

The Poetics and Politics of Cosmopolitanism in English Literatures of South Asian Background

Cosmopolitanism - A Fascinating Concept

The term cosmopolitanism has gained such a wide currency in contemporary debates that some critics speak of a paradigm shift. The fascination with the concept of cosmopolitanism dates back to antiquity and has often been regarded in view of its translation as "world citizenship". Today, the potential - but also the pitfalls - of cosmopolitanism are being discussed across various disciplines with a sense of urgency. While the interest in recent literary cosmopolitanism seems partly fuelled by authors' biographies and book marketing strategies, it is also informed by the identification of a vaguely cosmopolitan stance. Although the concept does feature in literary studies, the difference between a normative-philosophical and a descriptive-analytical approach is often not distinctly established.

Closing a Gap

This research project aims at closing this gap by defining the cosmopolitan stance in a methodologically and terminologically reflected manner, by a critical analysis of postcolonial texts. It is our hypothesis that the investigation of the poetics of a postcolonial text brings to the fore politically and socially informed characteristics of cosmopolitanism. The concept of cosmopolitanism thus offers the opportunity to connect a politically aware, context-oriented analysis with the analysis of the formal properties of a fictional text, i.e. language, style, narrative and genre, as well as poetic and aesthetic facets. Our methodological framework will enable us to fill a lacuna in literary scholarship on cosmopolitanism, in that we take into view the politics of the postcolonial field of literary production and, at the same time, pay greater attention to the poetic dimensions of the fictional texts by analyzing in detail their narratological, stylistic and formal features.

Globalization and English Literature of South Asian Background

The recent effects of globalization go beyond the forms of centre-periphery migration within the colonial space, and exhibit a preoccupation with the supranational complexity of social realities. Particularly postcolonial literary texts often exhibit a heightened consciousness of historical, geographical and cultural embeddedness, which presents a unique chance to study the political implications of a literary cosmopolitan stance. This particular segment of literature represents in an exemplary way the two poles informing the cosmopolitan configuration: embeddedness in the local and transversal into the global. The choice of South Asian literatures in English as a case study provides us with a transnational and transcultural scope which takes into account the consequences of colonialism, migration and diasporas in a paradigmatic way.

The project group includes **three separate PhD-projects**, each of which addresses the common topic from a different relevant angle:

Home, Nation and the World: Fictions of Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Indian English Literature (Annie Cottier)

Staging Alterity: Religious Othering and the Cosmopolitan Gaze in Postcolonial South Asian Novels (Nora A. Escherle)

Cosmopolitanism, Belonging and the Family: Second Generation South Asian Writers in Britain (Melanie Mettler)

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