

always deferred, that supplementation is possible only because of an *originary lack*" (105; my emphasis). Of course, once this lack is seen to be originary, the door is wide open for the critic to show this *différance*-as-lack at work always and everywhere—in Rousseau's texts and "many others." Criticism is here reinvested with a well-defined deconstructive job to do; instead of revealing the meaning of texts, the critic reveals the failure of that meaning. In the end, it is certainly true that Culler has paid a great deal of attention to the *topic* of deconstructive double reading (pace some of my comments), but he has not, in my opinion, dealt sufficiently with the *logic* of double reading in Derida's texts.

JEFFREY T. NEALON
Penn State University, University Park

Zionism and *Daniel Deronda*

To the Editor:

I wish to thank Phyllis Lassner, Karen Alkalay-Gut, and Chanita Goodblatt for their perceptive letter (Forum, 107 [1992]: 1281–82) calling attention to the gratuitous anti-Zionism embedded in a parenthetical aside in Bruce Robbins's January 1992 *PMLA* article, "Death and Vocation: Narrativizing Narrative Theory." Robbins claims that Daniel Deronda's Zionism "excludes and marginalizes [Gwendolen] Harleth much as Zionism has continued to exclude and marginalize the Palestinians" (44). For political critics like Robbins, it seems no opportunities are to be lost promoting one's political cause. Lassner, Alkalay-Gut, and Goodblatt point out that Robbins inserts a highly controversial polemic within an "aside" so that the contention operates rhetorically as common sense, not requiring the ordinary rigors of argument, or even more sinisterly as a "subliminal message."

Robbins's reply to the letter is even more disturbing. The unrepentant author claims that among the people with whom he speaks it is common sense that Zionism is a hideous political movement; a commonsensical aside therefore is perfectly appropriate. To defend his hatred of Israel, he uses his identity as a Jew to dramatize his revulsion at the treatment of the Palestinians by the Zionists. So loathsome is Zionism that Robbins can bring himself to use the word "Israel" only once!

There are several issues of note here. First, Robbins's aside and his more extended comments indicate the sorry depths to which political criticism can de-

scend. One might hope that politically oriented criticism could sustain in its analysis the complexity of insight and subtly nuanced reflection that a literary critic can bring to bear on a literary work. No such luck here! Instead, one finds a simplemindedness (or, to be more generous, an ignorance) that would be out of place in most newspapers. At a time when an Israeli Labor government is negotiating with its Arab neighbors and the Palestinians, Robbins can speak of Zionism as something that only mistreats—"marginalizes and excludes"—Palestinians. Absurdly, Robbins concludes his Forum reply with a patronizing recommendation to Lassner, Alkalay-Gut, and Goodblatt to "exemplify" dissent and diversity within Israel, which he says is in dire need of these two qualities. Robbins has maybe missed the last four decades of Israeli history, not to mention the century or so of contentious Zionist history? Israel has long had a vociferous and at times large peace movement favorable to compromise with the Arabs. I would gladly argue the merits of Zionism and justify Israel's right to exist and to defend itself, but the *PMLA* Forum is not the appropriate place. At the very least, a fair-minded, informed person cannot reduce the complexities of the Israeli-Arab conflict into a simple matter of the Zionists' being unfair to the Arabs. In the aside Robbins had to be brief, but it is clear from his reply that he *really* takes a simplistically negative view of Israel.

Second, there is the issue of literary representations of Jews and Judaism. According to Robbins, Daniel Deronda's Zionist vocation "excludes and marginalizes" Gwendolen Harleth; as Lassner, Alkalay-Gut, and Goodblatt accurately point out, Harleth does not have to marry Deronda to fulfill her fictional destiny, which Eliot suggests is not exhausted by the marriage and romance plots. Just as many readers complained to Walter Scott that *Ivanhoe* should have wed the more interesting heroine, Rebecca (presumably a baptized Rebecca), so readers have wanted to pair Deronda and Harleth—Gwendolen being more interesting than Mirah, or perhaps than any other character in the novel. The reader as matchmaker! Daniel's marrying Mirah and Rebecca's *not* marrying the gentle *Ivanhoe* evoke Jewish endogamy, which can generate anxiety about "exclusion," especially when at least one of the characters—Scott's Rebecca, Eliot's Deronda—is so attractive and appealing as to "deserve" membership in the majority gentile society. Is it not the case that Jewish endogamy has been judged much more harshly (as clannishness, in the negative characterization) than any other kind of endogamy?

Robbins slides from the sentimental banality of lamenting Harleth's being left out, an outlook he dresses up in the jargon of Foucauldian exclusion and margins, to the assertion that Deronda's Zionism also excludes and marginalizes Palestinians. Is there nothing that can control analogizing? Where can it reasonably stop? Shouldn't one at least try to use historical contextualizing to distinguish between the nascent Zionism associated with Eliot's novel and the most recent conflict between the Israeli government and the Palestinians?

MICHAEL SCRIVENER
Wayne State University

Reply:

As I write, four hundred Palestinians, mainly intellectuals, are waiting in the desolate border zone between Israel and Lebanon, expelled from their homes by the Israeli government—the Labor government of Yitzhak Rabin—for no crime other than their political beliefs. According to the *New York Times* of 22 December, Israeli officials “acknowledged that an operation they had hoped would fade quickly from the spotlight had turned into what one of them called ‘an awful mess’” (A3). However this mess is eventually cleaned up, it already puts some order in my various responses to Michael Scrivener.

To begin with, it suggests that the new Rabin government offers little reason to change one's opinion—as Scrivener seems to propose one should—of Zionism as a state ideology. As the *Times* reported on 31 December, “[T]he three leftist parties that make up Meretz, which many Arabs supported in the elections . . . also signed on to the deportation order” (A3). More important, the expulsion of the four hundred reminds us that talk of Zionism's “marginalizing and excluding” its victims (including its Sephardi Jewish victims) cannot be dismissed as metaphoric play, loose “analogizing,” or trendy academic posturing that has nothing to do with real life. These margins are geographically precise; here, exclusion is exclusion. And exclusion is what Zionism has never ceased to be about since it first spoke of “a land without people for a people without a land.”

People without a land—today we can watch them try to bathe and keep warm on a cold Lebanese hilltop without a name. For me, the most wrenching irony in this episode is the way these dispossessed Palestinians have become mirrors and remembrances of those dispossessed Jews, after the Second World War, whose

image was so potent a force in establishing the Israeli state. I wonder whether any Jew of my generation or older has not thought, watching this new extraterritorial drama, of the title episode of Leon Uris's *Exodus*. In that book, which I passionately read and reread as a child, a handful of European Jewish refugees sit on a boat and threaten to blow themselves up, suspended symbolically between an uninhabitable Europe and a Palestine to which the British refuse them entry, until the great imperial power is forced to give in. The parallel is of course imperfect in more than one way. But anyone who was once moved by Uris's (historically based) image of unbearable in-betweenness, as I was, would seem obliged at least to question the massive weight of “common sense” that for so long has kept such parallels from even being hinted at.

The reporting of this “public relations disaster for Israel” (*Nightline*, 5 Jan.) suggests, however, that American common sense has now begun to shift significantly. And it is this shift, I think, that Scrivener is really protesting when he objects to the “gratuitous anti-Zionism” of my “parenthetical aside.” The anger he directs specifically at the *form* of the aside implies that disapproval of Zionism is too deviant, too controversial, or too dangerous to figure otherwise than inside the framework of a carefully balanced full-scale debate. (Until recently, disapproval of Zionism was rarely permitted into American debates at all, which have thus been anything but balanced—but that is another story.) Now, thanks to the *intifada* and the illegal deportation of the four hundred, the Zionist view of the world seems to be taking its place, next to the notion that men are innately superior, as a perspective that need not and should not be granted the dignity of repeated rebuttal.

Was my aside gratuitous? I assumed that interested readers like Scrivener would already know the superb analysis of *Daniel Deronda* in Edward Said's *The Question of Palestine*. Said states what needs to be stated about the context surrounding Eliot's imagining “a genuinely hopeful socioreligious project in which individual energies can be merged and identified with a collective national vision.” On the one hand, he writes, Eliot usefully envisions “a generalized condition of homelessness.” On the other hand, like other Westerners of the time, Eliot expresses her admiration for Zionism in “the total absence of any thought about the actual inhabitants of the East” (61–62, 65). But if it would have been gratuitous, or sanctimonious, to repeat in my article what has already become common sense to so much of the profession, it is perhaps less gratuitous here and now—that is, in an argument over the protocols of scholarly argument—to remind