

## The Cosmopolitan Novel: Notes from the Editor Pamela McCallum

Midway through E. M. Forster's canonical modernist novel *Howards End*, members of a wealthy English family, the Wilcoxes, discuss a young woman, Margaret Schlegel. "Oh, I forget, she isn't really English," the sister comments, to which her brother replies, "She's a cosmopolitan.... I admit I'm rather down on cosmopolitans. My fault doubtless. I cannot stand them ..." (81). What has marked Margaret as a cosmopolitan is her German father, her travels on the continent and her interest in other cultures. All of this seems quite unremarkable from the perspective of the twenty-first century, but in the intense nationalisms preceding the First World War—Forster's novel was published in 1906—the Wilcoxes see the Schlegel sisters, both born and raised in England, as somehow failing to have a "proper" national character. Forster's narrative, however, is less concerned with national identity than with working through the tensions within the root meaning of cosmopolitan: "citizen of the world" from the Greek *kosmos* (world) and *politēs* (citizen). The Schlegel's German father sees himself as a "countryman of Hegel and Kant" (23), and, in the words of Evelyn Cobley, "what the Schlegel children inherit from the German side of their lineage is their cultural sophistication and idealistic intellectualism" (278). Unlike the Wilcoxes, the Schlegel sisters are able to respond to others with openness and empathy, and these qualities too form their cosmopolitan inheritance. They are citizens of the world in the sense that they approach others as potentially their co-citizens. In contrast, the Wilcox men can also claim to be citizens of the world, not in the sense of any interest in other cultures, but rather because their businesses traverse national boundaries in the name of global capitalism. As Cobley puts it, Forster foregrounds "the contrast between cosmopolitanism as the circulation of ideas forming

our cultural identity and cosmopolitanism as the circulation of capital in arena of economic activity” (278).

Forster is prescient in his juxtaposition of a cosmopolitanism of ideas and affect with the instrumental orientation of global capitalism, and there is no doubt that the interconnections and interpenetration of the two have deepened during the twentieth century and after as migration of populations across the world and the penetration of corporate investment into new spaces of production have increased exponentially. It comes as no surprise, then, that the contemporary British writer Zadie Smith returns to engage *Howards End* in her exploration of transatlantic ethnicities and aesthetics in her novel *On Beauty*. How might these questions and ideas translate into theoretical reflections? In the Clare Hall Tanner lectures at Cambridge University, delivered in the spring of 2001, Anthony Appiah, one of the foremost contemporary theorists of cosmopolitanism, argues that “soul making”—the production of human identities—is not given, but rather is produced “in the way in which we are seen and treated by others” (Hawthorn). Appiah suggests that it is possible to enter sympathetically and constructively into the life of another. The ethics Appiah sketches out here requires the ability to imagine social difference within the shared life-worlds of multicultural societies in the twenty-first century, and literature is one site where these processes might take shape. These experiences of reading will be challenging, marked by hesitations and sometimes by failure, and always subject to rethinking and revisiting, but they open up the possibility of respectfully entering the world of others.

This special issue on “the cosmopolitan novel” explores some of the questions raised by Appiah and other theorists of contemporary cosmopolitanism: Bruce Robbins, Pheng Cheah, Berthold Schoene, Timothy Brennan, Rebecca Walkowitz—the list could go on. Contributors take up a wide range of narrative and cultural texts both canonical and emergent: Salman Rushdie and Peter Carey; Yiyun Li, Catherine Bush and Dave Eggers. *ARIEL* is grateful to the guest editors of the issue, Emily Johansen and Soo Yeon Kim, who have brought together a productive and provocative group of articles. Thank you to Berthold Schoene, who initially contacted *ARIEL* about the project. It is our hope that “the

cosmopolitan novel” will generate wide discussion on this timely topic in postcolonial studies.

### Works Cited

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