

# Cosmopocalypse: From Prophetic Vision to Political Foresight in *Romola*

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THE story takes place in a distant land, hundreds of years in the past. Against a backdrop of interstate conquest, a holy man struggles to unite a people who have lost their sovereignty to an oppressive foreign monarch. Vivid imagery depicts horned beasts, a madman, a trial by fire, and prophecies of things to come. This is the Book of Daniel—but it could also summarize George Eliot’s *Romola* (1862–63), in which the omen of a “big bull with fiery horns” foreshadows a French invasion that will overthrow the Florentine Republic.<sup>1</sup> Eliot’s novel of the Italian Renaissance is a strikingly original composite of imagination and historical research; she was not, of course, merely or even primarily attempting to rewrite a book of the Bible. As Mary Wilson Carpenter has observed, however, the Book of Daniel fascinated mid-Victorian thinkers, who divided themselves into two opposing camps when they debated whether its prophetic content was “divine or fraudulent.”<sup>2</sup> Eliot participated avidly in this debate. Her interest in Daniel first appeared in an 1847 letter that she wrote when she was still known as Marian Evans. That interest would culminate nearly thirty years later, when she published *Daniel Deronda* in 1876. Within those three important intermediary decades, Eliot translated David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, learned to read biblical Hebrew, and composed her most enduring works of fiction. It should come as no surprise that her interest in prophecy informed her novels.

In this article, I contend that George Eliot’s higher critical approach to biblical prophecy led her to interpret prophetic knowledge about the future as a product of historical scholarship rather than supernatural revelation. This interpretation bore creative fruit in Eliot’s novel *Romola*, a book that repeatedly condemns the irrational ethos of supernatural prophecy by rebuking mystical seers’ emotional volatility and their ignorance of history. As a rational alternative to supernaturalism, *Romola*

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upholds a serious, scholarly mode of prophecy whose power to predict the future derives from historical research. This alternative prophetic mode frames prophets as well-informed students of history whose knowledge of the past prepares them to analyze the political challenges that their societies face in the present or will face in the future. I argue that Eliot derived her rational prophetic mode from the Book of Daniel, whose prophecies she understood to be works of historical fiction written after the events that they claimed to foresee. In Daniel and *Romola* alike, prophetic foresight becomes inextricably entangled with historic hindsight. Consequently, visionaries seeking to unveil the future must study the past.

Recasting prophecy as a mode of historical scholarship enables *Romola* to affirm the practice's literary seriousness and, crucially, to uphold it as a method of informed political analysis. In particular, subscribing to a prophetic mode that anticipates the future by evaluating history requires political visionaries to temper any idealistic promises about a cosmopolitan future with more sober-minded studies of the intercultural violence that has plagued the past.<sup>3</sup> *Romola's* rational, practical method of conducting prophecy therefore corresponds to its rational, practical method of imagining what degree of cosmopolitanism is achievable in practice. As we shall see, the story's blithely utopian epilogue, which depicts the heroine living happily ever after with her multiethnic Greco-Italian family, is qualified by the novel's awareness of how difficult it is to achieve cosmopolitan sympathy among people of different cultures. Compared to the epilogue's optimistic closing image, the main body of the book presents a more sustained, and more historically engaged, account of intercultural strife in fifteenth-century Florence. Insofar as *Romola's* tumultuous portrait of Florentine history tempers the epilogue's utopian optimism, the novel's distinctive mode of prophecy-as-history insists that cosmopolitan theory must remain rationally grounded in historical reality in order to merit serious intellectual consideration.

The title of my article refers to Eliot's prophetically inflected analysis of cosmopolitanism as "cosmopocalypse." I use this term to invoke the original Greek meaning of ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*), which denotes a process of "uncovering" or "revelation." In this context, I suggest that the retrospective orientation of Eliot's prophetic mode provides her with a method to *uncover* or *reveal* cosmopolitanism's practical limitations by studying its historical obstacles alongside its future prospects. Attending to the revelatory function of cosmopocalypse in *Romola*

exposes the unsettling ubiquity of violence in the political imagination of the early 1860s, when the international hegemony that Britain had enjoyed since the end of the Napoleonic Wars began to crumble in response to the ascendancy of rival powers. As events like the Italian Risorgimento and the French invasion of Mexico confirmed the importance of force in mid-nineteenth-century politics, it appeared increasingly doubtful that the future would inaugurate a period of sympathetic international accord. Cosmopocalypse in *Romola* thus highlights the threats to cosmopolitan idealism posed by an increasingly multipolar, increasingly violent world.

#### THE BOOK OF DANIEL, HISTORY, AND THE SCHOLARLY PROPHECIC MODE

Before turning to Eliot's work, it is worth briefly summarizing what the Book of Daniel says and how historicist critics have interpreted its content. The book, which was purportedly written by Daniel himself, recounts the story of the prophet's Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE. Over the course of twelve chapters, Daniel endures the torments of oppressive foreign monarchs, and he interprets dreams and visions as portents of future times. In one particularly famous episode, he dreams of four aggressive beasts that represent four earthly kingdoms destined to govern the world. The Ancient of Days will eventually overthrow the last of these four kingdoms and replace it with the eternal reign of a heavenly ruler "like the son of man."<sup>4</sup> So the official story goes, and so many faithful readers have been willing to receive it. Since at least as early as the third century CE, however, historicist scholars have recognized that Daniel—even assuming that such a person ever existed—did not write the prophecies attributed to him. In fact, those prophecies originated in Jerusalem, not Babylon, and they were written in the second century BCE, not the sixth. As John Collins observes, "the crucial argument on the date of Daniel was already formulated by the Neo-Platonic philosopher Porphyry," who argued that the book was the work of an anonymous Jerusalemite who adopted the persona of a well-known historical figure in order to publish a disguised polemic against the contemporary Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes, one of whose anti-Semitic mandates had recently transformed the Temple of Solomon into a pagan shrine.<sup>5</sup> According to Collins, Porphyry's "basic point was that Daniel 'predicted' accurately the course of events down to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, but not beyond it."<sup>6</sup> In other words, the Book of Daniel's prophetic foresight is actually historical hindsight; although its prophecies appear to

tell the future, they merely recollect the past. A long tradition of historicist scholarship has confirmed Porphyry's reading, whose essential argument remains unmodified even today.<sup>7</sup>

In 1840 the woman who would eventually adopt the pseudonym of George Eliot very nearly made her authorial debut as a "historico-apocalyptic expositor."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, scholars have yet to fully appreciate how consistently Marian Evans returned to the practice of biblical hermeneutics in order to formulate her earliest theories of literary narrative.<sup>9</sup> In a November 1847 letter to her friend Sarah Hennell, Evans excitedly remarked that "I have found two new readers of Strauss."<sup>10</sup> One of these readers, a "Coventry gentleman," will "certainly" receive "a lift in the right direction, from [Strauss's] critical, logical character—just the opposite of [the gentleman's] own" (122). Here, Evans touches on an argument whose implications she would develop in many of her later, more substantial writings on biblical interpretation: "critical, logical" scholarship offers a didactic corrective to uncritical, illogical forms of thought. As Evans's letter continues, her attention turns away from biblical interpretation, in general, toward the interpretation of a particular biblical book. "I am amusing myself," she says, "with thinking of the prophecy of Daniel as a sort of allegory. All those monstrous 'rombustical' beasts . . . seem like my passions and vain fancies, which are to be knocked down one after the other" (122). This line suggests that, even in the very earliest stages of Evans's career, her interest in higher criticism proved inseparable from her faith in scholarship's corrective agenda and her fascination with the prophecies of Daniel.

Throughout the 1850s, Evans repeatedly addressed prophecy from a rational, historicist standpoint in the articles that she contributed to newspapers and literary journals like the *Leader* and the *Westminster Review*. All the while, she continued to immerse herself in German higher criticism, particularly that of Feuerbach. If it is conventional to state that Evans understood the Bible as an artifact from ancient history, it is more original to add that she also understood it as an artifact written by historians who lived in ancient times. She makes this point in her 1851 review of W. R. Greg's *The Creed of Christendom*, where she quotes Greg's higher critical interpretation of the Bible. In his words:

The Hebrew prophets were wise, gifted, earnest men, deeply conversant with the Past—looking far into the Future—shocked with the unrighteousness around them—sagacious to see impending evil—bold to denounce wickedness in high places—imbued, above all, with an unflinching faith, particularly strong among their people, that national delinquency and national virtue

would alike meet with a temporal and inevitable retribution—and gifted “with the glorious faculty of poetic hope, exerted on human prospects, and presenting its results with the vividness of prophecy”—but prophets in no stricter sense than this.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage, Greg reimagines the prophet. He is no longer a προφήτης or *prophetes*—literally, a *before-speaker*—but rather a figure who is “conversant with the Past” (289). Insofar as prophecy’s essential quality becomes its “wise” and “poetic” engagement with history, historical scholarship like Greg’s even becomes a mode of prophecy in its own right (289). Granted, these are Greg’s ideas, not Evans’s, and she reassures her readers that the *Leader’s* editorial board is “far from setting the seal of our approval to all [of his] opinions” (295). Nonetheless, Evans implicitly sanctions Greg’s higher critical interpretation of the Bible. For one thing, she commends his “well-arranged summary of salient facts and arguments” (289). For another, she praises his “strong moral and intellectual charm” and even proclaims that he “sets forth very powerfully much truth of which society is in urgent need” (295). By praising Greg as though his historical scholarship made him a heroic prophet, Evans lends credit to his claim that history-writing constitutes a method of prophecy.

This conflation of history-writing with prophecy marks a crucial stage in the development of Evans’s thought. An undated fragment from a notebook that she kept after adopting the name of George Eliot suggests that prophecy might generate a versatile form of historical knowledge capable of analyzing several temporal periods—past, present, and future—simultaneously. In this notebook fragment, Eliot proposes that “the exercise of a veracious imagination in historical picturing seems to be capable of a development that might help the judgment greatly with regard to present and future events.”<sup>12</sup> History-writing constitutes a mode of prophecy, and vice versa, because “brief, severely conscious reproductions . . . of pregnant movements in the past” generate a sharper understanding of the present and the future by illuminating “the historical preparation of the very system under which we live.”<sup>13</sup> This contention frames a novel like *Romola* as a historical and a prophetic work in equal measure. Much like the Book of Daniel invokes the Babylonian exile in order to reflect on the political conditions of Jerusalem four centuries later, so the fictional “reproduction” of a “pregnant” period like fifteenth-century Florence lays the historical groundwork for the future “development” and birth of the nineteenth-century world.<sup>14</sup> Laden with the language of gestation, this organicist approach to history suggests that prophecy is possible, not because a higher power speaks to

certain gifted individuals, but because time grows and develops according to predictable trajectories. The prophet-qua-historian can therefore extrapolate from known historical events to unknown future ones simply by making logical inferences that account for the influence of gradual developmental processes.

It is important to recognize that Eliot did not believe her historicizing mode of prophecy to be entirely new. Although it disavowed the irrational outlook of certain nineteenth-century evangelicals like the preacher John Cumming, whom Eliot satirized in a withering 1855 article, it returned to the example of a much more hallowed precedent. Throughout her life, Eliot invoked the Book of Daniel to support her view of the prophetic mode as a historicizing practice. In 1855 she alluded to Daniel's prophecy of the beasts when she derided Cumming for his ahistorical interpretation of "the little horn."<sup>15</sup> Much later, in the journals where she kept her preparatory research for *Daniel Deronda*, she reflected that "the unknown teacher" who wrote Daniel "was the first who grasped the history of the world, so far as he knew it, as one great whole, as a drama which moved onward at the will of the Eternal One."<sup>16</sup> This reflection contains Eliot's prophetic theory at its most mature. It frames the Book of Daniel as the exemplary work of prophecy. It suggests that prophecy fulfills a didactic function. It envisions history organically, as "one great whole."<sup>17</sup> Finally, it interprets Daniel as a hybrid work of "history" and "drama" that forecasts the future by studying the past.<sup>18</sup> Two thousand years before George Eliot wrote *Romola*, a pseudonymous Jerusalemite was writing prophecies that functioned like well-researched historical fiction.

#### ROMOLA'S RATIONAL AND IRRATIONAL PROPHETS

I have been arguing that Eliot's engagement with higher criticism and the Book of Daniel encouraged her to redefine prophecy as a rational practice that intuits the future through the scholarly investigation of the past. In what remains of this article, I will contend that *Romola* promotes this new prophetic mode as a method of historically informed political analysis. Eliot's novel pejoratively associates irrational, mystical forms of prophecy with the cloister. In contrast, it portrays the rational, scholarly form of prophecy as a publicly engaged activity that participates in politics by studying history in order to anticipate the times to come. I will show that, even though Eliot believed that utopian visions of a cosmopolitan future serve an aspirational purpose, *Romola* ultimately suggests

that such visions are as historically naïve as mystical forms of prophecy. The novel rejects this naïveté, embraces the study of history, and insists that any historically informed variety of cosmopolitanism must acknowledge the practical difficulty of overcoming the intercultural violence that has defined the past.

Marian Evans's interest in prophecy did not disappear when she began to write the novels of George Eliot. In recent decades, research by Barry Qualls, Norman Vance, and Ilana Blumberg has disproven the common twentieth-century assumption that Eliot's fiction embodies an essentially secular ethos.<sup>19</sup> Scholars no longer hesitate to cite the influence of Christian grace on her portrayals of sympathy, nor do they neglect the religious typologies that characterize figures like Silas Marner and Dorothea Brooke. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of prophecy itself still appears only on brief, rare occasions in existing studies of Eliot's fiction. For Gillian Beer, Saleel Nurbhai, and Anna Neill, it serves primarily as a metaphor by which to characterize Eliot's interest in Darwinian evolution.<sup>20</sup> Peter Hodgson, Charles LaPorte, and Mary Wilson Carpenter compellingly address Eliot's attention to prophecy as literature, but they do not suggest that it consistently informed her understanding of broader subjects like politics or historical time.<sup>21</sup> Overall, I find Caroline Levine's formalist approach to prophecy in Eliot's novels to be the most exciting reading of this subject that exists. In her analysis of *Romola*, Levine contends that "the prophetic model is effectively the same as plotted narrative" because "narrative and prophetic meanings alike take shape only when we look back from the perspective of the future to read significance in the past."<sup>22</sup> This claim honors the narratological significance of prophecy to Eliot's fiction by focusing upon the tension that exists between the novel's ethic of human freedom and the predetermined structure of its plot. More importantly, its definition of the prophetic mode as a temporal structure corresponds to Eliot's idea of prophecy as a phenomenon that contemplates the future through the study of the past. This idea of prophecy as a temporal structure attuned to both the past and the future allows it to fulfill the function that Levine's more recent book on forms attributes to narratives in general; prophecy opens a "*generalizable understanding of political power*" by tracking the development of "multiple social forms . . . as they cooperate, come into conflict, and overlap" across time.<sup>23</sup>

*Romola* promotes its rational, scholarly prophetic mode in opposition to the mysticism of ecstatic visionaries whom it codes as irrational, emotional, and historically ignorant. Through its opposition to these

qualities, the novel upholds the political theories of Niccolò Machiavelli.<sup>24</sup> In *Romola*, Eliot's fictional rendition of that philosopher insists that his own hard-hearted political outlook, which spurns utopian idealism in favor of pragmatic realism, "is the doctrine of all men who seek an end a little farther off than their own noses" (495). This makes it both literally and figuratively a doctrine of foresight. It is also a doctrine whose central principle will sound suspiciously familiar to anyone who has read Eliot's nonfiction writing on prophecy. Like Eliot herself, the fictional Machiavelli contends that foresight must derive from one's knowledge of history. "Satan," he says, "was a blunderer, an introducer of *novità*" (495). In order not to replicate Satan's blunder, political thinkers must possess the foresight to reject the allure of novelty and innovation. Old things, rather than new ones, have the power to define the future course of time.

*Romola* sanctions Machiavelli's theories by portraying Dino, Romola's "unearthly brother," as a mystical prophet whose irrational method of foresight corresponds to his refusal to participate in politics and public life (155). Prior scholars have debated the extent to which the novel confirms the truth of Dino's prophecies.<sup>25</sup> In my view, the more important issue is its evident distaste for his prophetic methodology. Before the narrative begins, Dino chooses to "forsake" the world and seclude himself inside a monastery, where his forthright rejection of academic learning leads him to neglect the study of the past (155). He boasts that "I had not studied the doctrines of our religion, but it seemed to take possession of me. . . . Before I knew the history of the saints, I had a foreshadowing of their ecstasy" (154–55). Although Romola loves her brother unconditionally, *Romola* implicitly critiques a character who abandons his earthly responsibilities in favor of the cloister on the basis of nothing more than a powerful feeling. The contrast between an energetic, publicly engaged prophet like Savonarola and a sickly, sheltered prophet like Dino is conspicuous. While the former preaches vigorously to the citizens of Florence, the latter—supine upon his deathbed—reminds his sister that "in visions and dreams we are passive" (156). Until the very moment of his death, Dino remains a cloistered, unscholarly mystic whose visions of the future peer into the private life of Romola's home rather than reflecting on the problems of Florence at large. Although his prophecies may sometimes be accurate, his intellectual character is consistently unadmirable.

Savonarola serves as a crucial intermediary figure between the irrational, mystical form of prophecy that *Romola* decries and the rational, scholarly form that it endorses. In one respect, the friar's "labyrinthine

allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, his enigmatic visions, and his false certitude about the Divine intentions” align him with the loathsome force of “timorous superstition” (234). At the same time, however, he possesses the intellectual self-consciousness to recognize and criticize his flaws. Savonarola understands “with painful clearness” that his visions are “not, in their basis, distinctly separable” from those of the ecstatic mystic Camilla Rucellai (443). His capacity for self-criticism, along with his “active sympathy” for the “general good,” transform his “life [into] a drama in which there were great inward modifications accompanying the outward changes” (234–35). In other words, he is not a purely irrational prophet, much less a prophet who secludes himself inside a cloister; instead, he is a publicly engaged thinker who possesses the ability to scrutinize his own assumptions. In contrast to the “farthing candle” of the mystics’ “prophetic gossip,” Savonarola’s “mighty beacon” shines “far out for the warning and guidance of men” in such a way that transforms all of his sermons into “political incidents” (208, 234). According to *Romola’s* narrator, he even bears “a mission like that of the Hebrew prophets” (208). Flawed though he may be, Savonarola’s intellectual self-scrutiny and his proximity to historic precedent make his variety of prophecy more similar to Eliot’s than any of the others in the novel.

After Savonarola’s death, Romola symbolically succeeds him by inheriting a more historically reflective form of his prophetic power. At the moment of his execution, her vision literally merges with his. She remains, however, situated in her body, from which she observes him standing on the scaffold. Thus, in a moment of uncanny sight, Romola perceives Savonarola from her perspective, but through his eyes: “she only saw what he was seeing—torches waving to kindle the fuel beneath his dead body” (578–79). It is as though she looks in two different directions simultaneously. This perspectival dualism persists throughout the novel’s epilogue, where Romola, like the prophets whom Eliot praised, fuses retrospective historical insight with future-facing visions of the days to come. Her adopted child listens with “awed wonder” as she recounts the lesson of Savonarola’s life: “act nobly and seek to know the best things God has put within the reach of men[;] you must learn to fix your mind on that end, and not on what will happen to you because of it” (582). Compared to the irrational mode of prophecy, Romola’s mode looks very different. First, she conducts herself sedately rather than ecstatically. Second, she offers moral instruction and distributes political advice when she encourages her child to behave like a “great man” in public (582). Third, she makes no claim to supernatural

inspiration but instead derives her judgments of the days to come from a careful study of history's lessons. *Romola's* rational, reflective, and historically engaged method of prophecy ultimately provides a clear alternative to irrational mysticism.

Eliot's novel closes with the idealized image of its heroine ministering to her happy multiethnic family. This image suggests that Eliot believed in cosmopolitanism's value as a sociopolitical aspiration even though she understood its perfect achievement in practice to lie beyond the teleology of historical progress. In accordance with this understanding, the utopian optimism of the novel's final scene does not go unchallenged. I will use the following section to illustrate how *Romola* deploys the rational prophetic mode in ways that complicate the epilogue's suggestion that the future might inaugurate a multicultural utopia founded on familial sympathy. As we shall see, the prophetic conflation of the future with the past projects the violence of history into the years to come. In the process, idealistic visions of the future are chastened by a more rational and realistic skepticism of its cosmopolitan potential.

#### FROM PROPHECY TO COSMOPOCALYPSE

Due in part to the fact that Eliot's understanding of prophecy derived from the Book of Daniel, a work written in response to intercommunal strife at the cultural crossroads of Hellenistic Jerusalem, the seemingly minor subject of prophecy's role in her fiction bears directly on the very major scholarly discussions surrounding her portrayal of cosmopolitanism.<sup>26</sup> Many of these discussions center on cosmopolitan ethics and the question of whether Eliot believed it possible to achieve a cosmopolitan society in practice. For instance, Amanda Anderson's reading of "The Natural History of German Life" prioritizes the "broader historical consciousness" associated with scholarly detachment and argues that the "cultivation of distance" enabled nineteenth-century writers like Eliot to "objectify facets of human existence so as to better understand, criticize, and at times transform them."<sup>27</sup> Building on Anderson's argument, David Kurnick contends that "Eliot's oft-repeated injunctions to know the other and her endlessly compassionate sense of this project's difficulty" result in skepticism about "the possibility of honoring both local and global claims without ethical contradiction."<sup>28</sup> More recently, Lauren Goodlad has argued that *Romola* participates in an "adulterous geopolitical aesthetic" that reflects upon "the impacts of capitalist globalization by making

adultery the sign of heirloom collapse, commodified marriage, existential exile, and the threat of contamination ‘from elsewhere.’”<sup>29</sup>

All of these readings emphasize Eliot’s ambivalence toward cosmopolitanism—if not as an ethical ideal, then as an achievable political practice. My account of Eliot’s politics suggests that her awareness of cosmopolitanism’s limitations emerges from her prophetic mode’s emphasis on rational historical scholarship. To that end, just as biblical prophecy looks backward to history in order to project a vision of the future, so *Romola* surveys historical episodes of intercultural contact in order to anticipate the future trajectory of cosmopolitan politics. This trajectory is not a blindly optimistic one. Instead, the violence that has historically accompanied intercultural contact implies that a cosmopolitan society in its purest, most utopian form cannot realistically come into existence at any time in the foreseeable future. Spurning naïve visions of a multicultural utopia on the horizon, Eliot’s prophetic mode instead upholds a more rational, realistic, and historically informed interpretation of the future as a time that will not fully separate itself from the intercultural violence of the past.

*Romola*’s proem and epilogue provide the clearest portrayals of what utopian cosmopolitanism looks like in theory. Both of these scenes take place in distant futures, long after the primary narrative has ended—the proem in the nineteenth century, and the epilogue in the abstract fairy-tale time of happily ever after. From these vantage points, the scenes idealize a universal sympathy that transcends intercultural differences without dismissing their existence or denying their importance. Eliot’s proem, for instance, invokes the figure of a fifteenth-century Florentine “shade” who haunts the streets of nineteenth-century Italy in order to evaluate the continuities between the past and present (2). This shade is a counterpart to Eliot’s nineteenth-century readers, who haunt the streets of Renaissance Florence to fulfill a similar purpose. The novel’s narrator optimistically maintains that “the broad sameness of the human lot” can overcome vast differences of time, space, and culture to encourage sympathy among the people of the world at large (1). “We resemble the men of the past more than we differ from them,” and “our imagination” remains, in any case, powerful enough to bridge the gaps that separate us from our fellow humans (1–2). English readers can identify with Italian characters, and the people of the nineteenth century can identify with those of the fifteenth, because their shared humanity associates them with the same community.

The universal human community envisioned in the proem acquires a more intimate counterpart in the epilogue. There, readers learn that Romola has formed a household with her husband's former mistress and agreed to raise the couple's illegitimate children as though they were her own. Kate Flint, who interprets this household's "community of women" as a homosocial alternative to "the standard [heterosexual] romance plot," acknowledges the epilogue's potential to envision worlds that diverge at least partially from the more familiar status quo of nineteenth-century life.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the epilogue's homosocial politics, however, its cosmopolitan undertones enable this divergence. Both of Romola's adopted children are Greek on their father's side and Italian on their mother's. The novel thus concludes with the optimistic image of its heroine presiding over a contented multicultural family. Because so much of *Romola's* narrative is dedicated to Savonarola's visions of a future paradise, it is difficult to miss the implications of this closing scene. In the future, paradise might take the form of family bonds; in the present, the multicultural inhabitants of Florence must realize that they are capable of loving one another.

Because the proem and the epilogue literally bookend *Romola* with tidy resolutions to the intercultural violence that makes up the novel's intervening chapters, the plot invites readers to accept utopian cosmopolitanism as the natural endpoint of politics. *Romola's* prophetic mode of temporality, however, persistently reopens the dilemmas that the plot attempts to close. By looking backward to the past in order to predict the future, this mode transforms the novel's recurring episodes of intercultural conflict into a pessimistic historical record that casts doubt upon the idealistic promise that a cosmopolitan future is in reach. For example, a pivotal moment of *Romola* identifies the future with the past in the prophetic style that I have been discussing. Almost exactly halfway through Eliot's novel, the heroine decides to abandon her treacherous foreign husband, Tito, to depart from the city of Florence, and thus to trade "her broken love and life" for the promise of "freedom and solitude" (319, 355). She hesitates momentarily when she experiences a sudden "vague but arresting sense that she was somehow violently rending her life in two: a presentiment that the strong impulse which had seemed to exclude doubt and make her path clear might after all be blindness" (319). Nevertheless, she rebels against this "presentiment," and she tears her wedding ring from her finger.

At first, Romola's decision seems to constitute a stunning break with the events that have preceded it. By choosing to abandon her past, she is

“not acting after any precedent,” which means that “life” now “[comes] to her as an entirely new problem” (320–21). Even so, one person *has* foreseen this incident. After Romola disguises herself in the “grey serge mantel” of a nun, she glimpses her reflection in a mirror and discovers that “she looked strangely like her [late] brother Dino,” who had predicted that her marriage would end in disaster (318–19). Now, at the very moment of disaster that her brother had foretold, Romola “could not prevent herself from hearing inwardly the dying prophetic voice” forewarn her of her destiny “again and again” (323). This voice discomfits her, but she refuses to believe that supernatural prophecies might predict future events: “What had the words of [Dino’s] vision to do with her real sorrows? That fitting of certain words was a mere chance” (323). With this reassuring thought, she flees the city.

Although Romola never believes that her brother possessed supernatural foresight, her own “presentiment” about the outcome of her actions eventually turns out to be correct. To explain this, there is no need to suggest that she possesses divine inspiration. Unlike her brother, who scorns history, Romola reflects upon the past in order to anticipate the time to come. First, insofar as her “memories” of Dino’s prophecy “[link] themselves in her imagination” to her understanding of “her actual lot,” they yoke her interpretation of the present to her experience of history (323). Second, Romola historicizes the present itself by imagining that she will someday look back on it from the future, long after its consequences have become apparent. These two processes allow Romola to survey the breakup of her marriage from at least three different chronological positions. She leaves her husband in the present. Her presentiment about this action identifies it with the future. Finally, her real memories of Dino’s prophecy and the hypothetical memories that she might someday form about the breakup place it in the past. Because the unusual temporal structure of this scene’s prophetic mode makes a single action seem as though it might exist concurrently in multiple different moments, Romola’s act of foresight bears an uncanny resemblance to an act of hindsight. It is as though she understands what she is currently doing by remembering what she has done, even though she has not really done it yet.

By linking history to the future, Romola’s presentiment about her marriage abides by the scholarly mode of prophecy that Eliot identified with Daniel and the other ancient prophets. In turn, historical knowledge encourages Romola’s growing political consciousness. Initially, her marriage to Tito seems to usher in a new age of multicultural accord,

a “time of perfect trust,” as his “love [makes] the world as fresh and wonderful to her as to a little child” (318). Faced with the mounting evidence of her husband’s prior cruelty, however, she experiences “the breaking of illusions” such as these (320). From this moment onward, her naïve idealism about her future prospects transforms into a more rational and cautious realism. Metaphors of political conflict begin to saturate the narrator’s descriptions of the couple’s wedded life. Marriage, readers learn, “must be a relation either of sympathy or of conquest” (414). After Tito betrays Romola’s trust, she contemplates the “duty of resistance” versus the “duty of obedience” (457). Eventually, a “new rebellion” rises within her, and she “los[es] her crown” (500). In summary, whereas the novel’s proem and epilogue frame the multicultural family in optimistic terms, the body of the novel more consistently describes Romola’s marriage in language that reveals the unsettling tendency of private, multicultural relationships to descend into violent, public struggles for political sovereignty. Goodlad interprets *Romola* as a “female Bildungsroman in which a young girl marries and is soon disabused of her ‘phantom’ love, but goes on to engage in mature ‘unions’ that enable her to participate vicariously in public affairs.”<sup>31</sup> I suggest, however, that Eliot’s novel never engages more actively in public affairs than when its heroine engages in immature unions. Above all, the tumultuous outcome of Romola’s marriage to a foreign man belies the utopian promise of a cosmopolitan future and replaces it with an ongoing zero-sum contest between competing parties. Although nothing about the marriage’s multiculturalism inherently dooms it to failure—throughout the novel, Romola optimistically clings to the hope that her husband might atone for his bad behavior—the novel illustrates that hope and optimism on their own are insufficient to maintain a peaceful interpersonal relationship. All parties must commit to the hard, pragmatic work of cooperation, communication, and compromise in order to ensure that they have a satisfactory future together.

Just as Romola’s idealistic vision of a happy future wedded to a foreign husband ultimately comes to an end due to that husband’s real history of cruel behavior, so, on a larger scale, does the optimistic promise of Florence’s future diminish after the unpleasant experience of foreign invasion. When Lorenzo de Medici dies, the French king Charles VIII crosses the Alps with an army of “terrible Swiss” and strips the Florentine Republic of its independence (206). Romola is technically referring to Tito when she exclaims, “It cannot be! I cannot be subject to him!” (319–20). She might, however, just as easily be speaking about

Charles VIII. After all, Tito's unsuitability as a husband derives not only from his shameless and disloyal liaison with another woman but also from his shameless and disloyal collaboration with Florence's French occupiers. By reenacting a public crisis of national sovereignty within the private confines of marital life, Romola's outburst about subjecthood conflates her disillusion with the futures of two different multicultural relationships—hers with Tito, and Florence's with France. Both futures dismiss the prospect of a peaceful multiculturalism as naïve, and both replace it with a sobering revelation of the violence that has so often accompanied historical relationships across cultures. In the remainder of this article, I will refer to this revelatory mode of politics as “cosmopocalypse” and examine how it influences *Romola's* understanding of the future's cosmopolitan potential.

#### COSMOPOCALYPSE: INTERCULTURAL VIOLENCE AND COSMOPOLITAN TOLERANCE

The prophetic mode's conflation of the future and the past establishes the structural pattern for cosmopocalypse's conflation of cosmopolitan tolerance and intercultural violence. This pattern manifests especially clearly in *Romola's* ambiguous portrayal of Charles VIII and his invasion of Italy. The narrator reports that although some Florentines “compared the new-comer to Charlemagne . . . welcome conqueror of degenerate kings,” others “preferred the comparison to Cyrus, liberator of the chosen people” (206). Nineteenth-century readers would also doubtlessly have thought of Napoleon Bonaparte, who, like Charles, “crossed the Alps with a mighty army” on his way to Italy (210). Because *Romola* situates Charles VIII in fifteenth-century Italy and also across a broader swath of time and space, the king is an “equivocal guest” in more ways than one (211). From a Florentine perspective, he is equivocally foreign and domestic, contemporary and historical. Crucially, he is also equivocally a benevolent liberator and an oppressive conqueror. Apart from their military accomplishments, Charlemagne, Cyrus, and Napoleon are remembered for their cultural patronage and judicial reform; Napoleon and Cyrus are famous, furthermore, for their policies of religious toleration. Charles and his historical predecessors therefore serve ambiguously as emblems of coercive imperialism, on one hand, and beneficent multiculturalism on the other.

The narrator's remark that Charles constitutes an “antitype” of his predecessors reveals how profoundly *Romola's* portrayal of him depends on the historicizing logic of biblical prophecy as Eliot understood it (207). Dorothea Barrett's notes to the Penguin edition of *Romola*

helpfully define “antitype” as “that which is shadowed forth or represented by the ‘type’ or symbol.”<sup>32</sup> As a structure of biblical rhetoric, the antitype identifies people or events from history with those belonging to the future. In the New Testament, Christ is an antitype of Adam; in the Book of Daniel, Antiochus IV Epiphanes is an antitype of Nebuchadnezzar. Similarly, the association that *Romola* establishes between the potential cosmopolitanism of the future and the real intercultural violence of history transforms each one into the other’s antitype. This transformation produces an awareness that cosmopolitanism is, as Bruce Robbins says, “powered by real historical forces.”<sup>33</sup> In turn, cosmopolitanism’s connectedness to history suggests that “if we think of [cosmopolitan] attachments first of all as connections by means of sympathy or affection, which is now the word’s primary sense, we are likely to forget the residual element of violence in our attachments and belongings.”<sup>34</sup> Unlike the essentially ahistorical expressions of cosmopolitanism in *Romola*’s proem and epilogue, the main narrative’s more historically engaged approach situates cosmopolitanism within the context of a longer timeframe. The result is less utopian, but the narrative suggests that it is more historically plausible. Compromised though it may be, a cosmopolitanism tinged with a residue of violence is the only one that the foreseeable future can realistically offer.

As though to demonstrate the ethical compromises of a realistic cosmopolitanism, *Romola* repeatedly reveals that intercultural violence in one region of the world produces the conditions for multicultural societies to emerge in another. When Tito, for instance, describes “the loss of Constantinople” as “the gain of the whole civilized world,” he is referring to the way in which the Ottoman Empire’s territorial conquests produced a wave of Christian refugees who brought classical learning to Italy and thus contributed to the onset of the Renaissance (283). According to Tanya Agathocleous, “cosmopolitanism and nationalism are often understood antithetically, but they are frequently seen as symbiotic in Enlightenment and Victorian writings,” which stage “an internal dialectic between complicit and critical views of globalization.”<sup>35</sup> True to the paradigm that she describes, *Romola* implies that Florence’s cosmopolitan reputation for multiculturalism, humanism, and commercialism cannot fully erase the city’s indebtedness to historical acts of ethnonationalist coercion, which mark it like a scar. Though it may be a self-appointed member of the civilized world, Florence is evidently not a happy cosmopolitan family like the one in the novel’s epilogue, nor is it a place where,

as in the novel's proem, intercultural sympathy necessarily encourages a higher form of understanding among unlike groups of people.

So far from higher understanding, the novel's very first chapter depicts an anonymous Florentine polemicizing against Jewish refugees and merchants. "The Frati Minori are trying to make Florence as hot as Spain for those dogs of hell that want all the profits of usury," he tells Tito (14). "Grey cloth is against yellow cloth," Christians against Jews (14). John Rignall has argued that *Romola's* portrayal of "plague-infected Jewish refugees . . . marks the inscription of historical violence in the beauties of the Italian landscape."<sup>36</sup> To expand upon his argument, "historical violence" does not spontaneously cease when Jewish refugees—or, for that matter, Greek ones like Tito—enter Florence. Instead, the novel's refugee characters suffer some of the novel's most harrowing deaths; the bubonic plague kills many of the Iberian Jews, while Tito dies at the hands of his own father figure. Insofar as these refugees' experiences of intercultural violence in the past appear to exclude them from a peaceful resolution in the future, actually existing cosmopolitan societies like Florence fall short of the epilogue's utopian ambitions.

*Romola* never suggests, however, that it is necessarily unethical or frivolous to aspire to a more perfect form of cosmopolitanism in the future. One of the novel's most explicitly prophetic chapters, "Romola's Waking," reveals cosmopolitanism's entanglement in historical acts of violence, but it also endorses the moral righteousness of cosmopolitan sympathy among people from different cultures. In that chapter, Eliot's heroine embarks on a dreamlike boat ride to the Italian coast, where she ministers to a community of dying "Spanish or Portuguese Jews" who have fled Iberia as refugees and contracted the bubonic plague (552). Her selfless act of humanitarianism saves many lives. In turn, the grateful refugees memorialize her as a quasidivine figure via the "many legends [that] were afterwards told in that valley about the Blessed Lady" (559). The symbolic power of Romola's transfiguration into an allegorical Madonna elevates this episode from a straightforward historical narrative into something like the Hebrew chronicles and prophetic texts whose inspired blend of fact and fiction Eliot praised. The scene's religious symbolism naturally coincides with its cosmopocalyptic revelations about tolerance and violence. To that end, one of the chapter's strangest features is the way in which the narrator persistently proclaims that Romola has traveled "over the sea," "over the sea" to aid the Jews

(554–59). Despite the repetition of this phrase, Romola has not traveled “over the sea” at all. She has merely sailed down the Arno River from Florence to the western coast of Italy.

Whether or not its meaning is figurative, the phrase “over the sea” aligns multiple times and places in a way that associates a particular act of cosmopolitan sympathy in fifteenth-century Italy with a longer and more violent history of European empire. From one perspective, Romola’s putatively overseas evangelism functions as an antitype of nineteenth-century Britain’s missionary activity. More immediately, the phrase “over the sea” aligns Italy with Iberia. The sympathy that Romola displays towards the Jews repudiates the violence of the Iberian pogroms that transformed them into refugees, but her efforts to convert them all to Christianity merely reiterate the logic of anti-Semitism underneath a softer, more benevolent façade. Italy, which welcomes refugees, and Iberia, which produces them, are therefore not as different as they may appear. The case of the “Hebrew baby” who becomes a “tottering tumbling Christian, Benedetto by name,” epitomizes the unsettling juxtaposition of cosmopolitan sympathy alongside intolerant coercion (558). “Queer little black Benedetto” always remains visibly alien within the Italian community that has adopted him, and his ongoing designation as a “Hebrew” suggests that his official status as a “Christian” does not guarantee him membership in the community that has supposedly adopted him. Consequently, this scene’s optimistic promise of a universal family never fully separates itself from the coercive measures capable of bringing many different cultures into just one household.

*Romola* implies that the title character’s humanitarian agenda is precisely what makes her heroic. In the end, however, the narrative refuses to endorse straightforward cosmopolitan idealism. Even “Romola’s Waking,” which depicts a praiseworthy act of cosmopolitan sympathy, recognizes that act’s position within a longer and more troublesome history of intercultural violence. By denying the naïvely utopian closure of happily ever after, the chapter affirms the novel’s broader commitment to a sober and historicizing mode of foresight that understands the future not as a miraculous revelation but as a logical extrapolation from prior events. This mode of foresight produces a skeptical, scholarly, and realistic outlook on the future’s potential for cosmopolitanism, an outlook that rejects blind idealism and magical thinking in favor of judgments based on rational historical analysis. Such an outlook proves no more hostile to cosmopolitanism per se than Eliot’s skeptical, scholarly, and realistic outlook on prophecy proves hostile to prophecy per se. Instead, *Romola*

attempts to extricate these two phenomena from their ignorance of history and, in doing so, to elevate them into subjects worthy of serious study.

#### CONCLUSION: GEORGE ELIOT AND THE PROPHETIC MODE OF TEMPORALITY

It is worth asking why Eliot would want to give *Romola* its utopian epilogue at all if, as I have been arguing, her scholarly mode of prophecy undercuts the historically naïve idealism associated with that kind of ending. In an 1857 letter to John Blackwood, Eliot expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of conclusions in general. After acknowledging “the danger of huddling up my stories” with abrupt endings, she defended herself by saying that “conclusions are the weak part of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion, which is at best a negation” (*George Eliot’s Life*, 319). This letter suggests that Eliot perceived conclusions to be inherently antihistorical insofar as they transform uninterrupted processes of development into isolated narrative fragments. Compared to a story’s resolution, which entails the artificial “huddling up” or “negation” of its narrative impulses, its main body tends to prove more intellectually satisfying. In *Romola*, this tendency becomes apparent when the epilogue rather suddenly resolves the narrative’s protracted representation of political turmoil in Florence. The virtue of Eliot’s prophetic mode is its insistence that the experiences of history remain relevant even after they seem to have concluded.

To that end, Eliot’s mode of prophecy is an especially powerful form of writing about history because—whether by deriving a prediction of the future from a careful study of the past or by speaking about historical events as though they had yet to take place—it demonstrates that no historical period can be entirely discrete from any other. In this context, the fact that *Romola* opens in 1492 allows it to reflect obliquely on the ongoing transformations associated with nineteenth-century modernization and globalization through the medium of a symbolically authoritative precedent. Eliot’s novel dramatizes the competing cultural rhythms of tradition and modernity by juxtaposing, for instance, the insularity of Florence’s traditional aristocratic feuds with the outward-facing internationalism of the city’s growing mercantile networks. Different periods similarly overlap in *Romola*’s simultaneous association of Savonarola with medieval monasticism and proto-Protestant critique, in the tension that it sketches between Bardo de’ Bardi’s fondness for classical literature, on one hand, and the demands of a commercial printing industry on the

other, and even in the narrative's suggestion that the lessons of the fifteenth century are still relevant to Victorian-era readers. Eliot frames prophecy as a strategy of history-writing, one whose simultaneous orientation toward the past and the future enables writers to emphasize that different periods coexist in the same moments. Prophecy, in other words, insists that knowledge of the past is more than a prerequisite to knowledge of the future. Because the past and future are coterminous, knowledge of one period is also inherent within knowledge of the other.

How, in the end, should Eliot's historicizing mode of prophecy and its implication of cosmopolitan futures in histories of violence inform academic understandings of her fiction? For starters, prophecy's importance to her novels should remind scholars that Marian Evans's passion for biblical hermeneutics did not disappear when she became George Eliot. Although some writers have framed Eliot as a Comtean positivist whose fiction charts the "moral development of mankind" and upholds a nondenominational "religion of humanity," focusing on prophecy reveals that she continually attached importance to particular structures of biblical narrative.<sup>37</sup> Alongside her indebtedness to Comte, scholars must acknowledge her indebtedness to the Book of Daniel. Doing so not only identifies Eliot as a writer who engages deeply with specific religious practices such as prophecy but also resituates *Romola* itself within the wider context of her literary corpus. The novel's historical setting and its preoccupation with Catholicism rather than Protestantism can make it seem like a minor work, or even an aberrant one, in the longer course of Eliot's career.<sup>38</sup> Attending to prophecy's significance across her writings, however, shows that *Romola* participates in a recurring narrative pattern that blends future-facing visions of political reform with circum-spect reflections on historic precedent. Eliot's decision to set nearly all of her novels a generation or two in the past enabled her to write historical fiction that made earlier times prophetic of the 1860s and 1870s. *Felix Holt* (1866) uses 1832 to forecast the dangers of the 1867 Reform Bill, while *Middlemarch* (1871–72) invokes the naïve reformism of the early 1830s to cast doubt upon the liberal reformism of the 1870s. Moreover, many of Eliot's novels invoke prophecy and prophets in order to stake their political claims. When the citizens of Treby Magna grapple with the benefits and detriments of radicalism, the narrator of *Felix Holt* repeatedly describes their efforts as a kind of prophecy; when Eliot sought a historical antitype for her modernizing heroine Dorothea Brooke, she chose the sixteenth-century prophet St. Teresa; and when she published *Daniel Deronda*, she identified a historical tradition of

Jewish prophecy with a distinctly future-facing strain of nationalism. “Living warmth will spread to the weak extremities of Israel,” forecasts the prophet Mordecai in the last of these three novels, only after “the illumination of great [historic] facts which widen feeling, and make all knowledge alive as the young offspring of beloved memories.”<sup>39</sup>

The political revelation about history’s connection to the future is the most significant consequence of Eliot’s prophetic mode. *Romola’s* ambiguously prospective and retrospective temporal orientation uncovers the violence that has shaped, and will continue to shape, an increasingly interconnected geopolitical world. Compared to influential nineteenth-century narratives like positivism and liberalism—both of which uphold an optimistic faith in human progress—Eliot’s cosmopocalyptic reading of history remains more skeptical that a utopian future can emerge from an imperfect past. Because cosmopocalypse exists in tension with these optimistic narratives, my interpretation of Eliot’s fiction supports readings by Neal Carroll and Nathan Hensley, both of whom have drawn attention to her awareness that residual forms of coercive violence remain embedded within consensus-based liberal societies.<sup>40</sup> Although *Romola* never rejects the moral worth of progressive ideas as such, it expresses a cautious and realistic skepticism about progressivism’s utopian potential to break from the past. In Eliot’s work, the historical experience of intercultural violence does not support the emergence of a cosmopolitan future; or, at the very least, it does not support the emergence of a cosmopolitan future that is perfect or utopian in character. It may not be coincidental that *Romola’s* prophetic mode and its cosmopocalyptic politics emerged in the 1860s, when the rise of assertive rival states began to challenge Britain’s international hegemony. Although Eliot published her most celebrated novels during the high-water mark of the so-called Pax Britannica, her use of prophecy to reflect on the troublesome historical persistence of intercultural violence ultimately forecasts the increasingly contentious geopolitical landscape of New Imperialism.

#### NOTES

1. Eliot, *Romola*, 17. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
2. Carpenter, *George Eliot*, 133.
3. Tanya Agathocleous has noted that, during the Victorian period, cosmopolitanism was “alternatively seen as a phenomenon and an ideal,

an ideology and an ethos.” The word referred both to “the condition [that] we now call globalization” and to the Kantian aspirations of “‘perpetual peace’ and ‘universal brotherhood’” that might accompany it. In this article, I use “cosmopolitanism” in its Kantian sense. See Agathocleous, *Urban Realism*, 2–3.

4. Dan. 7:13 (KJV).
5. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 197.
6. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 197.
7. Richard Henshaw, for example, dates the Book of Daniel to the reign of “Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–163 BCE) and his wars with the Egyptians.” Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett attribute it to “the time of the Maccabean resistance to the Greek tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century (c. 168–165 BCE).” See Henshaw, “Notes,” 913; Carroll and Prickett, “Explanatory Notes,” 368.
8. Carpenter, *George Eliot*, 31.
9. Charles LaPorte’s account of Eliot’s artistic interest in the Bible focuses exclusively upon her poetry, which, he argues, she perceived as an instructive force “to evoke a deeper appreciation of the Bible’s historical moral role” in European culture. For Suzy Anger, Eliot’s critical attitude toward traditional “theological exegesis” encouraged her “to shape a more viable and principled hermeneutics . . . of sympathy,” which reached its apex in late novels like *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. My attention to Eliot’s engagement with prophecy expands on these scholars’ ideas by addressing Eliot’s early nonfiction essays as well as a novel written in the middle years of her career. See LaPorte, *Victorian Poets*, 190; Anger, *Victorian Interpretation*, 96.
10. Eliot, *George Eliot’s Life*, 122. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
11. Quoted in Eliot, “W. R. Greg’s,” 289. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text. Neither Greg nor Eliot provide a source for the quoted passage within the passage that I have cited here, and I have been unable to locate one.
12. Eliot, “Historic Imagination,” 288.
13. Eliot, “Historic Imagination,” 288.
14. Eliot, “Historic Imagination,” 288–89.
15. Eliot, “Evangelical Teaching,” 43. The little horn appears in Dan. 7:8 (KJV): “I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.”

16. Eliot, *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, 406.
17. Eliot, *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, 406.
18. Eliot, *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*, 406.
19. Qualls contends that Eliot's fiction repeatedly deploys biblical typologies to produce "double representations, at once 'real' and 'typical,'" which naturalize the sacred without desacralizing it. Blumberg similarly affirms Eliot's interest in religion by interpreting *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) as conversion narratives that understand "sympathetic knowledge" to be "a function of Christian grace." Vance, finally, assigns Eliot a prominent place in his longer analysis of nineteenth-century fiction's relation to the Bible. Most relevant to this article is his suggestion that "Savonarola's rhetorical fervor [in *Romola*] may have links with the tradition of nineteenth-century evangelical teaching." See Qualls, "George Eliot," 200; Blumberg, "Sympathy or Religion?" 364; Vance, *Bible and Novel*, 106. For a useful overview of "secularization theory," its conceptual limitations, and its historical importance to literary studies, see Kaufmann, "Religious," 607–27.
20. In 1983 Beer argued that Eliot's novels embody the logic of natural selection by depicting fatal events that occur without proper forewarning: "Many of these events the reader has half foreseen, but he has not foreseen *enough*." Following Beer, Nurbhai states that Eliot imagines the "visionary" as an analogue to the "experimental scientist" who proposes a "hypothesis." Neill has likewise claimed that Eliot understands "sympathy" to be a "form of second sight" and a process of quasi-Darwinian "selection" that "traces the organic origins of the great events of history to the small events of biological descent and sympathetic fusions among minds." Angelique Richardson's work on Eliot's relationship to Darwinism does not deploy prophecy as a metaphor, but it does share the same secularizing logic as the other sources I have cited. For instance, Richardson remarks that Eliot conceives of nature as a more important "source of morality" than religion. See Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 207; Nurbhai, *George Eliot*, 118; Neill, *Primitive Minds*, 92, 100; and Richardson, *After Darwin*, 158.
21. Although Hodgson acknowledges Eliot's commitment to biblical exegeses like Strauss and Feuerbach, he cautions that this commitment must not overshadow her indebtedness to figures such as "Rousseau . . . Spinoza, Hegel, Shakespeare, Goethe, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Mill, [and] Carlyle." Similarly, LaPorte's reading of Eliot's poetry

treats her investment in the religious figure of the “prophetess” as window-dressing to her fascination with the literary figure of the “poetess.” Unlike Hodgson and LaPorte, Carpenter makes prophecy a cornerstone of Eliot’s fiction. Her attention to apocalyptic iconography, however, prioritizes the mystical interpretation of prophecy that Eliot critiqued in figures like Cumming. For example, Carpenter’s analysis of *Romola* parses the numerological significance of chapter divisions, interprets the protagonist as an allegory for the Woman Clothed in the Sun, and theorizes that the novel upholds “a sevenfold division of Romola’s journey, framed by apocalyptic proem and epilogue.” See Hodgson, *Theology*, 11; LaPorte, “George Eliot,” 162–64; and Carpenter, *George Eliot*, 81.

22. Carolyn Levine, “The Prophetic Fallacy,” 153.
23. Carolyn Levine, *Forms*, 19 (emphasis original).
24. Daniel Malachuk has argued that Eliot portrays Machiavellianism as a “cruel” and “ineffective” form of politics (“*Romola*,” 49). Nevertheless, I agree with Gary Wihl that *Romola* “gives Machiavellianism new canonical form” (“Republican Liberty,” 255). Despite their differences of opinion regarding Eliot’s treatment of Machiavelli, Malachuk and Wihl both agree that *Romola* fundamentally concerns itself with the political limitations and moral compromises inherent to a liberal society. My focus on the cosmopocalyptic politics that emerge from Eliot’s peculiar mode of prophecy supports this understanding of the novel.
25. See the full text of Carolyn Levine, “Prophetic Fallacy”; and chapter 3 of Carpenter, *George Eliot*.
26. George Levine has recognized this connection in the context of *Daniel Deronda*, whose prophetic Jewish subplot evaluates “the question of epistemology” by comparing different strategies to learn about and know a foreign culture. See especially George Levine, *Dying*, 180–85.
27. Anderson, *Powers of Distance*, 4–5, 14–15.
28. Kurnick, “Unspeakable George Eliot,” 489–90.
29. Goodlad, *Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 201.
30. Flint, “George Eliot,” 147.
31. Goodlad, *Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 202.
32. Barrett, “Notes,” 610.
33. Robbins, *Perpetual War*, 18.
34. Robbins, *Perpetual War*, 30.
35. Agathocleous, *Urban Realism*, 4.

36. Rignall, *George Eliot*, 65.
37. Wright, *Religion*, 190.
38. Among critics, *Romola* is perhaps the least beloved of Eliot's major novels. In 1948 F. R. Leavis remarked that "few will want to read [it] a second time." Three decades later, Ann Ronald cited the book as a "touchstone of artistic failure." Felicia Bonaparte's judgment is even harsher: "Never, of course, did Eliot disappoint us as utterly as she did in *Romola*." See Leavis, *Great Tradition*, 50; Ronald, "George Eliot's," 268–69; and Bonaparte, *Triptych*, 1.
39. Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 532–33.
40. Hensley contends that the climactic flood in *The Mill on the Floss* positions "the revolutionary founding of law" in an abstract time "many years ago" and that, in doing so, it disguises violence as a "hypostatized and sealed image of 'nature'" rather than an integral component of lawmaking. In a similar spirit, Carroll argues that Eliot's novels "demonstrate that procedural conceptions of consensual reality often depend on an absolutist tendency seemingly inscribed within their operation." See Hensley, *Forms*, 75–76; Neal Carroll, "Illiberalism," 378.

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