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Stefano Evangelista, *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle: Citizens of Nowhere*, Oxford, OUP, 2021, pp. 282, ISBN 9780198864240

Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle: Citizens of Nowhere offers new insightful perspectives on cosmopolitanism in *fin-de-siècle* writing in English. Building on important works by Regenia Gagnier, Matthew Potolsky and Parejo Vaillo, Evangelista's book sets out to bridge a critical gap between English Studies and new developments in comparative and world literature. Moving beyond investigations of imperial networks tackled by postcolonial scholarship, he aims to open up a wider perspective on Victorian Studies by looking at linguistic and geographical entanglements, spaces of mediation, and moments of cross-cultural contact that cannot be framed within a national focus on Britain or the English language. As the debate between nationalists and cosmopolitans unfolds at the turn of the twentieth century, Evangelista attempts to shed light on the fundamental role of literature in simultaneously promoting and interrogating cosmopolitanism, observing how "the literary medium not only reflects but *creates* specific conditions to reach beyond the social, cultural, linguistic, affective and ethical boundaries of national cultures" (p. 20).

Each of the first three chapters of the book conducts an in-depth study of a single writer – Oscar Wilde, Lafcadio Hearn, and George Egerton, respectively – who brought English literature and language into dialogue with foreign cultures, embracing the creative potential of world citizenship. Evangelista's analysis underlines the variety of their literary responses and simultaneously emphasises their shared ability to cut across geographical and linguistic borders, as well as their productive interest in translation. In the age of imperial expansion and national jingoism, these three writers of British descent are shown to fashion new, alternative identities and cultural practices, while at the same time embodying "the existential anxiety of the cosmopolitan writer as citizen of nowhere" (p. 120). Evangelista's carefully chosen subtitle for his book reflects indeed the "paradoxical nature of cosmopolitanism", which he sees as "a position of both strength and vulnerability" (p. 4) where privilege and loss, worldliness and exile, connectivity and unbelonging exist in "an uncomfortable state of symbiosis" (p. 19).

The first chapter, "Oscar Wilde's World Literature", focuses on the canonical figure of Wilde as a key theorist and promoter of the new literary cosmopolitanism of the English *fin de siècle*. After providing a background on the concept of 'world literature' as defined by Goethe and its English reception, Evangelista shows how Wilde played with this idea from the very start of his career, stressing the need for an international critical dialogue in which authors and works – when viewed

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from abroad and thus inhabiting a supranational space – would acquire different meanings. The following section moves on to consider Wilde’s French-language play, *Salomé* (1893), which, far from being an isolated and eccentric experiment, is seen as representing “the culmination of [Wilde’s] desire to cross and disrupt national borders, providing at the same time a practical outlet for the theory of world literature elaborated in his critical writings” (p. 36). Encapsulating his cultural and physical mobility between France and England, this work and its well-known publication history stir up reflections on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and national identity, provoking and frustrating “the desire to clean and standardize the text, to make it fit into a stable language and national identity” (p. 71).

While Wilde frequented salons and readily identified with metropolitan networks, Lafcadio Hearn escaped the metropolis and emphasised cultural diversity by lending ear to the peripheral. A highly admired writer in Japan, where he adopted the name ‘Koizumi Yakumo’, Hearn has been progressively marginalised in the West as an unexceptional travel writer or as a Japanophile at a time of anti-Japanese political sentiment, before being labelled as an orientalist *tout court* by postcolonial criticism. In the second chapter, “Lafcadio Hearn and Global Aestheticism”, Evangelista attempts to bring this literary figure to the forefront and to complexify his subject position by showing how the author’s cosmopolitanism actually consists of an “unsolved dialectic of uprooting and rootedness, of balancing contradictory positions of socio-cultural privilege and vulnerability. Politically and aesthetically, his literary cosmopolitanism compounds anti-imperialism with elements of orientalism” (p. 81). Fearing the ambitions of geo-political domination and cultural homologation coming from the British Empire, Hearn fought for the preservation of the local in Japan, including in his writings a series of anecdotes, snatches of translation, tales and legends that he learned from the people he encountered, as well as explanations of different customs and traditions. Evangelista’s analysis of Hearn’s cosmopolitan commitment ultimately has him stand out as a foremost cultural mediator whose literary work both “shaped the knowledge of Japan in the West by broadcasting Japanese culture” and “left a lasting mark on the literary culture of his adopted country by promoting the preservation and appreciation of Japan’s traditional folk tales” (p. 111).

If Wilde’s gaze was pointed towards France and Hearn’s towards Japan, George Egerton looked at Northern Europe and was particularly drawn to Norway. In his third chapter, “George Egerton’s Scandinavian Breakthrough”, Evangelista turns his attention to this innovative and experimental writer who, though overlooked in the twentieth century, has been recently rehabilitated thanks to feminist scholars. However, Evangelista contends, approaching Egerton’s work through the critical lens of Gender Studies has led critics to overlook another crucial facet of her identity, that is, “how much Egerton positioned herself at the margins of English literary culture, writing from the point of view of strangers and outsiders, translating foreign literatures, and adopting cosmopolitanism as a discourse of cultural authority” (p. 118). After investigating Egerton’s portrayal of women’s mobility in her fiction, which unravels the conflicting associations of cosmopolitanism with an empowering individualism and emotional dislocation, Evangelista sheds light on her work as translator of modern

Scandinavian literature. Far from being a mechanical activity aimed at profit, translation was for this writer “an act of dissent against the rules of the British literary market, which then as now favoured original work in the national language” (p. 131). Her textual dialogue with Ola Hansson and Knut Hamsun did not merely contribute to the English assimilation of Scandinavian literary modernity but affected her own creative process as a writer of fiction, thus inviting scholars to re-assess translation as an act of cooperation and productive contamination.

Moving from individual works to larger international backdrops for the circulation of literature, the last two chapters of the book shift the focus to how different kinds of networks shaped the construction of literary cosmopolitanism in the public sphere at the turn of the century, emphasising first the role of the periodical press and then the emergence of movements for the promotion of universal languages.

The fourth chapter, “Controversies in the Periodical Press: *Cosmopolitan* and *Cosmopolis*”, examines the relationship between world literature and journalistic practices by providing a comparative analysis of two monthly journals launched at the *fin de siècle*: the American *Cosmopolitan* and the short-lived European *Cosmopolis*. Linked to social privilege, glamorous consumerism and *savoir faire*, the former tried to reach as wide an audience as possible and redefined world citizenship as an increasingly feminised social identity driven by materialistic desires, while still taking its educational ambition seriously. The latter, instead, was a high-brow, multilingual journal which counted on a prestigious list of contributors and embodied an idealistic vision of cosmopolitanism trying to generate new ideas and create transnational encounters. Evangelista points out how their discursive construction of literary cosmopolitanism was thus profoundly different, revealing “the tension between the politico-philosophical ideals of world citizenship inherited from the eighteenth century and filtered via Goethe’s notion of world literature, and the fast-developing new understanding of cosmopolitanism inflected by consumer culture” (p. 169). At the turn of the century, both periodicals nevertheless encouraged the creation of “a dynamic international space” (p. 165) enabling authors, for example, to review foreign literatures or being discussed by foreign critics, or simply to be published alongside writers from abroad.

The last chapter, “Those Who Hoped: Literary Cosmopolitanism and Artificial Languages”, focuses on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and the artificial language movements of the *fin de siècle*, whose goal was mainly to facilitate communication between people of different nationalities. Evangelista underlines how the adoption and proliferation of a universal language responded to the perception of an increasingly interconnected world and the desire to create a brotherhood of men:

In common with other forms of cosmopolitan activism, universal language movements shared an ethical commitment to securing equality among different nations and races, dialogue, fraternity, and justice. For their exponents, language was where differences between peoples and nations were most indelibly encrypted: it was the framework that needed to be questioned and dismantled most urgently if divisive nationalisms were to be effectively opposed. (p. 208)

The chapter first concentrates on Volapük, unpacking the associations, controversies and prejudices attached to this ‘universal’ language as they emerge in Henry James’s

short story “The Pupil”. Evangelista then moves on to evaluate key features of the literary cosmopolitanism of Esperanto, the most successful artificial language ever created which overtook Volapük, and ultimately closes with an investigation of the Esperanto movement in *fin-de-siècle* Britain.

A crucial and much-welcomed contribution to the scholarship devoted to late nineteenth-century literature, *Literary Cosmopolitanism in the English Fin de Siècle* invites scholars to move beyond the categories of author, canon, and text as traditionally constructed within the boundaries of the nation and to “rehabilitat[e] translation as a constituent part of the literary landscape” (p. 258), as an extremely rich cultural activity which is to be considered alongside other forms of artistic creation. As it unveils the tensions and controversies that the notion of ‘world citizenship’ carried with it, the book further shows “how the debate on cosmopolitanism that took place in the *fin de siècle* laid the foundations for our own understanding of this concept in the twenty-first century” (p. 5). Against the backdrop of rising xenophobic nationalism, right-wing extremism, populism and the oppression of minorities, Evangelista’s book helps us shed new light on key issues that still preoccupy us today, enriching contemporary debates relating to transcultural dialogue and the culture of mobility and migration.