

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Sneja Gunew, *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-Cosmopolitan Mediators* (Anthem Press, 2017)

The cosmopolitan desire to transcend national borders and to create a global community remains akin to state policies of multiculturalism which former settler colonies such as Australia and Canada developed to preserve and embrace ethnic differences. However, just as the former has been challenged in recent years because of its inherent Eurocentrism and the latter as having a potential counteractive effect of eliminating differences, both terms are now under new scholarly investigations as in Sneja Gunew's *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-Cosmopolitan Mediators*.

In the acknowledgements, therefore, at the very beginning, Gunew identifies two tasks carried out in the book: one is to continue with her career-long efforts to unveil alternatives to monolithic cultural entities as products of national cultures; the other is to juxtapose, as well as to differentiate between, Australia and Canada in this process. A decade away from her earlier ground-breaking comparative work on multiculturalism, *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*, this new work not only reinvestigates multiculturalism against different social and historical contexts, focusing particularly on its Australian and Canadian ramifications, but also puts forward the idea of post-multiculturalism, echoing fittingly current neo-cosmopolitan debates over a previous 'blindness concerning many groups, histories and geopolitical areas that were overlooked in the past and that need to be brought to the center of our culture criticism' (3). Adopting Lyotard's concept of 'post' as 'future anterior' (back to the future), Gunew argues that the missing elements in the old dynamics of state multiculturalism offer possibilities for alternatives. Nation-states and globalisation fail to fully connect us to the world, whereas the cosmopolitan dimension (most notably the element of multilingualism) in the works of post-multicultural writers 'hinge[s]' national cultures and globalisation. By drawing eclectic examples from post-multicultural and Indigenous writers in settler colonies including Canada and Australia, together with transnational writers across diasporas from Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, China and India, Gunew contends that post-multicultural writers (and artists) are figures who 'offer a cosmopolitan mediation and translation between the nation-state and the planetary' (11).

Besides the six gracefully organised body chapters, *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-Cosmopolitan Mediators* is bookended by the introduction ('The World at Home: Post-multicultural Writers as Neo-cosmopolitan Mediators') and conclusion chapters ('Back to the Future and the Immanent Cosmopolitanism of Post-Multicultural Writers') presenting both in title and in content the main argument of the book. Through a crisp and pointed delineation of the massive displacement of refugees and asylum seekers, the closed European borders, and a re-emerging binary between West and non-West (Islam) in the past decade, Gunew argues for the need to render a new framework for literary and cultural studies which invites people to think in 'planetary' instead of 'global' terms. More specifically, she identifies the need for moving beyond the monolingual paradigm dominating Anglophone literary studies.

Book reviews: *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-Cosmopolitan Mediators* by Sneja Gunew. Yingjie M. Cheng.

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Chapter One, 'Who Counts as Human within (European) Modernity?' starts with unfastening the global reach of cosmopolitanism by asking a significant question, 'who counts as European?' First looking at outlier figures from the English canon such as Frankenstein's Creature and Bram Stoker's Count Dracula and then focusing on Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe* from contemporary post-multicultural writing, Gunew gives textual examples of different manifestations of Europe in varied imagined geographies and temporalities. Meanwhile, projecting the same question onto Australian and Canadian cultural and social canvases, Gunew refers to 'European' as a 'Floating Signifier' that relies upon specific historical and colonial situations for a definition. Through her literary and cultural interrogations of the word 'Europe', Gunew makes it very clear that it is valuable to 'break down the global reach of cosmopolitanism so that it signals its historical contingencies, internal differences and discrepant modernities' (31).

In the second chapter, 'Vernacular Cosmopolitans', the author borrows from Paul Gilroy's conceptualisation of the stranger and uses the threefold structure of 'imagining the stranger', 'imagining oneself as stranger', and 'being interpellated as stranger in the place one calls home' to first help examine European cosmopolitanism via some recent fictions that include the central and eastern margins of Europe. She then looks at 'Eur/Asian' cosmopolitanism by drawing on the works of several diasporic 'Eur/Asian' artists. Writers and artists from these groups, defined as vernacular cosmopolitans, construct their voluntary 'estrangement from one's own culture identified as one of the necessary symptoms or attributes of the new cosmopolitanism' (52).

Starting with a review of current diaspora criticism, the third chapter, 'The Serial Accommodation of Diaspora Writings', holds that diaspora subjects equal either post-multicultural writers or transnational cosmopolitan writers. Taking the textual examples from three women writers based in Canada and Australia respectively who mediate their relationships to India, Gunew uncovers in particular complexities of the serial accommodations of diasporic women writers. Their writings demonstrate 'new and flexible subjectivities' (69) which serve as our optimal existence within uneven global mobilities. A quick reference in this chapter to the significance of Indigenous groups in unsettling postcolonial myths of nationalism anticipates a focused discussion in Chapter Four, 'Indigenous Cosmopolitanism: The Claims of Time'. Gunew holds that the only groups under the circumstance of globalisation who could currently occupy the universal are those who are ruthlessly excluded. Aboriginal people, for example, have their own cosmology in which everything is animated. They are primarily interested in the supposedly hyper-local which refers to specific tribal areas, termed also as their immediate "countries". Indigenous cosmopolitanism facilitates a planetary mode of thinking as well as a neo-cosmopolitan debate over post-humanism. Through her rich reading of works by indigenous writers such as Kim Scott, Alexis Wright, and Canadian Thomson Highway, Gunew extols Indigenous Cosmopolitanism as a temporal and spatial alternative to the conventional rendering of cosmopolitanism.

Continuing with her challenge to the inherent Eurocentrism of cosmopolitanism by looking into global English, Gunew in the next chapter, 'The Cosmopolitanism in/of Language: English

Performativity’, discusses different linguistically enunciative positions as reflected in novels from both China and the Chinese diaspora. Either doing cultural translations in their works to a globalised readership or translating between a Chinese localism and the particular context of an Australian readership, these writers show a ‘thematic interest in English as a path to an alternate functioning of globalization’ (95). Reflecting further upon the effects on languages and their speakers produced by globalised mobility, Chapter Six, ‘Acoustic Cosmopolitanism: Echoes of Multilingualism’ examines oral dimensions of multiculturalism in Australia. The ‘accents’ from other languages, disrupting the authority of English and colonial monolingualism, ‘reinstates a yearning for homogenous origins’ (97). This yearning represents a cosmopolitical dimension that indicates connections to the world and therefore remains less constrained by homo-hegemonies engendered by monolingual ideologies.

Restating in the conclusion chapter her invocation of Lyotard’s logic of the ‘post’ and what is previously forgotten in multicultural and cosmopolitan debates, Gunew recaps the efforts made by writers and scholars since the 1980s to set up multicultural literary studies in Australia. As she builds her conclusion largely upon the Australian context as compared to the more multilingually diverse situation in Canada, the book as a whole has a pointed revelation of the ‘more sporadic and ad hoc’ studies in Australia over ‘multicultural’ writers and calls for a continuous and more targeted scholarly discussion on the topic.

In *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-Cosmopolitan Mediators*, Sneja Gunew proposes a cosmopolitan reading pedagogy, which, although she herself admits to be ‘stammering’, offers a new literary and cultural critical approach. Gunew also traces her own migrant and diasporic experience, using her first-hand perception to give further voice to (post-)multicultural and (neo-) cosmopolitan discussions. Sneja Gunew’s well-established expertise in multicultural literature and the comparative standing and approach she takes in her research renders this monograph a scholarly production which is both versatile and inventive. Her proposal of the term ‘post-multicultural’ in literary and cultural arenas couples dexterously with current neo-cosmopolitan debates and thus creates ‘a new cultural politics and ethics’ (3) that meet contemporary challenges.

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