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Author(s)	Angelia Poon Mui Cheng
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Being in the World: Literary Practice and Pedagogy in Global Times

Angelia Poon Mui Cheng

Abstract: This article examines the implications of recent developments in postcolonial theory and globalization studies for literary pedagogy. I argue for a critical cosmopolitan pedagogy that nourishes the creation of alternative imaginaries and uses literature to teach students to engage more fully with the world and provide two examples of how this might be enacted. The first centers on the idea that, in a globalized world, literary pedagogy cannot avoid dealing with texts translated into English from other languages. Using the global, multicultural city-state of Singapore as a case in point, I argue that teaching translated texts can provide minority perspectives erased by official history and be a strategic way of interrogating the hegemony of the Anglophone segment of the population and, historically, the English-educated class. The second example discusses Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and suggests pedagogical approaches that help the text in its work of estranging the reader. Ultimately, a literary pedagogy that takes the question of perspective seriously can help readers and students resist neoliberal capitalism's emphasis on the management of the self in the service of markets in favor of a more politicized global subject fully committed to engaging the world.

Keywords: literary pedagogy, teaching translated texts, globalization and education

What is the place of English literature and literature education in this conjunctural moment of globalization, neoliberalism, and powerful market forces? How do we as literature educators convince students that

literature is not marginal but central to living the good (i.e. ethical) life in global times and thus they should read this novel or that poem? These are questions that teachers of English literature find increasingly impossible to ignore. In this article, I make the ethical case for literary literacy and consider its crucial pedagogical implications. Drawing upon developments in postcolonial studies and the ways in which the field has sought to position itself to more trenchantly critique globalization, I argue for a critical cosmopolitan pedagogy that nourishes the creation of alternative imaginaries and uses literature to teach students to engage more fully with the world. The specificities of my location in Singapore undergird my investment in and approach to the questions above. As an island, nation, and global city, Singapore has—like many other places around the world—plugged itself wholeheartedly into economic globalization, connective technologies, and information and labor flows. State-driven neoliberalism and an aggressive immigration policy that saw the country's population expand by thirty percent in ten years are some of Singapore's defining features in the new millennium. Given these circumstances, it is little wonder that the educational challenges of preparing students to negotiate and navigate cultural differences, as well as become critical, ethical, responsible, and politically aware national and world subjects, are particularly acute.

After establishing some of the essential theoretical coordinates for literary pedagogy in the contemporary moment, I provide two examples of how a critical cosmopolitan pedagogy might be enacted. In the first case, I argue for the use of translated texts in the English literature classroom, specifically Singaporean literature translated into English from its original Malay, to encourage students to think critically about the constitution of racial otherness and the organization of multiculturalism within the Singaporean national space. Reading Malay literary texts in translation affords students a different perspective and structure of feeling which challenge the received narrative of the nation's history. In the second example, I suggest that teaching students to analyze the deft use of narrative perspective in contemporary literary texts can support the epistemological and ontological demands of critical cosmopolitanism. I focus on Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) to

explore the ways in which teachers can aid the text in its work of destabilizing and disorienting the reader so as to provoke greater self-reflection on one's engagement with Otherness and one's place in the world.

I. Toward a Critical Cosmopolitan Pedagogy in Literature

The stark inequalities of globalization, the social problems created by mass flows of migrants and labor, class polarization, climate change, the degradation of the planet, and the continued presence of wars fuelled by ethnic, religious, and ultra-nationalist tensions are just some of the pressing problems of our global moment that call for an urgent epistemic break with business as usual in education. Desperate times call for critical pedagogies. In this climate, the idea of cosmopolitanism as an ideal ethical stance has proven especially compelling for both literary criticism and literary pedagogy. To be a citizen of the world means adopting a stance inclined toward openness and difference and maintaining a sense of obligation and moral responsibility to fellow human beings, regardless of national borders. Cosmopolitanism abjures parochialism and narrowness. Ulf Hannerz defines cosmopolitanism as a disposition, "a willingness to engage with the Other," and "an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences" (239). Ulrich Beck describes what cosmopolitanism might mean in everyday terms and identifies cosmopolitan competence as involving both "situating and relativizing one's own form of life within other horizons of possibility" and "the capacity to see oneself from the perspective of cultural others and to give this practical effect in one's own experience through the exercise of boundary-transcending imagination" (89). The reflexivity and self-relativization that Beck singles out are the elements that Gerard Delanty implicitly celebrates when he notes how the potential for self-transformation distinguishes cosmopolitanism from globalization and transnationalism. He writes:

Without a transformation in self-understanding it does not make much sense to speak of cosmopolitanism. Thus for this reason cosmopolitanism is not a simple matter of diversity or transnational movement. Cosmopolitanism concerns self-

problematization and while diversity will, by the pluralizing nature of cosmopolitanism, be inevitable, the reflexive and critical self-understanding of cosmopolitanism cannot be neglected. (Delanty 12–13)

To be sure, cosmopolitanism has received its fair share of pointed and valid criticism. Perhaps the most obvious charge against cosmopolitanism is its elitism. Cosmopolitanism has traditionally connoted an ease of mobility and aesthetic detachment embodied by cultural elites and a jet-setting, wealthy transnational class. Against this stands the figure of the stateless refugee uprooted against his or her will, “the Other of the cosmopolitan” whom Simon Gikandi understands as “forced to develop an alternative narrative of global cultural flows, functioning in a third zone between metropolis and ex-colony, producing and reproducing localities in the centres of metropolitan culture itself” (26). The refugee’s narrative, always too easily silenced, haunts the edges of any celebratory discourse of cosmopolitanism that complacently accepts border-crossing, cultural hybridity, fluidity, and displacement as (romantically) desirable notions. The presence of the refugee is thus a stark reminder that a kind of cosmo-politics is always at play in the implicit designation of cosmopolitan and non-cosmopolitan.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the liberal cosmopolitanism associated with Kwame Anthony Appiah’s work on “rooted cosmopolitanism” and the “cosmopolitan patriot” has proven a popular choice among scholars and educators. The idea of a rooted cosmopolitanism is certainly attractive, not least to a place like Singapore where citizens are regularly exhorted to embrace economic globalization and its “realities” while staying faithful to national obligations. Resistance is futile; the Singapore government presents this approach as the only way for the country to be both a global city and a territorial nation. However, Appiah has been criticized for presenting a too-seamless impression of the relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Bruce Robbins, for example, views such a cosmopolitanism as lacking a political edge and an activist dimension that would involve global solidarities; he chides Appiah for finessing the

“uncomfortable possibility that one may at some point (for example, in wartime) have to choose one set of obligations over the other” (59).

Cosmopolitanism entails a relationship between self and Other, and the problem that Robert Young identifies in the use of the concept of the Other in postcolonial theory also plagues cosmopolitan theory. In his essay “Postcolonial Remains,” Young makes a case for the conceptual re-orientation of postcolonial scholarship and theory by problematizing postcolonial criticism’s appropriation of the Other over the last few decades. He notes, in particular, how the category of the “Other” has grown limited and unyielding and writes that “[n]o one is so different that their very difference makes them unknowable. Othering was a colonial strategy of exclusion; for the postcolonial, there are only other human beings” (39). The danger, Young suggests, is that the use of the Other as an analytical tool has become fossilized and ultimately abets an inordinately skeptical epistemology that presumes a subject’s inability to know or understand someone from another culture as well as the impossibility of meaningful dialogue between different cultures and people. As a critical and ethical project, cosmopolitanism and any pedagogy derived from it must therefore avoid reifying the Other as fundamentally alien and incommensurable. Instead, it must actively seek out similarities and commonalities between self and Other while also staying alert to differences.

Despite the many valid criticisms and qualifications that have been levelled at cosmopolitanism, however, it remains a powerful ethic and ideal suitable for framing literary study and education. Its gesture toward openness rather than narrowness and provincialism parallels the general thrust of education, particularly humanistic education, which encourages expansion of knowledge and self-transformation in connection with the world and Others. A critical cosmopolitan pedagogy is one that incorporates these criticisms as part of its self-reflection; such a pedagogy insists that our students, who occupy a range of subject positions from the privileged globe-trotting subject to Gikandi’s figure of the refugee, be part of the world as ethical and thinking subjects who contribute meaningfully to humanity and history.

With critical cosmopolitanism, how we imagine the world is also very much at stake. The distinction between “the world” and “the globe” is worth maintaining and elucidating. The globe envisioned by conventional celebratory versions of globalization that revel in time-space compression, a 24/7 labor force, flexible markets and business climates, and the unrestricted flow of global capital connotes fluidity and control. In his critical meditation on this concept of the globe, Peter Hulme remarks that it represents perfection and complete sphericity. It encourages the all-seeing “Apollonian eye” (51), a totalizing vantage point of imperialist control. In light of the inequalities and uneven power relations that are a structural feature of globalization and which suppress alternative epistemologies, languages, horizons of knowledge, and, ultimately, ways of being, we must take seriously Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s recommendation that we “supplemen[t] globalization by providing a world” (473). The world implied by critical cosmopolitanism suggests the importance of texture and crenellation and may be pitted against the image of the smooth globe; critical cosmopolitan pedagogy thus insists that we pay attention to the divisions, borders, and polarities that striate the planet. Walter D. Mignolo’s notion of “border thinking” is useful in this regard because it asserts the constitutive and inextricable relationship between modernity and coloniality and presents a wider world—one that has been restricted and diminished by Eurocentrism—by opening the gates to subalternized knowledges, views, ideas, and tongues. Mignolo counters prevailing notions of globalization, which promote homogeneity and universalism, with the notion of “global diversity,” which “leads to a desire and a project of conviviality and hospitality beyond the frontiers established by universalism, purity, and monolingualism—a totality that’s not a *uni-verse* but a *global di-verse*” (246; emphasis in original). Global diversity reconceives the world in terms of plurality and multiple centers.

Fortuitously and significantly, the world implied by a critical cosmopolitanism finds resonance with foundational postcolonial theorist Edward Said’s notion about the worldliness of a text. Writing as early as the 1970s against the excessive textualism of literary theory in the American academy, Said argued for a secular critical praxis and

consciousness rooted in a basic understanding of the text as worldly: “The point is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society—in short, they are in the world and hence worldly” (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 35). He suggests that we must grapple with the circumstantial reality of the text and its specific language and rhetoric, which are embedded in a particular historical moment, while also recognizing our situatedness and (limited) horizons as readers, critics, and, we may add, teachers. By insisting on the worldliness of the literary text, Said expresses an investment in the operations of power, interests, and positions. He attempts to demolish the ivory tower and blur the lines between academic, scholar, activist, and citizen. Thus he also writes:

Yes, we need to keep coming back to the words and structures in the books we read, but, just as these words were themselves taken by the poet from the world and evoked from out of silence in the forceful ways without which no creation is possible, readers must also extend their readings out into the various worlds each of us resides in. (*Humanism and Democratic Criticism* 76)

In this way, Said makes reading as much a political activity as writing.

In the interest of extending our readings out into the world as Said suggests, I argue that one of the principal reasons for advocating a critical cosmopolitan pedagogy is that it can act as a foil to neoliberal capitalism and its market logic. We have witnessed an aggressive expansion and encroachment of neoliberal discourse with its emphasis on profits, consumerism, market reasoning, and branding into many domains of life, including schools, universities, and the arts. Neoliberalism emphasizes the management and reinvention of the self in the service of markets and may thus be understood as “[constructing] individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating” (Gill 443). In the global corporate university, education is increasingly promoted in terms of rendering students more competitive, entrepreneurial, and enterprising. As a result, literature tends to be ignored or, at best, commandeered as part of a curricular emphasis on creativity and

thinking outside the box. A pedagogy aimed at cultivating critical cosmopolitan subjects capable of developing ethical alternatives to neoliberal verities seems more urgent than ever before. Thus, Robert Spencer's argument in relation to cosmopolitan criticism and postcolonial literature is also relevant to a critical cosmopolitan pedagogy: "The theory of cosmopolitan criticism should demonstrate how reading postcolonial literature can engender the critical consciousness and the global solidarities that are required to imagine, inaugurate and sustain cosmopolitan political arrangements" (37). Spencer contends that postcolonial criticism is valuable not just because it provides critiques but because it can articulate utopian visions or alternatives to current and unjust social arrangements. Thus rather than viewing the nation-state as irrelevant, for example, critical cosmopolitanism must develop a critical relationship with the nation, understand how it can promote parochialism, ethnocentrism, and wars, and recognize its vital role in providing protection for its citizens and enabling collective cultural expression. We need not be ideologically wedded to the nation's disappearance even as we remain alert to the possibility of alternative groupings and collectivities. It is only by being cognizant and mindful of the claims of the national and the local that a critical cosmopolitanism can have transformative and emancipatory potential.

II. Seeing with a Different Tongue

For literature teachers, one of the primary challenges posed by a critical cosmopolitan pedagogy is ensuring that it is enacted in everyday classrooms in meaningful and accretive ways. In the case of Singapore, I suggest that literary texts translated into English from the country's other official languages—Malay, Chinese, and Tamil—constitute a valuable resource we can draw on to alter students' sense of the nation and the world. When Singapore achieved independence in 1965, English was made the first language although a bilingual education policy ensured that the various racial groups would also learn their respective "mother tongue" languages. Thus Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil became second languages. The postcolonial state's language policies have established rigid borders between the four languages and the corresponding

literatures, with each discrete language/literature spawning its own distinct writers and scholars. Mignolo's notion of "linguaging" helps animate a static conception of separate languages and literatures that directs us away from literature as fact and object and toward "the idea that speech and writing are strategies for orienting and manipulating social domains of interaction" (226). Linguaging as "cultural practice and power struggle" (227) enables us to apprehend how translated texts may have the potential to interrogate the hegemony of the Anglophone and the English-educated classes in Singapore by providing minority perspectives erased or elided by official history. With their different linguistic, literary, and cultural reference points, such texts re-orient Singapore's historical map and spotlight routes and coordinates not determined solely in relation to its British colonial past. Cosmopolitical pedagogy turns inward, to the local and national, in order to reinvent these categories.

I would use Mohamed Latiff Mohamed's novel *Confrontation* to introduce students to the concept of "linguaging" and encourage them to question received history. The text, which was translated from Malay into English in 2013, presents readers with a sense of what Singapore might have been and how the nation's place in the world would have been altered had history taken a different turn. *Confrontation* is set in the multicultural and multiracial urban village of Kampung Pak Buyung during the struggle for political independence just before 1965. Chinese and Malays inhabit the same space; their lives seamlessly intertwined. The spatial politics of the text can be examined in class with various historical maps. A British colonial map demarcating separate areas for the different ethnic groups as part of the colonial power's divide-and-rule strategy can be used, for example, as a visual stimulus to initiate a discussion on the links between space and race. This discussion can be followed by questions about the "kampung" and what it represents to Singapore both historically and symbolically.

As students delve more deeply into the novel, key textual moments can be mined for discussion. The main protagonist of *Confrontation* is a boy named Adi and significant historical processes such as the impending decolonization and the increasing ethnicization of Singapore society

are filtered through his consciousness and confused eyes. Following gang fights and ethnic conflict, Adi moves out of Kampung Pak Buyung to a more ethnically homogeneous space. The relocation inaugurates him into his “first experience of living solely among Malays” (Mohamed 159) and somewhat ominously foreshadows an increasingly segregated society. Adi’s neighbour and mentor, Abang Dolah, an unconventional character who is also a politically-minded *bomoh* or witch doctor, articulates a vision of Malay unity across the archipelago and expresses hope in a regional political entity, Nusantara, bound by a common Malay culture and language. Abang Dolah says, “The people of the archipelago will speak a common language, Bahasa Nusantara. We’re not small, we’re great! We have hundreds of millions of members. Don’t look inward, look outward, only then will we feel that we’re not small” (104). This textual moment articulates what might have been Singapore’s historical reality. The following questions can be asked to help students seriously consider this possibility:

- What are some of the implications of Nusantara?
- What if English were not the first and common language in Singapore?
 - How might racial and ethnic politics be different?
 - How would your lives be different from what they are now?
 - What kind of Singapore would you be living in?

Students can also be led to examine and question how the novel presents the vision of Nusantara:

- How does the text set up this alternative vision of Nusantara?
- Does the text present Nusantara as wishful thinking?
- Are we invited to interpret Nusantara as a real alternative given Abang Dolah’s lack of credibility?
- We are told in the novel that “[s]omething bad was going to happen. Like the cancer in Abang Dolah’s stomach, it was waiting to erupt” (175). To what extent does the novel blame the Malays for failing to unite?

Nusantara, of course, was not to be. The idea of Malaysia, a federation comprised of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah, which would have ensured the dominance of the Malay language and culture, is irrevocably shattered by the historic announcement of Singapore's withdrawal from the merger. We are left with the fleeting glimpse of a different future in which the Malays in Singapore would have been part of a majority in a larger country rather than the minority in a small nation-state. The loss suffered by the Malays as part of this history hardly registers in the consciousness of today's Chinese majority in Singapore. Instead, the dominant image in public consciousness, which features regularly in the media and in school textbooks, is that of the first Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, crying on national television following the failure of merger. That moment of disappointment quickly became a story about failed heroism to cast into sharper relief the fragility and vulnerability of the island nation with a Chinese majority. Students can critically examine how *Confrontation* serves as a narrative counterpoint to this powerful visual moment. At the novel's end, Singapore has separated from Malaysia and Abang Dolah is on his deathbed. His final words to Adi allude to the waning of Malay culture and invite readers to assess the extent to which this prophecy has come to pass for the Malays: "Betrayed . . . future . . . bleak. You have . . . no . . . future" (176). The novel raises important questions about how historical knowledge is determined by the majority perspective and provokes students into imagining the very different geopolitical map and cultural landscape that might have been Singapore's. In keeping with this line of questioning, students can be asked to contemplate and reflect upon how Anglophone writing in Singapore may also have been complicit in the marginalization of, or at the very least been indifferent to, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil literatures.

Confrontation extends the historical horizons of Singaporean readers for whom the official national narrative has been so ingrained. It offers a perspective and raises issues not found in Singaporean novels in English. Teaching a translated text from a critical cosmopolitan perspective thus means confronting students with questions about other pasts and daring them to imagine alternate futures. Such a pedagogical

approach should be seen as part and parcel of what Paul Gilroy calls “the methodical cultivation of a degree of estrangement from one’s own culture and history” (67).

III. Playing with Perspective

A critical cosmopolitan pedagogy seeks to ask tough questions about one’s place in the world. In Singapore, despite the country’s self-styling as an open city committed to globalizing economically, public discussion rarely moves beyond economics to consider the nation’s obligations to a wider humanity. The country’s place on the world stage is usually seen in terms of how it ranks according to global economic and educational indices. A text such as Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which dwells on the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror, can be used, for example, to stimulate class discussion about Singapore’s decision to be part of the “coalition of the willing” when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, a decision which has remained largely unexamined. Peter Morey describes the novel as “an example of a sort of deterritorialization of literature which forces readers to think about what lies behind the totalizing categories of East and West, ‘Them and Us’ and so on—those categories continuously insisted upon in ‘war on terror’ discourse” (138). The text can be used to teach students to problematize the binary logic of such convenient sloganeering as US President George W. Bush’s famous proclamation, “You are either with us or against us” (“You Are Either”). Furthermore, the novel’s interrogation of economic fundamentalism provides an opportunity to examine the neoliberal and global capitalist policies that Singapore embraces.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist uses dramatic monologue to disorient the reader and question some of the assumptions about Muslims, Pakistan, and terrorism that have become mainstream since 9/11. In the novel, the Pakistani narrator Changez holds a conversation with an American who could be a CIA operative but whose voice is never heard. The novel begins in Lahore with Changez hailing his interlocutor by asking, “Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance?” (Hamid 1).

Changez's tone is unfailingly polite and charmingly archaic. By turns funny, accommodating, uncomfortably straightforward, and ingratiating but always eloquent, he cannot be pinned down. Who is he and who is the alleged American with whom he is supposedly speaking? How can we believe his story and what he says? Changez's advice to his American companion that he "should not imagine that we Pakistanis are all potential terrorists, just as we should not imagine that you Americans are all undercover assassins" (183) certainly applies to the reader as well. Beyond sounding this note of caution, however, the novel refuses to provide any stable or reliable points of reference that the reader can accept with reasonable certainty. Instead, the reader is immersed in an atmosphere of suspense and mounting menace as the text stages the question of who is friend and who is foe.

My proposed pedagogical approach toward the novel builds on what Vilashini Cooppan calls the "ethics of reading" (38), which "turns on the moment in which we fail to recognize the familiar and claim that failure as modality of knowledge" (38–39). It involves the student-reader working through destabilizing moments in the novel to analyze the encounter with that which is unfamiliar or deliberately estranging as part of a "pedagogy of alterity" (Nandi 76). In the text, a key moment occurs when Changez, then an employee of the prestigious valuation firm Underwood Samson who regularly traverses a world of gross inequality as he assesses the fundamental market-worthiness of firms, is in Manila on a job assignment. While in a car stuck in traffic, he locks eyes with a jeepney driver beside him who is regarding him with "undisguised hostility" (Hamid 66). Musing over the man's dislike of him, Changez concludes that they "shared a sort of Third World sensibility" (67) which made his privileged presence seem intrusive and repellent. As he turns to his American colleague "with his fair hair and light eyes and, most of all, his oblivious immersion in the minutiae of work" (67), Changez thinks his colleague "so *foreign*" (67; emphasis in original). The moment is fraught and densely layered and students can be asked questions that focus on Changez's changing sense of self as well as Hamid's representation of the shift:

- How do we read this moment in the text? Is it one of self-realization, betrayal, or both? How is it linked to the idea of Changez as a “janissary” (151) that we see later in the novel?
- How is privilege represented in this particular moment? How is “otherness” constructed?
- What is Changez’s growing sense of alienation predicated on here?
- Do you agree with Changez’s reading of this moment?
- What is this moment a critique of?

In the novel, this moment occurs just before Changez learns of the 9/11 attacks, watches the collapse of the twin towers on television, and confesses his initial reaction: “I *smiled*” (72; emphasis in original). His subsequent explanation that he was “caught up in the *symbolism* of it all” (72; emphasis in original) is likely to provoke intense debate. To productively channel this debate, students can be asked:

- Is Changez’s explanation of why he smiled at all justifiable in an ethical sense? Or is it simply inexcusable?

Changez states that he was not thinking of the victims when he witnessed the attacks and suggests that “death on television moves [him] most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiple episodes” (73). The metafictional lines provide a fruitful opportunity to explore the ethics and power of fictive representation:

- Does tragedy have to be mediated to be felt?
- Can Changez’s admission serve as a justification for fiction or does it serve instead as a criticism of it?

Such questions encourage students to reflect on the very nature of the discipline itself in the literature classroom.

Central to the novel is its invitation to reconsider the meaning of the term “fundamentalism.” The text undercuts assumptions that readers might make, based on the novel’s title, that it deals with religious fundamentalism. The novel instead proposes that a business and market

fundamentalism focused on the bottom line and profit and loss is more detrimental and deleterious to the world. Changez outlines how, after studying at Princeton on a scholarship, he became the quintessential neoliberal subject groomed for a life of privilege. Recruited into Underwood Samson, he was introduced to the glamorous world of finance and superficial cosmopolitanism where his job was to “focus on the fundamentals” (98). To this end, students might be prompted to discuss the following:

- Who is the reluctant fundamentalist in the novel? Is it Changez the consultant or Changez the possible terrorist?
- What is the link between a business fundamentalism and the religious fundamentalism that is commonly understood as the source of much terrorism today?

The Reluctant Fundamentalist ends on a note of indeterminacy as the narrative builds to its climax and the narrator catches the “glint of metal” (184) in his American companion’s jacket. We are given no definitive answers about the intentions of the narrator or his American interlocutor and the uncertainty underscores the need for constant self-reflection and examination about the ways in which we “read” others as we find our ethical bearings in this world.

IV. Conclusion

Using a critical cosmopolitan pedagogy to challenge and even change students’ perspectives and sense of themselves in the world means that teachers must always be actively searching for texts that disorient readers and encourage them to rethink their positions and selves through different lenses. Employing such a pedagogy in relation to carefully selected literary texts can help students engage more deeply with their nation and the world and be sensitive to representations of other cultures and subjectivities while remaining self-reflexive and aware that they can intervene in seemingly inexorable global processes. As Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman note, “[i]t is important to view globalization as an ideological project and as a system of belief, that makes a claim about the inevitability of the present and, as such, the future as well” (171). As

literature teachers, we are committed to the close reading of texts, but it is also incumbent upon us to unpack the worldly contexts within which texts may be productively situated and discussed. Such a learning environment resonates with what Suzanne Choo terms “an other-centric [classroom] culture” where students are committed to “responsibly engaging” (152) with and understanding the Other. The challenge of literature education today is nothing less than helping students imagine the world anew.

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