contemporary Victorian society.” But the novel is also marked by many “striking new departures” (7). As with The Spanish Gypsy, Daniel Deronda is an extended experiment in both form and content. Specifically, Daniel Deronda is a conscious experimentation with and subversion of the established conventions of the bildungsroman, the most popular form of novel in Eliot’s time.

According to Jerome Buckley in Season of Youth, the bildungsroman is a “novel of education” or “novel of youth” (13) that traces the moral, psychological or social development of the main character (usually male) from youth to maturity. The bildungsroman relates the progress of a single individual within the broader whole of an established social order. It is a quest narrative in which the individual overcomes a series of obstacles placed in the way of his self-development. This dependence on an overarching linear plot with a clear trajectory is a fundamentally bourgeois literary form that reflects the circumstances of the nineteenth century individual who is moved by need or opportunity to rise above his initial class or origins, and whose progress moves toward an eventual integration into the middle or upper classes. The bildungsroman also often includes autobiographical elements and the author may rely on his or her own unique history, which given the bildungsroman’s highly formulaic character, can lend an air of reality to the narrative. Because of its emphasis on self-improvement and socialization the bildungsroman can also be used as a form of critique, as in Dickens’ Great Expectations (1861), that encompasses both the failings of the individual hero and of his society.

In addition to the general purposes or uses of the form, the English bildungsroman is further distinguished by several more specific characteristics. First, the protagonist is most often an orphan who begins the quest for his identity starting from childhood and proceeding to adulthood through education and travel. Second, the protagonist typically travels from a small town to London to find an occupation and to continue his search for identity. Third, it is usually in London that the protagonist has an experience with love. Buckley notes that in the English bildungsroman, there are “at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting” (17). It is the tension of these love affairs in combination with the

“education” the hero receives in London that ultimately, often painfully, leads the protagonist to reconcile himself to “the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make” (17). Ultimately, the protagonist’s struggle to find identity brings him back to the country home where he initially began developing his character and where he is often successfully and proudly reintegrated into society.

In her feminist reading of Daniel Deronda, Kristin Brady argues that “Eliot’s focus on a female as well as a male child fundamentally alters the conventional plot of personal development and vocation” of Bildungsroman: “while the [conventional] Bildungsroman traces the process by which the boy discovers his professional role within patriarchy, in presenting the girl’s quest for identity it can only expose her exclusion from the same power structure” (94). With its dual plot line and doubling of protagonists, Daniel Deronda can be read as a study in the contrasting quests of its male and female protagonists. However, a reading which focuses on Gwendolen’s story as most disruptive of bildungsroman convention tends to detract emphasis away from Daniel’s uniquely unconventional story -- the “racial” story -- that was most unsettling to Eliot’s contemporaries and continues to be a problem to modern students of Eliot’s last novel. As noted in the introduction to this study, Victorian critics were intrigued by Eliot’s portrayal of Gwendolen Harleth and her English counterparts, but were highly unsettled by Eliot’s emphasis on the Jewish characters and plot. Most significantly, many of Eliot’s contemporaries denounced Eliot’s conclusion in which Daniel, the eponymous character, embraces his Jewish heritage and effectually turns his back on the English society of his upbringing.

Fundamentally, it is Eliot’s use of “Jewishness” in Daniel Deronda that disrupts the conventional English bildungsroman and with it the cultural beliefs on which the form is

premised. Through her use of Jewishness as the inherent and culturally-reproduced condition of her borderline protagonist, Eliot offers a scathing critique of the biological and cultural claims used within her society to uphold white, English, male supremacy. Focusing on how Eliot uses Daniel and his Jewishness to both uphold and transgress the conventions of the English bildungsroman illustrates the complexity of her radical experiment in form and content. This experiment, however, is wrought with tension. As the ubiquitous but ambivalent racial “other” in Victorian England, the Jew could neither be opposed nor contained in purely oppositional terms. Eliot’s experiment with the bildungsroman form emphasizes this difficulty of containment. The borderline position of her protagonist is such that he cannot fit into established conventional forms, including the bildungsroman, and thus must continue his search for identity outside the teleological and parochial bounds of English social institutions.

As noted above, the bildungsroman is a highly formulaic and therefore a highly restrictive and conservative literary form. By presenting a different form of development, one concerned with changing the society in which the individual is to be integrated, rather than merely developing the individual himself, Eliot necessarily had to adapt, indeed transform, the conventions of the bildungsroman. Significantly, starting from Daniel’s orphan condition up until his final departure from the society of his upbringing, Eliot appropriates only to subvert almost every external element of the English bildungsroman. By taking the story somewhat out of its non-linear progression and following Daniel’s development from youth to maturity, from English to Jewish, one sees more clearly how Eliot blurs and complicates the biological and cultural determinants that operate on her protagonist and how these combined forces could work to create an exceptional and morally superior character, one

who comprises an ideal of sympathy on behalf of others and a sure sense of his own primacy. It is this type of ideal that was the end goal of the bildungsroman hero, and the ideal of an English gentleman, the station from which the revelation of Daniel's racial heritage ultimately excludes him.

Like the hero of the conventional bildungsroman, Daniel is an orphan but an orphan raised as a gentleman. Thus, unlike the working class hero of Great Expectations, Daniel does not have to struggle to attain a comfortable station in life and English society does not offer him any opportunities he does not already enjoy. Daniel's orphan experience is primarily one of contentment and privilege. As a ward of Sir Hugo, a member of the country gentry and a man who was "always cheerful and indulgent," Daniel's early experience was "very delightful" (140). Sheltered from the larger ills of the world and tutored privately in his home, Daniel does not begin to question his social position until, as a thirteen-year old boy, he reflects on his identity by contemplating familiar literary conventions:

Having read Shakespeare as well as a great deal of history, he could have talked with the wisdom of a bookish child about men who were born out of wedlock and were held unfortunate in consequence, being under disadvantages which required them to be a sort of heroes if they were to work themselves up to an equal standing with their legally born brothers. But he had never brought such knowledge into any association with his own lot, which had been too easy for him ever to think about it – until this moment when there had darted into his mind with the magic of quick comparison, the possibility that here was the secret of his own birth, and that the man whom he called uncle was really his father." (141)

With this unsettling possibility about his “lot,” Daniel becomes increasingly sensitive to any hints that his prospects are inconsistent with his understanding of the kind of stories English gentlemen tell about themselves. Thus he reacts with keen sensitivity to Sir Hugo’s light-hearted comment that with his fine singing voice, he may become a great singer. Daniel’s tastes for the privileges of being a gentlemen “were altogether in keeping with his nurture” and “now the lad had been stung to the quick by the idea that his uncle – perhaps his father – thought of a career for him which was totally unlike his own, and which he knew very well was not thought of among possible destinations for the sons of English gentlemen” (143-144). Thus only slowly does Daniel begin to question whether the stereotypical destinations for English gentlemen are appropriate to him, in large part because by most indications thus far, he is an English gentleman.

But the seeds of doubt have been sown. These doubts, which arise in part from his reflecting on the possibility of his illegitimacy, have a profound influence on his character. Incidents following the revelation of possible illegitimacy emphasize how Daniel’s characteristic sympathy for others is both an inherent condition and one that arises from the circumstances of his upbringing. These characteristics, with their feminine associations, contribute to Daniel’s growing sympathy for the plight of the ill-fortuned:

The sense of an entailed disadvantage – the deformed foot doubtfully hidden by the shoe, makes a restlessly active spiritual yeast, and easily turns a self-centred, unloving nature into an Ishmaelite. But in the rarer sort, who presently see their own frustrated claim as one among a myriad, the inexorable sorrow takes the form of fellowship and makes the imagination tender. Daniel’s early-wakened susceptibility, charged at first with ready

indignation and resistant pride, had given a bias to his conscience, a sympathy with certain ills, and a tension of resolve in certain directions, which marked him off from other youths much more than any talents he possessed.

(148-149)

Daniel's sense of "entailed disadvantage" is clear (among other things, his rights to inherit are, of course, "entailed" by the principle of primogeniture), but by virtue of his sex he is also substantially privileged. As a male ward in a wealthy home he is sent off to get an education worthy of the son of an Englishman. However, Daniel's "tension of resolve in certain directions" also unsettles the value he places on his conventional education. Although Daniel attends both Eton and Cambridge, at Cambridge he reproaches himself for having been attracted to the conventional advantages of English education and he is tempted to ask Sir Hugo to let him quit the University to pursue studies abroad: "He longed now to have the sort of apprenticeship to life which would not shape him too definitely, and rob him of the choice that might come from a free growth" (153). The decision to leave Cambridge is made for him, however, after the assistance he gives a friend causes him to forsake his own studies. Eliot thus makes it clear that the typical path of development for an English gentleman with its conventional education and accomplishments is itself an obstacle obstructing Daniel's true path.

Consistent with the conventions of the bildungsroman, Daniel travels to London where, *against* those same conventions, he lives comfortably on a generous "bachelor's income" (149). Like the more conventional hero, Daniel is moved by the need and opportunity to rise above his initial class or origins of Englishman; however, it is a moral

ascension he seeks and the movement toward such ascension is premised on sympathy for others who share his plight rather than on the ambitious desire for increased rank or privilege.

The “education” he receives in London thus begins with a compassionate gesture on his part, for it is in London, that he becomes involved with Mirah, a young Jewess, after saving her from her attempted suicide by drowning. Similar to the opening scene of the novel, Daniel’s chance meeting with Mirah displays a mysterious tension based on questions of physical appearance and of race. Initially, Daniel assumes that the black robed figure near the river’s edge is a prostitute, one of those “poorly-dressed, melancholy woman [who] are common sights” (159) in London. However, when he is close enough to see her face he is captivated by her “delicate, childlike beauty” (159). On speaking to her, Mirah’s foreign accent betrays a cultural otherness. Daniel asks Mirah if she is English. Mirah’s answer - “I am English-born. But I am a Jewess” (164) - parallels Daniel’s own as yet undiscovered identity. In addition to being a Jewess, we learn that Mirah is a woman of unblemished moral character, or as Mrs. Meyrick learns from Daniel, “‘a Jewess, but quite refined’” (169). This qualified comment reflects the prejudice of Daniel’s English upbringing as well as his sympathetic tendencies.

Mirah is in London on a quest of her own. Having escaped her exploitative father, she is searching for her mother, from whom she was separated at a very young age. Learning of Mirah’s unfortunate circumstances and of her search, Daniel’s interest in her plight is aroused: “Something in his own experience caused Mirah’s search after her mother to lay hold with peculiar force on his imagination” (175) and “roused his mind to a closer survey of details” (176) surrounding the lives of contemporary Jews. This leads him into the Jewish quarters of London, and, subsequently, into the homes, hearts and minds of the novel’s

Jewish characters. It is in the course of this search that Daniel acquires an education in the living conditions and religion of the Jewish community in Victorian London. As a product of his society, however, his views are initially characterized by general disinterest and unreflective prejudice. These prejudices are apparent in the following description of Daniel as he embarks on a search for Mirah's mother:

In spite of his strong tendency to side with the objects of prejudice, and in general with those who got the worst of it, his interest had never been practically drawn towards existing Jews, and the facts he knew about them, whether they walked conspicuous in fine apparel or lurked in by-streets, were chiefly of the sort most repugnant to him. Of learned and accomplished Jews he took it for granted that they had dropped their religion, and wished to be merged in the people of their native lands....Daniel could not escape (who can?) knowing ugly stories of Jewish characteristics and occupations; and though one of his favourite protests was against the severance of past and present history, he was like others who shared his protest, in never having cared to reach any more special conclusions about actual Jews than that they retained the virtues and vices of a long-oppressed race. (176)

Daniel's mental images of London's Jews also includes such stereotypes as "a hawk-eyed woman, rough-headed and unwashed, cheapening a hungry girl's last bit of finery" or "a young Jew talkative and familiar, willing to show his acquaintance with gentlemen's tastes, and not fastidious in any transactions with which they would favour him" (177). Such stereotypical views were common among Eliot's contemporaries and the fact that the Jewish

population was increasing at the time of Eliot's writing did not console a conservative and xenophobic society.

Between 1850 and 1900, the Jewish population in London rose from around 35,000 to 180,00 (Landow 1) and as a result, Jews became viewed as "daily present in society and demanding access into a bourgeois life" (*Difference*, Gilman 35). Given long-held, deep-rooted prejudices, demands for access to many civic roles still met with resistance. As late as 1869, Queen Victoria objected to "a Jew being made a Peer"; it was 1873 before universities were opened "to men of all faiths on equal terms"; and it was only in 1878, two years after the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, that Jews were permitted to hold the highest government and university offices. Also, in the ten years leading up to the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, an influx of Eastern European Jews into England caused an outbreak of racism that was related, in large part, to a widespread belief that the heavy investment losses suffered by speculators during the period were related to the manipulations of Jewish financiers, an event touched upon in *Daniel Deronda* with Mrs. Davilow's investment loss and the family's subsequent financial ruin (Baker 125).

Daniel's ensuing "quest" for Mirah's mother reflects both his lack of knowledge of his heritage but also a salient and paradoxical feature of the Victorian Jew – his ubiquity and his invisibility. Although readily recognizable in Jewish neighbourhoods, in shops marked with a family name, and in the synagogues of London, once outside of these locales a Jew could go undetected in the large city and could thus become as invisible to Englishmen as Daniel's own heritage remains hidden from himself.

Daniel's hidden Jewishness is a feature that Eliot plays upon to blur and subvert a perceived physiological basis of difference between Englishmen and Jews. Daniel has been

raised an Englishman, and while it has been pointed out that most people “would guess, without being told, that there was foreign blood in his veins”(218), in his early years nobody speculates that he may indeed be Jewish. Instead, Daniel’s difference from English society rests primarily on the mystery or ambiguity of his birth – in other words, solely on culturally ascribed notions of “otherness.” Although other members of the English gentry assume Daniel is Sir Hugo’s illegitimate son, the possibility is not discussed openly in polite circles. Rather, as Mrs. Davilow tactfully tells Gwendolen, Daniel’s circumstances are such that “‘he is under some disadvantage’”: although he is “‘well received’,” “[h]e does not inherit property, and is not of any consequence in the world” (282). In this way, Daniel, by nature of his circumstances, embodies the condition of the modern Jewish male – that is, a man admitted into dominant English society, but without being entitled to the full benefits that accompany admittance.

Curiously, although none of the English characters suspect that Daniel is Jewish, Jewish characters -- Mordecai in the Jewish bookshop in London (327) and Kalonymos in a synagogue in Frankfurt (253) -- approach Daniel to ask him if he is not in fact a Jew. Notably, physiological descriptions of Daniel and of many of the other Jewish characters are often purposefully left open to interpretation. Upon entering a Jewish pawnshop, Daniel recognizes the face of its proprietor, Ezra Cohen, as “unmistakably Jewish” (323) but further details are withheld. Similarly, when Daniel meets Mordecai shortly thereafter he sees at once “a finely typical Jewish face” (326); apart from Mordecai’s “crisp black hair,” however, there are no other more visible or outward markers of his person given. Rather, Daniel’s description rests on the “intensity of expression” (326) on Mordecai’s face. Thus, Eliot’s descriptions in these cases consistently raise specters of essentialist difference just as they

simultaneously deny them.

Daniel's experience in London again contrasts with the conventions of the English bildungsroman. Typically, the hero traveling to London expects to find opportunities to continue his education or opportunities for employment, but finds squalor and poverty instead. This discovery results in "disenchantment more alarming and decisive than any dissatisfaction with the narrowness of provincial life" (Buckley 20). Daniel, to the contrary, is not disenchanted but sympathetically and intellectually challenged by his experience. He begins to acquire a sharper sense of purpose and belonging in his growing circle of Jewish acquaintance. Thus he begins to embark on his true path at precisely the point where a conventional hero begins to realize that he may have been diverted from his own.

Despite his growing affection and respect for his new circle of Jewish friends, however, Daniel continues to remain attached to the provincial society of his upbringing and it is shortly after he leaves Mirah in the care of friends in London that he goes to the continent with Sir Hugo and sees Gwendolen at the roulette table. It is through the characters of Mirah and Gwendolen that Eliot represents the romantic interests -- "one exalting, one debasing" (Buckley 17) -- of the conventional bildungsroman but with the English cultural stereotypes reversed: Mirah, the despairing and suicidal Jewess, is portrayed as a woman of unblemished moral character, while the beautiful and high-spirited Gwendolen is portrayed as, "having an inborn energy of egoistic desire". (32) Again, there is a blurring of external or visible and culturally ascribed points of reference.

Daniel's romantic feelings toward Mirah are tempered by a sense of honour compounded by his belief in her vulnerable condition (192), and he therefore assumes the role of her guardian rather than lover. Although the relationship between Daniel and

Gwendolen represents a significant and mutual attraction, they meet on only a few occasions. These meetings have a profound effect on Gwendolen, and Daniel comes to assume the role of her confessor and moral guide. Although Daniel is attracted to Gwendolen, by nature of his mysterious birth he feels himself “in no way free” to pursue this attraction romantically (138). Thus, in contrast to the conventional bildungsroman, Daniel does not learn about himself through romantic adventure, but rather holds off romantic entanglement until he knows the truth about his birth.

While Daniel struggles to determine his identity, Gwendolen marries Grandcourt. Whereas Mirah’s innocent virtue makes Daniel feel protective, Grandcourt eventually makes Gwendolen contemplate homicide. Grandcourt is in many ways Daniel’s character foil; however, his character is also drawn to suggest more than mere individual failings. His existence is symptomatic of a larger social decline and degeneracy. As Marc Wohlfarth remarks, Grandcourt is “one of the first great decadent figures in English literature” (192), an appraisal that associates him with the same scientific discourse that reduces women and “lower races” by certain physiological and psychological traits. As with the study of sex and “race,” the study of decadence was also “obsessed with the body,” and Wohlfarth points out how Eliot “followed the scientific model of physiological decadence in drawing Grandcourt;” his “baldness, sallow complexion, and drawl all testify to the inner worm of degeneration” and together comprise “a perfect example of a decadent hermeneutics of absolute legibility: appearance and underlying reality speak of each other in transparent mirroring” (192). This “hermeneutics of absolute legibility” is also played out on the character of Daniel. In contrast to Grandcourt’s physical and moral unattractiveness, Daniel is portrayed as a “beautiful” man with full head of dark hair, an upright carriage and a “fine

harmonious unspoiled face” (271). In other words, Daniel’s moral rectitude is mirrored in his physical attractiveness.

In both body as well as in mind, Eliot intends Daniel to represent something of a utopian ideal of manhood. Daniel’s physical beauty is the external manifestation of the inner balance of female emotion with masculine rectitude. This ideal is illustrated in descriptions of Daniel as young man. In his relations with Sir Hugo, for example, we are told that though Daniel “was moved by affectionateness such as we are apt to call feminine, disposing him to yield in ordinary details” he yet had “a certain inflexibility of judgement, an independence of opinion, held to be rightfully masculine” (271). As a man of twenty-six, he embodies “refinement with force.” In physiological terms he has a “lithe powerful frame” and “firm gravity” of face, “thoroughly terrestrial and manly; but still of a kind to raise belief in a human dignity which can afford to acknowledge poor relations” (157-158).

The stated ideal of “refinement with force,” of a kind and charitable nature in one so “terrestrial and manly,” is meant to serve as an important contrast to Grandcourt who, strictly by the privileges accorded him at birth, has become the model of the English gentleman. Grandcourt is well pedigreed and is the first male in line to inherit Sir Hugo’s property. Outwardly, by way of dress and leisurely pursuits (notably, horseback riding and hunting), Grandcourt is even more of the blue-blooded English gentleman. While this “type” is decidedly unattractive to Eliot, it is one that is upheld, albeit with some reservations, by the larger society. Generally, the provincial circle of Diplo people feel about Grandcourt much as Gwendolen does – he is a man of “cold and distinguished manners” (93), or as the narrator concurs “formidable – a handsome lizard of a hitherto unknown species, not of the lively, darting kind,” a “splendid specimen” who “looked like an heir” (115). Unlike Daniel,

Grandcourt is also devoid of human sympathy and compassion, especially for his “poor relations” which include Lydia Glasher, the mother of his three illegitimate children, and later Gwendolen, her mother and her four sisters. The financial support that he does give to these families is given out of obligation and as an exercise of power, rather than out of any intrinsic sense of compassion or concern for the well being of others.

As a man with “the courage and confidence that belong to domination” (582), Grandcourt is a caricature of the ideal type that the hero of the traditional English bildungsroman is supposed to evolve into and thus he exemplifies why the form must be transformed: its object is a creature of decline and corruption. Notably, in his relations with Lydia Glasher (his discarded mistress) and with Gwendolen, both of who continue to act against his will but with a subtlety and cunning that matches his own, Grandcourt feels a gnawing sense of “imperfect mastery” (297). As Kate Flint points out, Grandcourt’s reasons for marrying Gwendolen are written in a forceful language of mastery and domination, which reveals “not the desires,” but “the anxieties of masculinity” (175). While this sense of imperfect mastery is most evident in Grandcourt, it also finds subtler forms of expression in the novel’s secondary characters – notably in the kindly fathers who are trapped by the very notions they uphold. Sir Hugo, for example, is uneasy about what the future holds for his wife and female children, who stand to suffer financially because of discriminatory inheritance laws that favour male children. Similarly, Gascoigne encourages Gwendolen’s marriage to Grandcourt, despite his knowledge of Grandcourt’s past, largely because he would like to be free from the responsibility of taking financial care of his sister, Gwendolen’s mother and her four daughters. Eliot uses the failures of these male “guardians” to fulfill their responsibilities toward the less advantaged and vulnerable to represent the

failure of English society as a whole -- a failure she contrasts with the norms prevalent in the London Jewish community of the story.

Eliot's notebooks and journals for Daniel Deronda show that she had an extensive knowledge and command of the depth and range of Jewish history and religion. In his authoritative study George Eliot and Judaism, William Baker shows how Eliot uses Judaism to call attention to a religion which is the root of Christian faith and to develop in Daniel Deronda such themes as universal sympathy and spiritual assistance – themes deep-rooted in Kabbalistic ideas of “rebirth of the soul,” “redemption of weak spirits” and “transmigration of souls” (160). More importantly, there is a clear connection between Daniel's Jewish roots, his feminine qualities, and his respect for women. Amanda Anderson notes the connection when she writes:

Eliot's ambivalent attitude toward deracinated cosmopolitanism emerges in her treatment of Daniel's highly attuned sympathetic imagination. Uncertain social position as an adopted and assumed illegitimate son of Sir Hugo is seen to promote his imaginative sympathy for all the disinherited and unprivileged, and especially for women in distress. (45)

But although Daniel may possess a Jewish heritage and feminine sensitivity, Eliot makes it clear that he also remains an English gentleman. The essential value of these dual sources of virtue lies in the extent to which they serve to temper one another (as a kind of action and reaction between refinement and force). This mutual tempering is definitive of the borderline character and it is evident in Daniel's reaction upon first confronting his mother, the monstrous Alcharisi – a character who represents something akin to the Jewish equivalent of Grandcourt.

Once a famous opera singer but now aged and terminally ill, it is the Alcharisi who calls Daniel to her to reveal his racial heritage. Approaching the meeting with the idealist vision of a happy reunion between long-estranged mother and son, his hopes are quickly shattered by both the words and gestures of his mother. The Alcharisi's very first words to him -- "You are a beautiful creature.... I knew you would be" (535) -- are followed by a kiss on "each cheek," like "a greeting between royalties." In a "colder tone," she adds "I am your mother. But you can have no love for me" (536). Upon what he perceives as his mother's invitation to observe her more closely, Daniel feels that she is "remarkable-looking" but her "worn beauty had a strangeness in it as if she were not quite a human mother" but rather "a Melusina, who had ties with some world which is independent of ours" (536). A melusina is a female monster, a serpent from the waist down, and thus this characterization strongly parallels Eliot's description of Grandcourt as a "formidable" but "handsome lizard of a hitherto unknown species" (115). The Alcharisi's next words to Deronda are more monstrous still:

"I did not wish you to be born. I parted with you willingly. When your father died, I resolved that I would have no more ties, but such as I could free myself from." (543).

The Alcharisi's lack of compassion for her son parallels Grandcourt's lack of compassion towards others generally, but to have called her son to her, only to reject him a second time is all the more monstrous and speaks to the extremity of the Alcharisi's detachment from fundamental human relations.

In the complex litany that follows, the Alcharisi bitterly relays the story of how she rejected her racial heritage. As she tells Daniel, the racial inheritance of the Jews is a “bondage” from which she sought to release him:

“What better could the most loving mother have done? I relieved you from the bondage of having been born a Jew.” (537)

While this claim fires Daniel “with an intolerance that seemed foreign to him” he recovers “his fuller self” to listen to one “who with the signs of suffering in her frame was now exerting herself to tell him of a past which was not his alone but also hers” (538).

In the most pointed attack on the oppressive notions of biological determinism—and specifically the idea that women do not have the same capacity for eminence as men -- the Alcharisi argues fiercely against the idea that “ ‘Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster’ ” (539). Devoid of the moderating emotions herself, she appeals to the sympathy of her son:

“You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man’s force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out—‘this is the Jewish woman; this is what you must be; this is what you are wanted for; a woman’s heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small, like Chinese feet; her happiness is to be made as cakes are, by a fixed receipt.’ That was what my father wanted. He wished I had been a son; he cared for me as a makeshift link. His heart was set on his Judaism. He hated that Jewish women should be thought of by the Christian world as a sort of ware to make public singers and

actresses of. As if we were not the more enviable for that! That is a chance of escaping from bondage.” (541)

Daniel experiences a range of emotions as he listens to his mother, but most marked is the reversal of gender-appropriate responses. In the first scene, Daniel feels himself “changing colour like a girl” and “trembling” in her presence, and though his emotions move between of distaste and repulsion, Daniel’s more feminine instincts prevail. He feels “oneness with the sufferer,” his “soul was absorbed in the anguish of compassion” and “[h]is pity made a flood of forgiveness within him” (547). By the time he parts with her, “[I]t seemed that all the woman lacking in her was present in him” (566).

Significantly, in keeping with the autobiographical element of the conventional bildungsroman, the Alcharisi’s comments reflect certain critical issues in Eliot’s own artistic career. Like Eliot, the Alcharisi is a female artist whose rise to eminence had been brought about by daring rejections and perceivably “monstrous” breaches of patriarchal notions and conventions. As Eliot had done in her own life, the Alcharisi first breaks bonds with her father and religion of her father, then through an unconventional marriage effectively severs family ties and pursues a successful and eminent artistic career. The Alcharisi claims that her ““nature gave [her] a charter”” – through her voice and artistic genius – to ““be something more than a mere daughter and mother”” (570). Eliot’s “nature” or talent also gave her a “charter” to exceed feminine expectations. However, the fictional story diverges sharply from Eliot’s autobiography in so much as the Alcharisi explicitly refuses to attribute any value to moderating human emotions – notably love and affection. As the Alcharisi tells Daniel in their parting scene, ““[i]t is a talent to love – I lacked it”” (571).

Eliot, while breaching many culturally-ascribed feminine conventions, yet clung to her affections as “the best gift” women have (Life 3:19). In doing so, she was rewarded both in her relationship with Lewes and through her art which expresses her affections through a sympathetic imagination. In contrast, the Alcharisi’s rejection of her female affections or moderating emotions ultimately lead to her bitter demise. Once her beauty is faded and her voice is lost, the Alcharisi is reduced to trading on her reputation in order to enter into a marriage of convenience with a wealthy man. Thus, a lifetime animated by emotional detachment culminates in the very sort of bondage she sought to escape.

Daniel’s meetings with his mother can be read as consistent with, but also a critical commentary on, the conventional hero’s experience in London. Unlike the Alcharisi, however, Daniel does not want to be entirely free from “bondage” if that means forsaking the possibility of incorporating himself into a larger social whole. As he declares to Mordecai at the end of the novel:

Since I began to read and know, I have always longed for some...captainship, which would come to me as a duty, and not be striven for as a personal prize. You have raised the idea of such a task for me – to bind our race together in spite of heresy. You have said to me – ‘Our religion united us before it divided us – it make us a people before it made Rabbanites and Karaites. I mean to try what can be done with that union – I mean to work in our spirit. Failure will not be ignoble, but it would be ignoble for me not to try. (642)

A social or corporate “duty” is of greater value, to Daniel, than a “personal prize.” Furthermore, the idea of “captainship” in this case (as in Fedalma’s case in The Spanish Gypsy) is without the reward – either that of fame or promise, or even hope, of success. Yet

to Daniel, this “duteous bond” feels “better than freedom” (637) because he is “no longer wandering in the mazes of impartial sympathy”; instead, there is the sense of a “noble partiality” and “the closer fellowship that makes sympathy practical” (637).

Daniel’s final speech recapitulates the longing of Fedalma, but with a difference. As noted earlier, Daniel’s experience in London is not a disappointment; rather, it marks the beginning of his real education into his Jewish community and heritage. In Daniel Deronda, the disenchantment experienced by the conventional bildungsroman hero in London is displaced onto Daniel’s meetings with his mother. The Alcharisi represents something greater and more modern than the city; she represents “cosmopolitanism.” As Amanda Anderson notes, “the dangers of cosmopolitanism are played out through the character of [the Alcharisi]”: a “willfully cosmopolitan woman who has renounced her cultural heritage, the Alcharisi represents for Eliot the more extreme dangers of modern detachment” (52).

The Alcharisi makes her way into the ranks of the upper classes by leaving her family, religion, and race behind. While Daniel is made a member of the hegemonic class structure by virtue of his sex and his adoption into Sir Hugo’s home, the Alcharisi rises into the upper class by willfully separating herself from her Jewish roots and by purposefully disregarding established norms of feminine behaviour. The dangers of “modern detachment” embodied by the Alcharisi are the dangers that result from individuals pursuing their individual interests without regard for the law of their traditional community, which of course is what the bildungsroman hero does (in varying degrees) as he embarks on his quest for “development.” The nightmare of bourgeois individualism is realized in the squalor and poverty of the very cities that bildungsroman heroes inevitably gravitate toward and

eventually flee. But the city is precisely where emotionally untethered individuals like the Alcharisi flourish. The Alcharisi embodies the extreme danger of this flourishing.

Grandcourt, on the other hand, is the embodiment of the English gentry – the landed aristocrat. He stands to the Alcharisi as thesis to anti-thesis. Whereas the Alcharisi strives to escape the patriarchal law and restrictions of her Jewish community by making her own way in the cosmopolitan capital cities of Europe, Grandcourt lives by entailed advantage. He is the dead hand of primogeniture, the decadent parasite. It is through the use of these extreme character types that Eliot ultimately undermines the bildungsroman form entirely. Together, the Alcharisi and Grandcourt represent the polarities that Eliot rejects: a decadent corruption of traditional values and the emotional sterility of an untethered modernity.

Were the Alcharisi English, she would be Gwendolen, but with more natural talent and far less naiveté. Or to make the same point in a different way, the Alcharisi is what Fedalma would have become had she renounced the claims of both Zarca *and* Don Silva. The difference between the “career” of the Alcharisi and the “fate” of Fedalma reflects the difference between the tragic form of The Spanish Gypsy and the bildungsroman form of Daniel Deronda. Daniel is not forced to choose between the “valid claims” of his virtuous English gentry upbringing and his virtuous Jewish forbears; rather, Eliot treats these two claims dialectically and presents Daniel as their synthesis. He is a new kind of man designed to embody the best of both traditions. Thus, as he tells his mother in their last interview, he cannot simply abandon his English upbringing and education:

“The effect of my education can never be done away with. The Christian sympathies in which my mind was reared can never die out of me...but I consider it my duty to identify with my hereditary people.” (566)

Similarly, in his interview with his grandfather’s friend Kalonymos, he insists

“I shall call myself a Jew. But I will not say that I shall profess to believe exactly as my fathers have believed” (620).

Thus, Daniel’s sympathy extends to understanding the oppression suffered at the hand of traditional patriarchies by women like the Alcharisi.

In so far as Daniel’s sympathy is irreducible, so also is his borderline condition and thus he cannot be re-integrated into an existing society at the end of the novel. Rather, the possibility for integration is cast into the future. The irreducible sympathy of the borderline character is thus tantamount to indeterminacy. Daniel cannot fully develop his identity because the society needed for him to identify or incorporate himself into does not exist yet. This condition marks the end of the bildungsroman form; the form cannot contain its protagonist anymore than the society of landed English gentry could contain the aspirations of Jews and women without transforming its values and traditional way of life. Individuals can no longer be controlled from the grave, as it were, by entailed advantages and disadvantages.

Unlike the tragic fate of Fedalma in The Spanish Gypsy, Daniel’s fate outside of the society of his upbringing does not necessarily entail his suffering or a change in the way that he understands his destiny to be unfolding. In the romantic idealism of the story’s conclusions, at least for Daniel, some aspects of the conventional bildungsroman are restored. As suggested by Kristin Brady, in contrast to the “dead hand” of the father that

tragically influences the lives and fates of Fedalma and the Alcharisi, the “effect of Mordecai’s ‘dead hand’ on Daniel is different...precisely because the object of his projections is a fellow male”: additionally, in “accepting his own Judaism and embracing his friend’s cause, Deronda – rather than repressing his own desire, like the women under such paternal influences – guarantees for himself the two rewards of the male Bildungsroman: marriage and vocation.” (181).

But while it is certainly the case that the patriarchal values are restored at the individual level for Daniel, the related and over-arching social, national, and racial values (upheld by both the English society within the novel and by Eliot’s contemporary readership) are challenged. Daniel’s departure from England and his embrace, though qualified, of his little-known Jewish heritage was the cause of general bewilderment and affront for many of Eliot’s contemporaries. Eliot’s challenge to these conventional expectations is consistent with her thematic intentions and her long-standing artistic purposes as an “aesthetic teacher” through her fiction.

The social and psychological realism that was and remains much of Eliot’s *cause celebre*, is exemplified in the contemporary setting, situations, and characterizations in Daniel Deronda and culminates in a necessary disruption of existing class, gender, and racial hierarchies. Eliot’s realism and her moral philosophy is one that emphasizes both social and moral “truths.” Through the character of Daniel, who by nature of his borderline position escapes the boundaries of oppressive social, gender, and racial classifications, Eliot illuminates the degenerative movement of her society and consequently emphasizes a key tenet of her moral philosophy: the need for an ever-widening of human sympathy to redirect a morally degenerative social system. In the conclusion of Daniel Deronda, the

essentialist and deterministic beliefs about non-English races ultimately turn in on themselves. In creating an English-Jewish protagonist whose moral character exceeds that of his purely English counterparts, Eliot brings to life a contemporary subject who does not nor cannot fit traditional literary forms and thus calls into question many of the conventional beliefs of her time.

### Conclusion

In between the publications of The Spanish Gypsy (1868) and Daniel Deronda (1876), Eliot's letters, notes and journals are replete with references to the limits of scientific determinism in explaining or accounting for the mysteries of human existence. Throughout these writings, Eliot stresses the value of art, which she refers to as "emotion blending with thought" (Life 3:216), as an answer to the spiritual void left by rationalist and scientific discourses on human development and, consequently, as a model for moral development in a world that is becoming increasingly more complicated and untethered from binding human traditions. Many of these writings appeared in the three-volume George Eliot: Life and Letters, collected, edited and published by John Cross shortly after Eliot's death in 1880.

Looking to these volumes for connections between the art and the artist, Victorian readers of Life and Letters were disillusioned by the mundane details of Eliot's daily existence and domestic affairs which exemplified traditional and conservative values seemingly at odds with her unconventional life. Conversely, readers were shocked by the documentation of Eliot's self-education in philosophy, art, linguistics and language. The vast depth and breadth of her reading and learning exposed her to be far more broad-minded, well-read, intellectual and philosophical than anyone had imagined.

Significantly, the Victorian responses to Eliot's personal and intellectual existence are marked by a "reverence and reservation" similar to that with which many of these same critics had approached her fiction. These responses thus again betray many masculine anxieties about a woman whose intellectual and literary eminence exceeded that of most

men of the time, and readers of the Life often put forth gender-biased arguments which attempted to label, contain, and thus reduce the quality and impact of Eliot's art. For example, even the homage paid by Henry James (perhaps Eliot's most admiring literary critic) is underscored by patriarchal and masculinist interpretations of her life and learning – interpretations which lead him to qualify his final verdict on her fiction:

Her deep, strenuous, much-considering mind, of which the leading mark is the capacity for a sort of luminous brooding, fed upon the idea of her irregularity with an intensity which doubtless only her magnificent intellectual activity and Lewes's brilliancy and ingenuity kept from being morbid. The fault of most of her work is the absence of spontaneity, the excess of reflection; and by her action in 1854 (which seemed, superficially, to be of the sort usually termed reckless) she committed herself to being nothing if not reflective, to cultivating a kind of compensatory earnestness. Her earnestness, her refined conscience, her exalted sense of responsibility, were colored by her peculiar position; they committed her to a plan of life, of study, in which the accidental, the unexpected, were too little allowed for....If her relations with the world had been easier, in a word, her books would have been less difficult" (CH 495).

As has been argued throughout this study, Eliot's complex life and her "peculiar" position in Victorian society, contribute to the difficulty of her fiction. But in emphasizing Eliot's "irregularity," her "absence of spontaneity," her indebtedness to Lewes, and her "compensatory earnestness," James reverts to an essentialist viewpoint and suggests that despite Eliot's magnificent intellect, she lacked the male "brilliancy and ingenuity"

necessary to satisfactorily sustain her efforts. Thus, her “peculiar position” and “relations with the world” are read to be detracting from her artistic greatness rather than augmenting it.

In response and in contrast to the many Victorian essentialist readings of Eliot’s life and fiction, more recent Eliot scholars have suggested that we would not have Eliot’s exciting, various, and progressively dynamic fiction had Eliot chosen a different life for herself (i.e. one in which she accepted and adhered to a more conventional feminine role in Victorian society). Eliot’s “borderline” position (as it has been referred to in this thesis) was not one without emotional strain, but it was precisely the position out of which she developed and honed her moral aesthetic and out of which she created more difficult and dynamic fiction such as The Spanish Gypsy and Daniel Deronda.

Additionally, these later works are more difficult and experimental than her earlier works not, as James would have it, because of a “compensatory earnestness” but rather, as has more recently been suggested by Barbara Hardy in her considerations of Daniel Deronda, “because [the] materials are complicatedly and truthfully close to realities”: Daniel Deronda, in particular, is

...one of those works of art whose greatness is inextricably bound up with imperfection. It touches the limits of Victorian fiction, and its imaginative courage (covering both art and vision) results in a certain strain and tension.”

(8)

Dorothea Barrett, in her 1998 study of Eliot and her fiction, makes a similar point: “We come to George Eliot not for perfect churches but for flawed cathedrals” (153).

The idea of greatness bound with imperfection is one that Eliot herself understood

and embraced. In an 1863 letter, Eliot acknowledged both the difficulty and the rewards of her literary efforts:

...great, great facts have struggled to find a voice in me, and have only been able to speak brokenly. That consciousness makes me cherish...that my work has...that religious and moral sympathy with the historical life of man which is the larger half of culture” (Life II: 286).

Such sentiments synthesize not only the struggle and uncertainty, the precariousness and privilege, of Eliot’s borderline position but also the underlying moral and social purpose of her fiction.

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