



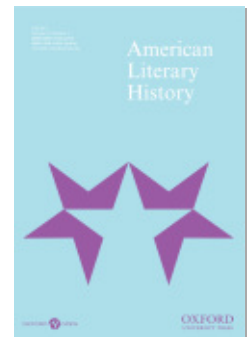
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Caren Irr

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Toward the World Novel: Genre Shifts in Twenty-First- Century Expatriate Fiction

*Caren Irr**

The dream of the great American novel is past. We need to write the global novel.

Maxine Hong Kingston, “The Novel’s Next Step”

I am working myself up to writing a kind of epic global novel. I suppose a lot of people are always working themselves up to writing that kind of novel.

Kazuo Ishiguro, “In Conversation with Kazuo Ishiguro”

Since at least the late 1980s, ambitious writers have been imagining a new kind of narrative called the global, planetary, international, or simply “world” novel, and in recent years, their visions have started to come to fruition. Paralleling the much-remarked phenomena of accelerated migration and increased interpenetration of global markets, this new genre of the novel is changing the face of twenty-first-century US literature. Most importantly, the world novel is beginning to make global conditions newly legible to American readers.

For some readers, this world or worldly novel replaces the Holy Grail of an earlier generation—the so-called great American novel.¹ Yet several features thought to characterize the world novel also seem to derive from the earlier form: namely, multistranded

**Caren Irr* is Professor of English at Brandeis University where she teaches contemporary film, fiction, and social theory. She has written and edited four books on the politics of culture; her current research concerns the emergence of new genres in twenty-first-century fiction.

narration, broad geographical reach, cosmopolitan ethics, multilingual sensitivity, and a renewed commitment to realism.² With the possible exception of multilingualism, all of these features could also describe Dos Passos's Depression-era *U.S.A.*, for example, as well as characterizing recent novels celebrated for their worldliness, such as Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). Recognizing this continuity in form, a number of critics have identified national narratives that might inspire contemporary global fiction. Political scientist Benedict Anderson proposes José Rizal's classic of the Filipino anti-imperial movement, *El Filibusterismo* (1891); Malcolm Bradbury offers Angus Wilson's East/West fantasy, *As if By Magic* (1973); and Guy Reynolds suggests *Worlds of Color* (1961), the final volume of W. E. B. Du Bois's trilogy on African-American family life. Tim Brennan's candidate is Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963), and Salman Rushdie's somewhat underrated novel of Bombay musicians turned international celebrities, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (2000), has been mentioned more than once in this context as well.³

The influence of national predecessors on international writing is sometimes thought to be a liability, as in Joseph Slaughter's critical assessment of the influence of the Goethian bildungsroman on human rights talk and the postcolonial novel, but not always. In *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (2004), Michael Denning imaginatively pairs his own suspicion of the "marketing category" of the world novel with an investigation into mid-century American proletarian fiction. Denning offers the innovative thesis that the broad reach of a Gabriel García Márquez or a José Saramago might owe more to the explicitly internationalist politics of the earlier generation of leftist writers than to the blander international style favored by multinational media conglomerates.⁴ Although the specific ideologies of the left-wing writers Denning discusses rarely make explicit appearances in US fiction of the last 10 or 20 years, this earlier generation's interest in situating national crisis in a global market suggests a model for understanding the transition from national narrative to world novel. Extrapolating from Denning, we can understand the world novel as arriving when the genres of the nation stretch to incorporate politically charged elements of the global scene.

Genre theory prompts us to a similar proposition. As Rick Altman argues in a classic article in cinema studies, new genres usually emerge when the inclusion of new semantic material forces a transformation of an existing generic syntax.⁵ Genres such as the national novel change shape and push past their earlier limits when they strain to accommodate new content. After a form

exhausts its efforts to mold the content to the existing genre, a transition—often recognizable only in retrospect—arrives. In a flurry of invention, a genre shift occurs.

Without contesting this pattern for the emergence of new genres, not all observers agree that the threshold for the world novel has been reached. In his wide-ranging survey of new novels, Bruce Robbins asserts that “generic rules . . . severely limit the instruction [the American novel] can deliver about the world and America’s place in it” (1099). Among the constraining principles Robbins identifies is the rule that “history abroad will never be less than an atrocity” that motivates celebratory immigration narratives, along with the corollary that these atrocities will be represented by way of “mercifully short” narrative detours (1099). To the extent that twenty-first-century American fiction travels abroad, according to Robbins, it remains captive to the expatriate’s narrative of romantic or erotic self-discovery. Even though this story might occasionally shade off into do-gooders’ ethical questions, or an occasional investigation of commodity logic, by and large new fiction, in Robbins’s view, founders on the problem of laying blame for international problems either too forcefully or too lightly at the door of Americans. Robbins concludes that no fully “worldly” fiction has yet appeared in the most recent American literature because twentieth-century narratives of self-development simply have too strong a hold.

While some of Robbins’s characterizations (especially his account of the absurdist strain in expatriate narrative) are compelling, his central assumption about the fixity of genre in twenty-first-century fiction is less persuasive. Innumerable examples beyond those treated in Robbins’s survey suggest that the rules he has identified have been regularly broken and that new conventions have begun to assert themselves, especially in twenty-first-century writings concerned with expatriation. If these genres are not quite so immutable, then the failure to deliver “instruction,” as Robbins sees it, in contemporary fiction might not be quite so absolute either. Twenty-first-century writers, to some extent, may have heeded calls for the renewal of the political novel, such as that offered by Walter Benn Michaels in *The Shape of the Signifier* (2004).⁶

In the well-documented and publicized career of Dave Eggers, for example, critics may encounter a new variety of worldly political consciousness to document and interpret. Eggers’s oeuvre begins with his exceptionally self-conscious memoir of personal and familial loss, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000), but his second effort was a “do-gooder” novel of the sort Robbins describes. *You Shall Know Our Velocity*

(2002) turns from self-exploration to an international itinerary by chronicling the adventures of ill-informed young Americans who take a whirlwind one-week journey around the world while trying to distribute a large sum of inherited money. After this mildly satirical compression of the *Wanderjahr* narrative, Eggers's subsequent novels have taken an even less personal turn by documenting the worlds and voices of persons distant from his own suburban upbringing. His prize-worthy nonfiction novel *What Is the What* (2006) is based on the life story of Sudanese Lost Boy Valentino Achak Deng, and his most recent book, *Zeitoun* (2009), similarly focuses on immigrant experiences in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. If Eggers is, as many have been eager to claim him, a "one-man zeitgeist" or representative man of American letters, then both the specific experiments with containing first-person domestic narrative and his shift toward international and activist content deserve our attention.⁷ Eggers's career may suggest, too, why the world novel begins its emergence in the specific subgenre of national fiction called the expatriate novel: the world novel's relatively more political and institutional sensibility requires a recovery from the specific consumerist psychology of the expatriate. To recognize the signs of this recovery and not mistake it for inflexible continuity with the symptoms it repudiates, however, we have to broaden our set of examples and read even more synthetically than other instructive introductions to the twenty-first-century novel have done.

If, for example, we consider under the heading of expatriate fiction not only recent narratives of young, unattached Americans on European sojourns (works that still differ more from their predecessors than we might initially assume) but also fictions written by and about expatriates relocating to the US, a new set of patterns emerges. While still clearly in dialogue with expatriate classics of the modernist era, the latter novels introduce a new set of generic conventions that modify the romantic unreality of the international scene, often by sharpening our sense of the different lenses expatriates from various backgrounds employ. Works in this vein are often triangulated narratives staging a collision of "worlds" that throws the institutional and political specificities of the US into sharp relief. A third group of writings—those I will call the work of the new nomads—establishes yet another set of variations on the expatriate formula. In the writings of this last group, the expatriate novel's definitive center—the wounded self-seeking aesthetic compensation abroad—gives way to relatively more depersonalized figures for global exchanges. A particular sort of worldly emptiness characterizes these writings, generating a contemplative

tone quite distinct from any self-satisfied detour through a museum of global atrocities.

Even if, when considered singly, none of these variants on the expatriate novel entirely fulfills critical or authorial desires for an informative, innovative, purely extra-national world novel, the nearly 30 works aggregated in this essay do signal a significant mutation of the genre of the expatriate narrative. This group of writings illustrates the world novel's emergence from a shift in the syntax of genre. A synthetic account of the expatriate novel reveals this process to be already well under way.

1. The Twenty-First-Century American Abroad

Those novels of the new millennium that describe the adventures of Americans abroad perhaps predictably reproduce features of modernist expatriate writing most faithfully. Many novels in this vein include direct, though skeptical, mentions of the Hemingway generation. Self-consciously indebted to their literary predecessors, these works also recognize a need to revise the habits of the modernists. For some authors, such as Gary Shteyngart in *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (2003), this revisionist impulse triggers a thorough satire of modernist conventions. The first third of Shteyngart's debut sends up the erotic and professional ambitions of discontented immigrants, but the remainder converts its Russian-American hero from "a man who couldn't measure up to the natives" to "Vladimir the Expatriate, a title that signified luxury, choice, decadence, frou-frou colonialism" (179). Uniting the two portions of the novel is Shteyngart's consistently Rabelaisian pleasure in his protagonist's mock-heroic inability to master either the American world he leaves behind or the Central European environment he enters. His hero might imagine himself a conqueror luring American innocents into his elaborate Ponzi scheme, but he is quickly and repeatedly thrown off-kilter by his own investment in the same expatriate quest for erotic and aesthetic fulfillment on which he preys.

Beyond these ironies of characterization, Shteyngart's novel also insists on the limits of other generic rules governing modernist expatriation. As the title indicates, one of Shteyngart's targets is the inescapable traveler's guidebook packed with rules for the etiquette of cross-cultural encounters. If works such as Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) emulate the guide by punishing transgressors like Robert Cohn, then Shteyngart's novel pointedly rewrites that convention. His Vladimir Girshkin ("part

P. T. Barnum, part V. I. Lenin" [3]) turns expatriate precisely from a position of being, like Cohn, only partially assimilated; Shteyngart's twenty-first-century expatriate begins from the position Hemingway excluded. Furthermore, in addition to repeatedly dropping the name of Hemingway, "the patron saint of the expatriate scene," Shteyngart rewrites one of the most purportedly revelatory passages from *Sun*, the hero's ecstatic union with a primal Old World nature through fishing (301). While Jake Barnes achieves rapture in a Spanish trout stream, Girshkin's narrative dwells repeatedly on the lascivious consumption of cooked fish before deepening the parody with the introduction of a midget-sized poet named Fish who "looked like an unwashed twelve-year-old" with "the voice of Milton Berle" (303). This Fish promises an updated postmodern revelation by means of Manhattan's latest designer drug: "horse powder"; after ingesting together, Fish and Girshkin plunge into the "bottomless joy of anesthesia"—only to emerge, a mere 15 minutes later, into an everyday world of buttons and party planning (306). Shteyngart, in other words, overplays even Hemingway's most hyperbolic moments of expatriate revelation, sending them through the mill of his own deflationary slapstick humor.

Similar moments of parodic allusion to expatriate classics abound in recent contributions to the subgenre of the American abroad. The dissatisfied youngsters populating Arthur Phillips's *Prague* (2002) also recall Hemingway's would-be sensualists. Richard Russo's *Bridge of Sighs* (2007), an upstate-New York to Venice and back narrative, refers at several key moments to Henry James's Italian stories; Cynthia Ozick's *Foreign Bodies* (2010) explicitly updates the situation of James's *The Ambassadors* (as arguably do portions of Chang-rae Lee's 2010 war novel *The Surrendered*, discussed further below); and Peter Cameron's *Andorra* (1997) and *The City of Your Final Destination* (2002) both employ the Jamesian narrator who knows more than his rather oblivious protagonist about the moral corruption of the world the expatriate enters. Self-consciousness about the derivativeness of the very project of aesthetic renewal and erotic liberation via travel provides a starting point for these narratives, not a conclusion.

One might be tempted to conclude that these satires and parodies reflect the influence of Mark Twain on the genre, were it not for the fact that the trajectory of these novels so often leads from a mildly shame-faced acknowledgement of the contemporary expatriate's belatedness to a direr sense of entrapment in a dangerous alien culture. Arthur Phillips's protagonist becomes so enmeshed in shady dealings in Budapest that only in the final pages does he

finally muster the energy to propel himself outward toward the titular fairy-tale city of Prague. All of Russo's characters are inexorably drawn back to the economically depressed town from which they initially fled. And both of Cameron's novels end with a Hoffmanesque eeriness in which repatriation or imprisonment abroad seem the only alternatives. Rather than providing release through a second-order aestheticization of the experience of travel, then, as Clemens and his heirs commonly do, twenty-first-century fictional treatments of Americans abroad emphasize the implosion of creative projects and choke off the motives as well as the means for further mobility.

The spatial figures recurring in these works reveal a similar investment in certain forms of anxious reduction and enclosure. As in recent immigration fiction, we commonly find that any single location is shadowed by a sister city. Phillips's Budapest is haunted by Prague; Shteyngart's Prague is permeated by Moscow and Manhattan, while Russo's New York City and Venice are always presented in relation to his invented up-state community. Peter Cameron's writing embraces this principle most fully—filling his rural Uruguay with shades of European capitals and even populating his traveler's point of relative origin (Kansas) with the traces of an older imperial world order. His possibly Egyptian—no, Iranian or maybe Canadian—hero Omar longs while traveling for Midwestern cuisine, that “Indian cooking filtered through British imperialism and modified for Americans” (*City* 38). In this frequently replicated paratactic regression, the intensity of perception a Hemingway hero devotes to local particularities of place and scene gives way to the presentation of a relatively continuous, tendentially homogenous, world space. For the expatriate in these novels, the chance that one might be temporarily and therapeutically released into an alien scene is greatly reduced because the stress falls so often instead on the inescapability of the cultural matrix of origin. These writers largely give up the modernist's project of mapping the new, choosing to move instead among relatively undifferentiated urban spaces strongly reminiscent of a home it turns out they have not left so far behind after all.

The same emphasis on the inescapability of the home culture's consumerism does not characterize all genre modifications of the last 10 years. On the contrary, the fullness of the narrator's immersion in villages of the developing world is a common theme in novels written by returned Peace Corps volunteers, and the accompanying project of building a stronger, more perceptive self is strongly endorsed in works such as Tony D'Souza's *Whiteman* (2006) and Robert Rosenberg's *This Is Not Civilization* (2005).

These examples suggest that the significance of the country/city axis is being reconsidered in the twenty-first-century novel. Whether or not the extra-fictional urban form itself has undergone a fundamental alteration (a case Saskia Sassen among others has made), in fiction of the new millennium, the city less often serves as the site where an inspirational shock of the new can arise from any turn around the corner; more often the city appears as a space where the shock of the familiar occurs.⁸ The contemporary literary expatriate quite often recognizes all too much while abroad and is therefore drawn back into the spaces and temporalities of the American home. The protagonists of the most recent expatriate fiction very often awake, Dorothy-like, from the Oz of European travel to embrace the newly valued home culture. Only when reconciled with “this small, good world behind us,” as Richard Russo puts it, is any future mobility possible (642).

In this first subset, then, twenty-first-century expatriate fiction deviates somewhat from its generic predecessors while also remaining largely within the parameters more harshly characterized in the 1960s by travel writer Paul Theroux. Observing cultural conflict in East and Central Africa, Theroux asserted that Tarzan was an expatriate and vice versa. The first casualty of a Tarzan-ish approach to expatriation, Theroux argues, is curiosity about one’s new environment. “When the expatriate feels he knows the country in which he is working, he loses interest,” and his own hopeless desires for personal distinction begin to supersede full-bodied investigation of and commitment to the politics of the location he newly inhabits, Theroux writes (14). When he composed this piece, Theroux had just recently been expelled from Malawi for political activity, and he is understandably relentless in his condemnation of other expatriates’ acquiescence to the conditions that support their mobility. Their quietude, he concludes, leads them finally to an essentially fascist accord with repressive state authority. No matter what politics the expatriate might espouse, Theroux would have us measure narratives of this condition by the unspoken relationships (especially racial ones) they allow to go unchallenged.

Recalling Theroux’s argument should not lead us to conclude that contemporary expatriate novels betray a latent fascism or an unshakable assumption of white privilege. After all, all the narratives of Americans abroad considered so far take their protagonists to majority-white locations, and their voyageurs are more likely to be off-white than the locals on whom they rely. If anything, these novels are as a group invested in reversing the racialized eye of the expatriate Theroux describes.

Instead, Theroux helps us notice the pronounced silence this first group of novels maintains about international politics. Even when some forms of state power are depicted (as in the police chases featured in Cameron's *Andorra* and Shteyngart's *Handbook*), curiosity about the motives, strategies, and circumstances of alternative modes of state power is noticeably absent. At most, these novels observe different tactics by which power is implemented, but these are usually reduced to cultural effects, rather than being related in any functional, interesting way to different institutions or histories. Novels treating Americans in quest of aesthetic experiences abroad are, as Robbins has rightly suggested, largely disinclined to investigate the political conditions that may have laid some groundwork for this purported cultural homogeneity. This is particularly striking since the same was not true in modernist expatriate fiction. Hemingway moved seamlessly from the aesthetic preoccupations of *The Sun Also Rises* to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, his markedly partisan novel of the Spanish Civil War. The twenty-first-century novelists' exclusion of state politics as a topic is a distinguishing feature, but we should understand this as a retreat from rather than a continuation of twentieth-century norms.

2. Expatriates in America

Before generalizing about expatriate fiction as a whole, however, we need to consider other versions of the genre, since fiction treating expatriates from elsewhere in the world as they encounter conditions in the US so often reveals a more direct approach to institutional authority. In part, this clarity results from the fact that quite a few of these novels are concerned with narrating responses to 9/11: Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008), Teddy Wayne's *Kapitoil* (2010), and Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006), most directly, and Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* (2009) and Susan Choi's *A Person of Interest* (2009) more indirectly. The concerns of these novels are at least collective and sometimes openly political from the outset. Also, all of these recent novels concerned with expatriates in the US are set in specific urban locations and devote considerable space to sociological description. All explore specific professional idioms in detail, generating plot twists and linguistic innovation out of arguably American variants of professional norms. The abandoned national homes of the expatriates tend not to shadow the protagonists' everyday movements as we might expect in fictions of exile or immigration; sometimes (as in Choi's novel), even the name of

the sending country is suppressed. Instead, a direct engagement with a new world in the narrative present takes center stage. From the parks and avenues of *Netherland's* Queens neighborhoods and *The Great World's* Bronx underpasses to Choi's Midwestern college town and Nell Freudenberger's private L. A. high schools in *The Dissident* (2006), the specific milieus that frame the expatriate's American experiences are precisely mapped. These expatriate fictions retain the home country as a site to which the protagonist may periodically return, but the prospect of such a return renders the American scene one scene among others; it is not a postmigration real that consigns all other scenes to a shadowy and mythic past. In short, fictions of expatriation in the US tend to engage in the American scene without universalizing its time-space or depopulating the present via repeated swerves through the memory of atrocity.

Rather than doubling up the novel's *topos*, the expatriate-in-America subgenre doubles up on protagonists. All of these novels involve paired heroes, one of whom observes the other's adventures. Typically, the narrating expatriate has a higher level of mobility or cultural capital than the second, more embedded figure, but this position of relative privilege is usually undercut as the narrative proceeds. This chiasmatic structure inverts the prototype for this sort of narration, *The Great Gatsby*. Where Nick Carraway begins, in the reported action of Fitzgerald's novel, as a relative outsider, admiring Gatsby's apparent success, he learns over the course of the narrative to take a position closer to the seat of power than Gatsby's elaborate charade would allow. In contemporary expatriate fiction, the same ironic logic pertains; these are still novels, to varying degrees, describing a nearby downfall. However, as a group, they express their distinctive geopolitical sensibility by narrating that downfall from within, as it were, and exporting an ultimately more heroic rise to an other who remains more opaque to narration. In these novels, in other words, it is not Fitzgerald's "rich" who are different from and more romantic than the novel's "you and me" but rather the expatriate "poor." It is the multitude's encounter with the institutions and locations of American power that provides the comic force of this subgenre, even though the story of the poor is typically held at arm's length.

This distancing of the heroism of the poor is all the more notable because the double protagonists are normally brothers. Colum McCann's narrative tracks one Irish sibling who follows his monkish other from Dublin to the Bronx in the months before the latter's death; Abraham Verghese's *Cutting for Stone* (2009) makes the brothers twins who differ in their responses to their

Anglo-Indian parents' expatriation in Ethiopia and then later the US. (In this group, Messud's *Emperor's Children* stands apart in placing an uncle/nephew relationship at the center, but it is also a more indirect treatment of the theme of expatriation anyhow, dealing as it does with domestic rural/urban mobility.) Nell Freudenberger's novel initially appears to be devoted to a single protagonist, the titular Chinese dissident, but the plot eventually turns on the reader's discovery that the supposed dissident who has taken a position as artist-in-residence in an upper middle-class L. A. high school is merely a stand-in for his more adventurous comrade-in-arms, a conceptual artist. Several other novels treat the fraternity metaphor more figuratively—comparing the expatriate experiences of fellow sportsmen (O'Neill's cricketers in *Netherland*), professional colleagues (Choi's fellow mathematicians and Wayne's financial analysts), or involuntary housemates (Jonathan Raban's homeowner and contractor in *Waxwings* [2003]). However the male protagonists are paired, they are always paired. This pattern is all the more notable for its uncommonness in tales of Americans abroad; the latter novels uniformly represent the American as being either alone or immersed in a larger group operating as a single hive-mind. The dyadic structure of the expatriate-in-the-US story simply does not characterize narratives of extra-national space, even though both variants stay with the modernist convention of depicting the traveler primarily as a masculine self-questioner (or the figure that Nina Baym calls the "beset" man longing for a space of freedom beyond the confines of a feminized convention).⁹

Fraternal rivalry, then, is one of the most besetting, bedeviling issues for these sojourners; in expats-in-America novels, one "brother" routinely undercuts the authority of the other, usually from below, as it were. McCann's more conventional brother comes to appreciate his ascetic sibling's devotion to prostitutes; Raban's professorial European exile admires the entrepreneurial energy and linguistic creativity of the gypsy contractor who renovates his home; Verghese's American-educated doctor is saved by his less formally trained twin's last-minute donation of a kidney; and O'Neill's Anglo-Dutch financier learns to situate his own personal dilemmas relative to the more intense struggle for survival that animates his Trinidadian cricket teammate, and so on.

In the final third of *Netherland*, O'Neill's narrator offers a particularly memorable instance of the way the less advantaged expatriate illuminates the world for the more advantaged. During an awkward Christmas holiday in southern India, Hans sees men walking in the forest and reflects: "I keep on seeing these men. I do not think of Chuck [the Trinidadian] as one of them, even

though, with his very dark skin, he could have been one of them. I think of Chuck as the Chuck I saw. But whenever I see these men I always end up seeing Chuck” (230). By coming to know Chuck as a fellow expatriate in New York, Hans learns to read alternative routes, histories, and faces; his map of the world expands to include these wavering perceptions of the mobility of others. It is not solely his own movements on which he need (or can) rely to image a geopolitical scene. Chuck had repeatedly drawn Hans’s attention to the old Dutch presence in New York, but the real “nether” regions of the novel turn out not to be the history of Europeans but rather Chuck’s bare brown cricketing fields.

In the final passages of the novel, Hans magnifies images of this new Ground Zero, with the help of Google Maps before swerving out to the planetary level where “a human’s movement is a barely intelligible thing” and “the USA as such is nowhere to be seen” (252). The narrator’s detour into the other man’s “netherland” becomes a necessary gathering of momentum that allows him to propel himself out into the putatively postnational, cosmopolitan space to which his own force alone seemed unlikely to bring him. As their titles alone indicate, similar metaphors of triangulated flight are crucial to *Let the Great World Spin* and *Waxwings* as well, and the transnational, multicentered institutions of empire, the law, capital, and humanist medical ethics create similar effects in the other novels in this group as well. Together, the expats-in-the-US novels use a socially advantaged European narrator to collect reflections of the livelier dramas surrounding protagonists from the developing world before absorbing both into a new synthesis at the level of the technologically mediated global image.

In these resolutely concrete narratives of culture conflict, however, the voice of the “other”/“nether” migrant is consistently held at a distance from the center of narration. Although the nether twin is sometimes simply stalled institutionally through visa problems (as in Freudenberg, Verghese, Raban, and Wayne), just as often the narrator cannot reach him because he is dead (O’Neill, McCann, Messud, and differently Choi). On the one hand, this kind of distance might signal a cautionary impulse in the expatriate novel, a desire to resist any pull toward excessively utopian sensibilities, a desire to temper any romanticization of the poor with political skepticism. On the other hand, we might less charitably understand this tendency as an attempt to steal some reflected glory from the purported authenticity of the third world subject while containing the potentially disturbing political effects of genuine solidarity. That is, even while attending to the

incompleteness of single-voiced narratives of expatriation, these novels may be extinguishing some of their own glimmers of a new proto-global subject by casting that figure into the past—retrojecting him in order to affirm the safer figure of the jaded late-modern skeptic as the only viable actor in the present.

This latter, less charitable reading is reinforced by this group's consistent use of irresolute endings. From O'Neill's final family Ferris wheel ride to Raban's imagist discovery of birds in flight and Verghese's protagonist's recognition of his father's voice on the long-distance line, these novels tend to use familial reconciliations to produce figurative rather than active closure. After explaining the necessary deaths of the poorer twin, they pull their modestly defeated protagonists back into their various spheres of professional competence, strongly suggesting that apparently inescapable, irresolvable public conflicts can in the end only be recognized, not acted upon, and that the relatively more manageable sphere of bourgeois family life is finally the only manageable playing field. In a reversal of Sergei Eisenstein's charge to the artist, they "distract audiences" from "a current conflict" rather than exacerbating it (69). They close with a renewal of their commitment to the scene and worldview of domestic realism, rather than even more fully unsettling modernist genre expectations with imported syntactic elements. Despite their use of politically charged twin protagonists and their stronger commitment to mapping the present, in other words, works in this second cluster of expatriate writings also reveal some (but not all) of the generic limits to a world vision evident in the narrative of the American abroad.

3. The New Nomads

The same cannot be said of the more exploratory works in the third group of expatriate writings. These fictions of the perpetual expatriate or stateless nomad are often narrated from the point of view of disaffected diplomats. In this regard, one of their prototypes must certainly be Graham Greene's only nominally English narrator in *The Quiet American* (1955). Like Greene's detached, deracinated observer of American naiveté, the administrator/spy/neutral observer at the heart of *The Great Fire* (2004), Shirley Hazzard's complicated novel of English and Australian citizens adrift in post-1945 Asia, and the recently released backpacking ex-con at the heart of Mark Jacobs's Bolivian novel *The Stone Cowboy* (1997) exude a sort of numbly exhausted placelessness, as do the protagonists in several of Jacobs's subsequent international

thrillers. It is not uncommon for the new nomads' narrative structure to replicate this psychological decentering. Both Chang-rae Lee's *The Surrendered* and Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel* (2010), for example, explore the shattered consciousnesses of a network of characters whose lives have been altered by war in East Asia by means of a series of nested narratives; individual characters reflect on their own moments of surrender to military, erotic, and/or theological forces beyond them, and the novels themselves link these sections to one another by means of a logic unconstrained by place, family, or plotted causality. Resisting the Faulknerian drive toward a deep and intensely local historical causality that is only partially, at best, recognized by interlocking narrators, Lee's novel explores institutional locations—empty storefronts, low-rent apartments, cars, and hotels—made meaningful only by the geopolitical narrative linking their inhabitants, and Yamashita repeatedly probes the ideological as well as interpersonal and institutional worlds necessary to tell the story of a single block in San Francisco's Chinatown during the 1960s and 70s. In a brief discussion of David Mitchell's narrative experiments, Rita Barnard describes the point of view experienced in all these decentered narratives as a "multiple, mobile optic, both internal and external to its successive narrators" (214). Barnard associates this point of view with a surveillance satellite tracking a multipolar crisis and opposes it to the famous sense of the print-culture national simultaneity that Benedict Anderson so influentially described.

Another, less technologically coded of the mobile sensibility of the new nomad appears in Jane Alison's *Natives and Exotics* (2005). With a more Woolfian lightness of tone, Alison describes the life of a stepchild of an American diplomat posted in Central America during the 1980s. This character launches a geo-botanical consciousness that takes native and exotic plant species as a counterpoint for human migrations underwritten by the imperial relations that link Scotland, the Azores, and Australia. In Alison's novel, the diplomat's daughter has no more possibility of repatriating to a home that she never knew than does an orange produced by grafting. Alison describes new human and plant species that are native to nowhere and unsettle systems of classification that rely on either an eco-conscious purging of exotics or their market-oriented import.

Neither Alison's loosely Woolfian qualities nor her turn to botanical metaphors is unique in contemporary fiction. Michael Cunningham most clearly and Salvatore Scibona more indirectly have both helped to revive appreciation for some of Woolf's narrative tactics (in *The Hours* [1998] and *The End* [2008], respectively). And botany arguably comes second only to a preoccupation with

entering the mental world of the financier as an indicator of contemporaneity in twenty-first-century American literature. Capital and ecology quite frequently serve as images of each other in recent novels, figuring something that is either a naturalized market or a marketized nature as the basis for contemporary cultural flows. Viken Berberian's *Das Kapital* (2007) brings these figures together most pointedly, through a tripartite plot concerned with Cypriot agriculture and short selling in the international paper market, but we might also recall Ruth Ozeki's denaturalization of female physical development in *My Year of Meats* (1999) and Andrea Barrett's explorations of the global distribution of expertise in natural history in *Servants of the Map* (2003), as well as other recent examples such as Leslie Marmon Silko's exploration of biopiracy in *Gardens of the Dunes* (1999).

Although the consequences of rethinking global flows along the lines of this triangular field (nature–culture–capital) are considerable, to comprehend fully the specific effects that these treatments of nomadic mobility have had on genre, we should turn in some detail to a final and more literal adaptation of the expatriate novel: Aleksandar Hemon's *Nowhere Man* (2004). Hemon's carefully composed narrative builds up the world of its title character, Jozef Pronek, by triangulating among Chicago, Sarajevo, and Kiev, before finally shifting the scene to a version of Shanghai that turns out to assume qualities of all the former locations. Hemon's spatial orientation, in other words, is resolutely inter-urban rather than international in this novel because he repudiates the premises of national narratives. Throughout his travels, Pronek identifies himself as a Sarajevan, rather than a Bosnian—using the latter designator only when it offers a mild improvement over even cruder labels. “I am complicated,” he responds when a potential employer asks whether he is a Serb or a Muslim; his stomach heaving feeling entrapped, he adds, “You can say I am the Bosnian” (146). The merely provisional nature of this acceptance of a larger group identity is also foregrounded in an earlier passage when Pronek encounters, of all people, President George H. W. Bush and is left “bedazzled by the uncanniness” of the American's alien expressions of nationalism (106). A taste for nationalism is not itself a national characteristic, however; Hemon achieves a very similar effect in any number of passages exploring the distasteful falseness of a range ethnic or national generalities—whether in the form of Serbian nostalgia for *pravoslav* solidarity or strategically performed Russian anthems.

In short, even before his migration to Chicago and immersion in the pan-ethnic stew of English-language learners, Hemon's Pronek is already ambivalent about widely dispersed narratives of

national belonging. His worldly expatriation precedes his geographical mobility by several steps. Rather than a locational shift marking a his detachment from a home culture or allowing an immersion into a potentially restorative experience of a new aesthetic designed to cure him of a rootless modern anomie, Pronek's narrative of expatriation stresses the primary status of anti- or simply a-nationalism. In Hemon's novel, a dissociated nomadism begins at home and extends to all levels of identity. Pronek reinvents himself several times before migration—first as John Lennon in his high school Beatles tribute band and later as Blind Jozef Pronek, during his blues phase—and this process continues in Chicago when he canvases for Greenpeace, introducing himself as his childhood friend “Mirza from Bosnia,” “Sergei Katastrofenko from Ukraine,” “Jukka Smirdiprdiuskas from Estonia,” “John from Liverpool” (once again), “Nobody,” “Phillip from Luxembourg,” “Joseph from Snitzland” and even the generic “Someone Else” (179–80). Formed in youth by his own knowingly ersatz versions of musical celebrity and first asserting himself in performances designed to disrupt the more banal official national music culture of home and school, Jozef is a nowhere man from the outset, expatriated early and often—not through crisis but simply as a developmental phase.

Despite the centrality of this antinational theme and the recurring interest in an apparently global popular music culture, Hemon's narrative does not drift toward the relativistic narcissism that Robbins associates with the American expatriate abroad, recognizing only variants of a dully familiar urban commercialism everywhere he travels. Instead, *Nowhere Man* fuses Pronek's complicated detachment from other people's misperceptions of nationality to a special adaptation of the fraternal motif we observed in the expatriates-in-America subgenre. The novel first introduces Pronek from the point of view of a childhood associate who encounters him by chance at an ESL center. Observing one of the more advanced classes, this unnamed narrator hears Jozef “reading in a very low voice, as if confessing,” a newspaper passage describing the profound intimacy experienced by the conjoined twins Ronnie and Donnie; “Donnie is me, and I am Donnie,” Jozef mumbles (23). Bringing the narrator's doubling of Jozef into the open, this passage anchors Jozef's multiple selves in a logic of two-ness. Our first introduction to Jozef, then, anticipates the doubling that resolves his plotline. As *Nowhere Man* winds down, Jozef moves toward a more comfortable, romantically coupled state and replaces his retroactively embarrassing Beatles songs with a rendition of *sevdalinka*, a “Bosnian blues” that is “so sad that it makes you free” (210). Even after he fuses his American

and European selves through song, a painful abyss surrounding Jozef's "real me" still persists, and the narrative does leave Jozef dizzy with "violent adrenaline," claiming his own place by screaming "Here! Here!" However, this frenzy is fairly quickly contained; its world is shifting, mobile but tolerable. In the crisis scene, Jozef's narrating double manages the scene by speaking to him in the first person—first in Bosnian and then in English: "Calm down, I'm telling him, everything will fall into place" (221). A twinning not of rich and poor or white and brown brothers, then, but rather a therapeutic synthesis that can contain a multitude of past and future selves organizes Hemon's novel. The importance of this device is underscored by the peculiar final section.

In "Nowhere Man," the seventh part of *Nowhere Man*, the unnamed narrator of the opening section—a voice close to the disembodied presence that comforts Jozef during his crisis but also borrowing details very similar to those found in Jozef's story—again takes the helm. On a honeymoon in Shanghai, this narrator intently reads a biography of a Ukrainian spy known as Evgenij Pick, Joseph Pronek, Dr. Montaigne, and Evenij Mihailovich Kojevnikoff, among other pseudonyms. In a swirl of metafictional references culminating in a self-deprecating description of Pick's associate "Alex Hemmon, a former member of the Purple Gang in Detroit, a hit man who has to kill somebody every time he gets drunk (which he does habitually), and who moonlights as a professional trombonist" (233), Hemon renews his earlier emphasis on Pronek's multiple identities, resolving them again in the figure of the physically conjoined twin. In the novel's final image, the unnamed narrator absorbs all of these variations into himself, even going so far as to swallow Pronek's mouse motif: "It is right inside me now, clawing at the walls of my chest, trying to get out" (242). As in the novel's third section, when a Ukrainian-American roommate, closely observes Jozef and falls in love with him, the narrator and his subject become intimately identified at several levels. Rather than preserving the distance between brothers so vital to narrative ironies of the expatriate-in-America novel, *Nowhere Man* collapses distance in favor of an unusually intimate fraternal bond maintained in full knowledge of the dispersed, multistranded, postnational universe its subjects inhabit. This traveling fraternity keeps various world locations and inter-urban networks alive, even as it refuses to celebrate its own or other people's nationalist nostalgia.

In the end, then, when considered in light of its many related companion texts, Hemon's *Nowhere Man* fully illustrates some of the generic mutations the twenty-first-century expatriate

novel has undergone and suggests its movement toward a form we might plausibly call the world novel. The chronotope of this emergent genre is markedly different from the jigsaw puzzle tiles of modernist contributions to the expatriate genre, however criss-crossed those gaps between national pieces might be by an ambivalent Jamesian narrator. In the most recent versions of the expatriate novel, we find instead a recurring interest in multinational doubles and an overlapping simultaneity of spaces and selves that muddies the shiny images of American consumer culture. In place of the modernist expatriate's sometimes ecstatic sense of release from the confines of the home culture, we often find in the twenty-first-century novel an evacuated nostalgia that invokes while refusing sentimentality about origins. Finally, the central discovery of the contemporary expatriate narrative less often turns on the narrator's newly formed and aestheticized self than on an intensified perception of an other with whom he retains some close identification. The contemporary expatriate novel describes a world of conflict, antagonism, and affection—a world in which space is politically marked, even if a specific political ideology is rarely affirmed.

In short, in numerous instances, twenty-first-century fiction with expatriate themes imagines specific non-American locations as well as paths toward them without resort to an earlier generation's clichés about atrocity and third world wretchedness. This fiction inhabits its own distinctive world. Its expatriates may occasionally allude to the immigrant's conventionally more celebratory narrative or the do-gooder's uplift ambitions, but by and large the expatriate novel of the twenty-first century refuses the early and mid-twentieth-century American story of the heroic rise. The hero of the twenty-first-century expatriate novel typically turns out to be not the self-made man but rather something more like Marcuse's one-dimensional man—a subject occupying an institutional non-space in which romantic love or family life partially, but never entirely, compensates for a profound sense of vulnerability. The subject of this world yearns for a fraternity it does not fully know how to enjoy, because this hero remains so intensely aware of the enormous disparities in power, funds, access to care, language, and life chances that characterize the international scene. The resulting narratives of partially acknowledged links and chance connections may not be political novels in the most literal sense; these novels rarely describe ideological struggle or conversion outright. Yet they are arguably proto-political in their recognition of the formative effects of the global inequities on travel and the mobile subject. In these mutations of the expatriate

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novel, then, the geopolitical consciousness of the world novel begins to show its face. This new form reveals a distinctive spatial, social, narrative, and ethico-political orientation, significantly different from its twentieth-century predecessors. These observable generic mutations suggest that fiction grappling with the pragmatics of global mobility and inequality has begun to display array of effects whose significance we can now begin to measure.

Notes

1. Some refuse this opposition between great American novel discourse and globalism—notably Lawrence Buell. See his advancement of *Moby-Dick* as a candidate for the American novel as world novel in “The Unkillable Dream of the Great American Novel: *Moby-Dick* as Test Case,” *American Literary History* 20.1–2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 132–55.
2. These are some of the features of the world novel identified by, among others, Rita Barnard, “Fictions of the Global,” *Novel* 42.2 (2009): 207–15; Vilashini Coopan, *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing* (2009); and Michael Valdez Moses, *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture* (1995).
3. See Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.* (2007); Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (2005); Malcolm Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury* (1987); Guy Reynolds, *Apostles of Modernity: American Writers in the Age of Development* (2008); Tim Brennan, *At Home in the World* (1997).
4. See Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (2004), 51–53.
5. See Rick Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” *Cinema Journal* 23.3 (Spring 1984): 6–18.
6. Walter Benn Michaels argues for the revival of the novel of ideology as opposed to the novel of identity in *The Shape of the Signifier* (2006).
7. See Caroline Hamilton, *One Man Zeitgeist: Dave Eggers, Publishing and Publicity* (2010).
8. See Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (1991).
9. See Nina Baym, “Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors,” *American Quarterly* 33.2 (Summer 1981): 123–39.

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