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Derek Miller

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## MRS MEYRICK'S CAT

By Derek Miller

“‘Great God!’” the words escaped Deronda’ as he watched the just-prevented-from-drowning Mirah. ‘The old thought had come now with a new impetus of mingled feeling, and urged that exclamation in which both East and West have for ages concentrated their awe in the presence of inexorable calamity.’<sup>1</sup>

Among those who welcome Mirah to Mrs Meyrick’s household is the cat Hafiz, seen by Deronda as it ‘came forward with tail erect and rubbed himself against her ankles’,<sup>2</sup> an Eastern moment accompanying Mirah’s entrance into the Meyrick family. Hafiz is later to purr as Mirah starts to tell her story to Mrs Meyrick.

Hafiz was a celebrated fourteenth-century Sufi Persian poet, out of favour with the court for about twenty years from 1368, innovative, lyrical, mystical, symbolist. If from no other source, Eliot could have read poems by Hafiz in a collection of translations from Persian poetry in Goethe’s *West-östlicher Diwan* of 1819. Hafiz is thus in keeping with the many symbols of Eastern reference scattered throughout the book, tending to prepare Deronda for his mission beyond the end of the novel.

### Notes

- 1 George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. John Rignall (London: J. M. Dent [Everyman paperback], 1999), pp. 182-3.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 192.