

## Why Does Daniel Deronda's Mother Live In Russia?

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Eliot, like Daniel, wanted to avoid “a merely English attitude in studies” (*Daniel Deronda* [DD] 155). She educated herself to a degree which her critics struggle to match about Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Bohemia, and Palestine -- but not about Russia. In her relative lack of interest in this country she was typical of her own country and time; Lewes's acquaintance Laurence Oliphant noted in his 1854 account of his travels in Russia that “the scanty information which the public already possesses has been of such a nature as to create an indifference towards acquiring more” (vii). Apart from the works of Turgenev, Eliot is not known to have read any Russian literature, even though Gogol', Dostoevskii, and Tolstoi would have been available to her in French translation. The take-off decade for English translations of Russian literature started in the year of her death (Brewster 173). Why, then, having hitherto mentioned the country in her fiction only as a source of linseed in *The Mill on the Floss*, did she choose Russia as the location of Leonora Alcharisi's second marriage, self-imposed exile from singing and Europe, and emotional and physical decline?

Of course, Russia is not simply imposed on Alcharisi by Eliot; she also chose it for herself (this article will treat her and her second husband as though they were real people, in the interests of historical investigation). After the death of her first husband she had suitors of many countries, including Sir Hugo Mallinger, and there is no reason to think that by the age of thirty her options had narrowed to a single man. Of Halm-Eberstein's personal attractions she makes no mention. There are, however,

several reasons why she may have favoured a Russian husband. She ended her life as a singer abruptly and absolutely, and may have wished to move as far away as possible from the West European countries most associated with her unhappy childhood and motherhood: Italy and England. She would also have wished to remain unknown to Daniel, and inaccessible to Jews such as Kalonymos who knew of Daniel's birth. The Russian Empire was not only geographically remote, but difficult to travel in. Assuming that she first marries at the age of eighteen, she arrives in Russia in the year in which the first train line between Moscow and Saint Petersburg had only just opened. Alone amongst European countries, Russia required its visitors to carry a passport. On the other hand, in so far as she sought wealth and social status to help compensate for the loss of her career, she may have favoured marriage into an aristocracy which in the early 1850s had greater power in relation to its inferiors, if not to its superiors, than any (other) European aristocracy. Married to a Prince, she would have had access to the Saint Petersburg Court, which was then arguably the richest and most splendid in the world.

But George Eliot had a number of reasons for choosing Russia as the location for Alcharisi's second marriage, in addition to those of Alcharisi herself. After Alcharisi's second marriage, she suffers greatly, and Russia was to Eliot an obvious place for someone to suffer *in*. Its reputation in Britain was that of a barbarous autocracy; it is highly likely to be the unnamed 'certain barbaric Power with valuable possessions on the map of the world' in which Daniel Doyce finds employment in *Little Dorrit* (Part 2 Chapter 22). In 1842 Eliot wrote to Cara Bray that she would be stoical about her father's change of house, "if I be attaining a better autocratship than that of the Emperor of all the Russias – the empire over self" (*Eliot Letters* [EL] 1: 138). Shortly before beginning *Daniel Deronda* she had become acquainted with

Turgenev, who had been exiled by the Tsar to his country estate between 1852 and 1854 for writing a laudatory obituary of Gogol'. *Daniel Deronda* makes several references to Siberia: Lush says "I am not to be exiled to Siberia" (by Gwendolen's dislike), and Sir Hugo (with reference to Halm-Eberstein) quotes Leroux as remarking that "A man might as well take down a fine peal of church bells and carry them off to the steppes" (*DD* 270, 375) Alcharisi seems, as some convicts were, physically broken by the experience (Kalonymos "took a journey into Russia to see me; he found me weak and shattered") -- or even killed ("she looked like a dreamed visitant from some region of departed mortals") (547, 571). David Kaufmann commented in his 1877 essay in praise of the novel, *George Eliot und das Judentums*, 'Her life as we see it is a broken existence -- a picture of apostasy punished.' (Kaufmann 80). She is forty-five, but, like Eliot who was fifty-seven at the time that she created her, fears that she does not have long to live. On the other hand, the novel also associates Russia negatively with luxury, and with the vice which it most prominently denounces -- gambling.<sup>1</sup> In Leubronn Daniel stays in the *Czarina* Hotel, Gwendolen dines at the *Russie*, and on his way to Leubronn Grandcourt stops to win "about two hundred" from "some Russian acquaintances" (136).

The hostility of the novel's presentation of Russia accords with and reflects the political enmity which existed between Britain and Russia for much of the nineteenth century, but at no time more than during Alcharisi's first years there. She remarries in approximately 1851 -- the year in which Britain and Russia broke off relations in the run-up to the Crimean War. Two years later Eliot, who was suffering from a cough, hoped that "the cough will soon take its flight from me and wing its way across the

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<sup>1</sup> This representation is matched and inverted by *Daniel Deronda*'s exact contemporary *Anna Karenina*, which negatively associates England with luxury.

Baltic to the Emperor Nicolas” (*EL* 2: 143). During the same period *The Westminster Review*, under Eliot’s deputy editorship, positively reviewed one history book and one story hostile to Russia. Of David Urquhart’s “The Progress of Russia in the West, North and South” the reviewer wrote:

we do not say that he hates Russia too cordially. We believe with him, that her fraud and force is the vastest and deepest fountain of misery to all Europe [...] The Russians are more insidious than the Ottomans three centuries before, because they are culturally and diplomatically involved with Europe. (*The Progress of Russia* 552)

The reviewer of “Schamyl, The Prophet-Warrior of the Caucasus” approved of the story’s bias towards the Russian-slaying Chechen protagonist Sultan Schamyl and against the “flax-haired Christian dogs” with their specious doctrine of Pansclavismus’, and asserted that:

Europe has stood by while the faith of Poland was supplanted by the groveling idolatry of the Greco-Russian church, and has beheld, unmoved, the constitutional liberties of Hungary trodden under the heels of the drilled forcats of Russia [...] the late deeds of the Turkish army on the banks of the Danube do but confirm the moral of Schamyl’s history, showing as it does [...] how much nobler is the nationality of the free Caucasian than that of the slavish Russ, at heart a savage, but knouted into order, chicaned into obedience, and whitewashed over with an outward semblance of civilization. (*Schamyl* 480, 517)

Since Alcharisi arrives in Russia in around 1851, she was giving birth to her first Russian child or two at the same time as Russia, and possibly her husband, was at war with her mother’s home country, which was being supported by her native Piedmont.

This betrayal is not made explicit in the novel, but its first readers would have felt it.

However, Eliot is highly unlikely to have been either of the reviewers quoted above. Despite her distaste for the Russian autocracy, and the fact that in *Middlemarch* Will Ladislaw's artistically-gifted grandfather is a Polish patriot, Eliot herself was not passionately anti-Russian. Even in 1853 she wrote to Cara Bray that "I care more about Coventry ribbons than Greek insurrections, and I am not sure that a success against the Russians would cause me half as much joy as a satisfactory stocktaking" (*EL* 2: 150). She watched Ilfracombe's fireworks to celebrate Turkey's 1856 victory over Russia with a sense of detachment: "On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, of course, Ilfracombe set itself to work to rejoice by royal command, at the ratification of the Peace" (*EL* 2: 247). When Lewes's son Thornie "failed to pass his second Indian Examination, and refused to go through the two years' ordeal again", he returned from Edinburgh "with a fixed idea of going to fight for the Poles against the hated Russians." However, "His father felt that it would be a sin to allow a boy of nineteen to incur the demoralization of joining [...] coarse men engaged in a guerilla warfare, to say nothing of Thornie's utter unfitness for military subordination and other inevitable hardships" (*EL* 4: 102, 117). Whilst writing *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot commented on Kinglake's recent account of the Crimean invasion, *The Battle of Inkerman*, in a manner equally detached from both parties (*EL* 6: 122-23). When, in the year after the novel was finished, Russia declared war on Turkey, Eliot merely sympathized with the sufferings of both sides: "The sadder part of one's life is reading the Times reports about France, and imagining the sufferings of the poor unglorified fellows in the ranks both Russian and Turkish" (*EL* 6: 424). Theophrastus observed in 1878 that people's opinions on the Eastern Question were in practice determined more by fortuitous circumstances than the impartial evaluation of

adequate knowledge: “even in a higher range of intellect and enthusiasm we find a distribution of sympathy or pity for sufferers of different blood or votaries of differing religions, strangely unaccountable on any other ground than a fortuitous direction of study or trivial circumstances of travel” (*Impressions of Theophrastus Such* 161).

Moreover, Eliot had one material reason to like Russia -- which was that it liked her. Most of her novels were published in Russian in Moscow or Saint Petersburg between six months and one year of their first English publication. *Adam Bede* went through three Russian editions in 1859, there were five editions of *Middlemarch* before 1875, and Lewes’s *Problems of Life and Mind* was serialized as *Voprosy o zhizni i dukhe* in Saint Petersburg whilst *Daniel Deronda* was being serialized in England. By comparison France was hostile: *Daniel Deronda* took five years to be translated into French, *Middlemarch* took nineteen, and *Felix Holt* (which Tolstoi found to be “excellent”) never has been (Knapp 323).

In addition, Russia’s culture also had its own attraction for Eliot. During the first stages of writing *Daniel Deronda*, she visited a London Russian Church and was delighted by the “strange weird and thrilling singing” which she heard there; in the year of her death she visited the Russian Church in Paris in the hope of hearing such “wonderful intoning and singing” again (Haight 477; *EL* 7: 274). Although Eliot was no more a Pan-Slavist than is Klesmer, she did entertain the category of “Slav”, and associated it with cultural energy and promise. Klesmer himself appears to be “a felicitous combination of the German, the Slave and the Semite” (*DD* 206). He shares both musicality and Slavic ethnicity with Will’s Polish grandfather, and he is mistaken by Bult for being the Polish refugee which Will’s grandfather in fact *is*. Of course, an important part of Klesmer’s representation is that he is Cosmopolitan -- a “felicitous combination” and a *wandering Jew* (206). Nonetheless, it is significant that

the Slavic forms a part of this combination, as it does of the range of musicians from whom Eliot drew her representation of Klesmer. These included not only the German Wagner, the German Jewish Mendelssohn, and the Hungarian Liszt, but Anton Rubinstein, who had a German-Jewish mother and a (converted) Jewish-Russian father. The fact that Klesmer's actual ethnicity is never made clear (it is revealed only that he grew up "on the outskirts of Bohemia") allows him to appear as the beneficiary of a generic Slavic artistic energy, which the half-Polish Mirah also possesses (413). The fact that Russia is a worthy cultural destination for Klesmer is indicated when, disgusted by Bult's Philistinism, he announces to Catherine: "I am neglecting my engagements. I must go off to St Petersburg" (207).

It is poignant that Alcharisi, with her voice still substantially intact, moves to, and is silenced in, a country which not only appreciates fine music as much as any, but has a fount of native musical talent. As a Princess she is of too high a rank to sing in public without scandal, and as an individual she is not of a temperament to accept the compromise of singing in private: "I repented; but it was too late. I could not go back. All things hindered me -- all things" (548). Instead, she becomes what Armgart terms 'A pensioner in marriage', and repeatedly fulfils the reproductive role of a wife (Eliot: *The Complete Shorter Poetry* 150). In this respect, too, her location is poignant, since the position of women in Russian aristocratic society was in several respects better than that of women in British bourgeois society, as Eliot herself was aware. In 1869 Eliot wrote to Oscar Browning, who had just visited the country: "I am glad to know of your safe return from those ultra-civilized regions where, I understand, women are in good practice as lawyers." She had just met with the Russian mathematician Sofia Kovaletskaiia, whose "husband was with her [...] contending for women's equal right of study [...] but I dare say that your rapid

journeying brought you into no contact with these portents of Russia's future" (*EL* 5: 59). Eliot's term "ultra-civilized" is not just exaggeration, but satirical at the expense of the English who, despite lacking female lawyers, might think it ironic.

However, the greatest poignancy in Alcharisi's choice of country is the fact that it was the most anti-Semitic country in Europe (the word is only just anachronistic, being a German coinage of 1879 adopted by English two years later). Many European cities had urban ghettos for Jews; only Russia had a Pale of Settlement (this covered the Western-most part of the Empire, including much of what is today Lithuania, Belorussia, Poland, and Ukraine). During the nineteenth century the Russian government, like the Papacy and the Kingdom of Naples, was holding out against the process of secularization by actively supporting its Church. But whereas Jews were given full civil rights in Alcharisi's newly-unified native country in 1870, in Russia this did not occur until 1917. The Russia to which Alcharisi moved was ruled by Nikolai I, who on coming to power in 1825 had made energetic efforts to convert Jews. He extended to them the standard twenty-five-year military draft, and introduced a system under which Jewish boys were taken from their parents at the age of twelve in order to be forcibly baptized. Admittedly, by the time of Alcharisi's arrival he had altered to the more successful policy of encouraging assimilation through accommodation. His Minister of Education, Uvarov, set up Jewish schools based on *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) principles, and permitted state rabbinical seminaries within the Pale. By the time of Alcharisi's visit to Daniel in the mid-1860s, the "Tsar liberator" Aleksandr II had abolished juvenile conscription and the forced conversion of Jews, and made Jews graduating from tertiary education eligible for state, professional, and commercial employment throughout Russia (Haberer 10-13). In 1853 one percent of gymnasium students were



Jews; by 1880 this proportion had increased to twelve percent. Nonetheless, Jews still faced obvious restrictions, and these, combined with their improved education, encouraged their participation in revolutionary movements. In the 1860s nihilism was referred to by some Russians as a Jewish disease (Haberer 187).

Alcharisi is not likely to have taken much interest in these matters, despite the fact that many of the Jewish revolutionaries were as strongly opposed to Jewish authority as they were to that of the State, and, like her, rebelled against Orthodox Jewish separatism, superstition, conservatism, and sexism (Haberer 110). The only Jews she would have been likely to see, except in so far as her husband had any business dealings with them, would have been performers; as such, they would have had limited entry into her social circle. Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein were rare examples of converted Jews who became successful in high Russian society; they founded the Saint Petersburg and Moscow conservatoires, Anton had the direct patronage of the imperial family, and Nikolai taught Tchaikovskii. Alcharisi is eight years younger than Anton, and might, had she existed, have known him. However, as fellow converts to Christianity, one of whom fiercely rejected her native Judaism, they would have been unlikely to have discussed the Russian Jewish question. Alcharisi would have had no reason to visit the Pale or the Saint Petersburg ghetto, and, had she done so, would have found the Ashkenazi as culturally foreign as familiar to her. Nonetheless, she is likely to have known that the condition of Jews in Russia was worse than that in the countries in which she grew up; in England a converted Jew, Disraeli, was the Chancellor of the Exchequer by the time that she speaks to her son.

It is worth asking by how much Eliot's knowledge exceeded Alcharisi's. Eliot knew Rubinstein, and might have heard that his music was criticized for being

insufficiently Russian by the *Moguchaiia Kuchka* (“Mighty Handful”) of five romantic nationalist composers, Balakirev, Kyi, Musorgskii, Rimskii-Korsakov, and Borodin. This accusation was almost certainly coloured by anti-Semitism. Eliot wrote in her *Daniel Deronda* notebook that in Russia and Poland the Jews “are still dreadfully oppressed. Their worst endurance is the conscription -- twenty-five years of service without hope of advancement.” She considered many such Jews to be culturally “in deep darkness”, and seems to have known little about the Maskilic, secularizing, Russian-Yiddish intelligentsia (Irwin 84-85). She read histories of the Jews of England, of Holland, of Bohemia, of Spain (for *The Spanish Gypsy*), of Palestine, of Germany (she was taught Hebrew by Emmanuel Deutsch, who was from Prussian Silesia), in ancient times, in the Middle Ages, and in literature -- but not in the Russian Empire (Fleishman 61-66; 71-75). Rubinstein may have been the only Russian (converted) Jew whom she knew. *On the Shores of the Black Sea*, Laurence Oliphant’s account of his 1853 travels in Russia, which appeared in *Blackwood’s Magazine* and which Eliot may well have read, makes no mention of the Russian oppression of Jews, focusing as it does on the atypical Caucasian Karaïte Jews (Oliphant 295).

Eliot did, however, encounter anti-Semitism in Russian literature. In September 1875, shortly before she wrote the section of *Daniel Deronda* in which Alcharisi meets her son, she and Lewes read out to one another Turgenev’s *Nouvelles Moscovites* in a copy given to Eliot by the author. It contained the 1846 short story *Zhid* (or “Le Juif”, as it was translated by Mérimée), of which the eponymous Jew, Girshel, offers to prostitute his daughter to a Russian army officer, robs him through her, and spies on the Russian camp for the Napoleonic enemy. The officer tries but fails to save Girshel from being hanged for treason. Girshel is physically disgusting,

cringing, and preposterous. Both the officer and the reader are torn between pity, revulsion, and amusement. When he is sentenced to death for spying:

He began to rush about like a captured animal, his mouth gaped open, he croaked voicelessly, he even started jumping on the spot, convulsively waving his elbows. He was only wearing one boot; they'd forgotten to put the other one on him...his kaftan gaped open...his skull-cap fell down... [...] The unhappy Jew made such strange, deformed gestures, cries, and jumps, that we all smiled involuntarily, even though it was terrible, it was really terrible to us. The poor guy was dying of fright. 'Oi, oi oi!', he cried, 'oi!'<sup>2</sup>

Leon Poliakov argues in his *History of Antisemitism* that Gershel stands in a tradition of Russian literary representations of Jews which started with the also disgusting, sycophantic and treacherous "Yankel" of Gogol's 1835 *Taras Bulba* (75). Other Jews in this tradition include Moshel Lebya of Turgenev's much later, 1872, story "The End of Chertopkhanov", and Soloman the innkeeper in Chekhov's novella *Steppe*. A literary tradition of representation of Jews was the more possible since most Russian authors, like most Russians, had little contact with Jews (Leskov xvi). However, it is worth comparing Gershel with Fagin, who was created eight years

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<sup>2</sup> "On zametalsia, kak poimannyi zverek, razinul rot, glukho zakhripel, dazhe zaprygal na meste, sudorozhno razmakhivaia loktiami. On byl v odnom bashmake; drugoi pozabyli nadet' emu na nogu...kaftan ego raspakhnulsia..ermolka svalilas' [...] Vyrazhalas' u neschastnogo zhida takimi strannymi, urodlivymi telodvizheniiami, krikami, pryzhkami, chto my vse ulybalis' nevol'no, khotia ia zhutko, strashno zhutko bylo nam. Bedniak zamiral ot strakhu. '-- Oi, oi, oi!' -- krichal on, -- oi!'" (Turgenev 100, 103).

before him. Certainly, Fagin has more composure than Gershel when he is told that he must hang: “he stood, like a marble figure, without the motion of a nerve”. It is the court audience which raves and blasphemes, whereas the Russian soldiers who detain Gershel act with dignity. Dickens’s narration does not approve of the death penalty; Turgenev’s narration is neutral. However, that night Fagin:

started up, every minute, and with gasping mouth and burning skin, hurried to and fro, in such a paroxysm of fear and wrath that even they - used to such sights - recoiled from him with horror [and ask him] “Fagin, Fagin! Are you a man?” (*Oliver Twist* 361, 363; Chapter 52)

Dickens was not alone amongst English authors in his caricatures of Jews. Lewes himself, in his comments on the Jewish actress Rachel, whom Alcharisi partially resembles, demonstrates crude and casual anti-Semitism (Stokes 776).

It seems, therefore, that Eliot did not have an especially acute or well-informed sense of the particular disadvantages of Russian Jews. Russian anti-Semitic sentiment increased sharply at the end of the eighteen-seventies, yet Theophrastus, in “The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!”, refers nearly always to the *European* treatment of Jews. This reluctance to distinguish Russia from the rest of Europe fits with the nature of *Daniel Deronda* as a whole; its principal division is between the Jewish and the Gentile worlds. Whereas the novel has faith in Jewish national unity, and uses Italian unification as a prototype of Zionism, it mocks the notion of any division of Gentiles into ethnically homogenous groups. Amongst the debaters in the Hand and Banner, “pure English blood (if leech or lancet can furnish us with the precise product) did not declare itself predominantly” (446). The fact that Alcharisi’s Prince is of an immigrant German family, Halm-Eberstein, is calculated. The ignorant, snobbish, and passive anti-Semitism of Lady Mallinger or Mrs Meyrick differs in degree more than

kind from the laughter which Cohen's anti-Semitic parody raises in such Habsburg cities as Vienna, Pesth, and Prague (185). In the novel as a whole, therefore, Russia more resembles Britain than either resemble the Jewish ghettos of either country, or the Israel which Daniel hopes to recreate.

Yet there is a poignancy, of which Eliot would have been aware, and which Alcharisi might have consciously embraced, in Alcharisi's decision to convert to the Christianity of the most assertively-Christian great power of the world. This makes her betrayal of her ethnicity all the worse, as Kalonymos -- when he visits her in Russia shortly before she contacts Daniel -- may have pointed out to her. Just as the development of modern Israel has retrospectively endowed the novel's Zionism with prophetic power, so the poignancy of Alcharisi's position is retrospectively intensified by the fact that much early and subsequent immigration to Palestine came from the Russian Empire. Just after *Daniel Deronda* was finished, Disraeli's intervention in the Russo-Turkish Berlin peace treaty to make it less favourable to the Russian victors increased anti-Semitic sentiment in Russia; as Theophrastus remarks: "For less theoretic men, [...] the value of the Hebrew race has been measured by their unfavourable opinion of a prime minister who is a Jew by lineage" (162). In February 1879 Eliot observed to Blackwood that "There is a great movement now among the Jews towards colonizing Palestine [...] Probably Mr. Oliphant is interested in the work" (*EL* 7: 109). Indeed, Oliphant travelled in the Pale to verify reports of the pogroms which started in 1880, and intensified after the assassination of Aleksandr II in the following year (Polowetzky 138). The Russian Lev Pinsker was, with the Austrian Theodor Herzl, one of the leaders of the Zionism which Mordecai prophecies; in 1881 the *Chovevei Zion* ("Lovers of Zion") movement urged Jews to move from the Russian Empire to Palestine, and in 1897 many Russian Jews went to

the first Zionist Congress in Basle. In 1891 Anton Rubinstein left Russia over Imperial demands that Conservatoire admittance be awarded according to racial quotas which he considered to disadvantage Jews (Polowetzky 138).

*Daniel Deronda* was warmly received in Hebrew and Russian translation by Russian Jews. As William Baker points out, “The mass of East European nineteenth-century Jewry, living in conditions of hardship, accepted [Mordecai’s visionary] ideas as real rather than ideal” (164). The novel was used “in order to preach up-to-date Zionism [...] by various Zionist societies in Russia” (Werses 36). In fact, many Russian readers only had access to the novel in the form of “reviews, summaries and translations of selected excerpts” -- but some such selections were made in order to intensify the novel’s Zionist message (Werses 30). When the Lithuanian student Eliezer Ben-Yehuda read the chapters of *Daniel Deronda* which were being serialized in a Russian journal, ‘they had a very strong effect on him, instilling in him an amazing spirit of hope, bravery and awakening’ (according to his biography, possibly by himself, quoted in Werses 24). Soon afterwards, he abandoned his medical studies at the Sorbonne, travelled to Palestine, and helped to develop the Hebrew language, and secular Jewish nationalist thought (Levitt 83). Readers such as he would have been keenly aware of the ironies of Alcharisi’s position.

However, they might also have known that Alcharisi’s marriage was highly unlikely to have taken place. Prince Halm-Eberstein is admittedly not of the most prestigious type of Russian aristocracy -- the pre-Petrine. His ancestors probably emigrated from Germany under Peter or Catherine, then worked their way up through the Petrine civil or military service ranks, which made no discrimination on grounds of ethnicity. Nonetheless, his rank is both high and hereditary, and he would have owned a coat of arms, land, and serfs. There are several references in the novel to the

royalty of genius, as also in “Armgart”, in which the protagonist claims: “Heaven made me royal” (*The Complete Shorter Poetry* 126). However, as Alcharisi says: “A great singer and actress is a queen, but she gives no royalty to her son” (*DD* 544). A marriage between an aristocrat and a commoner was far less usual in Russia than in England, in which the more flexible class structure permitted aristocrats to marry heiresses from merchant families in order to boost the family wealth; Lush thinks that Grandcourt intends to use Catherine Arrowpoint in this way. One, eccentric, mode in which a Russian aristocrat might marry a commoner was for him to marry one of his own serfs; *Anna Karenina*’s Levin contemplates doing precisely this.

However, Levin is not a Prince, and his proposed bride would at least have been an Orthodox Christian. This is not to say that Russian aristocrats did not marry foreigners; indeed, Catherine the Great, and the last three Tsarinas, all converted from Lutheranism to Orthodoxy in order to marry the Tsar. Under Russian law Jews could do the same. Unlike in Spain, where even converted Jews and their descendants (*conversos*) were banned from certain offices, in Russia Judaism was legally defined by religion, not ethnicity. Alcharisi’s marriage was possible in law, and Eliot almost certainly knew that this was so. However, it would be unheard of. It was a commonplace for a Russian aristocrat to make a Jewish singer his mistress, but not to marry her. Indeed, the very rigidity of Russian aristocratic marriage practices may have partly explained the sexual laxity for which the Russian court was notorious in England, and which *Anna Karenina* deprecates.

In this respect the Habsburg Empire was not dissimilar to Russia. Mirah recalls of her courtship by the Count in Vienna: “I had it firmly in my mind that a nobleman and one who was not a Jew could have no love for me that was not half contempt”; “he wished me to visit him at his beautiful place, where I might be queen

of everything” (186). She is precisely *not* being offered the sort of nobility which Alcharisi acquires. Rachel Félix was born in approximately the same year as Alcharisi, 1821. Like her, she was Jewish, toured Russia in the 1840s as a tragic actress (as Alcharisi may well have done), had her health broken by living in Russia, and, according to Lewes, could not act feminine tenderness:

Scorn, triumph, rage, lust and merciless malignity she could represent in symbols of irresistible power; but she had little tenderness, no womanly caressing softness, no gaiety, no heartiness. She was so graceful and so powerful that her air of dignity was incomparable. (Stokes 774-75)

Rachel was the lover of several European aristocrats, including three members of the Bonaparte family -- but she did not marry.

It is impossible that Halm-Eberstein does not know that Alcharisi is Jewish. Certainly, there are other things about her which he does not know, including her previous marriage and child, and what she is doing travelling in ill-health to Genoa in 1866. After her first husband’s death, she “rid [herself] of the Jewish tatters and gibberish that make people nudge each other”, and is helped by the fact that neither her “Christian” name nor her face suggest her ethnicity. When Daniel reads this name and sees this face, he does not suspect it. Her acting capacities are repeatedly stressed, and she claims that she “acted” the role of “the wife of a Russian noble” (548). It may also be remembered that during Alcharisi’s decade of fame the Irishwoman Eliza Gilbert, also born in 1821, successfully acted the part of “Lola Montez, the Spanish dancer” in Europe and Russia. However, Leonora begins her career when married to Charisi, and her stage name Alcharisi also suggests Sephardic ancestry (there was a contemporary Hebrew poet called Alcharisi, and a twelfth century Spanish poet called Al Harizi) (Irwin 162). Otherwise, she might have chosen “Deronda” as a stage name,



which, despite being a name from her own ancestry, clearly does not suggest Judaism to anyone. Not only Halm-Eberstein, but Russian court society in general, would have known that Alcharisi was Jewish. Whether or not it was his first marriage, it would have been considered a *mésalliance* far more scandalous than that of Catherine Arrowpoint to Klesmer.

It is overwhelmingly likely that Eliot, in devising Alcharisi's marriage to Halm-Eberstein, was thinking about her friend Turgenev and his friend Pauline Viardot (this connection has also been made by Rebecca Pope) (143). Viardot, née García, was a French Italian mezzo-soprano, also born in 1821, who acquired European-wide fame as an opera singer. Both singers were trained by an older female relative: in Alcharisi's case, by her Aunt; in Viardot's, by her mother (soprano Joaquína Sitchez) and elder sister (Maria Malibran). Both got married young, at someone else's persuasion (Alcharisi's father's and George Sand's), to men who loved them dearly and who supported them in their careers. Although Viardot was not considered to be Jewish, her father, Manuel del Popolo, believed his own father to have been a gypsy, and some people alleged that he was "a Jew or a Moor" (Fitzlyon 16).

Viardot was connected to Russia on many levels. Her godmother was Princess Pauline Galitsin, daughter of the distinguished Russian man of letters Count Andrei Shuvalov, who married into the Russian Galitsin family. Their salon in Paris was an important place of Franco-Russian cultural exchange (Fitzlyon 15). After Viardot started touring in Russia, she quickly learned its language, sang Russian music in Russian, and was sometimes taken for a native speaker. From 1843 to 1846 she was permanently attached to the Opera in Saint Petersburg, and in 1867 she accepted the invitation of Anton Rubinstein to teach at the Saint Petersburg School of Music.

Like Alcharisi, and despite her marriage, Viardot had many admirers. In Petersburg she had four principal admirers, of whom one gave her the skin of a bear which he had shot. She had this made into a rug, replaced its claws by gold, and after performances would recline on it in a white peignoir whilst her admirers sat on one paw each (Fitzlyon 164). Across Petersburg these men became known as “the four paws”. Of the four of them, however, only Turgenev left Russia for her (165). He spent most of his life after the age of twenty-five following the Viardots around Europe, supporting them financially, and eventually moving in with them and their four children; he died in their house. As Alcharisi says: “Men followed me from one country to another” (*DD* 537). According to Viardot’s biographer Fitzlyon, Viardot “always put her work first, and all personal considerations second”, whereas for Turgenev his love for Viardot predominated (207). When the Viardots were obliged to move away from Baden-Baden at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, because of Louis Viardot’s French nationality, Turgenev immediately followed them to London and rented a place in Manchester Square, a few minutes’ walk away from the Viardots’ house on Devonshire Street (407-8, 415-20). He wrote to Viardot at the time: “To these deep and inexhaustible feelings which I have for you has been added some sort of an impossibility of being without you; your absence causes me some kind of physical terror, as if there was not enough air” (407-08). Alcharisi tells Daniel: “I know very well what love makes of men and women -- it is subjection [...] I was never willingly subject to any man. Men have been subject to me” (*DD* 571).

It was because of the Viardots’ enforced residency in London that Eliot became acquainted with both them and Turgenev. The friendship of Eliot and Lewes with Turgenev has been well-documented; from 1871 he was a regular visitor to the Priory, admired Eliot’s works, and corresponded intermittently with her until her

death (he was one year older than her, and outlived her by three). Eliot's friendship with Viardot has been less discussed. Pope considers that "Eliot and Viardot were friends, moving in many of the same artistic and intellectual circles. Indeed, Viardot occupied in the world of music a place parallel to Eliot's in the realm of letters" (143). Viardot knew many languages, designed her own costumes and researched their historical accuracy, composed music, and was George Sand's closest female friend. She and Eliot had many acquaintances in common including Sand, Clara Schumann, and Liszt, who had taught Viardot how to play the piano. On the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1871 Eliot and Lewes "had Tourgénéff, Trollope, Bullock and Emily Cross to lunch – 17 people afterwards – including Lady Castletown [...] and *Viardot* who sang divinely and entranced every one, some of them to positive tears. This lasted till 6" (*EL* 5: 143-44). The performance constitutes a poignant contrast to Gwendolen's performance at the Arrowpoints' archery ball, and is closer to that of Mirah during the party at Park Lane.

Eliot also knew of two other couples which might have affected her choice of nationality for Alcharisi's second husband. Viardot's student Marguerite-Josephine-Désirée Artôt, a Belgian mezzo-soprano, was briefly engaged to Chaikovskii, until Viardot dissuaded *her*, and Rubinstein dissuaded *him*, from the marriage. Eliot may have known of Artôt since the latter studied under Viardot in London. Artôt and Chaikovskii met and became engaged whilst she was performing in Russia in 1868, but in the next year she married a member of her own company, Spanish baritone Marian Padilla y Ramos, in a match which required no sacrifice of her career.

The other couple which Eliot may have had in mind is Liszt and the Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, who lived together even though the latter was married. Eliot and Lewes came to know them in Weimar in 1854, and Eliot recalled

them warmly in her journal (237). The Princess was a Polish noblewoman, born Karolyna Elizabeth Iwanowska, who married the German-Russian Prince Nikolaus zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. She unsuccessfully sued for a divorce after she and her husband became estranged; otherwise she would have married Liszt, who lived with her for forty years. She influenced his career by persuading him to give up his itinerant life of performance at the age of thirty-five in favour of composition.

Halm-Eberstein, then, may have been created with conscious or unconscious reference to the Prince zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, Liszt, Turgenev, and Chaikovskii. Of these, the first is by far the closest match in terms of rank, name, and ethnicity. However, he married a foreign aristocrat, not a commoner. Turgenev was of a minor gentry family. Chaikovskii was middle-class. None of them wished to marry a Jewess. Of the singers Viardot, Alcharisi, and Armgart, the real one had by far the happiest life – a fact which lends support to the thesis that Eliot denied her heroines her own level of success and happiness, even when (as in the cases of Armgart and Alcharisi) they are exceptionally gifted, and have a real-life model of success. Viardot combined her career with a supportive marriage and the rearing of four children, all of whom themselves became musicians. Indeed, in 1859 Bessie Rayner Parkes argued in an article in the *English Woman's Journal*, “On the Adoption of Professional Life by Women”: “Let it not be assumed [...] that in such cases domestic life is always sacrificed; many women have fulfilled both careers admirably well, and if actresses and singers have conquered the difficulty, in spite of their exciting vocation, surely the painter, and sculptor, and even the physician, might do likewise” (qtd. in Correa 63). Unlike Armgart and Alcharisi, Viardot did not have an early scare about her voice. She continued operatic singing until 1863, and then -- like Armgart but unlike Alcharisi -- settled down to concert singing and teaching, giving her last performance

in London in 1870, and teaching until her death in 1910 (Grove 762). Alcharisi has one man who supports her career for just a few years, whereas Eliot and the Princess zu Sayn-Wittgenstein (a journalist) had one such man for most of their adult lives, and Viardot had two such men for most of her adult life. These men respectively gave up their country and career for her (Louis Viardot had been director of Paris's Theatre-Italien). On the other hand, Turgenev's career was not sacrificed to Viardot. He collaborated with her on Lieder and operettas to which she wrote the music and he the words; she was a helpful critic of his writing; he praised her singing. Contrary to Alcharisi's assertion, love did not necessarily operate at the expense of talent.

Nonetheless, and despite the fact that Alcharisi's models were in several respects more fortunate than Alcharisi herself, Eliot also gives her an unlikely opportunity -- that of marrying a Russian Prince. Turgenev, who was of a lower rank, encountered hostility in Russia because of his love for someone whom his mother referred to as of the "demi-monde", and a "damned gypsy" (Fitzlyon 186). Indeed, Viardot was widely accused of keeping Turgenev an emotional captive, and was significantly described by some as "a crafty Jewess, who was bleeding him to death" (Fitzlyon 419). Henry James, who attended the Viardots' salon in Paris, tells a version of this story: "I meant to add about poor Turngenieff that there [are] insuperable limits to seeing much of him, for the poor man is a slave -- the slave of Mme. Viardot. She has made him her property, is excessively jealous, keeps him to herself etc. [...] Such is the tale I am told" (*Letters of Henry James* 2: 16). *Daniel Deronda* makes no suggestion that Halm-Eberstein has made a *mésalliance* in marrying Alcharisi, nor that his social standing or chances of preferment are adversely affected by what must on his part be an infatuation, nor that she faces any hostility in Russian society as a result of either. When she remarks that "I made myself like the people I lived among",

there is no reason to think that she is concealing such a scandal as that caused by Viardot or the Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein (*DD* 544). Rather, it is likely that Eliot did not appreciate the magnitude of the difference between Turgenev, the second son in a gentry family without title, and a Prince -- or between the English and Russian aristocracies in general.

The ignorance which permitted this misunderstanding was not uncommon in England. For Eliot, as for many of her English readers, Russia was a contradictory cipher for barbarism, decadence, and cultural vigour. With regard to the details of its social norms, she had a space of common nescience in which to manoeuvre. However, *Daniel Deronda* is a meta-aesthetic romance as well as a realist novel, and the former mode permits it deviation from likelihood. It also permits the suggestion that it is Alcharisi, rather than Prince Halm-Eberstein, who lowers herself when they marry. When Deronda hears of Catherine's engagement to Klesmer he says: "If there were any *mésalliance* in the case, I should say it was on Klesmer's side" (349). Since Catherine is not disinherited, however, Klesmer is permitted to combine both forms of royalty, living "rather magnificently [...] a patron and *prince* among musical professors" (my emphasis: 518). When Gwendolen hears Mirah sing, on the other hand, she reflects that "it had been her ambition to stand as the 'little Jewess' was standing, and survey a grand audience from the higher rank of her talent -- instead of which she was one of the ordinary crowd in silk and gems" (575-76). This mute, seated, bejeweled, titled beauty is precisely what Alcharisi becomes. She does so in a country which she chooses for its remoteness and wealth, and which Eliot chooses for its connotations of exile, injustice, decadent aristocracy, and hostility to both Jews and England. It is simultaneously an outpost and an epitomy of the novel's Gentile world, yet contains within itself an antidote to that world in its native cultural energy. From

this Alcharisi finds herself excluded. It is carried by such figures as Turgenev -- her inverse -- who abandons a settled life in Russia at around the same time as Alcharisi arrives there, for an itinerant life as a lover, whilst simultaneously pursuing his career. By 1878 he had sufficient appreciation of the literature of a country hostile to his own, to deflect Lewes's compliment to him as the greatest living novelist, to the good friend who had just finished *Daniel Deronda*: George Eliot (Haight 513).

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