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Sympathy and Cosmopolitanism: Affective Limits in Cosmopolitan Reading

Katherine Hallemeier

Abstract *This paper argues that contemporary understandings of cosmopolitan literature are significantly limited by their dependence on sympathetic attachments as constitutive of cosmopolitan practice. I trace a genealogy of the connection between sympathy, cosmopolitanism, and the novel that extends from Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant to Martha Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah, in order to contend that contemporary models of cosmopolitan reading rely on problematically normative definitions of the 'human'. J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*, I propose, suggests an alternative model of cosmopolitan reading that neither equates sympathy with humanity, nor precludes those who 'feel apart' from participation in cosmopolitan community.*

Contemporary cosmopolitan thinkers have interrogated the potential of reading literature for the development of the sympathetic imagination and the increased capacity to feel for others. In this paper, I contextualise contemporary cosmopolitan theory by offering a brief historical genealogy of the connections between sympathy, cosmopolitanism, and the novel in works by Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant. These thinkers are touchstones for much contemporary cosmopolitan theory, literary and otherwise, that debates if and how sympathy constitutes a sound basis for cosmopolitan practice. I outline the contours of these debates in order to argue that cosmopolitan theory, insofar as it associates sympathy with 'the human', works to foreclose the very differences that it purports to embrace. I then go on to question whether the advancement of cosmopolitanism is indeed best imagined through the lens of sympathy. I conclude by offering a reading of J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* (1997) that suggests ways cosmopolitan literature might be re-envisioned in order to embrace, rather than refute, the differences borne of 'feeling apart'.

I. The novel, sympathy, and cosmopolitanism: an historical genealogy

Since the novel's popularisation in the eighteenth century, novel reading has been associated with the cultivation of an ethically or politically efficacious

sympathy. Such associations have not always been amenable, however, to the cultivation of a particularly cosmopolitan perspective. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith articulates an idea of sympathy that is concomitant with a 'sense of propriety' that both marks individual virtue and ensures the fulfillment of public duties (Smith 2006: 137). This idea of sympathy, however, is explicitly pitted against '[t]he stoical apathy' that characterises classical cosmopolitan thought (137). In the philosophy of Zeno, the *cosmopolites*, the 'citizen of the world', is detached from the feelings of the *polis*, while in communion with the wise and virtuous, through divine *logos* (Douzinas 2007: 152).¹ Smith, in contrast, argues that we must relinquish the idea that 'we should view ourselves, not in the light in which our own selfish passions are apt to place us, but in the light in which any other citizen of the world would view us' (Smith 2006: 136). In place of efforts at distancing, Smith advocates the cultivation of 'that extraordinary sensibility, which we naturally feel for the misfortunes of our nearest connections' (137), and suggests that such proper sensibility is better cultivated through the study of literature than through the 'metaphysical sophisms' of classical philosophy: 'The poets and romance writers, who best paint the refinements and delicacies of love and friendship, and of all other private and domestic affections, Racine and Voltaire, Richardson, Marivaux, and Riccoboni, are, in such cases, much better instructors than Zeno, Chrysippus, or Epictetus' (137). Smith prescribes the sentimental, epistolary novel precisely because it does *not* portend the instruction of universalistic, cosmopolitan philosophy.

Smith's rejection of cosmopolitan philosophy hinges upon his understanding of sympathy as that which is dictated by extant relationships and obligations. Duties and sympathies alike, he suggests, materially end with 'country': 'The state or sovereignty in which we have been born and educated, and under the protection of which we continue to live, is, in ordinary cases, the greatest society upon whose happiness or misery our good or bad conduct can have much influence' (Smith 2006: 229). The state that protects the individual is also the state that the individual can affect. Smith dismisses attempts to sympathise on a cosmopolitan scale because he understands sympathy to be dependent on such mutual 'influence'. Only if you can claim universal influence, his logic would propose, can you go on to claim universal sympathy. Otherwise, he argues against the idea that we must feel 'extreme sympathy with misfortunes which we know nothing about' (135). 'The care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings', proclaims Smith, 'is the business of God' (238). He concludes, 'To man is allotted a much humbler department, the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, and his country' (238). For Smith, God may love 'the citizen of the world', but between 'one citizen of the world' and another, there is no relationship worthy of the name and so no basis for substantive sympathetic engagement.

¹The *apatheia* of the Stoic stands in contrast to the *sympatheia* of the united *demos*: 'The Greek verb *sympascho* and the noun *sym-patheia* mean to suffer with others, to feel with and for others, to be affected by the same thing and to link emotions in public' (Douzinas 2007: 75–76).

Adopting Smith's antipathy for the virtues of apathy, many contemporary advocates of cosmopolitanism follow Smith in privileging the 'thick' experience of everyday feelings, habits, and loyalties before a pure, universal 'reason'.² Much of contemporary cosmopolitan theory contravenes Smith, however, by suggesting that the age of globalisation has expanded the scope of those on whom 'our good and bad conduct can have much influence', even as international capital and environmental degradation have affected crises of the nation-state (Fine and Cohen 2002). Here, cosmopolitan thought tends to follow the work of Immanuel Kant, for whom our very existence in the world creates an inescapable sociability, encapsulated in and furthered through international commerce and culture (Cheah 2006: 81). In his 1795 tract, 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', Kant argues that because '[t]he peoples of the earth have . . . entered in varying degrees into a universal community . . . a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere' (Kant 2001a: 107–108). An assumption of global mutuality forms the basis for Kant's cosmopolitanism, which he defines as the right to 'conditions of universal hospitality' and upholds as a necessary precondition for the rational advancement of perpetual peace (Derrida 2001: 19).³ A presumed human community necessitates sympathy for the suffering of distant others and the consequent pursuit of an international cosmopolitan order.

Whereas Smith recommends the reading of literature because it counters cosmopolitan stoicism, Kant embraces literature because he believes in its potential to forward his cosmopolitan project. As Kant acknowledges in 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' (2001b), 'the kind of philosophical history he is advocating amounts ultimately not to some kind of statistical analysis but to a "*novel*"' (Earle 2005: 52). This Kantian 'novel', as Bo Earle argues, is one that imaginatively engages with 'behavioral trends of the human species in aggregate' and represents them as moving towards a yet-to-be realised 'cosmopolitan end' (Earle 2005: 210). Kantian cosmopolitan philosophy, by offering a narrative that describes a common humanity, 'provocatively directs us out into the unromantic world of hard empirical and even statistical data for redemption of our Romantic ideals' (210).⁴ And indeed, Kant's claim that the humanities can cultivate humanity by developing '*the universal feeling of sympathy*, and the ability to engage universally in very intimate *communication*' (Cheah 2006: 1) finds resonance in Shelley's proclamations that poetry can strengthen 'a man[']s' capacity to be 'greatly good' by encouraging 'him' to take on 'the pains and

²In my use and definition of the terms 'thick' and 'thin' to read cosmopolitan theory, I draw on a discussion of these terms by Richard Rorty in 'Justice as a Larger Loyalty' (1998), which references Michael Walzer's *Thick and Thin* (1994).

³For an interrogation of the implicit limits, exclusions, and perversions of a Kantian universal law of hospitality, see Derrida's *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001).

⁴In this respect, if scholars have 'often posited' a tension between Romanticism – 'often defined now by rampant individualism, now by rising nationalism' – and cosmopolitanism, it is yet significant that 'the words "*cosmopolitan*" and "*cosmopolitanism*" entered the English language in the early nineteenth century' (Heydt-Stevenson and Cox 2005: 130).

pleasure of his species' (Shelley 2006: 844). For both the philosopher and the poet, the imagination is capable of world-making: the writer apprehends a common humanity and transmits this insight through prose or poesy. A sympathetic imagination that is cosmopolitan in scope emerges as a means to cultivate a cosmopolitan community in practice.

Smith suggests that novels cultivate those human sympathies that are antithetical to cosmopolitanism, while Kant maintains that novels cultivate the sympathy for humanity that is a precondition for the realisation of cosmopolitanism. Both thinkers, however, maintain that literature evidences something essential about human sympathy. For Smith, literary sentiment exemplifies how humans do not feel sympathy on the basis of an abstract idea of shared humanity. For Kant, literature exemplifies, through its very circulation via sympathetic engagement, the fact of a shared humanity. In both cases, the possibility of cosmopolitan community hinges on if and how sympathy comprehends 'the human'.

II. The novel and sympathy in contemporary cosmopolitan theory

Models of human sympathy continue to play a central role in accounts of the potential value of a literary education for the cultivation of cosmopolitan community.⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum and Kwame Anthony Appiah are perhaps the two moral philosophers and literary critics who, in the past twenty years, have most prominently connected novel reading with cosmopolitan practice. Both of these thinkers have imagined human sympathy as cosmopolitan in its scope. They have done so, however, in markedly different ways. While Nussbaum argues, *pace* Smith, that sympathy *can* be cultivated to embrace all of humanity, Appiah suggests, *pace* Kant, that humanity can *already* be defined as cosmopolitan because of a universal capacity to sympathise.

Nussbaum defines cosmopolitanism primarily as a moral project that requires the cultivation of sympathy beyond existing national boundaries. 'Most of us are brought up to believe that all human beings have equal worth . . . but our emotions don't believe it' (Nussbaum 2002: xii). Reading literature, she posits, is one way to overcome this problematic 'emotional narrowness' and to create a citizenry that feels responsibility to all humankind. The novel's very form, Nussbaum argues, 'constructs compassion in readers, positioning them as people who care intensely about the sufferings and bad luck of others, and who identify with them in ways that show possibilities for themselves' (1995: 66). An education that presents 'lives outside our [national] borders' as 'deep, rich, and emotion-worthy', consequently works to 'renew our commitment to the equal worth of humanity' (Nussbaum 2002: xiv). As such, a 'cosmopolitan education' not only helps us to 'learn more

⁵Claims that the reading of novels potentially contributes to the cultivation of a specifically cosmopolitan civic virtue can be read in light of a more general contemporary propensity to issue a defense of literature by extolling the virtues of the sympathetic imagination. As Sophie Ratcliffe notes in *On Sympathy*: '[T]here is something of a "vogue for empathy" a fuzzy but general assumption that expressing sympathy or empathy, and engaging in purportedly "empathetic" literary encounters, may encourage civic virtue and liberal humanitarianism' (2008: 5). Of course, Ratcliffe concludes, '[t]o say that this is unlikely is to say nothing new' (5).

about ourselves', but also allows us to 'make headway solving problems that require international cooperation' and to 'recognize obligations to the rest of the world that are real and that otherwise would go unrecognized' (11–12). Nussbaum's cosmopolitans understand that 'they are, above all, citizens of a world of human beings' (6).

Against Nussbaum's vision of aspirational moral community, Appiah defines cosmopolitanism primarily in terms of an extant ontology that accounts for already existing sympathies that cross national boundaries. Appiah proposes that the practice of cosmopolitanism does not so much require agreement about moral principles – such as the equal worth of all human beings – as 'dialogue among difference' and 'conversations among places' (2001: 207; 225). Cosmopolitanism, argues Appiah, 'begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association' (2006: xix). Such 'habits of coexistence', argues Appiah, are made possible through the sympathetic imagination – through 'the capacity to follow a narrative and conjure a world' (2001: 224). Whereas Nussbaum views reading literature as a means for extending sympathy beyond national borders, Appiah views it as the exercise of an extant cosmopolitan sympathy. 'What makes the cosmopolitan experience possible', writes Appiah, what 'grounds our sharing', is 'the grasp of narrative logic that allows us to construct the world to which our imagination responds' (223). Our capacity 'to respond in imagination to narratively constructed situations' (223), our ability to read with 'sympathy and concern for others' (203), makes cosmopolitans of us all – even as the novel, as a standing invitation to exercise the 'narrative imagination' (223), 'is cosmopolitan in its very beginnings' (203). Novel reading exercises what Appiah sees as the ontological human sympathy that binds us in an extant cosmopolitan community. Appiah's cosmopolitans are not necessarily united by the fellow-feeling and shared principles that are often implied by the term citizenship; rather, Appiah insists, among cosmopolitans, 'the world we imagine is more than a world of fellow-citizens' (202).

Nussbaum and Appiah argue, respectively, that the reach or existence of the sympathetic imagination determines the possibility of cosmopolitan practice. Both visions of universal cosmopolitan sympathy, however, have been placed under critical scrutiny. Homi Bhabha, notably, has critiqued Nussbaum's vision of a self that privileges a liberal conception of 'humanity' before other, more local loyalties (Bhabha 1996). 'The usual argument against Nussbaum's version of cosmopolitanism', writes Bruce Robbins (echoing Adam Smith), 'is that we cannot possibly be expected to care about those far away as intensely as we care about our families' (Robbins 2007: 53). In demanding the universal cultivation of sympathy for all humankind, Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism demands the universalisation of the liberal humanist subject.⁶ Consequently, 'the older, singular, Nussbaum-style

⁶While Smith does not proclaim a moral obligation to humanity as such, his theory of sympathy is vulnerable to a critique of universalism similar to that leveled against Nussbaum, insofar as Smith's sympathizing subject is implicitly masculine, 'rational', and individualist (Hinton 1999: 27).

cosmopolitanism is now regularly dismissed as universalism in disguise' (Robbins 2007: 48).

Appiah, in contrast, strikes an 'attractively "conversational" balance between universal demands and local particularities' (Bongie 2008: 58), suggesting that cosmopolitanism can be practiced in different ways in different localities. The assumption, however, of a humanity that is essentially cosmopolitan in its capacity to sympathise with 'others' who 'are down the street today or across oceans or centuries from ourselves' risks a certain complacency (Appiah 2001: 224). As Chris Bongie, building on the work of Peter Hallward, argues, Appiah tends to conflate a '*descriptive* assessment of culture' – as cosmopolitan and hybrid – with '*prescriptive* political practices' (Bongie 2008: 58). Robbins similarly notes in Appiah a problematic elision of cosmopolitan culture and substantive politics. There is a 'continuity' between Appiah's notion of 'getting used to' and a 'more general liberal presentism' (Robbins 2007: 56). The notion of an ongoing cosmopolitan cultural exchange constructs 'a temporality that quietly urges us to go easy on the imperial horrors of the past' and 'is credited with almost super-natural ability to resolve the contradictions of the present and future, or at least to get used to them' (Robbins 2007: 57).⁷ Appiah's cosmopolitanism resonates not just with a problematic liberalism, but also with a strain of localist conservatism, which Lauren Berlant describes as 'rephras[ing] the embodied indignities of structural inequality as opportunities for individuals to reach out to each other, to build concrete human relations' (Berlant 2004: 4). Whereas Nussbaum's prescription of sympathy risks articulating a cosmopolitan politics premised on an abstract universal sympathy, Appiah's description of sympathy risks depoliticising cosmopolitanism.⁸

III. The limits of cosmopolitan sympathy

Critiques of Nussbaum and Appiah focus on the plausibility of developing or identifying an efficacious cosmopolitan sympathy. While these critiques are valuable, it is possible to approach the problem of cosmopolitan sympathy

⁷Critiques of Appiah echo those of Kant, even though Appiah's view of cosmopolitanism is less teleological. In suggesting that current politics, commerce, and culture are all part of the path to perpetual peace, Kant's elucidation of an inexorable path to a cosmopolitan condition problematically 'offers the consolation of philosophy for the violence and suffering in the existing world' (Fine and Cohen 2002: 159), even as the suffering engendered by colonialism and imperialism has 'disproved Kant's benign view of the unifying power of international commerce and discredited the moral-civilizing claims of cosmopolitan culture' (Cheah 2006: 81).

⁸Despite critiques of Nussbaum's and Appiah's work, recent articulations of cosmopolitanism repeat their visions of cosmopolitan sympathy. Seyla Benhabib, for example, echoes Nussbaum in *Another Cosmopolitanism* (2006) by advocating for the cultivation of cosmopolitan norms. In *Visceral Cosmopolitanism* (2007), Mica Nava's work recalls Appiah's when it contends that 'committed opposition to racism and a deeply felt sense of connectivity to others', such that one will act against 'dominant political and representational regimes', 'is also often rooted in non-rational unconscious factors' (64).

from a slightly different angle: namely, by considering the *effects* of endeavoring to engender cosmopolitan sympathies. Such an approach centers less on the reasonableness of envisioning a cosmopolitan humanity united by sympathy and more on the ethical consequences of undertaking such an exercise. Within cosmopolitan theory, sympathy emerges as a means of apprehending or describing a common humanity. The models of humanity proffered through the mechanism of sympathy, however, are arguably antithetical to the more equitable humanity that cosmopolitanism seeks to advance or proclaim. As I shall demonstrate, whether sympathy is imagined as a supplement to reason or as its antithesis, cosmopolitanism problematically delimits the capacities and influence of 'other humans'. Through recourse to sympathy, cosmopolitanism implicitly reinforces the unequal capacities it wishes to deny.

Within Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism, for example, cosmopolitan subjects extend sympathy to all of humanity as a precondition for equitable decision-making in the international public sphere. Sympathy reveals a common humanity whose existence must be acknowledged for truly just international debate to occur; sympathy for humanity becomes a mode of enhancing judgment. This model of sympathy adheres to a 'cognitive' view of emotion which does not accept that 'feeling is not, at some level, run by a rational program' (Wesling 2008: 19). Sympathy in this branch of cosmopolitanism is imagined as always humane, and therefore as a valuable supplement to humane reasoning. Notably, however, humanity is not allowed to affect the sympathising cosmopolitan subject in unanticipated ways that exceed rational control. What is consequently lost in Nussbaum's cosmopolitan thought is what is lost in cognitivist models of emotion: a sense of unruly, possibly unpredictable, relational feeling. Cosmopolitan sympathy is problematically rendered as the sympathy of the critical reader, for whom reading entails 'a clear opposition between the text object and the reading subject' (Warner 2004: 20). The subject 'has' a feeling that is directed towards an object; the possibility that the subject is affected by the 'object', be it novel or neighbor, in a way that is beyond the subject's cognitive control is disallowed. Humanity does *not* affect the cosmopolitan subject, because the cosmopolitan subject is bound to be inexorably sympathetic only in a rational manner. Insofar as cosmopolitanism adheres to a cognitivist methodology, then, it suppresses precisely what it claims to be enhancing: an intensified experience of 'human' equality.

Appiah's cosmopolitanism sidesteps this critique by suggesting that cosmopolitan feeling is not necessarily tending towards a 'reasonable' apprehension of a common humanity. By suggesting the existence of cosmopolitan sympathies that are nonconscious, Appiah's cosmopolitanism adheres to a model of sympathy that attends to what Rei Terada calls 'the nonsubjectivism of emotion' (Terada 2001: 7), or what Sara Ahmed calls the 'relational' character of emotions (Ahmed 2004: 7). Within these frameworks for understanding emotion, the 'subject' and 'object' of emotion are undone by each other in the relationship that is signaled by feeling. Feeling cosmopolitan, within Appiah's ontological cosmopolitanism, is a matter of being relentlessly affected by distant others in ways that are not always manageable. Rather than suggesting a model of cosmopolitan reading that emphasises the critical capacities of the reader, Appiah's understanding of sympathy supports a model of cosmopolitan reading that emphasises the power of the 'other' of the literary text. This is

to say that, for Appiah, literature is that which necessarily contains the potential to move its readers; it is continuously available to be interpolated into cosmopolitan exchange.

While Appiah's cosmopolitanism eschews the cognitivism that reduces humanity's effects to the sympathetic, it is yet problematic insofar as it defines humanity as quintessentially cosmopolitan in its sympathies. As Berlant has noted in a seminal essay on sentimental literature, novels and reading practices that embrace an 'ideology of true feeling' tend to produce a 'jumbled' political field, in which 'the ethical imperative towards social transformation is replaced by a civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy' (Berlant 1998: 641). For Appiah, reading offers just such an opportunity for self-satisfied but ineffectual 'connection'. While 'others' are allowed to be affecting, the effects of that 'otherness' are domesticated through a vision of a humanity that is united through its capacity to feel in cosmopolitan ways. Cosmopolitanism comes to stand as a theoretical term that gestures towards valuing differences of class, race, and gender. This gesture, however, subsumes material differences under a common human condition, even as the attribution of cosmopolitan feeling to subordinated groups arguably reinforces those groups' subordination.

The theory that imagines cosmopolitanism either in terms of rational or extra-rational sympathy circumscribes humanity as reason's other. 'Other' humans, who are constructed either as objects of cosmopolitan sympathy, or as sympathising cosmopolitan subjects, are excluded from the realm of rational cosmopolitan politics. The very sympathy that is meant to further an understanding of human equality in the cosmopolitan sphere in fact perpetuates inequalities through the implicit and unequal distribution of rational powers. The cultivation or existence of the sympathetic faculty promises human equality, even as this equality is undone by models of sympathy that construct a passive or emotive 'other'. In practice, the project of expanding or exercising a sympathetic capacity arguably enfold its subjects within an imperialist regime that reduces and disciplines 'human' feeling to that which is, by definition, always already cosmopolitan.

I have argued that a cosmopolitanism that looks forward to the articulation and practice of cosmopolitan sympathy may undermine these same cosmopolitan ends. Yet, much contemporary theory persists in advocating for the desirability of cosmopolitan sympathy, as well as for the cultivation of this sympathy through the reading of literature. Recent literary theory has made arguments that both differ from and extend Nussbaum's and Appiah's work. Those that differ tend to argue for the cosmopolitan character of particular kinds of literature, be they modernist, postmodern, or postcolonial. For example, Jessica Berman, in *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community*, argues that 'modernist fiction challenges our ability to restrict social identity' and so 'becomes an instructive narrative model of how we can begin to imagine community anew' (2001: 27). Rebecca L. Walkowitz, in *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*, similarly maintains that 'the modernist strategies of cosmopolitan writing have served to test and expand the critical methods of international thinking' (2006: 27). Bridging modern and postmodern literature, Berthold Schoene's *The Cosmopolitan Novel* suggests that 'cosmopolitan novel[s]', including those written by

contemporary British novelists such as Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, and Ian McEwan, 'promot[e] an open and flexible practice of community that can accommodate the whole world' (2009: 21). Robert Spencer also cites Rushdie, along with Timothy Mo, W.B. Yeats, and J.M. Coetzee, in *Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Literature*, in which he argues that the 'best products of postcolonial writing' embark on a project of 'exploring and even instilling the cosmopolitan forms of relationship that would be required to create and legitimise a global society that has left imperialism behind' (2011: 3–4). Although they differ in their literary foci, these scholars are united insofar as they find that the seeds of a practicable cosmopolitanism are planted in the reading of an exclusively defined cosmopolitan literature. What is more, as in the theories of Nussbaum and Appiah, these cosmopolitan theories of literature privilege novels for offering readers the opportunity to reorient their relationships to 'others'. Readers are positioned as central to the reading experience, whether they are evaluating, or being moved by, the text.

In either case, the cosmopolitan world that readers purportedly help to create in the process of reading is, simply put, profoundly self-centered. Pedagogies that aim to uphold reading as instantiating cosmopolitan community consequently risk perpetuating the inequalities that they ostensibly aim to combat. As an alternative to this model of cosmopolitan reading, I propose to sketch an understanding of cosmopolitan literature that does not hinge upon cultivating cosmopolitan sympathy in the individual reader. In order to do so, I turn to an autobiographical novel by J.M. Coetzee, an author whose work has alternately been categorised as modern, postmodern, and postcolonial. I argue that Coetzee's writing does not privilege the circulation of sympathy, but rather gestures towards the cosmopolitan potential of its absence.

IV. The fiction of cosmopolitanism

J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997) may initially seem an unlikely starting point for questioning cosmopolitan sympathy. The first in a trilogy of fictionalised memoirs, *Boyhood* records, in third-person, present tense, formative moments in the life of the young John Coetzee, in and near Cape Town in the 1940s and 1950s. The narrator takes pains to highlight the provincial, as opposed to cosmopolitan, character of the protagonist and setting. This continuous foregrounding of an inescapable provincialism, however, raises questions about the ethics of relationships forged through cosmopolitan sympathy and, by extension, through cosmopolitan reading.

I will focus on one notable example. Near the end of the book, the narrator describes Mr. Whelan, an English teacher, and Brother Otto, another teacher whose subject of instruction goes unnamed. Both teachers offer their South African students something of a cosmopolitan education:

Some days, Mr. Whelan comes to class . . . boiling with rage at the newest outrages of the Russians in their satellite countries. 'In their schools they have created classes in atheism where children are forced to spit on the cross,' he thunders. 'Those who remain true to

their faith are sent to infamous prison camps. That is the reality of Communism . . .' From Brother Otto they hear about the persecution of Christians in China . . . his stories have more authority because he has actually been in China. 'Yes, I have seen it with my own eyes,' he says in his stumbling English: 'people in a tiny cell, locked up, so many that they could not breathe any more, and died. I have seen it'. (Coetzee 1997: 140–141)

Read in a generous light, Mr. Whelan and Brother Otto are cosmopolitans in these moments of storytelling: they abhor the unequal treatment of 'distant others' and introduce their students to global struggles that exceed the prescriptions of the nation-centered Standard Six syllabus. At the same time, the provinciality and hypocrisy of their sympathies cannot be doubted. Their sympathy for suffering Christians is one with their hatred of Communists. This hatred, in turn, suggests the teachers' support of the South African apartheid regime, or at least their opposition to the anti-apartheid movement and its communist ties. Both teachers claim the authority to judge global atrocity and, in the process, co-opt Russian and Chinese people into a transnational community that is ultimately invoked to bolster the authority of the South African National Party. 'Distant others' are rendered passive and acquiescent; they are positioned as part of a transnational community of which they may or may not be aware and which they may or may not refuse. In their necessary intersections with particular national and individual histories, the stories of Mr. Whelan and Brother Otto starkly exemplify how appeals to cosmopolitan sympathy may reinforce extant inequalities and nationalist agendas.

Just as suggestively, these stories point towards the potential ineffectuality of even a deeply flawed cosmopolitan pedagogy. Precisely because Communism is not on the Standard Six syllabus, the narrator records, 'what goes on in China and Russia can be ignored. China and Russia are just excuses to get Brother Otto or Mr. Whelan talking' (Coetzee 1997: 141). For most of the students, stories about the suffering of 'distant others' are simply the means to avoid learning the regular lesson plan. As for John Coetzee, 'he is troubled. He knows that his teachers' stories must be lies, but he has no means of proving it. He is discontented about having to sit captive listening to them, but too canny to protest or even demur' (141). *Boyhood* dramatises how appeals for cosmopolitan sympathy may generate resistance, rather than openness, to 'others'.

One possible reading of this scene would be to diagnose the students' responses as failures of sympathy, and, following Nussbaum, to think of ways in which cosmopolitan sympathy might be taught by teachers (or texts) more effective and more 'truly' cosmopolitan than Mr. Whelan and Brother Otto. Alternately, following Appiah's emphasis on the importance of cosmopolitan conversation, one might highlight that Mr. Whelan and Brother Otto have been able to discover common ground with some Russian and Chinese people; one might then argue for, and celebrate, the likelihood that their students may likewise develop unanticipated sympathies with 'strangers' in the world. Both readings imply that the lesson of the text is one that exceeds the provincial viewpoints of teachers and students alike.

Such interpretations are consonant with critics of Coetzee who suggest that Coetzee's writing encourages a transnational sympathetic engagement with otherness, or that it emphasises ways in which sympathetic engagement already transcends national borders. Homi Bhabha famously lists Coetzee as an author whose writing 'enjoin[s] the international community to meditate on the unequal, asymmetrical worlds that exist elsewhere' (Bhabha 1994: 5). More recently, Robert Spencer argues that Coetzee's works 'strive to galvanize their readers, to provoke them into purposeful introspection, and potentially to interpellate them as more self-conscious, more critical and more broad-minded citizens of the world' (Spencer 2011: 3). Katherine Stanton, in *Cosmopolitan Fictions* (2006), argues that Coetzee's novels demonstrate how South Africa is a product of global histories and attachments, and that this imbrication must shape our understanding of obligation, debt, and restitution to the 'racial other'. While Bhabha and Spencer argue that Coetzee's fiction highlights a moral imperative to engage with 'distant' nations and cultures, Stanton argues that the fiction draws attention to existing transnational connections, which in turn demand that political and ethical actions be situated in a global context. Regardless of whether these critics conceive of cosmopolitanism as a critical project, an affective engagement, or both, they read Coetzee's writing as espousing the cultivation of a sympathetic cosmopolitan community.

Compelling as these readings are, it is possible that in the case of *Boyhood*, at least, they do not do full justice to the degree to which the text is in sympathy with, as well as critical of, its imperfectly cosmopolitan characters. The narrator, after all, is careful to provide a plausible reason for John Coetzee and his peers responding as they do to stories about the suffering of other people: 'what Brother Otto tells about China or Mr. Whelan about Russia is no more real than Jan van Riebeeck or the Great Trek' (Coetzee 1997: 141). It is not necessarily the stories' cosmopolitan scope that yields the students' indifference and incredulity, but rather their apparently fictive quality. For these students, stories about humanity, past and present, do not extend or unveil a cosmopolitan reality, but rather render 'humanity' as unreal as a novel.

The form of the 'fictionalized memoir' itself seems to affirm the students' experience of humanity-as-story. Theories of cosmopolitan literature tend to be united by arguments that literature potentially exposes or forges the reality of humanity, either as a moral category or as an empirical fact. These arguments explicitly or implicitly value literature because of its relation to a pre-given understanding of reality. Coetzee's texts, in contrast, relentlessly foreground their own fictitiousness. As Derek Attridge (2004) has argued, *Boyhood's* deployment of the third person establishes the distance between the living author J.M. Coetzee and the character John Coetzee. It follows that the narrator's account of John Coetzee, more than representing J.M. Coetzee, emphasises that accounts of J.M. Coetzee are fictions. Fiction usurps, rather than reveals, the reality of 'humanity' and the 'self' alike.

I suggest that this usurpation, far from foreclosing the possibility of cosmopolitan community, gestures towards possibilities for cosmopolitan practice that do not center on individuals extending sympathy to, or feeling sympathy with, other 'human' beings. Emphasising the fictiveness of humanity presents the opportunity to adopt a principle of postcolonial studies,

which, as Sam Durrant has argued, sees one of its tasks as being 'precisely to keep open the question of what constitutes the human', and thereby disrupt 'the will to power inherent in any attempt to define the human' (Durrant 2004: 12–13). In other words, cosmopolitan theory might benefit from adopting a postcolonial methodology that seeks to embrace what Durrant calls the 'radical heterogeneity of human experience' (13). Attentiveness to this 'radical heterogeneity' would require considering that sympathy, like rationality before it, is an inadequate measure of humanity. By not defining humanity in terms of sympathy, cosmopolitanism might be re-envisioned so that feelings such as outrage, indifference, and denial are potentially as constitutive of 'humanity' as is sympathy. In *Boyhood*, the young John Coetzee's 'contemptible secret' is that '[h]is heart is old, it is dark and hard, a heart of stone' (Coetzee 1997: 123). The cosmopolitanism I propose is one that acknowledges this 'secret,' rather than attempting to repress or disown it.

A cosmopolitanism that allowed for feeling apart (or, indeed, for not feeling at all) would require a rethinking of the purpose of a cosmopolitan literary education. Novel reading, in the model of cosmopolitanism I am suggesting, would not primarily consist of sympathising with another as 'fully human', or as apprehending 'human' community through sympathetic engagement with a narrative. Rather, novels might be understood as cosmopolitan, insofar as they question and test prevalent definitions of, or stories about, 'humanity'. Rather than presuming that sympathy constitutes a social fabric, cosmopolitan reading might consider how the presence or absence of sympathy is immaterial to our responsibility to others.

Such a consideration constitutes the final challenge of *Boyhood*. In the memoir's closing pages, John Coetzee grapples with the death of his great aunt, Aunt Annie. The boy's feelings towards his aunt while she is alive are ambivalent. During visits, 'he tries to keep his disgust from showing' (Coetzee 1997: 116). While Aunt Annie seems to feel a 'special bond' with him, it is 'a bond he does not feel at all, does not acknowledge' (116). His only interest in Aunt Annie is the shelves full of books in her flat, many of which are filled with copies of a book 'written by his great-grandfather, Aunt Annie's father' (117). Even this interest, however, is limited: he tries to read his ancestor's memoir, but 'it is too boring' (118). What is more, the boy is befuddled as to why his great aunt has translated, printed, and attempted to sell a book authored by a father whom she feared. John Coetzee's mother suggests that 'she surely had a sense of duty toward him' (118).

John's antipathy for his aunt and her book project makes it all the more remarkable that, in the text's final lines, the boy's thoughts echo his aunt's sense of duty. At the funeral, it emerges that 'no one has given a thought to the books' at Aunt Annie's flat, 'the books that no one will ever read' (Coetzee 1997: 166): 'He alone is left to do the thinking. How will he keep them all in his head, all the books, all the people, all the stories? And if he does not remember them, who will?' (166). The questions extend beyond the boy's family in their cosmopolitan valence: how does one comprehend 'all the people'? The cosmopolitan practice suggested by these questions, however, does not hinge upon the extension or practice of sympathetic feeling. Rather, the lines gesture towards the boy's responsibility to remember, retell, and reread stories about precisely those who have seemed, and continue

to seem, strange, fearsome, and boring. The cosmopolitan tradition insists on the individual's responsibility to others given the reality of a sympathetic humanity. Coetzee's text challenges its reader to think through the individual's responsibility to others given that humanity – both one's own and others' – often seems to be an unsympathetic fiction.

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