

# The Cosmopolitan Eliot

*Bruce Robbins*

“If there is one Victorian writer for whom the term *cosmopolitanism* seems inescapably appropriate,” David Kurnick writes, “it is George Eliot” (Kurnick 489). This judgment does indeed seem inescapable. At the beginning of her career Eliot acquired a quite exceptional knowledge of European languages, lines of thought, and national histories, and she deployed that knowledge to impressive effect as an intellectual journalist and translator. Her quest to deprovincialize herself and her readers did not end when she began publishing fiction. A fundamental goal of that fiction was to achieve a larger, more comprehensive view of matters that might seem petty, domestic, or provincial. Often this meant nurturing empathy with people who stood outside the invisible circle that separated significant from insignificant lives. Nothing is more obviously cosmopolitan than the aim of making that circle visible, inducing readers to see and feel its restrictedness, generating impatience with the selfishness, stupidity, and provinciality that kept it in place.

Still, to make use of a title that attaches to Eliot the honorific adjective “cosmopolitan,” as I do here, might seem to prejudge the degree of eagerness with which she in fact embraced that concept, while also skirting the possibility that her version of it might involve something other than self-evident virtue and achievement. What sort of boast is this? The question needs to be asked, and how one answers will depend on judgments of what exactly cosmopolitanism was for her and how far in its direction she was willing to go.

Where cosmopolitanism is concerned, many readers will recognize Eliot’s reluctance (I paraphrase Mr. Brooke) to go “too far.” Will Ladislav’s dream, remembered

---

*A Companion to George Eliot*, First Edition. Edited by Amanda Anderson and Harry E. Shaw.  
© 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. Published 2013 by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

in the wake of Brooke's disastrous election speech, has been that "now public life was going to be wider and more *national*" (351; ch. 51; emphasis added). The dream was never that public life would be *international*, though Ladislav's own perspective of course is, and much of the authority of his character depends on the fact that it is. It's as if the historical events of the 1830s, momentous as they were, could not make room for an intellectual internationalism that Eliot is nonetheless impelled to register. This divergence touches upon one of the salient ambiguities of the term cosmopolitanism: the scale at which it should be taken to apply. In ordinary usage, it does not always apply to the scale of world. (What "world" meant at the linguistic moment of origin, when *kosmo-polites* or "citizen of the world" emerged both in mimicry of and by contrast to the Greek *polis*, which was not a modern nation, is in any case a complicated story.) The term is of course sometimes defined as detachment from national loyalty in favor of loyalties and principles that are universal, but it can also refer (as it does sometimes in the United States) to the transcendence of smaller, potentially separatist loyalties (to locality, race, ethnicity, and so on) in the name of the nation itself.<sup>1</sup> As far as attitude toward the nation is concerned, cosmopolitanism can therefore count as both pro-nationalist and anti-nationalist.

Eliot herself tends to be pro-nationalist. Writing in the era of heroes like Giuseppe Mazzini and movements like Italian unification, she is deeply appreciative of self-sacrifice in the name of the larger national cause. Ambivalent about her own liberalism, she seems suspicious of anyone who would seriously entertain a larger-than-national dream (though Mazzini himself did) or, as we see more often in her novels, who would think about the world in the sort of abstract, universalistic way that would encourage such dreaming. Anti-cosmopolitanism in this specific sense lies at the very beating heart of *Middlemarch*. Why else does Mary Garth express an ultimate preference for Fred Vincy over the Reverend Farebrother, who is clearly (at least at first) the better man? When Mary chooses in favor of local loyalties, she is choosing in effect to pretend that she had no choice. Affection rooted in childhood memories is absolute; it justifies a refusal of all comparison. It's as if Eliot feared that feeling itself could not survive a weighing and measuring of sympathy by universal or rational or merely non-local standards. What else is the novel's single most famous passage about than a reluctant restraining of imaginative sympathy even though ethics would seem to require precisely that one's sympathies be universal and unrestrained? I refer of course to the sublime vision of the squirrel's beating heart, the growing grass, the fatal roar on the other side of silence (135; ch. 20). Trying to take in the world's neglected subjectivities is both morally obligatory for Eliot and, she seems to suggest, emotionally or imaginatively unlivable. It's like the task of making space in one's feelings for the inhabitants of distant countries.

Eliot's most explicit and most negative statement on the subject of cosmopolitanism appears in her essay "The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!" from *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*: "The time is not come for a cosmopolitan to be highly virtuous. . . . I am not bound to feel for a Chinaman as I feel for my fellow-countryman." This judgment of the limits of her time is immediately and seriously qualified:

I am bound not to demoralize him with opium, not to compel him to my will by destroying or plundering the fruits of his labor, on the alleged ground that he is not cosmopolitan enough, and not to insult him for his want of my tailoring and religion when he appears as a peaceable visitor on the London pavement. (147)

In adding these important qualifications, especially concerning the economic dimensions of England's international bad behavior, Eliot is speaking as a cosmopolitan in the largest, most international sense. She certainly cannot be accused of flattering the complacency or common sense of her compatriots. But she quickly comes back to a sort of solidarity with those compatriots, an inevitable re-centering of perspective in their concerns, values, and interests: "Affection, intelligence, duty radiate from a center, and nature has decided that for us English folk that center can be neither China nor Peru" (147).

Here Eliot seems to choose a pragmatic nationalism whose potential overlap with cosmopolitanism is worthy of further attention. With the mention of China and Peru, however, she also aligns herself somewhat surprisingly with the Tory crowd that mocks Brooke's campaign speech. The liberal, free-market cosmopolitanism of this speech has naturally been upstaged by its other qualities, but it too may be worth a second look.<sup>2</sup>

"I've always gone a good deal into public questions—machinery, now, and machine-breaking—you're many of you concerned with machinery, and I've been going into that lately. It won't do, you know, breaking machines: everything must go on—trade, manufactures, commerce, interchange of staples—that kind of thing—since Adam Smith that must go on. We must look all over the globe:—'Observation with extensive view,' must look everywhere, 'from China to Peru,' as somebody says—Johnson, I think, 'The Rambler,' you know. That's what I have done up to a certain point—not as far as Peru; but I've not always stayed at home—I saw it wouldn't do. I've been in the Levant, where some of your Middlemarch goods go—and then, again, in the Baltic. The Baltic, now" (349; ch. 51).

It's when he passes from the Levant to the Baltic that Brooke is interrupted by a laugh-creating echo from the crowd, an echo which, "by the time it said, 'The Baltic, now'" (350; ch. 51), has become fatal.

Brooke is of course punished by the crowd first of all because of his signature inability to keep to the point, any point. The crowd wants to hear about his support for the Reform Bill, not about Peru or China or the Baltic, and rightly so. But Brooke has been presented from the first chapter on as "a man who had traveled in his younger years, and was held in this part of the country to have contracted a rambling habit of mind" (2; ch. 1). If you think of the rambling mind as a product or stylistic expression of his physical ramblings (a connection accentuated by the mistaken allusion to Johnson's *Rambler*), it's not just his incoherence that is repudiated, but his cosmopolitanism. And if so, then Eliot's own echoing of the interruption becomes a bit harder to interpret. After all, there is nothing self-evidently incorrect about the idea that

knowledge of the countries where the goods produced in Middlemarch are sold is relevant to the town's welfare and ought to be of interest to its inhabitants. Brooke is right to insist on the significance of distant places for his constituents-to-be, even if the Middlemarchers themselves don't see the connection. This is, recall, a novel of *provincial* life. Provinciality is one of its problems. From this angle, Brooke's incoherence could be presented with a little ingenuity as less a portrait of the cosmopolitan as such than a portrait of the cosmopolitan as seen with impatience by a local or provincial. Of course any mention of Peru or the Baltic or the Levant will look tactless and incoherent if your standards of tact and coherence are determined exclusively by local spaces and provincial loyalties. But should they be? In setting the crowd up to interrupt Brooke, it's as if Eliot were herself channeling him in his self-correcting, self-restraining mode: "It is easy to go too far, you know. You must not let your ideas run away with you" (508; ch. 72).

China and Peru seem to be there largely because Johnson had melodiously joined them in verse, yet it would not be difficult to fill in some hard facts about all of the countries mentioned, those two included, which would bring out important causal links between the Middlemarch economy and the countries Brooke never gets to talk about. Even a couple of hours of cursory digging turn up some promising hints both in the lead-up to the Reform Act and in the years when Eliot was writing *Middlemarch*. China: In the early 1830s, the East India Company's massive smuggling of opium into China, which would soon lead to the First Opium War, was gearing up in a big way. In 1829, the first opium clipper was built, speeding up the trade considerably by beating the monsoon winds; in 1830, permission was granted to grow poppies in India, enormously expanding production, and the Chinese authorities sent a letter of protest to Queen Victoria; in 1832, the opium trading house of Jardine Matheson and Company was registered, which made huge profits from the trade and remains "one of the foremost trading multinationals in South-east Asia" (Booth, 114). As we have seen, Eliot was still upset by the opium trade when she wrote *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* at the very end of her writing life. The Baltic: in 1857 the abolition of the "Sound Tolls" that had discouraged shipping from entering the Baltic led to the rapid development of Copenhagen and no doubt to consequences for British trade as well, for example in Russian timber and precious stones. (One thinks of *Middlemarch's* jewels and furniture.) By 1879, ships carried as much tonnage through the Baltic as through the western Mediterranean. Peru: Peruvian mines, which are mentioned as a site of investment in Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, were at issue when Britain backed Chile against Peru in a war over nitrates. With respect to Peru, the middle of the nineteenth century saw a paradigmatic investment curve, rising with the sudden importance of guano for fertilizer (a determining element in international food prices, and for that matter in the Irish famine), and then falling dramatically with the exhaustion of Peru's reserves.<sup>3</sup>

Even these very provisional findings are enough, I think, to suggest that Brooke had a case, whether or not he himself was capable of making it.<sup>4</sup> This case gives greater interest both to Eliot's smack-down of cosmopolitanism on the hustings, assuming

this episode can be so described, and to the role played in Eliot's fiction and in the Victorian period generally by what might be called "free-trade cosmopolitanism"—an impulse, unexpectedly produced by fidelity to Adam Smith and *laissez-faire*, not to erect racial and imperial stereotypes but on the contrary to tear them down. Established scholarship on the subject of cosmopolitanism would suggest that the concept's great century is the eighteenth, while the nineteenth century sees an exponential growth in nationalism and racism. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, champions of anti-slavery consumer boycotts argued, not without reason, that to add sugar to your tea was to spill the blood of slaves. To read Charlotte Sussman on the sudden decline of these boycotts after emancipation in the 1830s—the period covered by *Middlemarch*—is to be instantly convinced that there has been no steady progress toward cosmopolitanism.

After 1838, appeals to a universal sensibility—mutual emotions discovered in sympathy and tears across vast distances—began to disappear from British conceptions of cultural difference, to be replaced by a more essentialist and 'scientific' understanding of 'race' . . . by the mid-nineteenth century, these views had given way to a more pessimistic, deterministic belief in the ineradicable savagery of inferior nations. (Sussman 193)

Once slavery was gone, there were few if any boycotts, though the coercive exploitation and physical abuse of colonial labor had not of course disappeared. Imperialism encouraged a "deterministic belief" in "ineradicable savagery." And yet, given the example of the boycotts, the hypothesis emerges here that there nevertheless existed a nineteenth-century cosmopolitanism that can be disengaged from imperialism, if not completely, and that might have led to a different sort of British knowledge of the non-European world, even if George Eliot herself had mixed feelings about it.

Eliot has been described as cosmopolitan on the grounds of her valiant attack on anti-Semitism in *Daniel Deronda* and her endorsement of Jewish nation-building, a project which is not deferential to the English national perspective and indeed propels her hero and the novel itself far outside England. But on the evidence of the same novel she can equally well be called anti-cosmopolitan. We are told in chapter 3 what a pity it is that Gwendolen Harleth, who has wandered so much, has no real home to return to, no special place endeared to her by childhood memories. "A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labors men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge" (50; ch. 3). The suggestion is that without the "sweet habit of the blood" imposed by accident of birth and acquired before there is choice or knowledge, all subsequent knowledge may suffer from a fatal and mysterious defect. Knowledge may widen, but without leading to empathy; no amount of "effort and reflection" will be able to make it do so. "At five years old, mortals are not prepared to be citizens of the world, to be stimulated by

abstract nouns, to soar above preference into impartiality; and that prejudice in favor of milk with which we blindly begin, is a type of the way body and soul must get nourished at least for a time" (50). This "at least for a time" may be only what it seems, an account of how ethics develop in early childhood, and (as it seems to me) it may be somewhat disingenuous: a way of presenting partiality not merely as necessary in childhood, but as necessary to human life as such.

The point is underlined in the novel's plot. Deronda too is a kind of rootless cosmopolitan, and though he knows more about others than Gwendolen and feels more for them—he knows and feels too much rather than too little—he is threatened by much the same pathology: a paralyzing absence of locally-rooted partiality. "A too reflective and diffusive sympathy was in danger of paralyzing in him that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force" (413; ch. 32). What he is looking for is an "event" or "influence that would justify partiality . . . making him what he longed to be yet was unable to make himself—an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning and disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real" (413; ch. 32). As the representative at once of an ideal and a pathology, the cosmopolitan for Eliot seems to be just this "yearning and disembodied spirit," knowing a lot and vaguely stirred by that knowledge, but without local fixity and partiality, hence merely a kind of ghost. Daniel's miraculous discovery of his Jewish blood cures this disease in him. But it does so only by suggesting that nothing less outlandish and improbable would restore him to health—by suggesting, in other words, that in most cases there will be no treatment at all. This leaves Gwendolen rather than Daniel to stand for the modern or cosmopolitan norm, a norm which is also a malaise.

Mary Wilson Carpenter, who joins cosmopolitanism to the discourse of disease, uses cosmopolitanism's most negative sense, "the riff-raff" of the world or those who were—like the cholera itself—without local attachment and, therefore, entirely lacking in the capacity for fellow-feeling" (512), as a link between Gwendolen and Bulstrode, the relatively straightforward villain of *Middlemarch*.<sup>5</sup> But Gwendolen resembles Daniel more than she does Bulstrode. As the resonance between the two protagonists suggests, Eliot could not extricate herself from this dilemma by means of an ethical discrimination between good and bad characters. The problem was much too intimate for that. Like liberalism itself, Eliot worried that comprehensive knowledge and rational principles, valued and eagerly sought as the key to progress and righteousness, might somehow be antithetical to feeling and action, or that feeling and action might themselves be fundamentally partial and unfair.

In one of the most influential arguments about Eliot's cosmopolitanism, Amanda Anderson defends *Daniel Deronda* against charges like Terry Eagleton's "that the utopianism of the Jewish plot, with its accompanying ideal of organic totality, disavows the unstable conditions of modernity so vividly depicted in the Gwendolen Harleth plot" (Anderson 119). Anderson's counter-argument is that "Eliot seeks to elaborate

through her ideal of cosmopolitan Judaism a critical and nondogmatic way of relating to one's cultural heritage" (120). Partiality is good and necessary; in effect, it is not a problem so long as Eliot can ensure that it will be a "cultivated partiality" (121), thoughtful, critical, and not "an attempt to flee . . . instabilities by constructing Jewish identity as an absolute ideal or ground" (121). The hinge of this argument is the difference Anderson establishes between Mordecai's and Daniel's conceptions of Jewish identity, the first based on the absoluteness of blood and fate and the second more self-conscious and self-critical—in short, more detached.<sup>6</sup> In pursuing this logic Anderson suggests that "Eliot goes a long way toward balancing the claims of the particular against those of the universal" (122). It is this proposition that Kurnick queries in his reading of *The Spanish Gypsy* in parallel with *Deronda*. In fact, Kurnick says, Eliot had doubts "that ethnic nationalism can be easily squared with universal justice" (490). Being what he calls "a *sanguine* cosmopolitan writer" means being "one who believes firmly in the possibility of honoring both local and global claims without ethical contradiction" (490). Eliot may be a cosmopolitan, but she is not a credulously optimistic one.

Kurnick gives *The Spanish Gypsy* credit for acknowledging "that the project of establishing gypsy *Lebensraum* on settled territory will necessarily entail the 'blight[ing]' of another people" (502), an acknowledgment that as he says is "missing from the proto-Zionism of *Daniel Deronda*" (502). He is careful not to imply (as others, less scrupulous, might well have done) that injury to those it excludes is the universal, implacable, and bitterly unacceptable truth of the nation. For him this "zero-sum logic" follows not from the nation as such but more precisely from "any territorially-based ethnic nationalism" (502). At least in theory, then, the possibility remains open for a civic nationalism, not based on exclusive claims to territory, that would also not contradict cosmopolitanism's universal principles. Kurnick and Anderson could presumably find common ground, therefore, in something like the following line of thought: contradiction between the national and planetary scales of cosmopolitanism is not necessary, but it is certainly possible, and no cosmopolitanism can afford to ignore the possibility of such a contradiction, the possibility of a collision and an unavoidable choice between local loyalties and more expansive ones. Anyone who pushes for the highest, most restrictive understanding of cosmopolitanism will demand accordingly that in the event of such a choice, the word will apply to the larger and not the smaller loyalty. But the case that here and now the choice is indeed unavoidable cannot be taken for granted; it must be made.

If cosmopolitanism means nothing more than being nice to foreigners, if it does not entail the possibility of having to choose the welfare of foreigners over one's own interests and those of one's fellow nationals, then the term offers precious little to boast about. Facing the risk that it will lend itself to easy self-congratulation, Kurnick tries to give the concept more backbone by demanding from it "a willingness to endure the trauma of the encounter with the other." He judges that by this standard, "Eliot simply never seems traumatized enough" (489). The standard itself is open to question. Perhaps it's not enough to be nice; the price of admission to the cosmopoli-

tan club should be higher. But must the cost be paid in the currency of trauma? Or, as Christopher Herbert suggests, is trauma merely a counterfeit piece of secularized theology, familiar enough to escape detection but finally of questionable value?

The cultural anthropologist's idea of the necessity of undergoing 'an extremely personal traumatic kind of experience' as the prerequisite of shedding prejudice and thus attaining ethnographic truth (defined as entering into another conceptual world) reproduces closely the Evangelical salvation narrative in which an awareness of sin is imagined to be the prerequisite of the shedding of egoistic selfhood and the spiritual new birth which follows. (174)<sup>7</sup>

If trauma is indeed a prerequisite for cosmopolitanism, the paradigmatic scene in Eliot's fiction would have to be Dorothea's honeymoon in Rome. It is not often noted that the famous passage about hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat comes in the brief Roman chapters. In that context, the notion that the world's subjectivities are too vast and manifold to take in without extreme discomfort does not refer only to Dorothea's wifely unhappiness, which Eliot suggests is too common to notice. Less obviously, it also refers to Dorothea's own inability to take in the historical unhappiness embodied in the paintings, sculptures, and ruins of Rome. Recall that even her own unhappiness is not merely the result of a bad marriage choice. "There are few paintings," Dorothea confesses to Will, "that I can really enjoy . . . when I begin to examine the pictures one by one, the life goes out of them, or else is something violent and strange to me" (143; ch. 21). The strangeness and the violence could be read as a displacement onto the paintings of the disappointing discoveries of married life, but Eliot takes some trouble to insist that they are what they seem, products of "the weight of unintelligible Rome" (134; ch. 20).

Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence; the dimmer but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world: all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion. (134; ch. 20)

Dorothea is traumatized in a fairly uncontroversial sense: she suffers a radical interruption in her ability to continue within the patterns of emotion to which she is accustomed—an interruption in her ability to feel.

In effect, Rome and Casaubon fuse together into a single traumatic cause. Thanks to his ignorance of German, his inability to feel any personal enthusiasm for the glories of Rome, and his desire to defend the Christian faith against the threats of an emergent social science, Casaubon may seem an archetypal anti-cosmopolitan, but the subject

of his research is after all comparative mythology, and it is comparative mythology that Dorothea is trying and failing to assimilate when she makes her dutiful rounds of Rome's ruins, museums, galleries, and churches. To see so much of the past on display, especially a past that is at once pagan, Catholic, and aesthetically magnificent, is to have just the experience that Mary Garth successfully rejects: the distressing, self-subverting experience of pure comparison. It is no simple thing to open one's eyes to the full range of lives and cultures, joys and sufferings that have flourished on this planet. The event cannot leave one unaltered. Dorothea takes comparison as a threat to the ethical core of her being. Choosing "to drive out to the Campagna where she could feel alone with the earth and sky, away from the oppressive masquerade of ages, in which her own life too seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes" (134; ch. 20), she flees what the display of Rome seems to reveal to her about herself.<sup>8</sup>

In a sense, Rome merely stands in for ambiguities of cosmopolitanism that were already visible elsewhere in Eliot's fiction. As a self-declared novelist of provincial life, Eliot aimed to stretch the social circle by inducing in her readers (assumed to be largely metropolitan) a sympathetic interest in provincials. As her critics have often commented, much of her own sympathy went out however to the provincials and their quaint traditions. These made up a large part of her literary capital, so to speak, in addition to being the objects of her own early and formative fondness. When she expresses that fondness in a sly Toryism, stubbornly appreciative of tradition that she might elsewhere judge to be backward, she is facing one classic paradox of cosmopolitanism: should one be tolerant of those who, given a choice, would not themselves show tolerance? A similar paradox haunts the question of a proper cosmopolitan attitude to the nation: does solidarity with *someone else's* national movement (for example, the Italian *Risorgimento*, from which Eliot clearly borrowed for her account of Deronda's proto-Zionism) count as a bold cosmopolitan transgression of one's own national loyalty? Or should it be taken on the contrary as a regressive fidelity to the nation-form and evidence of an inability to see from an international or trans-national perspective?

In short, Dorothea did not have to travel or even to marry badly in order to be so traumatically disoriented. She achieves a sense of disorienting connection to a distant world as early as the first chapter of *Middlemarch* when she and her sister make their choices from among their mother's jewels. For Dorothea, this means inquiring into the ethical status of a commodity that has a foreign source. Declaring that if she were to wear her mother's emeralds, she would feel like she was "pirouetting," Dorothea decides after all not to give them up—and immediately afterwards, she thinks of the labor behind them.

"Yes! I will keep these—this ring and bracelet," said Dorothea. Then, letting her hand fall on the table, she said in another tone—"Yet what miserable men find such things, and work at them, and sell them!" She paused again, and Celia thought that her sister was going to renounce the ornaments, as in consistency she ought to do. (6; ch. 1)

Dorothea doesn't renounce them. Neither moral consistency nor moral clarity seems easily available. What does "miserable" mean here? Does it invoke misery in the economic sense? Mere unhappiness? Moral deficiency? One might think that it's the hard and physically deforming labor of producing the jewels that makes these workers unhappy, but that reading seems undercut when Dorothea equates finding and working on the jewels, which seem strenuous occupations, perhaps underpaid and perhaps bad for the health, with merely selling them, which presumably is no worse in these respects than selling anything else. One could read this scene as evangelicalism, or as a vestigial expression of the casual contempt that the landowning class had for retailers, or as foreshadowing the anti-sweatshop discourse that would remind jewelry-wearers of, say, the eight-year-old Indian children at risk of an early silicosis death from grinding agate.<sup>9</sup>

These are the ambiguities that cluster at the intersection of cosmopolitanism and free-market capitalism. The intersection had been noted. The Oxford English Dictionary's first reference for "cosmopolitan" is from John Stuart Mill's *Political Economy* (1848): "Capital is becoming more and more cosmopolitan." There has been no lack of attention to the limits and distortions that cosmopolitanism was likely to suffer from its dependence on this energy source, or for that matter to the value that Eliot's occasional Toryism acquires by its conjunctural resistance to Whig arrogance. But the topic of Eliot and cosmopolitanism cannot afford to neglect the possibility that she learned something worth learning from its capitalist adherents. Why did Disraeli attack the Liberals as cosmopolitans in his Crystal Palace speech of June 1872, while Eliot was writing *Middlemarch*? He might have been inventing a convenient straw man, but it appears he was not. Not only were some Liberals indeed willing to jettison the empire as too expensive, they were willing to ask inconvenient ethical questions about it. John Bright, whose speeches on India from the late 1850s Eliot was reading in the late 1860s while preparing for *Middlemarch*, was interested in India's potential to grow cotton as an alternate source to the slave-holding American south (Henry 104). That is, he was still thinking morally, if imperfectly, about the conditions of labor that produced English commodities—as Dorothea comes so close to doing when she considers the labor that produced the inherited jewels she is inspecting in the novel's first scene.

Bright favored investment in public works projects in India, including transportation, while he also complained that there had been no progress there. Whose fault was that? Consider:

I hope that no future historian will have to say that the arms of England in India were irresistible, and that an ancient empire fell before their victorious progress,—yet that finally India was avenged, because the power of her conqueror was broken by the intolerable burdens and evils which she cast upon her victim, and that this wrong was accomplished by a waste of human life and waste of wealth which England, with all her power, was unable to bear. (qtd. in Henry 105)

Bright is clearly worried about the expense. He never says England was wrong to conquer India. But he does say, and quite clearly, that the English are mistreating the Indians, and that this fact may determine the eventual judgment of history upon the British Empire as a whole.

George Eliot was one of those who did invest in Indian public works, including transportation. In this she was representative of the large numbers of middle-class Englishmen who, thanks to new financial instruments, were for the first time able to participate in overseas investment in the 1850s and 1860s. In a sense this was indirect participation in colonialism itself. In 1860, while finishing her “sugar” story, “Brother Jacob,” and receiving the first profits from *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot was investing a lot of money (two thousand pounds) in “East Indies” railway stock. She was reassured that her return of 5% was “guaranteed.” What this meant was that if the Indian railway didn’t make enough profit to pay the 5%, the money would be raised by Indian taxes. In other words, the money would be taken forcibly from the Indians. That’s exactly what happened. By 1869, something like 15 million pounds had been paid to investors under the guarantee system. In a letter in 1879, Eliot acknowledged that this logic was not foreign to her when she wrote that the disastrous failure of the Second Afghan War would be “a black day of Indian finance, which means alas a great deal of hardship to poor Hindus” (qtd. in Henry 78). Nancy Henry, from whom I take all this information, uses it to argue very usefully that Eliot derived her concept of realism in part from her skepticism about unscrupulous accounts of Empire intended to encourage investment.

At the same time, cosmopolitan knowledge enters into this picture in a potentially different way than it would in the case of, say, missionary work or imperial conquest. In order to feel confident enough to invest in a place, what would one want to know? One would want to know that the investment will turn a profit. If that’s the goal, then the degrading stereotypes of the native that we associate with nineteenth-century imperialism may be counter-productive. Yes, there is the myth of the lazy native. But that myth does not fill the entire field of representation. It would be shocking if it did, for the motive of encouraging investment was a strong incentive to brighten the picture, and even to pay attention to various sorts of abuses. The Indian railway in which Eliot invested was built in 1853 by the cousin of the publisher John Chapman, for whom Eliot edited the *Westminster Review*. Also called John Chapman, he published “Our Colonial Empire” in the *Westminster Review*, on Eliot’s watch, and in it “rejected Britain’s right to rule” (100). “We are not lords of India in any other than a present practical sense. We do not and cannot rule it by force. We cannot colonize it nor ought we” (101). This was of course not the dominant view, but it’s obviously one direction in which thinking about investment in India could lead. The piece, which was republished by *Westminster Review* in 1870, sixteen years after the author’s death, would have to count as a sample of Victorian cosmopolitanism. Chapman and Bright have none of Brooke’s spectacular incoherence, but they deepen the portrait of Brooke on the hustings, hinting at the existence of a vision on the other side of the interruption and the novel’s geo-political silence. At a minimum, they help explain Eliot’s

cosmopolitan resistance both to stereotypes about foreigners and to the cruder forms of colonial exploitation.

In his stump speech Brooke declares himself a follower of Adam Smith, a free trader. Smith has much to answer for. For example, he did not believe that poverty was an injury to the worker's dignity or, therefore, that the fact that capitalism might produce poverty should count as a damning argument against it. But he was of course opposed to the acquiring of colonies. He makes it clear that the impulse to legitimate colonialism can by no means be equated with the impulse to legitimate the so-called free market. The space between the free market and colonialism is a reminder that one did not have to get outside England in order to achieve detachment from its culture. Culture should never be defined as if taking distance from it is impossible. On the contrary, distance from cultural belonging is a fact about cultural belonging. Cosmopolitanism is an example: it was a potential that emerged from England's own contradictions. It should be no surprise that Eliot, whose greatness is inseparable from her own contradictions, should have represented cosmopolitanism with such passion or with such ambivalence.

## NOTES

- 1 In the United States, cosmopolitanism is often a way of characterizing a proper sort of patriotism in which the nation is valued (inevitably, valued to some extent over other nations) because of the degree to which it itself values heterogeneity within it.
- 2 This section of the essay is adapted from my "Victorian Cosmopolitanism, Interrupted."
- 3 According to Poovey, one moral seems to be, as far as Peru is concerned, that the bottom dropped out of the market when it was discovered that there was a bottom to the guano deposits.
- 4 One page before the fatal encounter on the hustings that ends his career, Brooke has another failed exchange, this one with a local merchant who sells tea, sugar, and spices. The foreign origins of those commodities are not alluded to, and it's not clear that Brooke himself is conscious of the ways in which his election or the passage of the Reform Bill might connect with those countries. (346–47). "Such a thing as a vote, now: why, it may help make to make men's fortunes at the Cape—there's no knowing what may be the effect of a vote," Mr Brooke ended, with a sense of being a little out at sea" (347).
- 5 It seems worth mentioning that as a cosmopolitan disease, cholera defied the received opinion that climate is determining as well as the moralizing of disease in terms of drunkenness, prostitution, and so on. Anyone drinking contaminated water, including the most pious and well-regulated of citizens, would fall ill.
- 6 Anderson complicates her argument interestingly in her discussion of Leonora Halm-Eberstein, Deronda's "bad mother." On the one hand, Anderson says, Halm-Eberstein's "deracinated cosmopolitanism" (139) represents "the threat of absolute detachment from the affective ground of community" (139–40). On the other hand, art becomes another community for her, and one that also offers a mode of affect. "I cared for the wide world, and all that I could represent in it" (693). As Anderson comments, this statement does not merely claim personal freedom but also "redefines a central term in Eliot's ethic of sympathy and duty" (141). "[A] recuperation of Daniel's character should not be made at the expense of Leonora, who represents a viable and deeply felt response to her own cultural context and personal past" (143).
- 7 Herbert, 174.

- 8 Is it a coincidence that, like Henry James in *Portrait of a Lady*, Eliot made the threat of cosmopolitanism in deep time—that's one way of describing what Rome meant to her—coincide with the heroine's perception of a marriage that was not working, her disappointment in the expectation of what marriage would mean? Marriage was of course the conventional happy ending of novelistic plot. In that sense, it makes sense that opening up the temporal scale of novelistic plot should overlap dramatically with a vision in which those present principles which seem so peremptory and absolute should be exposed to a long history that exposes their relativity.
- 9 What knowledge lies behind this exclamation? Emeralds were largely mined in Colombia and Africa, though some came (perhaps through the Baltic) from Russia and Austria. The largest source of diamonds had been India, but in the nineteenth century excited attention had turned to Brazil. And then in 1866, the discovery of diamonds in South Africa led to a diamond rush. Amethysts, which Dorothea does not choose, could also be found in Russia and Austria though Brazil and Uruguay and Mexico were more prominent sources. The exhaustion of the German deposits of agate in the nineteenth century had led to mining in Brazil, hence to the discovery of amethyst deposits there. See also Freedgood 126–28.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, Amanda. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.
- Booth, Martin. *Opium: A History*. New York: St. Martin's, 1996.
- Carpenter, Mary Wilson. "Medical Cosmopolitanism: *Middlemarch*, Cholera, and the Pathologies of English Masculinity." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38.2 (2010): 511–28.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. London: Verso, 1978.
- Eliot, George. *Daniel Deronda*. Ed. Barbara Hardy. London: Penguin, 1967.
- Eliot, George. *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. Ed. Nancy Henry. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1994.
- Eliot, George. *Middlemarch: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Reviews, and Criticism*. Ed. Bert G. Hornback. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Freedgood, Elaine. *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006.
- Henry, Nancy. *George Eliot and the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.
- Henry, Nancy. "George Eliot and Politics." *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*. Ed. George Levine. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 138–58.
- Herbert, Christopher. *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.
- Kurnick, David. "Unspeaking George Eliot." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38.2 (2010): 489–509.
- Levine, George. "Daniel Deronda: A New Epistemology." *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*. Ed. Suzy Anger. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001. 52–73.
- McCaw, Neil. "'The Most Ordinary Prompting of Comparison': George Eliot and the Problematics of Whig Historiography." *Literature and History*, third series 8.2 (2004): 18–33.
- Poovey, Mary. *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.
- Robbins, Bruce. "Victorian Cosmopolitanism, Interrupted." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38.2 (2010): 421–25.
- Sussman, Charlotte. *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713–1833*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000.