

Editorial Note

The JOLCEL spring issue of 2021 is a thematic issue about one of the central concepts in the name of the journal itself: cosmopolitanism. The name JOLCEL refers to Latin cosmopolitanism and European Literatures. The three articles assembled here describe the difficult dynamics in European literatures between empire, imperialism, and cosmopolitanism.

As Theo D'haen observes in his response piece, what unites the three articles in this issue is “the opposition between the ideal and the real, cast as a distinction between in- and outgroup [and] framed by classical texts.” All three articles demonstrate how literature created concepts of cosmopolitanism to explore the fissures between (historical) imperialism and idealisations of that imperialism by means of cosmopolitan ideologies.

The issue starts with an article by Christoph Pieper about ‘Cosmopolitanism and the Roman Empire,’ in which he looks at three versions of cosmopolitanism that are grafted on the idea of the Roman Empire and shows how their idealistic cosmopolitanisms necessarily come into conflict with the harsh realities of imperialism. Pieper discusses Cicero’s ideas of world citizenship, Augustine’s city of God as a cosmopolitan state, and Lorenzo Valla’s linguistic imperialism. He concludes that “cosmopolitan ideas often arise in times of strong imperialistic claims; they serve as alternatives to a seemingly uncontested world order of dominion, submission and egoism. Alternatives are not automatically perfect, perhaps not even better than the concepts they criticize—but they always open up discursive fields and trigger new reflection about the status quo.”

Helena Bodin offers an impressive bird’s-eye view of Byzantine cosmopolitanism, while tackling a related opposition within cosmopolitanism, namely that between unity and diversity. The Byzantine Empire is often called cosmopolitan. Bodin shows that various cosmopolitan tendencies exist and develop within the Byzantine tradition. She discusses Adam and Moses as Stoic cosmopolitans and Pentecost as a cosmopolitan event. This leads her to the conclusion that the Byzantine tradition encompasses both homogenising, monolingual Greek, and

heterogenising, multilingual, modes of cosmopolitanism. The homogenising mode opposes the local to the whole created world as the motherland of humans. The heterogenising mode opposes the *kosmos*, with its multitude of languages, ethnicities, and religions, to the heavenly world.

The last article, by Tycho Maas, turns to the European colonial empires at the end of the seventeenth century. While not engaging explicitly with the term cosmopolitanism, Maas touches on the same difficult relationship between the ideologies behind imperialism and classical and Christian idealism about shared world citizenship. The article centres on a letter written by Johannes Willem van Grevenbroek, a secretary of the Council of Policy at the Cape for the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Maas first describes how colonial discourses use Roman literature to construct degrading stereotypes about the native Koi peoples, and then analyses how Grevenbroek uses these same classical authors to argue against dominant representations of these peoples, thereby turning a mirror to Europeans.

Finally, in response to his reading of the three articles, Theo D'haen zooms out again, in order to reflect on the status of cosmopolitanism in European literatures, from his perspective as a scholar of modern literature.

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