Victorian Literature and Culture (2010), **38**, 489–509.
© Cambridge University Press 2010. 1060-1503/10 $15.00
doi:10.1017/S1060150310000136

UNSPEAKABLE GEORGE ELIOT

By David Kurnick

THE VERY IDEA OF VICTORIAN cosmopolitanism might at first glance seem an oxymoron. Historically bracketed by a Romanticism that took political inspiration from France and intellectual cues from Germany and by a modernism whose most prominent "English" personnel were largely from overseas, the Victorians can look decidedly parochial. The most incisive recent attempts to link cosmopolitan thinking to specific formal or stylistic innovations have tended to leave the Victorians out of the picture. A recent essay by David Simpson, for example, nominates what he terms the Romantic "historical-geographical epic" as a critically cosmopolitan genre – one whose barrage of footnotes ruptures the surface of the text and ensures that even in surveying the exotic Other, Romantic epics guarantee that "the pleasure of poetry sits uneasily but inescapably alongside the burden of critique" (150). On the modernist side, Rebecca Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style* (2006) has compellingly excavated the links between a host of modernist experimental practices and the project of thinking creatively outside national boundaries – reaching the conclusion that "there is no critical cosmopolitanism without modernist practices" (18). Neither Simpson nor Walkowitz deals with the Victorians in depth, but a certain idea of nineteenth-century realism hovers as the implicit contrast to the genres and practices they catalogue.[1]

If there is one Victorian writer for whom the term *cosmopolitanism* seems inescapably appropriate, it is George Eliot. And yet . . . the very effortlessness with which Eliot negotiates a dauntingly disparate range of intellectual coordinates and national traditions is also what, from another perspective, makes her cosmopolitanism suspect as a project of truly dialogic inquisitiveness. Eliot's oft-repeated injunctions to know the other and her endlessly compassionate sense of this project's difficulty are conveyed in prose whose composure seems to belie the point. If what distinguishes "critical" cosmopolitanism from the more complacent variety is a willingness to endure the trauma of the encounter with the other, Eliot simply never seems traumatized enough.[2] Simpson astutely points to "a gap at the heart of the concept [of cosmopolitanism] . . . whereby the ethic of openness and curiosity useful to liberals – cosmopolitanism as respect for and interest in the other, the unknown – runs against the sense that what marks the cosmopolitan person is *already knowing* what needs to be known" (142). He notes that this ambiguity has made the term not only popular but controversial: while the idea of the cosmopolitan has been recuperated in order to come to grips with a world increasingly populated with refugees, exiles, and immigrants, it also threatens to become a contemporary form of self-congratulation for "those who can barouche

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

around and learn French" (144). Cosmopolitanism, in other words, is a distinctly liberal project, and is subject to all the promises and shortcomings of a certain liberal vision. This is a vision whose historical locus classicus is the Victorian period and whose principle literary philosopher is George Eliot – a writer whose sheer mastery provokes as much suspicion as praise in modern readers.

This essay will argue that we haven't yet taken the full sense of George Eliot's disquiet, and that doing so will revise our sense both of her work and of Victorian cosmopolitanism more generally. I want to begin, therefore, by reviewing the plot of Eliot's major fictional engagement with the questions of cosmopolitanism and ethnic nationalism. The protagonist of the work in question is a young member of the ruling class in an ethnically diverse European imperial nation. But just as this protagonist is about to step into a life of metropolitan privilege, the discovery of a long-ago adoption reveals that the hero's rightful place is not among the elite but instead with a despised population of ethnic outsiders. This discovery leads to romantic complications – frustrating a probable union with another member of that ruling class – and eventually prompts our hero to depart the scene of the fiction on a journey to found an ethnic state for this newly embraced people. At the historical moment at which the fiction transpires, the success of this enterprise is far from certain. I'm speaking, of course, of *The Spanish Gypsy*, Eliot's book-length poem of 1868. Set in Inquisition-era Spain, the poem turns on the revelation that the heroine Fedalma, a dark-eyed beauty raised in the Spanish court, is a gypsy princess. This news provokes her to abandon her Catholic lover Don Silva and join her father, the Zíncalo chieftain Zarca, in his battle against the gypsies' Catholic oppressors. Silva attempts to join Fedalma in her new life as a gypsy patriot, but this plan comes to nothing when he murders Zarca in retaliation for *his* murder of an old friend and adviser to the Spanish court. (Silva's return to the Catholic side in the war is only one of the plot points that have led critics to read *The Spanish Gypsy* as naturalizing a sense of ethnic enmity and endorsing racial separatism). In the end, Fedalma embarks alone on a ship bound for Africa, where she hopes to found a national homeland for the gypsy people.

Any similarities the reader may perceive to a certain other Eliot text are not, obviously, purely coincidental. But while 1876's *Daniel Deronda* has become with good reason a privileged site for discussions of Victorian conceptions of race and nation, *The Spanish Gypsy* remains a nearly invisible moment in Eliot's career.[3] This is largely due to the text's ambiguous generic conception: part play, part prose narrative, part epic poem – and often all three at once – *The Spanish Gypsy* has always confused and troubled readers. But it is precisely this confusion and this trouble that merit our attention. The striking resemblance between the plot of *The Spanish Gypsy* and its better-known novelistic successor has, I think, focused attention on that plot at the expense of what is more notable about the poem: its unsettled and unsettling formal texture. The unwieldy feel of the poem is, in fact, its most insistent quality, one that upstages its overt story and has ethical and political implications that depart from that plot in important ways. And because the poem's plot so closely matches that of Eliot's more famous later treatment of ethnic minority and national aspiration, we can read *The Spanish Gypsy*'s formal strangeness as a record of Eliot's doubts about the ethical costs of that plot – most notably, its apparent belief that ethnic nationalism can be easily squared with universal justice.

Attending to *The Spanish Gypsy*'s strangeness, in other words, complicates the current critical consensus that Eliot is a *sanguine* cosmopolitan writer, one who believes firmly in the possibility of honoring both local and global claims without ethical contradiction. This

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is a consensus that unites even critics with sharply divergent views of Eliot's intellectual commitments. In *The Powers of Distance* (2001), Amanda Anderson celebrates Eliot as an exemplar of a Habermasian commitment to dialogue, responsive to the claims the universal places on the particular and those the "excluded particular" exerts on the universal (146). Anderson's argument focuses on *Daniel Deronda*, which she reads as modeling a cosmopolitanism that reconciles a Zionist "rhetoric of autochthony" with an attention to the claims of other, less primordially legitimated voices (45). Anderson's case is bolstered by her own evident affinity with this text; the stately cadences of Eliot's narration impart to Anderson's position a sense of judicious balance.[4] Bernard Semmel, on the other hand, presents George Eliot as a committed racial nationalist who believes that only the allegiance of everyone to his or her ethnic past will guarantee a truly equitable world polity. Semmel's *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (1994) argues that Eliot's late career is shaped by a belief in the "the morally overriding compulsions of blood and race" (112). Unlike Anderson, Semmel does discuss *The Spanish Gypsy*, but he does so to assimilate its politics to those of *Daniel Deronda*. He is one of many critics to read the earlier text as a staging ground for the ethnic nationalism – we might say the ethnic separatism – so palpable in Eliot's last novel.

These two takes are clearly opposed: Anderson offers a supple defense of Eliot's liberalism, while Semmel just as carefully exposes its troubling underpinnings. Anderson wants to present an Eliot with whom we in the present might agree, whereas Semmel realizes that his Eliot will be anathema to modern progressive sensibility. But these critics can sound very much like one another in their confident sense of Eliot's own confidence about the ethical coherence of the attempt to reconcile universal and local demands: Anderson's Eliot espouses "a reconstructed universalism committed to dialogical openness in the face of cultural and ethnic multiplicity" (144), while Semmel's Eliot encourages a "love for the national tradition as one among many in a world of cultural pluralism" (142). Despite their differences, then, Anderson and Semmel concur in their sense that Eliot is optimistic – her critics would say mystified, or complacent – about the ability of her cosmopolitan stance to do justice to cultural difference.[5] For reasons I hope will become clear, I think that neither of these versions captures the agonized tone and thinking of *The Spanish Gypsy*. The poem reveals a writer intensely conflicted about whether ethnic loyalism can easily cohabit with universal claims; indeed, I will be arguing that its fractured texture can be understood as ensuring that a permanent static accompanies any attempt to move between those frames of reference. Many critics have remarked that Eliot's fictional prose normally conveys a sense of stability, no matter how tempestuous the events or emotions narrated therein. The very look of the page, in which large blocks of narrative text carefully adjudicate the claims of competing characters, functions as an objective correlative of the sympathetic imagination, working as a slow but sure solvent of the partialities that fuel the diegesis to assure us that somewhere, at least, those claims are reconcilable.[6] A glance through *The Spanish Gypsy* – with its gaps and hesitations, its chapters of oddly disproportionate length and weirdly fluctuating narrative mode, and its violent changes in tempo, point of view, and prosodic structure – suggests instead a pictogram of the sympathetic imagination stretched to and beyond the breaking point.

It is in the context of this breakdown that I think we should view Eliot's willingness to concoct a story that apparently relies on a crude blood-and-soil nationalism. The recourse to racialist thinking evident in the plot is one attempt to salvage coherence from a veritable

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ideological wreckage – but it should not be taken as the poem's straightforward or final statement. I'll suggest that *The Spanish Gypsy* is less a dress rehearsal for the ethnic nationalism of *Daniel Deronda* than an anticipatory critique of the blindnesses of such nationalism. *The Spanish Gypsy* poses certain unanswerable ethical questions to the later text, questions that were not so much resolved as repressed or ignored in the more coherent achievement of *Deronda*. Where Eliot's last novel invests heavily in the notion of a heroic Jewish culture to legitimate its proto-Zionism, *The Spanish Gypsy* considers the possibilities for an affiliative politics not guaranteed by religious, national, or cultural prestige. When Deronda embraces his Judaism, he has an ancient language to learn, a distinguished exegetical tradition to absorb, a mythic past to claim, and a biblical promissory note to cash. Eliot conceives of the gypsies as a people with no homeland, no common language or literature, no heroic past: they interest her, in other words, because she understands them as a group by definition resistant to the redemptive logics of racial and cultural dignity.[7] Notwithstanding the dubious socio-historical validity of this conception of Roma identity, Eliot's text valuably uses this disparaging characterization of gypsydom to consider the question of what ethical pressure is exerted by a people who have no such alibis for their collective being.

Eliot's theme thus permits her to question not the comforts of national belonging (they are indisputable), but the more fundamental issue of the differential availability of nationalism's rhetoric and reality. The poem interrogates the ethical defensibility of ethnic nationalism in a global reality where not every ethnic group will enjoy the prerogatives of statehood. If *Deronda* appears to support the idea of the ethnically defined state as the best protection for vulnerable minorities everywhere, *The Spanish Gypsy* is agonizingly aware of what this solution overlooks: that minorities will continue to exist, that the nation as telos for all of them is unfeasible, and that their position in ethnically defined states (however these are constituted) will be ambiguous at best.[8] Which is to say that *The Spanish Gypsy* is startlingly prescient about a world – ours – in which both the difficulties of living as a minority inside an ethnically defined state and the tragedies that attend the creation of ethnic states are well-known.[9] In what follows I'll be exploring the ways this thematic question (how does one register the claims of vulnerable groups that have no nation and no realistic hope of one?) becomes in *The Spanish Gypsy* also a formal one (how can one represent a collectivity of the abandoned?). The poem's generic oddness is closely tied to its attempt to map the treacherous territory outside national belonging. In it we see George Eliot, the apostle of organic community, attempting to imagine a collectivity defined by a thoroughgoing and ineradicable inorganicism. That this attempt appears to issue in failure does not lessen the force of the poem's ethical provocation.

I

ELIOT FIRST CONCEIVED OF *The Spanish Gypsy* as a play, and spent six months working on it in 1864 before ill health and difficulties with its form caused her to put the manuscript aside. She returned to it two years later, recording in her journal that she had decided to give it a new – narrative – form, and *The Spanish Gypsy* was published in 1868. But in fact Eliot did not so much give it a consistent new form as she created a document whose mixture of dramatic and narrative modes makes it into an archeological record of its own evolution. In the published text, there are long passages of narrative, and others that follow the conventions of playscripts, with character tags and direct quoted speech. Sometimes the stage directions

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are versified, and so appear an organic part of the text, without italics. But sometimes the stage directions are in prose and appear (like stage directions for a "real" theater piece) in italics – and if the reader chooses not to ignore these latter kind of stage directions, they make a metrical mess of the poem. All of these modes, moreover, are continually interrupting one another. But what most interests me about the text's erratic genesis – and Eliot's decision to let its ravages show so clearly on the jagged surface of the text – is that it is precisely metrical messiness and interruption that characterizes the gypsy collectivity at the poem's thematic center.

Our first encounter with the gypsies occurs in the central square of the Southern town of Bedmár, a scene that begins as a kitschy celebration of Spanish *Gemeinschaft* and ends as something much more interesting. At the scene's climax, the beautiful Fedalma entrances the crowd with a spontaneous tambourine dance, and Eliot lavishly lays on the exotic touches. The "breath of flowers and aromatic leaves" suffuses the plaza and "gently sways the pulses of the crowd" (1. 1100).[10] The music "knits the crowd | Into one family" (1. 1147–48); the "wingéd sounds exalt the thick-pressed crowd | With a new pulse in common, blending all | The gazing life into one larger soul | With dimly widened consciousness" (1. 1221–24); "[v]ibrations sympathetic stir all limbs" (1. 1282). Shared pulsations, sympathetic vibrations, expanded consciousness: Eliot's trademark concerns are legible even through the aromatic breezes of the Plaça Santiago. But the gypsies arrive as intruders at this scene of national and ethnic self-communion. They are the embodied principle of rhythmic interruption:

> But sudden, at one point, the exultant throng
> Is pushed and hustled, and then thrust apart:
> Something approaches – something cuts the ring
> Of jubilant idlers – startling as a streak
> From alien wounds across the blooming flesh
> Of careless sporting childhood. 'Tis the band
> Of Gypsy prisoners. (1. 1424–30)

The self-present Spanish community is confronted by the eruption of another collectivity figured as a tear in the social body. The gypsies thus function as a punctuation to the dance and to the community it has coalesced – a full stop that both cuts it short and makes evident its constitutive exclusions. In the following lines, this eruption sponsors an array of jagged imagistic and rhythmic effects: the gypsies have no sooner intruded on the circle than the "stupendous throbbing" of the chiming church bell causes "speech and action [to] pause" (1. 1444, 1449). Most of the spectators stop to pray – but, as Eliot curtly informs us, "Not all" (1. 1455). The gypsies' nonparticipation transfixes Fedalma, who also "prays not" but stands staring at them (1. 1463). The scene in one sense provides a textbook example of a trope Katie Trumpener has identified as central to Western representations of gypsy ethnicity, the "freezing of time at the Gypsies' approach" (342). Trumpener demonstrates that the "nonsynchronicity" of the gypsies has traditionally been used to throw into relief the "consecrated folkloric space of patrimony" (342, 341). As eternal ethnic outsiders, the gypsies in the Western imaginary represent timelessness in the face of the progressive motion of enlightened history and rootlessness in the face of the territorially anchored nationalisms of Western politics. While Eliot's tableau clearly takes part in this tradition – the gypsies' appearance seems to quicken the Spanish community into hypercoherence – it also extends

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it in important ways. *The Spanish Gypsy* suggests that the figuration of gypsies at the limit of Western thinking about collectivity makes them a particularly crucial case for considering that project's ethical incoherencies. Eliot's poem is concerned not simply to repeat the gesture of gypsy exclusion but to think through it – even to try to imagine a politics from within the exceptional space created by that gesture. For while the gypsies appear at this moment as heralding the outside of the community, the gypsy collectivity itself soon becomes the central concern of *The Spanish Gypsy*. Eliot's heroine and her poem will attempt to take up residence, as it were, in the impossible geopolitical space marked by the gypsies' banishment from the scene of ethnic and national self-presence.

As one measure of the complexity of Eliot's project here, we might note that, in describing the surreally distended moment of the gypsies' eruption on the scene, Eliot echoes the language she used for the original Spanish collectivity the gypsies are now troubling: "The minute brief stretched measureless, dream-filled | By a dilated new-fraught consciousness" (1. 1484–85). This last phrase is drawn once again from Eliot's familiar set of terms for the expansion of the sympathetic imagination – and in fact the words are a near-repetition of the "dimly widened consciousness" that convened the original collectivity in the plaza. The resonance functions ambivalently. We might be tempted to read the repetition as Eliot's suggestion that Fedalma's sense of community with these outsiders is a logical extension of the sympathetic union sponsored by her dance; the verbal resemblance between the two descriptions would thus confirm the initial communitarian impulse and suggest that the energies of sympathetic collectivity naturally keep flowing outward to embrace even the most despised groups. This reading would support our sense of Eliot as confident about sympathy's cosmopolitan orientation: going with the flow of sympathy, this reading implies, will eventually do justice to everyone. But the implications of this moment are in fact much less comforting, and they trouble the sense of Eliot as the apostle of the gospel of sympathy. The jarring nature of the gypsies' emergence indicates instead that this new "consciousness" is a *contravention* of the prior one, an interruption of its apparent spontaneity. Eliot thus suggests that the collectivity that would include these new outsiders must be built not on the good vibrations that mystically unite the Spanish population but on the broken rhythms that trouble that unity. The "new-fraught consciousness" that dawns here is the intimation of a community formed around the interruption of community, a polity somehow centered on the fact of outsiderdom.

As the story continues, the gypsies unsurprisingly remain pariahs to the majority of the Spanish populace. But the troubled generic medium of *The Spanish Gypsy* means that the diegetic level hardly ever tells the whole story: the peculiar formal features of the poem continually distract us from the plot it recounts. As we have seen, the mark of the gypsies' dehumanization is interruption, the cut or jar to a coherent sense of self-presence. In the remainder of the poem, Eliot goes on to stage the formal contamination of her text by the jarring effects narratively in play in the moment we've just examined. At the level of form, *The Spanish Gypsy* universalizes the rhythmic irregularity that thematically defines gypsy difference; interruption is everywhere in the text, so that what began as a "gypsy" trait comes to seem radically unlocalizable. This is clear in the scene that immediately follows the one we have been analyzing. This scene repeats the gypsies' traumatic eruption and in doing so suggests that the poem's very shape has picked up that interruptive tendency, as if it were a contagion capable of jumping from the level of story to that of formal texture. Fedalma, back in the castle, is attempting to describe her afternoon encounter with the captured gypsies

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to her betrothed Don Silva. But a few lines into their conversation, they are intruded upon by the jangling rhythms of the same gypsy prisoners as they are brought into the castle in chains. Don Silva is interrupted in the act of fastening an earring onto Fedalma:

> DON SILVA. . . . you must be still.
> (*She stands perfectly still, clasping her hands together while he fastens the second ear-ring. Suddenly a clanking noise is heard without.*)
>
> FEDALMA (*starting with an expression of pain*).
> What is that sound? – that jarring cruel sound?
> 'Tis there – outside.
> (*She tries to start away towards the window, but DON SILVA detains her.*)
>
> DON SILVA O heed it not, it comes
> From workmen in the outer gallery.
>
> FEDALMA. It is the sound of fetters; sound of work
> Is not so dismal. Hark! They pass along!
> I know it is those Gypsy prisoners.
> I saw them, heard their chains. O horrible,
> To be in chains! (1. 2119–26)

The passage exemplifies "interruptions" of at least three distinct varieties. Most obviously, it repeats at the level of the story the gypsy's jarring disruption of a would-be scene of communion, as the clank of oppressive chains intrudes on the romantic tableau. Second, because this scene is composed in dialogue, it represents an interruption of *The Spanish Gypsy*'s own modal coherence: the immediately preceding scene in the Plaça Santiago has been narrated in the "epic" mode of third-person omniscience. Finally, and perhaps most jarringly, the text's own iambic pentameter is disrupted by the constant interpolation of stage directions.

It thus seems clear that this passage is a remnant of Eliot's first, theatrically-oriented version of the text: in performance, the translation of the stage directions into action would make this last form of "interruption" irrelevant.[11] But the more salient point here is that the frayed rhythm of *The Spanish Gypsy* constitutes a persistent formal echo of the gypsies' eruptive collectivity. This rhythmic oddness was the central issue in the first critical responses to the poem. While the *Macmillan's* reviewer complained of the "jar and incongruity of this intermixture" (Hutchinson 1: 244) – referring, it seems, both to its combination of prose and verse and to its jumble of dramatic and narrative modes – and disparaged the "want of pulse and harmonious swell in the lyric pieces" (245), the *Edinburgh Review* picked up this language and intimated a connection between the text's formal oddity and its thematic preoccupations. The writer claimed that the poem was "not shaped on any recognised model," that Eliot had done "some injury to that sense of artistic completeness [and] broken up rather than connected" the constituent parts of her poem (Hutchinson 1: 261). He is describing the disintegrative formal features of the poem, but his words might equally describe the collectivity of the gypsies themselves – a group whose togetherness is not justifiable according to recognized models of nation or culture and whose very presence in the polis, as we've seen, inflicts an "alien wound" on the social body. The isomorphism

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

between the poem's shattered form and the shattered collectivity at its heart suggests a rationale for Fedalma's abrupt decision to join the gypsies that does not rely on the notion of racial essence or even on a coherent conception of personality: Fedalma is obeying not the law of her soul or her race or her psyche but the very medium of her fictive existence. Her drive to "cut . . . the ring" (1. 1426) of Spanish community and join its constitutive outside is conditioned by her status as an inhabitant of a text that itself always feels alarmingly shredded.[12]

In *George Eliot's Pulse* (2003), Neil Hertz has persuasively claimed that such a drive toward the disintegrative is a fundamental if disavowed aspect of Eliot's entire career. Hertz identifies "pulse" as a key term and concept in Eliot's work, arguing that her preoccupation with pulsing fragmentation signals a deconstructive vortex. "Pulse," Hertz argues, names both "a minimally differentiated unit" and the "dissemination inherent in letters and the operations of chance," and Eliot is repeatedly drawn to images of "mad pulsation" that represent the contingency of the letter and in doing so threaten to undo the coherence of her novelistic project (3, 9, 14). Just as reliably, Hertz claims, Eliot quarantines these energies in "characters whose fate it is to be stigmatized within the moral economy of the novels and, in effect, to be cast out of their depicted societies" (2). This "drive toward elementary structures" – and the scapegoating that manages it – seem to be unconscious features of Eliot's work in Hertz's account, which implies that her novels are concerned to display a placid surface to their readers (141). Hertz's lack of interest in *The Spanish Gypsy* (his book does not mention the text) is striking for two reasons. First, as a poem, *The Spanish Gypsy* is engaged on the most intimate level – that of prosody – with the "pulsation" that Hertz identifies as central to her work.[13] Second, it is centrally concerned with how stigmatized characters are "cast out" of a depicted society. *The Spanish Gypsy*'s exploration of the ethical and formal ambiguities of "pulse" presents a complication for Hertz's thesis. His observation that it is often "a transgressive woman" (7) who is made to pay the price for Eliot's compulsively pulsive imagination is subtly contradicted by the example of the Spanish gypsy herself. As we have seen, Eliot describes Fedalma's will to dance as deriving from a sense of a "new pulse in common" – and the positive valuation given to the phrase and to Fedalma's tendency to self-display confounds the distinction between Eliot's "good" and "bad" heroines on which Hertz's analysis relies. And it is of course also important to recall that the "pulse" affirmed here is precisely that which will be interrupted both by the "stupendous throbbing" of the church bell that accompanies the gypsies' appearance and by the "jarring cruel sound" of their clanking chains.

The Spanish Gypsy confronts us, then, with *two* kinds of pulse: one signifying a rhythmic regularity and the other indicating that regularity's violent punctuation by a second, threateningly irregular rhythm. On the one hand, the steady beat of coherent meter, coherent formal texture, and coherent peoplehood; on the other, the ragged pulse heralded by the eruption of gypsy particularity and the jarring medium of *The Spanish Gypsy* itself. If the poem first valorizes the ethnic community convened by a "pulse in common," it proceeds to dissolve that community by introducing an erratic back-beat that works like radio static to trouble the clarity of ethnic self-communion. And far from sidelining her own proclivity toward "mad pulsation," Eliot exacerbates that proclivity by means of an insistently disjointed generic and rhythmic conception. In thus aligning her poem's rhythms with the gypsies' disruptive presence, Eliot's poem announces its sympathy with this beat that disrupts the beat – and thus with a community that, failing to consolidate its own self-presence, must also necessarily fail to take up its place in a world polity composed of such coherent ethnic

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

entities. At both the poetic and thematic level, then, Eliot embraces the fragmentation that Hertz claims is routinely abjected in her work. *The Spanish Gypsy* does not stigmatize and cast out the bearers of randomness and contingency but takes them as the basis of collectivity. If for Hertz "pulse" names the tendency in Eliot's work for the self to disintegrate into a series of random throbs, the problem posed by *The Spanish Gypsy*'s incoherent rhythm is how to inhabit that facticity. I want to suggest that what Eliot is exploring in the poem is the possibility of a form that would resist the hardening of form itself – and the possibility of a community that would resist the closure and reification of community itself. The pulse of *The Spanish Gypsy* works as both an indication of formal rigidity and of formal flexibility; or rather, the consistent "pulse" that is first exalted as the sign of communitarian belonging is continually undone by the ragged pulse of the text itself.

We might further specify Eliot's exploration of this doubled valence of "pulse" in *The Spanish Gypsy* through an opposition proposed by Lauren Berlant between "dead citizenship" and its "live margins." Berlant links tropology to citizenship by aligning the privileged zone of unquestioned national belonging with the taken-for-grantedness of dead metaphor. "Dead citizenship" is her description for that sense of national belonging that goes without saying; it names a privileged condition in which one's most intimate bodily acts are understood as participating in an abstract and iconic national norm. "A metaphor is dead," Berlant writes, "when, by repetition, the unlikeness risked in the analogy the metaphor makes becomes so conventionalized as to no longer seem figural, no longer open to history . . . In the fantasy world of national culture, citizens aspire to dead identities" – to identities which are so closely sutured to iconicity they appear to be liberated from the facticity of the body itself (60). That facticity is meanwhile abjected onto those vulnerable citizens who inhabit the "live margins" of the national imaginary (the usual suspects: sexual deviants, the racially and ethnically stigmatized, the disabled, the poor). Viewing *The Spanish Gypsy*'s "pulse" along these lines, we can see that this metaphor for national belonging hovers ambiguously between "life" and "death": as a bluntly corporeal figure, "pulse" seems to hew closely to the body's vulnerable "liveness" – but it can easily succumb to an idealizing "death" and thereby become a tool of the most exclusionary racial and ethnic rhetorics. We can see Eliot's insistence on the erratic pulse as a dedication to facticity, a commitment to keeping the metaphor "live" and vulnerable. *The Spanish Gypsy* drags a mystified "pulse" down to the level of the particular and the material: in the jangling metrical environment of *The Spanish Gypsy*, the community convened by the "pulse in common" is always threatening to disintegrate into its constituent parts. Eliot's jittery pulse thus makes an appeal to a body that would resist the decorporealization of dead-metaphoricity. And this also entails imagining a community that would keep faith with the out-of-step, a collectivity that would take as its fundamental unit the resolute facticity of that de-idealized, un-idealizable human body. Both projects find their form in the ruination of *The Spanish Gypsy*'s own pulse.

Eliot's correspondence reveals that *The Spanish Gypsy*'s commitment to arrhythmia was deliberate. She responded to the numerous reviewers and readers who offered her gratuitous prosodic advice by defensively claiming that the metrical irregularities of her blank verse were intentional.[14] Even more interesting is her fundamental lack of clarity over the metrical value of the very name of the gypsy tribe that occupies the center of her poem. Eliot's study of Spanish didn't alert her to the fact that "Zíncali" is a dactyl, accented on the first syllable. In the first edition of the poem, she thus has Fedalma try to persuade Don Silva not to defect to the gypsy camp by saying, "What the Zincala may not quit for you | I cannot joy that you should quit for her" (429).[15] The iambic pentameter, strictly followed, mistakes the stress of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Spanish name, and Eliot changed the line to remove the tricky proper noun altogether when this was pointed out to her. In the revisions she made for the Cabinet edition in the late 1870s, the line reads: "The bonds Fedalma may not break for you, I cannot joy that you should break for her" (3. 1231–32). Elsewhere, Eliot revised in an attempt to accommodate the correct pronunciation. But in only one or two cases does she manage to preserve the Spanish dactyl along with the meter, as when the gypsy chieftain Zarca tells Fedalma to be prepared "[w]hen women whisper, 'A mere Zíncala!' " (3. 983). Much more frequently, Eliot's revisions force the line out of its metrical regularity – or require the reader to preserve the meter by compressing the three syllables of "Zíncalo" into something that sounds more like "ZINC-lo":

> [Zarca to Fedalma:] That she – the Zíncala – who might save her race (3. 1017)
>
> [Zarca to Fedalma:] The fate that made you Zíncala, as his fate
> Made him a Spanish duke and Christian knight (1. 3176–77)
>
> [Zarca to Fedalma:] And you, my daughter, what are you – if not
> The Zíncalo's child? Say does not his great hope
> Thrill in your veins like shouts of victory? (3. 612–14)

Read with the correct dactylic emphasis, the tribal name introduces a kink into the poem's meter. Alternatively, if the meter is preserved, it is at the expense of the tribal name's own unfolding – as if this already oppressed people were forced to bear the bondage of prosodic constriction as well ("ZINC-lo" calls to mind both a people destined to "sink low" and the clink of the chains in which we so often see them bound). As the above examples indicate, it is Zarca who makes most frequent use of the proper name for the gypsy tribe, and he almost always does so while attempting to convince Fedalma of the naturalness of her affiliation with them: the Zíncali are her race; she is fated to belong to them; her identity is as corporeal as the blood in her veins. The prosodic awkwardness that attends these utterances does not exactly undermine Zarca's case for gypsy peoplehood. But it does subtly undo the rationale he offers, which rests on the metrically charged metaphors of pulse and beat. The gypsies are "men whose pulses leap with kindred fire," he insists to Fedalma; their faith is "taught by no priest, but by their beating hearts" (1. 2787). Zarca's language aspires to that dead metaphoricity fundamental to the rhetoric of national pulse (and, not coincidentally, to its close relation, the trope of racial "blood"). But it is precisely the "pulse" and "beat" that are made "live" again in the hesitation among "ZINcalo" (the dactylic Spanish), "ZinCAlo" (Eliot's version in the first edition), and "ZINC-lo" (her squashed accommodation of the poem's meter). Rather than subsuming facticity into iconicity, the liveness of embodiment into the deadness of citizenship, *Zíncalo* offers in its wavering pronunciation a phonemic emblem of their constitutive disaggregation. Like the "hard, contoured," foreign words Adorno described as "language's scapegoat" (189), *Zíncalo* feels mispronounced no matter how we choose to read it. It is a token of irredeemable foreignness.

II

MY FOCUS SO FAR HAS BEEN ON the representation of the gypsy community's particularity – and on how the features of that particularity infiltrate the narrative medium of *The Spanish*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Gypsy itself. But there is another collectivity crucial to *The Spanish Gypsy*, and although the members of this second group are not ethnic gypsies, they are distinguished (if that is still the right word) by precisely the same interruptive proclivities that characterize the Zíncali. And, of course, distinguish is not the right word, for this represents a further step in what I have called the universalization immanent in the poem. If *The Spanish Gypsy* first stages a primal scene of gypsy interruption and then translates this thematic interruption to the level of form – where, deterritorialized, it promises to name the condition of everyone – we will see how Eliot translates interruption back to the level of theme. Re-embodied in a group of non-gypsy characters, interruptive non-transcendence now seems a truly rampant (that is, ethnically un-anchored) condition. The group of Spanish minstrels led by the singer Juan performs the musical accompaniment to Fedalma's dance scene, and they thus appear to be aligned with the folkloric Spanish space represented by the Plaça Santiago. We might therefore expect them to evince resentment at the gypsies' interruptions of their performance. And in one of Juan's first speeches, it is indeed impatience with erratic rhythm that he appears to voice. A certain Captain Lopez has arrived in the plaza, and he regales the minstrels with gossip about Don Silva's decision to move up the date of his wedding to the Lady Fedalma. Lopez begins excitedly –

> LOPEZ. O there be sayings running all abroad . . .
> Some say, 'tis all a pretext – say, the Duke
> Is but a lapdog hanging on a skirt,
> Turning his eyeballs upward like a monk:
> 'Twas Don Diego said that – so says Blas;
> Last week, he said . . . (1. 681–89)

– but Juan cuts short this narration in exasperation:

> JUAN. O do without the "said!"
> Open thy mouth and pause in lieu of it.
> I had as lief be pelted with a pea
> Irregularly in the self-same spot
> As hear such iteration without rule,
> Such torture of uncertain certainty. (1. 690–95)

Juan appears to be making a case for verbal fluidity against the prosy overpunctuation of Lopez's speech. But matters are not that simple. "Iteration without rule" is, after all, a good description of *The Spanish Gypsy* itself; and being "pelted with a pea | Irregularly" is a good, if uncharitable, description of the experience of reading it. Even more strangely, it is also a good description of Juan's own jittery presence, which Eliot takes care to describe as wholly devoted to the off-beat pleasures of interjection and interruption. In the narrative section that introduces the minstrel players one by one, Eliot writes of

> JUAN there, the spare man with the lute
> Who makes you dizzy with his rapid tongue,
> Whirring athwart your mind with comment swift
> On speech you would have finished by-and-by,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Shooting your bird for you while you are loading,
> Cheapening your wisdom as a pattern known,
> Woven by any shuttle on demand.
> Can never sit quite still, too: sees a wasp
> And kills it with a movement like a flash;
> Whistles low notes or seems to thrum his lute
> As a mere hyphen 'twixt two syllables
> Of any steadier man; walks up and down
> And snuffs the orange flowers and shoots a pea
> To hit a streak of light let through the awning.
> Has a queer face: eyes large as plums, a nose
> Small, round, uneven, like a bit of wax
> Melted and cooled by chance. (1. 288–304)

In this passage, Juan's fidgety presence turns out to be just as jarring as Lopez's spastic narration: abruptly interjecting comments in conversation, jumping in to shoot "your bird" before "you" have loaded your gun, disorientingly attuned to ambient distractions and constantly causing them, contemptuous of "pattern" and prone to "flashing" movements, Juan's every gesture troubles rhythmic consistency. Even more notably, the passage rises to a kind of Eliotian auto-critique. Her next book famously describes the novelist's task as "unravelling certain human lots and seeing how they are woven and interwoven" – but where *Middlemarch* describes the weaving of "this particular web" (141) in terms clearly meant to exalt the project of narrative elaboration, here Eliot introduces a character who disparages his narrator's "wisdom as a pattern known, | Woven by any shuttle on demand." The always-in-control author seems genuinely disconcerted, truly rattled: Eliot's repetition within ten pages of the figure of pea-shooting is itself a kind of imagistic hiccup in the text. Moreover, the passage's grammatical choppiness becomes a second-order commentary on the famously mellifluous author herself. The first "sentence" here never arrives at a stable predicate, instead stuttering into silence in a repeated series of present-progressive verbs ("whirring," "shooting," "cheapening"). The next two (likewise incomplete) sentences omit subjects altogether, stringing together a series of curt and strangely decapitated verbs ("can never sit," "sees," "kills," "whistles," "walks," "snuffs," "shoots") with results more closely resembling Browning's pronoun-impaired Caliban than the stately narrator of *Romola* (1862–1863). The effect is the more curious when we recall that the passage is itself *about* Juan's tendency to cut off long-winded narration. It is as if Juan is interrupting Eliot's famously laborious sentences even as she attempts to tell us about his habit of doing so.

The closing lines of the above passage, which compare Juan's face to a piece of wax melted and then haphazardly congealed, indicate that such inconsistency is an emphatic feature of his body as well as of his bodily habitus. The lines associate him with an insistent corporeality, one that testifies to the workings of chance, contingency, and awkwardness. Juan's performance of emphatic singularity resists the idealizations of regularity and order; we might say that his spastic materiality forces a wedge between the two varieties of "pulse" we have analyzed. Aligned with the unassimilably corporeal, Juan interrupts the sublimation of the erratic pulse of embodiment into the prestigiously abstracted "pulse in common" of race and nation. In other words, he is a kind of genius loci of *The Spanish Gypsy* itself.[16] Like that text, and like the gypsy collectivity at its center, Juan confronts the rituals of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

communal integrity with disintegrative interjections. When Captain Lopez begins to gossip about Fedalma's racially dubious status – "her blood | Is infidel," he claims (1. 760–61) – Juan breaks in:

> JUAN. Tush!
> [Now Juan – who by snatches touched his lute
> With soft arpeggio, like a whispered dream
> Of sleeping music, while he spoke of love –
> In jesting anger at the soldier's talk
> Thrummed loud and fast, then faster and more loud,
> Till, as he answered 'Tush!' he struck a chord
> Sudden as a whip-crack close by Lopez' ear.
> Mine host and Blasco smiled, and mastiff barked,
> Roldan looked up and Annibal looked down,
> Cautiously neutral in so new a case . . .] (1. 762–72)

Juan's performative practice here anticipates in a playful register the gypsies' more harrowing eruption a few pages later, as the "snatches" of his song and the "whip-crack" of his lute disturb Captain Lopez's complacency. And this conversational disruption is seconded by the text's own extraordinarily complex formal and temporal stutter. No sooner has Eliot indicated Juan's interjected "Tush!" in the form of a spoken "line" than she switches to a bracketed "stage direction" that claims to speak of the "now" even as it moves into a past tense that distinguishes it from the more conventional prose stage directions we have already examined. Even more disorientingly, in a few lines the text arrives – as if by means of a temporal Möbius strip – once again at Juan's "Tush!" Eliot's narrative code-switching thus distends the moment of jarring interruption, seeming to multiply the gestures with which Juan breaks into Captain Lopez's musings on Fedalma's ethnicity: the exclamation, the "snatched" arpeggios, the thrumming, the sudden chord, the exclamation again – these events crowd awkwardly on top of one another in a kind of cubist multiplicity, coexisting in one moment ("now") even as they unfold in sequence.

I hope it's clear how far we are here from the "Victorian realism" that serves as the implicit point of contrast to recent critical discussions of the formal features of a critical cosmopolitanism. This text is fully as strange, fully as experimental and defamiliarizing, as its Romantic forebears and its modernist successors. More importantly, it does not seem to me coincidental that these mind-bendingly elaborate stuttering effects occur precisely at the moment when one character is rebutting the racialism that the poem's plot, taken in isolation, might seem to endorse. The fact that the interruption of that racialist logic is performed both by the text's warping and by a strangely undignified character "inside" the text who embodies that warping points, of course, to the interplay between form and content we have already remarked in the text. But it also implies, more specifically, the link in *The Spanish Gypsy* between the formal principle of interruption and a thematics of abjection. What I have described as Juan's resolute materiality, his immunity to self-transcendence, suggests that Eliot's exploration of self-interrupting community is also a meditation on a collectivity formed in indignity. In the last section of this essay, I want to explore further the way Eliot emphasizes the irremediable wretchedness of the gypsies as their most compelling characteristic. If it is the jumpy nature of *The Spanish Gypsy*'s form that most insistently

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

universalizes its imagination of gypsydom, the connection between gypsydom and the lack of dignity aligns the text with the "critical" cosmopolitanism of recent theorization – with a cosmpolitanism, that is, that takes its ethical bearings from the abject margins of national projects.

It is the perverse allure of abjection that appears to draw Fedalma away from the Spanish scene of national self-awareness she anchors in the text's first scene. The scene in the square is, as I have discussed, the precursor to the revelation that Fedalma is Zarca's daughter and thus designated to inherit leadership of his tribe. To be sure, Zarca makes his claim on Fedalma in part by appealing to the language of race, telling her that she is "of a blood | Unmixed as virgin wine juice" (1. 2739–40). In his 1902 book on Eliot, Leslie Stephen was willing to take Eliot at Zarca's word, and faulted the poem for its "absurd" reliance on the "physical fact of ancestry" as an ethical obligation (Hutchinson 2: 40). A number of critics have followed suit in describing the poem as indebted to a crudely deterministic racialism.[17] But there is another strain in Zarca's discourse, one that works against his emphasis on the metaphor of racial "blood" and the redemptive ethnic nationalism towards which the metaphor points. Fedalma responds to Zarca's appeal to her "unmixed" lineage by asking whether she is truly "of a race | More outcast and despised than Moor or Jew?" Zarca responds:

> Yes: wanderers whom no God took knowledge of
> To give them laws, to fight for them, or blight
> Another race to make them ampler room;
> Who have no Whence or Whither in their souls,
> No dimmest lore of glorious ancestors
> To make a common hearth for piety. (1. 2740–47)

Zarca frames the gypsy plight by using a rhetoric of timelessness that Trumpener has shown is central to this group's historical dispossession: without "Whence" or "Whither," the gypsies persist outside the teleologies that structure the destinies of other "races" and nations. But while the exile from national narrative of which Zarca complains here has enforced gypsy oppression, his words should not be taken as the text's endorsement *of* that national narrative. Indeed, Zarca offers a particularly clearsighted description of the disturbing implications of any ethnic nationalism orientated toward the goal of territorial sovereignty. The poem will shortly clarify that Zarca's central enterprise is the founding of a gypsy homeland in Africa – but his words here acknowledge that the project of establishing gypsy *Lebensraum* on settled territory will necessarily entail the "blight[ing]" of another people. (This is an acknowledgment missing from the proto-Zionism of *Daniel Deronda*). Zarca's political plans may be troubling, but they are not mystified; indeed, his awareness of the zero-sum logic of any territorially-based ethnic nationalism aligns his words with a "critical" cosmopolitanism that resists the erasure of the oppressed so often consequent on universalizing paradigms. Absent any narrative confirmation of precisely what in Zarca's account induces Fedalma to join the gypsies, we cannot be sure that it is the hackneyed appeal to virgin "blood" that does so and not this more ethically complex delineation of a people excluded from the legitimating rubrics of peoplehood. Indeed, as their conversation continues, it veers further from the redemptive appeal to nation and closer to an embrace of those tropes by means of which the gypsies have been constructed as irremediably "other."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Fedalma, for example, fascinatedly rehearses a litany of gypsy-abuse that Zarca chooses to echo back to her as a list of reasons for her to join them:

> FEDALMA. A race that lives on prey as foxes do
> With stealthy, petty rapine: so despised
> It is not persecuted, only spurned,
> Crushed underfoot, warred on by chance like rats,
> Or swarming flies, or reptiles of the sea
> To perish as they may?
> ZARCA. You paint us well.
> So abject are the men whose blood we share:
> Untutored, unbefriended, unendowed;
> No favourites of heaven or of men.
> Therefore I cling to them! (1. 2748–58)

It is impossible to read the animalistic tropes of Fedalma's speech without hearing in them a proleptic echo of the language the Nazis used to justify the genocide of populations of human "vermin" – the Roma among them, of course. But her description does not preface a call for the gypsies' extermination but rather a decision to *identify* with them on the basis of their abject exclusion from the rhetoric of human dignity. Indeed, the hypnotic negativity of Zarca's incantation has the odd effect of turning abjection into a kind of justification: the lament "untutored, unbefriended, unendowed" shades into a prideful rallying cry. As he puts it a few lines later, "[W]ere our race accursed (as they who make | Good luck a god count all unlucky men) | I would espouse their curse" (1. 2771–73). The striking grammatical construction here demands to be read as something more than a validation of, on the one hand, the myth of the gypsies' mystically doomed status or, on the other, this myth's nationalist inversion. Zarca's subjunctive opening ("*Were* our race accursed") instead exposes that myth *as* one, and his conditional conclusion ("I would espouse their curse") acknowledges the solidarity that the potency of that myth – despite having been metaphysically discredited – makes ethically obligatory. Skeptically gauging the logic of the "cursed race," Zarca's line at once rejects the mystification of oppression and names a will to affiliate with the group oppressed by those mystifications. The poem, that is, displays a striking willingness to stage the dehumanization of the gypsies – only to claim this as a reason to affiliate with them. In doing so, *The Spanish Gypsy* anticipates Giorgio Agamben's call for "a new ethics, an ethics of a form of life that begins where dignity ends" (Agamben, *Remnants* 69). Strange as it seems to assimilate the exemplar of Victorian liberalism with this decidedly antiliberal contemporary theorist, Eliot's poem in fact uncannily echoes Agamben's best-known formulation: Zarca's claim that the Spanish monarch Isabella "[h]olds Gypsies beasts unfit for sacrifice, | So sweeps them out like worms alive or dead" (1. 3036–37) is an almost exact anticipation of Agamben's definition of *homo sacer* as "*he who may be killed and not sacrificed*" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 8).[18] For Agamben, *homo sacer* designates the political condition of a humanity reduced to "bare life": a humanity that paradoxically becomes visible in the stripping away of the legitimating rubrics – nationality, culture, dignity, language – by which we currently recognize humanity. "Humans bear within themselves the mark of the inhuman," Agamben writes, and *homo sacer* names the capacity to be dehumanized inherent

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in and specific to the human as such (*Homo Sacer* 77). One goal of his work is to imagine an ethics that would survive the destruction of the human.

This is equally the ethical task that wracks Eliot's poem. The conclusion is reinforced by what we know of Eliot's own research into gypsy life, which was notably unconcerned to establish a tradition of gypsy cultural "dignity." Her notebooks reveal her main source for the poem was the notoriously unreliable work of George Borrow. A missionary for the British and Foreign Bible Society who became the most famous of nineteenth-century "gypsiologists," Borrow insisted on the irredeemably outlaw nature of the Roma; his exoticist fantasies have led historian David Mayall to label Borrow's attitude toward gypsies as one of "extreme hostility" (159). Mayall reports that Borrow was widely criticized for inaccuracy and hyperbole, and for his Casaubon-like ignorance of "comparative philology and the present state of knowledge on the subject" (160). That Eliot, usually such a meticulous researcher, should have been unconcerned to augment this source with more serious work is itself notable.[19] Her lack of interest in making the case for gypsy peoplehood by appealing to a proud cultural tradition (here too the contrast with *Daniel Deronda* is marked) suggests that Eliot's concern in *The Spanish Gypsy* is precisely to work out a model of an affiliative politics that would not be guaranteed by religious, national, or cultural prestige. What is left, and what appears to draw Fedalma, is the ethical pressure exerted by a people who are irremediably distanced from such rationales for collectivity. As she explains to the minstrel Juan, describing her first sight of Zarca, "I thought his eyes | Spoke not of hatred – seemed to say he bore | The pain of those who never could be saved" (1. 232–34). The words suggest that Fedalma is driven less by the "compulsions of blood and race" (as Semmel has it), than by the compelling identification with a collective project by definition resistant to the redemptive logics of racial and cultural dignity.

To be sure, the political prognosis for a community bound to facticity in this way is not good. After Zarca's death at the poem's climax, Eliot's narrator reports that without his rhetorical exaltation of blood-and-soil nationalism, the gypsy "tribe" is likely to "disperse" and "break in small and scattered bands" (5. 100–04). Fedalma describes the Zíncali's endless diaspora in words that might refer to the metrically troubled poem that has so far given them fictional shelter: "they are orphaned: their poor childish feet | Are vagabond in spite of love, and stray | Forgetful after little lures" (5. 270–72). Her words suggest an equation between the stray feet of *The Spanish Gypsy*'s metrics and the vagabond status of the gypsy nation itself. But despite the depressingly impractical nature of this endeavor, we should mark the radical originality of Eliot's conception of gypsy collectivity. In light of her poem's insistent derangement of the "pulse" of community, even the most blunt expressions of belief in racial identity take on a new meaning: Zarca, as we have seen, is unable to voice his people's name without raising the question of their very coherence as a people. Similarly, when Fedalma finally avows her status as a gypsy, she does so by claiming that "in my blood | There streams the sense unspeakable of kind" (1. 2961–62). But in *The Spanish Gypsy* everything about this familiar language of racialized blood is defamiliarized: it is precisely the issue of generic "kind" that so troubled the poem's first critics and which continues to disorient its readers. And that generic weirdness in turn keeps the question of the text's "speakability" an entirely live one: How *should* one speak, or read, *The Spanish Gypsy*? Can one coherently do either? With its erratic meter, its shifting referential protocols, its silent but obtrusive "stage directions," *The Spanish Gypsy* flirts quite literally with unspeakability. We should thus read "the sense unspeakable of kind" not as an avowal of some ineffable racial identity but as a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

precise description of a fictional world where the law of genre – and with it the regularity of "pulse," the abstraction of "blood," and the coherence of the hypothetically pure ethnic nation for which these stand – has been shaken beyond recognition.[20]

A culture of the cultureless; "race" without "blood"; collectivity without the nation – the projects so central to *The Spanish Gypsy* are not only profoundly un-Eliotish but also deeply unrealistic, even utopian. As generations of critics have noted, *The Spanish Gypsy* in some obvious sense does not "work." I want to close, though, by asking that we consider what we can learn from this *désoeuvrement*. For it is in its failure that the book is most revealing, both about George Eliot and about the Victorians for whom she remains perhaps the representative artist. The formal extremity of Eliot's text seems to me an index of how deeply this exemplary liberal questioned her own commitments to the doctrines that we now most closely associate with her name. Moreover, in its self-lacerating strangeness *The Spanish Gypsy* may help restore to us a sense of the aesthetic – as opposed to the propositional – quality of Eliot's work. *The Spanish Gypsy* makes it clear that even Eliot's supremely composed authorial voice can say more than it means and know more than it owns. The poem compels us to perceive Eliot as an author who sensitively registers conceptual impasses rather than as a sage who proposes solutions to such impasses or an ideologue who uses her stylistic gifts to offer sonorous apologia for them. If the characteristic features of Eliot's fiction are on the one hand the masterful management of narrative transitions from the local to the universal and on the other an implacable stylistic authority, *The Spanish Gypsy* reveals a writer apparently bent on sacrificing both gifts, and the ideological mystifications attendant on them. Offering us instead a text that persistently hobbles its own procedures – a text quite literally broken by the effort of finding an aesthetic frame adequate to its chosen subject – Eliot creates what we may call a traumatized representational practice. In the spirit of cosmopolitanism, we should pay attention to the internal difference this text illuminates in Eliot and in her historical moment.

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

NOTES

1. Buzard has recently explored the ways Victorian realism interrogates its own representational strategies while navigating Britain's new dominance as a global power. His argument that Victorian fiction performs a sophisticated labor of autoethnography is the most significant complication to date of the received idea of Victorian parochialism. Still, what is perhaps most provocative about Buzard's argument is his claim that a major concern of Victorian realism was to elaborate a complex image of the British "homeland" in the context of expanding empire. His book is thus a demonstration of what we might call the cosmopolitan background to Victorian insularity.
2. For accounts of "critical" or "minoritarian" cosmopolitanism, see Walkowitz 14–18, and Mignolo, who offers as cognate terms "globalization from below" and "border thinking."
3. The obscurity of *The Spanish Gypsy* should be mitigated by the attention it receives in excellent recent work by Nord, Tucker, and Charnon-Deutsch. (Tucker's sense that "the co-presence [in *The Spanish Gypsy*] of humanist hopefulness with bleak tragedy marks an unresolved, poetically generative standoff within the Victorian prospect as Eliot imagined it" is one with which my reading is in particular agreement [425]). While I have learned much from these critics, as well as from earlier analyses by

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Armstrong, Ragussis, and Semmel, the present interpretation departs from their readings in analyzing the poem's metrically and phenomenologically troubled nature in order argue that this formal confusion is its most salient quality.

4. For another recent invocation of Eliot's final novel that demonstrates her continued prestige as an exemplar of measured cosmopolitanism, see Appiah. "Note that in claiming a Jewish loyalty," Appiah writes approvingly, "Deronda is not rejecting a human one" (xvii).
5. Still among the most eloquent of the critiques to which I refer here is Said's brief discussion of *Daniel Deronda*, in which he notes that novel's "total absence of any thought about the actual inhabitants of the East, Palestine in particular" (65). Building on Said's argument, Mufti has more recently specified that Western imperial dominance is the unstated precondition of Eliot's Zionism.
6. For an analysis of the syntactic complexity of Eliot's style as an expression of the "bourgeois reality principle" (391), see Moretti. Eagleton has recently compared Eliot's sentences to "undulating hills, full of wry asides and scrupulously qualifying sub-clauses," and, like Moretti, gives this style an ethico-political name: "You can tell that George Eliot is a liberal by the shape of her sentences" (163).
7. For other discussions of Eliot's decision to present the gypsies as without cultural anchor, see Nord and Tucker. On the ethically troubling nature of "redemptive" logic, see Bersani.
8. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to develop the point, I believe that *The Spanish Gypsy*'s awareness of the underside of ethnic nationalism should alert us to the counter-nationalist currents even in a text like *Deronda* that seems so clearly to rely on nationalist thinking. (For an avowedly fanciful thought experiment about the ways in which a careful reading of *Deronda* might have altered the current political situation in Israel and Palestine, see the closing paragraph of Picker's "George Eliot and the Sequel Question"). My goal here is not to adjudicate the relative value of *The Spanish Gypsy* and *Deronda* as representative statements of Eliot's thought, but to ask that we take the full measure of the former text's skepticism about ethnic nationalism.
9. Mufti's *Enlightenment in the Colony* reads the "Jewish Question" in Europe as the paradigmatic case of minority in modernity – and thus as the crucial discursive background for understanding the status of Muslims in India and the crisis of Partition. The literature on these issues in the context of the Middle East is, of course, massive. For a measured and comprehensive analysis of the discussion in Israel about the current meanings of Zionism, see Silberstein's *The Post-Zionism Debates.* For a well-known Israeli writer's exploration of what national belonging means for the one-fifth of Israel's population that is Arab, see Grossman's *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel.* In their acute sensitivity to the paradoxes that attend an ethnic state's constitution and maintenance (a sense nicely conveyed in Grossman's title), these three very different books might be understood as exploring the aporias in ethnic nationalism that *Daniel Deronda* overlooks. But then (it is the argument of the present essay), so might *The Spanish Gypsy.*
10. Citations for *The Spanish Gypsy*, except where noted, will be by book and line number.
11. I have chosen this passage between Don Silva and Fedalma for its fortuitous concentration of thematic and formal "interruptions." But it is entirely typical of the text's formal procedures. An earlier passage from the same conversation, for example, reads as follows:

> DON SILVA. (*with haughty coldness*). Will you tell me now
> What was the prompting stronger than my wish
> That made you wander?
> FEDALMA. (*advancing a step towards him, with a sudden look of anxiety*).
> Are you angry?
> DON SILVA. (*smiling bitterly*). Angry?
> A man deep-wounded may feel too much pain
> To feel much anger.
> FEDALMA. (*still more anxiously*).
> You – deep wounded?
> DON SILVA. Yes. (1. 1862–67)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

We might expect Eliot to mitigate the visual oddity of this mixture of prose and verse by at least practicing it with consistency. But she disappoints that expectation: the poem's narrative protocols are given yet another twist by Eliot's occasional practice of putting stage directions in verse. In the following passage, the minstrel Juan queries the logic of the Inquisition by asking

> Whether [God] likes
> A well-burnt Jew or well-fed bishop best.
>
> [While Juan put this problem theologic
> Entered, with resonant step, another guest –
> A soldier: all his keenness in his sword,
> His eloquence in scars upon his cheek,
> His virtue in much slaying of the Moor . . .] (1. 650–56)

While the italicized stage directions in the first passage need to be "disappeared" in order for the poem to scan, the Roman-face, versified stage directions of the second passage are too evidently part of the poem to justify such a disappearance.

12. My thinking about interruption in *The Spanish Gypsy* is influenced by Buzard, who identifies the autoethnographic work of the nineteenth-century novel as connected to its "determinedly self-interrupting form" (7). Buzard is referring to moments of crossing between the levels of story and discourse. My suggestion is that *The Spanish Gypsy* – in accordance with the extremity of its thematic concerns – exacerbates the frequency and intensity of such self-reflexive moments to the point where story and discourse are indistinguishable. Also relevant here is Jameson's recent claim that Eliot's originality as a novelist consists in an "intensified and virtually photographic enlargement of those barely perceptible adjustments to the Other . . . a minute and microscopic negotiation with the shock and scandal of the Other" (122). Jameson is referring to *Middlemarch*, but his words seem even truer of the traumatized texture of *The Spanish Gypsy*. For a general discussion of Victorian metrical thinking, see Prins. For an analysis of the ways Victorian poets associated prosodic irregularity and "the subject matter of the Celtic," see Campbell 453.
13. For a thorough treatment of the intertwined ways Victorian poets and medical thinkers elaborated the idea of "pulse," see Blair, esp. 63–102.
14. Supplied with a list of metrical errors by a Belfast reverend, Eliot responded that "some of the passages marked by Mr Macilwaine for revision were deliberately-chosen irregularities" (*Letters* 463). She felt the need to write to John Blackwood that "the occasional use of irregular verse, and especially verses of 12 syllables, has been a principle with me, and is found in all the finest writers of blank verse" (464).
15. This and following references to the first edition are to page numbers in the variorum edition of *The Spanish Gypsy* edited by Van den Broek.
16. Tucker makes a related claim when he links Juan's "Byronic, *improvisatore* edge" both to *The Spanish Gypsy*'s mixed narrative/dramatic form and to the "instantaneity poetics of Spasmodism from a decade before" (424).
17. See in particular Semmel. McKay offers an ambitious analysis of Eliot's thought on this point and is sensitive to subtle distinctions in Victorian schools of racial "science." She concludes that *The Spanish Gypsy* buys into notions of "racial memory" (83) even as it challenges polygenist theories of separate racial evolution and "undermines the theme of nationalist autonomy" (100).
18. The congruence is far from random: Agamben mentions that the gypsies' dubious status in European political life made them particularly vulnerable targets for the Nazis' extermination efforts; he writes that the black triangle the Germans affixed to gypsy prisoners is "a symbol of [the] genocide of a defenseless population [that] ought to be remembered alongside the yellow star" (*Homo Sacer* 155).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

19. Nord's analysis of Borrow (71–97) comes to different conclusions from Mayall about the politics of his work. Duncan's discussion of Borrow's novel/ethnography/philological fantasy *Lavengro* (1851) as an "anti-generic" text (399) is suggestive about Borrow's prominence as a source for Eliot's equally unclassifiable work.
20. Compare Fedalma's ambiguous avowal to that of Zoe, the eponymous heroine of Dion Boucicault's 1859 melodrama *The Octoroon*. Zoe asks her white lover to examine her fingernails, hair, and eyeballs for the "ineffaceable curse of Cain," clarifying that "of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black – bright red as the rest may be, that one drop poisons all the flood; those seven bright drops give me love like yours – hope like yours – ambition like yours – life hung with passions like dewdrops on the morning flowers; but the one black drop gives me despair, for I'm an unclean thing – forbidden by the laws – I'm an Octoroon" (154). Zoe's appeal to what Werner Sollors has termed the "calculus of her blood drops" (222) is entirely, even floridly, "speakable."

WORKS CITED

Adorno, Theodor W. "Words from Abroad." Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen. *Notes to Literature*. Ed. Rolf Tiedmann. Vol. 1. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 185–99.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.

———. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 1999.

Anderson, Amanda. *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Berlant, Lauren. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

Bersani, Leo. *The Culture of Redemption*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990.

Blair, Kirstie. *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

Boucicault, Dion. *The Octoroon. Selected Plays of Dion Boucicault*. Ed. Andrew Parkin. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic UP of America, 1987. 135–90.

Buzard, James. *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.

Campbell, Matthew. "Poetry in the Four Nations." *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*. Ed. Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Antony H. Harrison. Malden: Blackwell, 2002. 438–56.

Charnon-Deutsch, Lou. *The Spanish Gypsy: The History of a European Obsession*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2004.

Duncan, Ian. "George Borrow's Nomadology." *Victorian Studies* 41.3 (Spring 2008): 381–403.

Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Malden: Blackwell, 2005.

Eliot, George. *Daniel Deronda*. 1876. London: Penguin, 1995.

———. *The George Eliot Letters: 1862–1868*. Ed. Gordon S. Haight. Vol. 4. New Haven: Yale UP, 1955.

———. *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life. 1871–1872*. Ed. Rosemary Ashton. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994.

———. *The Spanish Gypsy*. 1868. Ed. Antonie Gerard van den Broek. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008.

Grossman, David. *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel*. Trans. Haim Watzman. London: Jonathan Cape, 1993.

Haight, Gordon S. *George Eliot: A Biography*. 1968. New York: Penguin, 1985.

Hertz, Neil. *George Eliot's Pulse*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

Hutchinson, Stuart, ed. *George Eliot: Critical Assessments*. 4 vols. Robertsbridge: Helm Information, 1996.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jameson, Fredric. "The Experiments of Time: Providence and Realism." *The Novel: Volume 2: Forms and Themes*. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. 95–127.
Mayall, David. *Gypsy Identities, 1500–2000: From Egipcyans and Moon-Men to the Ethnic Romany*. London: Routledge, 2004.
McKay, Brenda. *George Eliot and Victorian Attitudes to Racial Diversity, Colonialism, Darwinism, Class, Gender, and Jewish Culture and Prophecy*. Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen, 2003.
Mignolo, Walter. "The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism." *Cosmopolitanism*. Ed. Sheldon Pollock, Carol A. Breckenridge, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. 157–87.
Moretti, Franco. "Serious Century." *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*. Ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. 364–400.
Mufti, Aamir R. *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007.
Nord, Deborah Epstein. *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807–1930*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006.
Picker, John M. "George Eliot and the Sequel Question." *New Literary History* 37.2 (2006): 361–88.
Prins, Yopie. "Victorian Meters." *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*. Ed. Joseph Bristow. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 89–113.
Ragussis, Michael. *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" and English National Identity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.
Said, Edward. *The Question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
Semmel, Bernard. *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.
Silberstein, Laurence J. *The Post-Zionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
Simpson, David. "The Limits of Cosmopolitanism and the Case for Translation." *European Romantic Review* 16.2 (1995): 141–52.
Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.
Trumpener, Katie. "The Time of the Gypsies." *Identities*. Ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. 338–79.
Tucker, Herbert F. *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse, 1790–1910*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
Walkowitz, Rebecca. *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150310000136 Published online by Cambridge University Press