Broadening Horizons
A Peak Panorama of English Studies in Spain

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Edited by
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PART I: KEYNOTE ESSAYS

COSMOPOLITAN STRANGERS IN THE LETTERED CITY: READING WORLD WRITING

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Abstract

The figure of the stranger recurs in social and literary discourses, its meanings and embodiments shifting with contextual changes and serving to highlight the ways in which otherness is constructed. A key concept in all theorisations of cosmopolitanism, the stranger is a long established literary character as well as an object of interest in recent urban studies. Twenty-first century discussions of neo-cosmopolitanism, while building on previous notions, shift the emphasis from the abstract concept of universality and the association with elitism towards a redefinition of the cosmopolitan which foregrounds resistance to the narrative of globalization and seeks a more inclusive critical framework, one which thinks in planetary, rather than global, terms. This article addresses the manner in which the figures of the stranger and the cosmopolitan intertwine in contemporary theory and in creative writing, and the extent to which literary texts are, in Pheng Cheah's words, a (cosmopolitan) "world-making activity" (2016).

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, stranger, postcolonialism, world literatures, Toni Morrison, Mohsin Hamid.

1. RETHINKING COSMOPOLITANISM[1]

Discussions of cosmopolitanism and alterity are inherent to postcolonial and feminist studies, as well as urban and spatial theories. These transdisciplinary fields converge to explore the manner in which the figures of the *stranger* and the *cosmopolitan* become entwined in contemporary theories and literatures. In a historical context that makes the analysis of such concepts more relevant than ever, recent writing strives to define ways of reading the world that may incorporate critical neo-cosmopolitan views. This article will consider the *cosmopolitan*

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to colleagues at the University of La Laguna for inviting me to deliver this keynote at the 41st meeting of AEDEAN in November 2017. I owe them also the great pleasure and honour of being introduced by Professor Fernando Galván Reula, an admired and respected academic, and cherished friend. My thanks also to the AEDEAN Board, presided by Professor Montse Martínez, for the chance to interact with colleagues nationwide.

stranger as a crucial twenty-first century figure in light of such theoretical and creative developments.

The notion of cosmopolitanism is well established in Western thought. As Kwame Anthony Appiah has observed (2006, xii), the term has proved to be quite a survivor. Going back in classical origins to the Cynics, who may have coined the term, other referents are the Stoics, their views represented in Hierocles' concentric circles (self-family-locals-citizens-nationals-humanity) and Plutarch, who quotes Socrates's self-definition as a citizen of the world and famously argues, in *De Exilio,* that the limits of the Universe are the same for all and that no one within them is an exile, a foreigner or a stranger. Despite these classical references, and the fact that the concept is generally associated with the West, it must also be acknowledged that its origins may not be unique, as Vinay Dharwadker sustains when he argues that an equivalent notion was formulated around 500 BC in the East by Siddharta-Gautama, the Buddha (Dharwadker 2001, 6). Cosmopolitanism does, however, inspire some of the moral achievements of the Enlightenment, including the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man [sic] and prominent European philosophers like Christoph Martin Wieland and Voltaire appeal to its conception of the world and humanity. Immanuel Kant inscribed the concept into modern Western thought with his *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795), where he argued for a *ius cosmopoliticum* or cosmopolitan right/law based on the principle of universal hospitality. Two of the most influential thinkers to retrieve and develop the concept of cosmopolitanism in the second half of the twentieth century, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, often inspire contemporary scholarship. In *Totality and Infinity* (1969), Levinas defined the foundation of ethics as the duty to respond to the Other, the responsibility for the Other in a vulnerable state. Significantly, he argues that the face of the Other (and therefore proximity) is crucial in compelling the response, a concept recently developed for contemporary urban spaces by Sara Ahmed, as will be discussed below. Jacques Derrida also sustains that hospitality, the willingness to welcome the Other into one's home, constitutes the foundation of ethics, although his deconstructive thought casts doubts on the feasibility of total hospitality (2000, 2003). The centrality of such concepts in today's world has given these texts an immediacy not always granted to philosophical production.

Kant's *ius cosmopoliticum* finally entered International Law in 1954 at The Hague Convention, as "the Common Heritage of Humanity," but is far from being a reality even today. Cosmopolitanism as a principle did reach a peak after the Second World War in reaction to the Holocaust, giving rise to ideas such as crimes against humanity in International Law and to world institutions in politics, but the Cold War and its neo-colonial strategies necessarily curtailed real developments, if not the imagination. As Gerard Delanty has argued (2012, 4), cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan tendencies coexist in any society and period, but specific theorizations of the concept and related practices can be identified more clearly at given moments. My interest here is the manner in which

cosmopolitanism is theorised in the twenty-first century and the implications for literature and reading.

Postcolonial studies and world literatures, which deal inextricably with matters of alterity and its encounters, necessarily move between the universal and the specific, and both fields developed much of their theory in the final decades of the twentieth century, a postmodern period which, in the West, foregrounded the voices of formerly invisibilised subjectivities and communities. Not simply, as has too often been argued, an era of identity politics, the postmodern period enabled the deconstruction of imposed subjectivities, including the national, and the inclusion of alterity into political and imaginative structures. While not defining itself as cosmopolitan, postmodernism's openness to otherness, together with the flourishing of national self-definitions as multicultural (Canada being a foremost example), paved the way for a new type of cosmopolitanism to emerge, most clearly in demographically multicultural societies. The crucial historical changes brought about by the end of the twentieth century (fall of the Berlin wall, end of Apartheid, Tiananmen), were joined by the revolutionary arrival of the Internet, to enable an incipient form of cosmopolitanism (Delanty 2012, 3), which coincides, in the philosophical realm, with the bicentenary of Kant's *Perpetual Peace* in 1995. In the world of literature, and more specifically literatures in English, the canon was being shaken by the irrefutable evidence of writing from the so-called margins, the writing back of the empire or the voice of the new "British subjects," to use the polysemic title from Fred d'Aguiar's 1993 poetry collection. Women, ethnic minorities, diasporic writers, were being widely read, slowly becoming mainstream.

However, the expectation of change around the new millennium, which had been heralded as opening a century of diversity, was again curtailed by historical events–the aftermath of 9/11 and the Great Financial Crisis–which veered the world towards narratives of security and austerity, towards the closing of national and human borders. And yet it is precisely this turn-of-the-century period that sees the emergence of the transdisciplinary field of what may be termed *neo-cosmopolitan studies,* and the discussion of the concept in a number of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, philosophy and, crucially for our purposes, literature and culture. In 1998, Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins collected the discussions around such changes in a crucial volume, *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation.* In the introduction, Robbins provocatively argued that cosmopolitanism had "a new cast of characters." The attribution of the term, he poses, has shifted from the accusatory charge of elitism ("Christians, aristocrats, Jews, homosexuals, and intellectuals") to "North Atlantic merchant sailors, Caribbean au pairs in the United States, Egyptian guest workers in Iraq, Japanese women who take *gaijin* lovers" (Cheah and Robbins 1998, 1). This shift implies a conceptual redefinition. Robbins addresses Paul Rabinow's claim that the term be extended to particular (rather than universal) and *unprivileged*–even coerced–transnational experiences. This formerly incompatible combination of

the universal with the particular will be the trademark of most new formulations of cosmopolitanism in the new century, and this may be precisely what makes them appealing and useful to literary analysis.

The introduction to *Cosmopolitics* begins by acknowledging these nuanced conceptions of cosmopolitanism: Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Benita Parry (1991) had already made claims for a *postcolonial* cosmopolitanism, David Hollinger and Mitchell Cohen for *rooted* cosmopolitanisms (1994), Homi Bhabha for *vernacular* cosmopolitanism (1996). What the volume highlights, in effect, is the moving away from a binary opposition of the national versus the cosmopolitan, and a call not so much for abolition of nationalism as for its redefinition; it also marks the abandonment of the traditional criticism of cosmopolitanism as a privileged position, as detachment from national or local responsibility and affiliations, which had been notoriously levelled, in literary theory, at Russian formalists. In contrast, the volume stages contemporary cosmopolitanisms arising from specific historical and cultural contexts, hence the apparently contradictory juxtaposition of terms such as *rooted* or *vernacular* with *cosmopolitanism.*

A novelty and strength of the resurgence of cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first century is that it occurs primarily as a reaction against the master narrative of the new century, that of globalization. No longer the privileged view of a mobile, rootless elite, cosmopolitanism is conceived as an ethical response, effecting a critique of globalization and stressing the need to take the Other into account in the search for solutions. For recent theorists, the concept is a state of mind, a disposition of openness and involvement with others. Ulrich Beck, credited with a major role in the recuperation of the concept, argues for a "dialogic imagination" (2002, 18), which incorporates other ways of life into individual experience, thus promoting understanding, comparison and critique, and a meaningful engagement with the other. Like Ulf Hannerz (1990, 2006), Beck considers cosmopolitanism a mode of dealing with meaning which requires engagement with otherness. Such theories, however, as decolonial critic Walter Mignolo has pointed out (2012), can still carry an unconscious un-cosmopolitan load in their dependence on the hegemonic view of European universalism, glimpsed, for instance, in Ulf Hannerz's reference to other cultures as an "aesthetic experience" (1990). Debates on cosmopolitanism in the new century have thus been involved in imagining "a new critical framework that is more culturally inclusive" and in thinking "in 'planetary' rather than 'global' terms" (Gunew 2017, 1). This critical framework, yet under construction, begins from the conversational model proposed by Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) for, while current connectivity means that we are better informed than ever, it has also made us aware of our blindness towards many cultures, histories and geopolitical areas, demonstrating the need to engage in a more sustainable manner with global cultures (Delanty 2012; Gunew 2017). Hence, one of the most influential reframings of cosmopolitanism as method in the new century has been Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers,* published in 2006. A philosopher by training, Appiah's work

is particularly relevant to literary scholars, not only because he argues his points through literature and story-telling, but also because the core of his method for living together, the model of *conversation* across boundaries of identities, is a particularly literary model. Looking back historically on cosmopolitanism, Appiah distinguishes two strands:

> One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind or even by the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, *which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance.* (Appiah 2006, xiii; italics mine)

Ignorance of others, he reminds us, is the privilege of the powerful. In human society, we need to develop habits of coexistence, conversation in its older meaning of living together, association. His defence of the power of narratives is explicit: stories are not only told, but discussed and evaluated in everyday life: "evaluating stories together is one of the human ways of learning to align responses to the world… [to] maintain the social fabric, the texture of our relationships" (29). This vindication of narrative in social terms suggests one aspect of the value of literature and creative art, which we will return to.

2. A WORLD OF STRANGERS?

The subtitle of Appiah's book, *Ethics in a World of Strangers,* brings us to our second concept and long-standing literary figure, the stranger. Albert Camus, Katherine Mansfield, J.D. Salinger or John Berger are but a few of the twentieth-century authors who include the word itself in their titles. The occurrence of such characters in literature is too frequent to summarise, their presence often linked to alter egos, doppelgängers or mirror images. But the stranger is also a specific social type which is (re)defined by time and place. S/he is thus a constantly shifting figure, defined in opposition to the self. Studies of alterity effectively contain the stranger, and postcolonial theory has analysed its different guises within contexts of power and the hierarchy of difference. This *othered* stranger, held in opposition to a community, a group or category, is my focus here. For although literature deals most intimately with the individual, it is the communal that creates canons and categories. And it is also in this communal context that the figure of the stranger interacts with cosmopolitanism.

In the second half of the twentieth century, two major theorists, the sociologist Georg Simmel (1964) and the philosopher of modernity Zygmunt Baumann (1988, 1995), approach the figure of the stranger. Both consider the stranger an in-between, ambivalent figure, neither friend nor enemy, an insider-outsider who threatens the insider/host's identity: "The stranger, like the poor […] is an ele-

ment of the group itself" (Simmel 1964, 402). Strangers, in such analyses, make social, cultural and even physical boundaries porous and unstable. Rather than reinforcing boundaries–as earlier analyses of binary thought on the self/other pair sustained–strangers, in their ambivalence, make boundaries problematic. A second important characteristic attributed to strangers by both Simmel and Baumann is an epistemological advantage, awarded by their intellectual mobility. The condition of the stranger, one of nearness and distance to the host group, fosters a hermeneutic perspective unavailable to those confined to local perceptions and allows them to transcend limited situated knowledge. Simmel speaks of the objectivity of the stranger, whose "particular structure composed of distance and nearness, indifference and involvement" (1964, 404) allows a "bird's eye view" (405), a broader cultural understanding. This hybrid, boundary-crossing subject had been anticipated, in spatial and urban theory, by Chicago school sociologist Robert Park ([1937] 1974).

The links between the figure of the stranger and the classical cosmopolitan subject are patent in Simmel's and Baumann's descriptions, in the display of an epistemic distance that allows the shuttle between particularism and universalism (a *rooted cosmopolitanism*) amounting to a critique of binary thinking, essentialist identities and grand narratives. The figure of the stranger has also been foregrounded in sociology (Marotta 2010, 2017) and in spatial theory, most particularly urban theory.[2] To refer only to the best known of those theorisations, Iris Marion Young (1986) described city life as "the 'being-together' of strangers," who encounter and acknowledge one another, face to face or through media, and remain strangers while acknowledging contiguity. Urban theorists in the 1990s dealt insistently with the fear of strangers, as summarised and critiqued by Canadian geographer Leonie Sandercock (*Cosmopolis 2: Mongrel Cities of the 21st Century*, 2003) who returns to the theme in Kristevan (1991) terms in her chapter "Home, Nation and the Stranger" (2003, 107-127), where she presents her proposal for "mongrel cities." And in a crucial intervention, Sarah Ahmed, at the exact turn of the century, published *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000) and put forward a perceptive interpretation of the manner in which urban encounters, through embodied proximity, propitiate what she describes as the "(mis)recognition of others as strangers" (32).

Ahmed's postcolonial framework reminds us of the prominent role of postcolonial studies in the general turn towards so-called globalization studies, as Bill Ashcroft sustains, and of the weary affinity between postcolonial theory

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[2] The stranger's affinities with the cosmopolitan subject have been recently studied, in the discipline of sociology, by Vince P. Marotta (2010; 2017), who argues the importance of this social type in understanding human condition and cross-cultural interaction (2010, 106).

and cosmopolitanisms (Ashcroft 2012, xxii). A similarly nuanced affinity exists between postcolonial reading and the concept of *world literature*. In both cases, the dangers of hegemonic formulations hover over utopian, ethical concepts. Postcolonial studies have traditionally been involved with world literatures, in their specific pluralities, while also proposing an ethical, transnational vocation in their engagement with diaspora and transculturalism. Bringing together these different frameworks, using them intersectionally to bridge the universal and the particular, is one of the challenges for literary analysts. Three decades of research in the field of literatures in English and that of women writers have allowed me witness how both of these interests have been treated as strangers, even trespassers, in the lettered city. This fact, verifiable in literary histories, is also reflected in the consideration awarded to those who chose this field of study in conservative academic contexts, the gated lettered city and its canonical keepers. A student at a time when even contemporary English literature–let alone Canadian or Jamaican–were absent from the university syllabus, my generation compensated by producing many contemporary literature specialists, and also–another sign of the times–many deeply theoretical critics. We had become academics, after all, at the time of the so-called "turn to theory," in the nineteen-eighties. Since then, various African, West Indian, Canadian and diasporic writers have been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and many writers from across the world, writing in English, have received international recognition (as proved by the many excellent contributions to nuanced reading in AEDEAN conferences). It is to be celebrated that such writers are being read, even if too often filtered by powerful Western publishing industries. World literatures in English, by different names, have entered universities. But they rarely do so yet on equal terms with more academically established British and USA literatures. This reluctance is not without consequences: it is Eurocentric, Western-biased, and reflects a world view which we sustain at a cost. It is also a loss of fundamental knowledge.

3. LITERATURE THROUGH A COSMOPOLITAN GAZE

In 2007 Zvetan Todorov, distinguished literary theorist and textual scholar, in his earlier career a much respected formalist, published a book which amounted to a manifesto, entitled *La littérature en peril* ("Literature in Danger").[3] Acknowledging the history of literary criticism and its need for formal analysis, it nevertheless denounced the manner in which a dominant detached, formal criticism

[3] The quotations included here are translated from the Spanish edition, contrasted with the French, as I have been unable to locate a full English translation of this book. Page references are also to the Spanish edition.

had superseded all other analytic perspectives. He thus called for the release of literature from the "stifling corset" of "formal games, nihilistic lamentations and solipsistic egocentrism," from the "formalist ghetto" of interest only to other critics, and pleaded to open literature "to the debating of ideas" (Todorov [2007] 2009, 98). This was not a rejection of narratological or other formal theories (28), but a reminder that they are a means to an end and that literature continues to address intellectual issues, therefore critical approaches, including contextual ones, are complementary. Todorov's reclaiming back literature studies from a restrictive perspective, his claiming of literature for a humanistic understanding of the world, bonds him with the cosmopolitan theorists and the world writers I will discuss next.

In 2017, Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, citizen of the most powerful country in the world and an assumed canonical writer, published her Charles Eliot Norton lectures, delivered in 2016 under the title *The Origin of Others* and dealing with the history of racism and "the color fetish" (2017a, 41-53; 2017b, n.p). Originally given as talks under the Obama presidency, these lectures acquire a more sombre transcendence on subsequent publication in the Trump era. Morrison explains her not always successful efforts to deconstruct, through narrative strategies, the assumptions about *blackness* in the US and elsewhere. Significantly for our subject, the second chapter bears the title "Being or Becoming the Stranger," the sixth and last is titled "The Foreigner's Home." The book is an avowed attempt to answer the question "What is the nature of Othering's comfort, its allure, its power (social, psychological or economical)?" (15). "My initial view," Morrison anticipates, "tends towards the social/psychological need for a 'stranger,' an Other in order to define the estranged self" (15-16). In the chapter "Being or Becoming the Stranger," Morrison uses a story by Flannery O'Connor ("The Artificial Nigger") and a personal anecdote (in which she herself sentimentalizes a stranger woman she meets only once) to illustrate the manner in which strangers are constructed and feared. She concludes, with many theorists of the self, that

> [T]here are no strangers. There are only versions of ourselves, many of which we have not embraced, most of which we wish to protect ourselves from. For the stranger is not foreign, she is random; not alien, but remembered, and it is the randomness of the encounter with our already known–although unacknowledged–selves that summons a ripple of alarm. That makes us reject the figure and the emotions it provokes–especially when these emotions are profound. It is also what makes us want to own, govern, and administrate the Other. To romance her, if we can, back into our own mirrors. In either instance (of alarm or false reverence), we deny her personhood, the specific individuality we insist upon for ourselves. (38-39)

This formulation coincides with Sara Ahmed's analysis of the urban stranger, that most contemporary figure of othering. In the already mentioned *Strange Encounters* (2000) Ahmed argues that the figure of *the stranger* is produced, not

by distance or absence of knowledge, but (as Simmel held) by proximity, by the type of close encounters produced in a shared city, which, through a process of othering define (certain specific) bodies as *out of place* or *strange.* In tune with Morrison's discussion above, Ahmed sustains that both the ideas of *stranger danger,* as in neighbourhood watch, and of *welcoming the stranger,* as in multiculturalism (or, we may add here, Morrison's fantasizing of the stranger), take for granted the stranger as a pre-existing category, an *ontological figure,* cut off from the different histories of her determination. The resulting *stranger fetishism,* which makes the stranger herself the origin of danger or of difference, can only be avoided by examining the social relationships that are concealed by this very fetishism. In other words, we need to listen to those strangers' stories, to individualise them or, as Kwame Appiah would have it, to enter into a cosmopolitan dialogue with them.

Although not in a specific urban context, Morrison moves in her lectures from the discussion of colour fetishism to this stranger/foreigner fetishism in the final chapter, "The Foreigner's Home," where she deals with the current mass movement of peoples: "of workers, intellectuals, refugees, and immigrants, crossing oceans and continents, through customs offices or in flimsy boats, speaking multiple languages of trade, of political intervention, of persecution, war, violence, and poverty" (93); more than sixty million, half of them children. Many are former colonized peoples moving into the seat of the colonizing powers in Europe or the US, many more today are war refugees. To illustrate their plight, what she describes as "the bane (the poison) of foreignness" (99), she uses Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King*, a classic Ghanaian novel which skilfully inverts the usual hierarchies by placing a white man as the fugitive, vulnerable foreigner in an African community. This allows us to witness, as Morrison describes,

> the de-racing of a Westerner's experience of Africa without European support, protection, or command. It allows us to rediscover or imagine anew what it feels like to be marginal, ignored, superfluous, foreign; to have one's name never uttered; to be stripped of history or representation; to be sold or exploited labor for the benefit of a presiding family, a shrewd entrepreneur, a local regime. In other words, to become a black slave. (109)

In Camara Laye's narrative strategies Morrison sees the parody of the usual constructions of foreignness: menace, depravity, incomprehensibility. Unsurprisingly, Laye's Africa is not dark, as in classic Western descriptions, most notably the canonical *Heart of Darkness*, but suffused with light. For, as Morrison puts it, "Understanding the motives, the sensibilities of the Africans–both wicked and benign–requires only a suspension of belief in an unbreachable difference between humans" (108).

Toni Morrison is practising in these analyses her own cosmopolitan, conversational reading, in the terms proposed by Kwame Appiah, a reading that combines a number of strategies: she enters a dialogue with European and

American texts about Africa, reading them from her own liminality; she enters a dialogue with a Ghanaian novel from the past, foregrounding the differing ethical conceptions of Africans and the white character, while also finding the points of convergence which allow the final moment of understanding, when the African king embraces the defeated, naked white stranger at the end of the novel. The fact that Morrison goes to such lengths in implementing and explaining this reading of difference within common humanity, despite her geopolitical placing in the privileged US, only emphasizes the intersectionality of discrimination. Her essays restate that colour, as socially perceived, continues to be a powerful bodily mark of the stranger. As she puts it, "the definition of 'Americanness' (sadly) remains color [whiteness] for many people" (2017a, 17).

4. OPENING THE GATES OF THE COSMOPOLITAN CITY

Toni Morrison mentions in passing that the Africa described by twentieth-century Western writers could almost be called, like Albert Camus's novel, *The Stranger* (Morrison 2017a, 23). Africa and blackness did epitomise for the west, until recently superseded by the fear of Muslims, the supreme Other, whether in terms of darkness and danger or in terms of the exotic. This realization underpins one of the most popular terms recently derived from the concept of cosmopolitanism, the neologism *Afropolitan*, which elicited a lively discussion among African specialists. Its founding text was not a theoretical tract, but a brief celebratory article published in 2005 by the African diasporic writer Taiye Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," in which she portrays a generation of internationally mobile, highly educated, culturally hybrid young Africans, the second generation diasporic children of African migrants to the West, who speak several languages and "belong to no single geography but feel at home in many"–these are the "Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world" (Selasi 2005, n.p.).

The theoretical underpinnings and the many popular derivations of this term, its rapid fame and adherence by young Africans in very diverse quarters, as well as its commodification for sales purposes, have been collected in books and special journal issues (see Durán-Almarza, Kabir and Rodríguez González, 2017, for a recent overview). All exceed the focus of this discussion, but it may be useful to remember a few significant implications of the term *Afropolitan*. The removal of the prefix cosmo- and insertion of Afro- can be read as a contradiction of the very essence of cosmopolitanism, as has been pointed out by some critics, or, in a fairer cosmopolitan reading, as a message sent by a generation of Africans who have gained the confidence to practice self-definition, to confront the stereotype of the backward impoverished Other, while critiquing the implied subject of cosmopolitanism, still generally thought of as Euro-American (the equivalent term *Europolitan* would be deemed redundant). Afropolitanism is, in their own terms, a "way of being African in the world" (Selasi 2005 n.p.; Gikandi 2011: 9)

that refuses the victim position (Mbembe 2007: 28); it is the self-description of a diasporic, hybridized, transnational generation of Africans living and moving across the globe. This subject position is not free of anxieties, importantly the issues of returning to Africa and of social privilege, but it highlights the changing subjects of cosmopolitanism in today's reality. A fairly long list of writers could be drawn, many funded in the US, from Teju Cole to Chimamanda Adichie, Taiye Selasi, Chike Unigwe or NoViolet Bulawayo, whose writing and histories, however, are also unique, distinctive and individual, relating to different African nations, and must be read in their full singularities.

There is no equivalent term for Asian cosmopolitans, whose migrations are no smaller nor less complex. In a different example of self-definition, Mohsin Hamid, author of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* writing for the Guardian as Man Booker candidate for his novel *Exit West* (2017), defined himself as follows:

> I was born in Lahore, and I live in Lahore, but I'm a mongrel through and through. Some of us look like mongrels. We'll have eyes that people think belong to one continent, and hair they think belongs to another. Some of us are mongrels inside. We're mongrels in ways that might not be obvious from a photograph. We're mongrels in how we muse, how we speak, what we believe, who we are. I'm that second type of mongrel. I've lived on both coasts of the Pacific and the Atlantic and far up the Asian land mass alongside an empty river that once flowed down to the Indian Ocean via the Arabian Sea.
>
> It's a frightening time for mongrels. Purity seems to be all the rage. In a rage. We see, once again, the rise of openly expressed white supremacy in America. We see growing anti-migrant sentiment in Europe, growing anti-Muslim sentiment in India, growing chauvinism in China, Turkey, Myanmar. And in Pakistan, quite literally the "land of the pure," where I live, we see a murderous attachment to purity so pronounced that no human being is pure enough to be safe. (*The Guardian,* October 14 2017, n.p.)

One cannot but think with regret of Leonie Sandercock's optimistic *Mongrel Cities,* published only in 2003, and mourn the change in political times. Given the present context, Hamid explains that he inevitably at times imagines his city following the path of the ancient towns that hinge between Asia, Europe and Africa, imagines bloodbath and fleeing his city, leaving loved ones behind. The novel *Exit West* explores those fears imaginatively, through the love story of a couple who must escape from war, and do so through the mysterious doors that punctuate the text.

> As a mongrel, I once thought I was unlike other people. But I have come to realise that everyone is a mongrel. Hybridity is at the core of humanity. It is our nature. We do not divide, like some single-celled organism, into further identical human beings. We commingle the genetic material of two different people to create a

> child. When we wage wars against mongrels, wars for purity, we attack what makes us human. We attack ourselves. (*The Guardian*, October 14 2017, n.p.)

If Kwame Appiah's model for living together is right, we cannot ignore writing such as this. Appiah argues that "Conversations across boundaries of identity –whether national, religious or something else–begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own" (85). This "engagement with the experience and the ideas of others" (85) turns an abstract stranger into a real and present one, or, in Ahmed's conception, circumvents stranger fetishism.

5. CONVERSING WITH STRANGERS: TOWARDS COSMOPOLITAN PRACTICES

The search for cosmopolitan reading practices does not suggest that novels be read as social documents (even if they are also that), nor as ethnography or autobiography. How could scholars ignore the analytical tools that have so carefully been constructed from the myriad perspectives now available for the purpose of reading (into) literature? It is precisely the power of the narrative that will engage or not the reader's imagination, thought or empathy, and it is still the role of the scholar to provide, or aid in finding, a more informed and proficient reading of literary works. But literature, as Zvetan Todorov argued in 2007, goes well beyond its formal strategies and is itself in dialogue with ideas. Authors and readers have been proved very undead. Furthermore, stories narrated from different sites are likely to bring new narrative strategies into play. Even classic literary types, like the *flâneur*, as I have discussed elsewhere (2015), will be transformed by a narrator whose place in the world differs from that of Western canonical writers, and it is those formal strategies that we need to converse with. In our own familiar spaces this is blatantly true. Recent writing about London includes plays on the London riots by South African born Gillian Slovo, using verbatim theatre techniques; performance-poetry-musical shows by Nigerian Inua Ellams, creator of the London *Night Walk*, who arrived as asylum seeker and is now, despite repeatedly denied citizenship, an integral part of the London art scene; the multimedia artist Xiaolu Guo, exiled from China, whose novels and films have portrayed London nightlife from perspectives hitherto undocumented. These are innovative authors, although not alien to Western forms. A more demanding dialogue undoubtedly takes place with writing which stems mostly from non-Western traditions.

A recent attempt to breach cultural gaps and to theorise cosmopolitan readings in postcolonial and migrant contexts is Sneja Gunew's *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-Cosmopolitan Mediators* (2017), which aligns with a critical, *post-western* meaning of cosmopolitanism defined, according to Delanty (2012, 41) by "a condition

of openness to the world... entailing self and societal transformation in light of the encounter with the Other." Gunew's book advocates revisiting Homi Bhabha's concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (1996) in order to define a form that is local, subaltern and peripheral, that makes visible the cosmopolitan nature of groups marginalized by the nation. Within this framework, she overturns established expectations about diasporic, immigrant, multicultural or ethnic minority writers, assigning them a crucial role in moving towards the understanding and practice of cosmopolitanism, "as mediating figures that facilitate new relations between national cultures and the global or, in the more felicitous term suggested by Spivak, Gilroy and Cheah, the *planetary*" (5). As she argues,

> The very elements that have been traditionally deployed to illustrate their constitutive suffering and oppression (the "migrant condition;" *migritude*), the belief that they are at home nowhere or in more than one place (and thus constitutively disloyal and "unpatriotic"), could be rethought to comprise their greatest attribute–that they can navigate the structures of belonging in numerous ways, not least by putting into question the complacent assumptions or self-evident universalisms that undergird many forms of both nationalism and globalization. (Gunew 2017, 5)

Gunew's central thesis in this book is that post-multicultural writers "provide a 'hinge' between national cultures and globalization as well as putting those concepts into crisis" (11), they offer a cosmopolitan mediation and translation between the nation-state and the planetary. While this may constitute a utopian view, and one which lays a further representational burden on such writers, it may also accurately describe the effect of writing such as Mohsin Hamid's, which moves between Asia and the West in times of fraught communication. Gerard Delanty observes that post-western cosmopolitanism is "located neither on the national nor global level, but at the interface of the local and the global" (2012, 41). Navigating such interfaces is therefore the complex task of both writers and readers. In the case of the critic, the project of cosmopolitanism is first and foremost one of reading rather than one of identifying or categorising cosmopolitan texts. Gunew's reasoning converges with Kwame A. Appiah's, as well as with Pheng Cheah's argument that "World literature is an important aspect of cosmopolitanism because it is a type of world-making activity that enables us to imagine a world" (2012, 138). Cheah's 2016 monograph *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* constitutes a sustained enquiry into how postcolonial texts create the possibility of social change through their imagining of alternative structures of time, of alternative worlds that contradict the logic of globalization.

Cosmopolitan epistemologies are by definition open, as closure would preclude their very nature. They begin, simply, by reading; they imply a willingness to read others without pre-given universals, to engage in the imagined realms and temporary worlding that the texts suggest, rather than imposing a grid of

pre-existing questions, whether formal or ideological. This is a reading that requires alertness to alternative aesthetics and ideas, a form of denaturalisation that might enable us to become receptive to other ways of "being at home in the world." It is not only that, as Zvetan Todorov and Richard Rorty argued, fictional texts provide encounters with other individuals, who broaden our horizon and our universe all the more when they least resemble us; or that, in Rorty's notion, through such texts we are "redeemed from egotism" (2001, 243 ff). Disagreeing with one of Rorty's fine points, I pose further, with Gayatri Spivak, among other theorists, that art–and very particularly literature, which makes sophisticated use of the most complex human skill, language–constitutes a valuable non-quantitative mode of knowledge. In order to expand this knowledge, it is crucial to remember, with Walter Mignolo, that: "the word cosmopolitanism declares from the beginning that it is a project [...] it is the outcome of an agency, but [...] not an agency in itself. Cosmopolitanism, in other words, is not something that is just happening. Someone has to make it happen" (Mignolo 2012, 86). I would say that, in literary studies, lecturers, theorists and critics are today interpellated more strongly than ever to contribute to this task.

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