

Introduction

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In his introduction to *Cosmopolitics* (1998), Bruce Robbins notes that

we are connected to all sorts of places, causally if not always consciously, including many that we have never traveled to, that we have perhaps only seen on television—including the place where the television itself was manufactured. It is frightening to think how little progress has been made in turning invisibly determining and often exploitative connections into conscious and self-critical ones, how far we remain from mastering the sorts of allegiance, ethics and action that might go with our complex and multiple belonging. (3)

In this sense, cosmopolitanism cannot only be a reflection of sophisticated aesthetic judgment. In the nearly thirteen years since the publication of this seminal collection on the resurgence of critical interest in cosmopolitanism post Cold War,¹ these causal yet unconscious connections have only multiplied. At the same time, the urgency of Robbins' argument here about the inescapability—even necessity—of cosmopolitan thinking has only grown. In other words, along with multiplication of unconscious connections, the political necessity for thinking of ourselves as active citizens of a global *polis* has also grown exponentially.

Indeed, etymologically, to be cosmopolitan is to be a citizen of the world—suggesting ethical and political commitments to global others, often understood as developing out of global mobility and the resulting interaction with various kinds of difference. Many cosmopolitan critics have seen the novel as a central site for developing these commitments. In “Cosmopolitan Reading,” Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that “the novel [is] a testing ground for a distinction between cosmopolitanism, with its emphasis on a dialogue among differences, and a different more monological form of humanism” (207). Martha Nussbaum places

a reading program (though not necessarily confined to the novel) at the center of her cosmopolitan education program in “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism.” Yet, Bruce Robbins and other postcolonial critics of cosmopolitanism resist constructions of cosmopolitanism like Appiah’s and Nussbaum’s where “the term cosmopolitanism is ordinarily taken to [refer to] aesthetic spectatorship rather than political engagement” (Robbins, *Feeling Global* 17; emphasis in original). Appiah’s and Robbins’ different takes on what cosmopolitan worldviews consist of and what the goal of these worldviews should be point to a tension that undergirds a good deal of critical writing about cosmopolitanism: is it principally an aesthetic or a political category? Can genres such as the novel envision non-exclusionary cosmopolitan world-views or models of cosmopolitanism concerned with engagement? Do recent attempts to “recosmopolitanize postcolonial studies” indicate critics’ assimilation into neo-colonialism or new forms of resistance to it (Cheah 89)?

These questions frame the debates in the essays collected in this special issue. In interweaving questions about aesthetics, politics, and cosmopolitanism, these essays consider the ways in which contemporary fiction—and, perhaps especially, postcolonial fiction—usher new cosmopolitan possibilities and diverse new ways-of-being into a radically globalized world. Methodologically, these essays all highlight the interventions and contestations postcolonial narrative fiction makes to normative theoretical and popular models of cosmopolitanism that are often marked by elitist notions of non-belonging and non-committal worldviews. In particular, the essays take issue with cosmopolitan theorists’ bifurcation between the global and the local, difference and identity, and politics and philosophy, so as to demonstrate the ways that contemporary cosmopolitan fiction imagines cosmopolitanism as always in a state of becoming, refusing to categorize cosmopolitan ways of being as only one thing or another.

These essays expand on the work begun by a variety of recent cosmopolitan scholars such as Rebecca Walkowitz, Berthold Schoene, and Shameem Black who consider different ways the novel imagines new ways of talking about and inhabiting global modernity. All three pose questions about the relationship between the novel and the world; par-

ticularly, they respond (explicitly or not) to Benedict Anderson's famous linking of the novel to the birth of the modern nation-state. If, for Anderson, the novel "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (25; emphasis in original), Walkowitz, Schoene, and Black all query what kind of community the contemporary cosmopolitan novel creates. Schoene, for instance, asks while "traditionally the rise of the novel has been studied in intimate association with the rise of the nation state, might increasing globalisation currently be prompting the development of a less homebound and territorialist sub-genre of the novel, more adept than its national and postcolonial counterparts at imagining global community" (12)? For Appiah, Nussbaum and other liberal cosmopolitan critics, the community imagined by narrative is the global community of human beings (a category that remains relatively under-theorized in this discourse). However, Walkowitz, Schoene and Black suggest that the contemporary cosmopolitan novel imagines a community defined by contestation and mutability—one that is not easily contained by existing categories of communal attachments, and that is a process, rather than biologically determined. Indeed, Black wonders whether "three of the most accepted ways to organize literary scholarship—shared nationality, shared ethnicity, and shared gender—can limit our ability to apprehend the intellectual contours of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century... Fiction in English at the turn of the millennium participates in a wider planetary conversation" (11).

Schoene, Black and Walkowitz all query the relationship between the novel and global communities—moving the debate from the more binary-focused opposition between Appiah and Robbins to consider the inseparability of the aesthetic and the political. As Walkowitz notes, "a cosmopolitan style is not an alternative to or replacement for a cosmopolitan politics... rather it describes an analytic feature of critical cosmopolitanism, which has been used politically by writers" (28). In part what this shift might represent is a movement from looking at novels as *representations* of cosmopolitanism to, instead, *prescriptive* models. In other words, a move from depicting "realistic" cosmopolitan identities and commitments, to imagining what cosmopolitanism *should* or *could*

look like. The essays in this special issue argue for the need to move away from a focus on only the representation of “emergent contemporaneity” (Schoene 14) to emphasize the necessity for contemporary transformation.

The essays here suggest, then, that the cosmopolitan novel has the potential to re-create the global *polis*; indeed, all the essays in the issue take novels seriously as, simultaneously, literary, ethical and political texts. One way this recreation takes place, the authors in this issue argue, is that the texts they examine take up ideas that are typically excluded from cosmopolitan discourse as a way to locate new, more engaged or situated versions of cosmopolitanism. They model the alternative or invisible practices that might produce a new cosmopolitanism. In other words, the essays contribute to the vision and revision of existent cosmopolitan thinking by illuminating histories and ideas conventionally ignored but conducive to envisaging a new cosmopolitanism. These revisions might take the form of making visible hidden cosmopolitan genealogies (Ghosh), reimagining testimony (Yost), the geographical power relations of aesthetic judgement (MacLeod), considering cosmopolitan memory (Tomskey) or embracing risk (Johansen) and treason (Kim). Other essays map out ways of thinking about cosmopolitan commitments outside the typically Euro-American context of cosmopolitan studies (Kong and Watson), thereby highlighting the increasing role of Asia in the reconfiguration of cosmopolitics in the twenty-first century. What characterizes the cosmopolitan novel as mapped here, then, is a (perhaps typically cosmopolitan) multiplicity of foci and interests. Yet what they share is a commitment to thinking through the consequences and responsibilities of global connections and interactions. Rather than seeing novels as either the sole way to cosmopolitanism or as an indictment of cosmopolitanism’s apoliticism, these essays position literary texts as central to the expansion of cosmopolitan discourse.

Notes

- 1 While cosmopolitanism has a long history, many critics date its current critical moment to the end of the Cold War. See Beck, Cohen, Dharwadker and Schoene.

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