EDITORS' TOPIC: VICTORIAN COSMOPOLITANISMS
Guest Editors: Tanya Agathocleous and Jason R. Rudy

Introduction
TANYA AGATHOCLEOUS AND JASON R. RUDY

Position Papers

Cosmopolitanism's Actually Existing Beyond; Toward a Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic
LAUREN M. E. GOODLAD

"The Country of the Plague": Anticulture and Autoethnography in Dickens's 1850s
JAMES BUZARD

Victorian Cosmopolitanism, Interrupted
BRUCE ROBBINS

Articles

Cosmopolitanism, Feminism, and the Moving Body
JUDITH R. WALKOWITZ

Anti-Slavery Cosmopolitanism in the Black Atlantic
EDLIE WONG

Matthew Arnold and Religion's Cosmopolitan Histories
SEBASTIAN LECOURT

Unspeakable George Eliot
DAVID KURNICK

Medical Cosmopolitanism: *Middlemarch*, Cholera, and the Pathologies of English Masculinity
MARY WILSON CARPENTER

Reluctant Cosmopolitanism in Dickens's *Great Expectations*
JOHN MCBRATNEY

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Rule Bohemia: The Cosmopolitics of Subculture in George Du Maurier's *Trilby*
KIMBERLY J. STERN

The Cosmopolitan Nationalism of Sarojini Naidu, Nightingale of India
SHESHALATHA REDDY

Good Europeans and Neo-Liberal Cosmopolitans: Ethics and Politics in Late Victorian and Contemporary Cosmopolitanism
REGENIA GAGNIER

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VICTORIAN COSMOPOLITANISMS: INTRODUCTION

By Tanya Agathocleous and Jason R. Rudy

THOUGH IT HAS BECOME CONVENTIONAL to refer to the "new cosmopolitanisms" when discussing the resurgence of the term in the 1990s, current debates about cosmopolitanism can be traced back to its usages in the nineteenth century. In both its Victorian and contemporary contexts, *cosmopolitanism* ranges in connotation from the pejorative to the progressive and in denotation from a phenomenon to an ideal. This constitutive ambivalence helps to explain the controversy that has attended the term, both then and now.

The *OED* defines the historical usages of *cosmopolitanism* in three different ways, which together encompass all of these variables: (1) "Cosmopolitan character; adherence to cosmopolitan principles"; (2) "In Soviet usage, disparagement of Russian traditions and culture (equated with disloyalty)"; and 3) "*Nat. Hist.* World-wide distribution."[1] In the first of these usages, cosmopolitanism is figured as a positive ideal; in the second, it is the condemnation of lifestyles associated with bourgeois decadence, as well as an accusation of "rootlessness"; while the third usage, ostensibly a neutral descriptive of a global phenomena, was often used negatively in the nineteenth century. Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill famously called the globalization of capitalism cosmopolitan, and highly contagious diseases were labeled cosmopolitan as well (as Mary Wilson Carpenter's contribution to this issue demonstrates).

The negative connotations of cosmopolitanism in the Victorian era are still those most frequently cited – Mill's "capital is becoming more and more cosmopolitan," for instance, is provided as a sample usage by the *OED*, and major Victorian authors such as Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James use *cosmopolitan* as a designation for some of their most degenerate characters. But the word was employed in a range of positive ways as well. The Kantian sense of the word, for example, was frequently invoked to support arguments in favor of free trade, especially at the time of the Great Exhibition, while the term was also used to name a journalistic-critical methodology. A range of journals, such as the *Cosmopolitan Review* (1861), the *Cosmopolitan* (1865–76), the *Cosmopolitan Critic and Controversialist* (1876–77) and *Cosmopolis* (1896–98), used it to invoke their commitment to "a patriotism which knows of no boundaries and no enemies – a patriotism which can withstand the searching look of justice. . . . We call for the help of those who, whatever may be their name, country, or colour, will be willing to seek with us the best means to bring concord and justice among men" (*Cosmopolitan Review* 5).[2]

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A decade ago, when the Victorian period was predominantly associated with nationalism and imperialism, the phrase "Victorian cosmopolitanisms" would have seemed not only clunky but counterintuitive. Recently, however, the "global turn" in literary studies has inspired a range of new approaches to the field: along with *cosmopolitan*, adjectives such as *European*, *international*, *global*, *geopolitical*, *transatlantic*, and *transnational* are increasingly being applied to Victorian texts in ways that promise to transform what we mean by "British" literature.[3] Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever's anthology *The Literary Channel*, for instance, describes the importance of a cross-channel exchange to the development of the British and French novel; Christopher Gogwilt uses the term *geopolitical* to investigate the literary impact of Britain's amorphous and extensive range of influence in the period; Amanda Claybaugh's *The Novel of Purpose* shows how British and American discourses of social reform, along with their novelistic traditions, were in explicit conversation; and Paul Young's book-length study of the Great Exhibition demonstrates that the 1851 world's fair played a pivotal role in the evolution of what he calls "the Victorian New World Order."

While the definition of *cosmopolitanism* is less self-evident than any of the terms used in the works above, we believe it operates as a particularly useful lens on the Victorian period for that very reason. Unlike *transnational*, *geopolitical*, and *global*, the terms *cosmopolitan* and *cosmopolitanism* were used frequently in the nineteenth century, and its many meanings provide insight into the wide ranges of responses to early globalization that characterized the period. Unlike *international*, the adjective *cosmopolitan* is flexible, pertaining not only to relations among nations but to individual activities and stances as well. Cosmopolitan, a combination of *cosmos* (world) and *polites* (citizen) evokes the relationship between individual and society, or that between city (polis) and world.

We use the plural rather than singular version of cosmopolitanism in our title, then, because we see it, both in the Victorian period and now, as a fundamentally heterogeneous phenomenon, irreducible to a single definition. This issue aims to demonstrate how the complicities, tensions, and conflicts between its different Victorian formulations provide a unique insight into the political and ethical possibilities of the period, while also serving as a necessary but often overlooked context for the controversies and problems that have beset the concept of cosmopolitanism in our own moment.

No less than in the Victorian era, contemporary uses of *cosmopolitanism* bear both positive and pejorative connotations. Across a range of disciplines, including literary studies, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, geography, and urban studies, the question of what exactly it is, how it might or might not function as an ethical enterprise, and how it might serve as a framework for scholarly inquiry, remains undecided. For some, such as Timothy Brennan, Pheng Cheah, and Simon Gikandi, cosmopolitanism is figured as the false idealism of globalization and the cultural logic of neoimperialism, while for others, such as Bruce Robbins, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Amanda Anderson, it is globalization's critical edge, an ethos that attempts to encompass all humanity while remaining attentive to the pitfalls of humanism.[3]

Anderson's work on cosmopolitanism has been particularly important for Victorian studies because it helps to show how the stakes for cosmopolitanism as an ideal in the nineteenth century are similar to those articulated in today's debates. Referenced by virtually every contributor in this issue, Anderson's 2001 book, *The Powers of Distance*, brought her investment in the "new cosmopolitanisms" debate (in which she had participated by

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contributing to Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins's *Cosmopolitics* [1998]) to bear on a range of canonical Victorian texts. In her usage, cosmopolitanism is an ethical and characterological stance intrinsic to the detached outlook of Victorian narrators and cultural critics. But by defining it as the "*aspiration* to a distanced view" (6, her emphasis), Anderson signals the degree to which nineteenth-century writers acknowledge the impossibility, or undesirability, of perfect distance. Anderson thus challenges the "hermeneutic suspicion" of literary critics who see Victorian forms of universalism as inherently fallacious, and shows how they were often "self-consciously pluralistic" (30) and politically "enabling" (4).

Anderson's nuanced approach to Victorian cosmopolitanism has helped to recuperate it both politically and as a phenomenon demanding further study. Moreover, her approach has also inspired debates about the value of the term in relation to the Victorian context. For instance, in their introduction to a 2007 special issue of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* (RaVoN) on "Victorian Internationalisms," also cited in this issue, Lauren Goodlad and Julia Wright find "Internationalisms" to be a broader and potentially more productive term than "Cosmopolitanisms." They argue that Victorian cosmopolitanisms, as opposed to some contemporary versions of the concept that are explicitly disarticulated from capitalism, are doomed to be limited in scope and ethically flawed. While we might be able to celebrate "Victorian literature's ethically and aesthetically rich engagements with multiplicity," they contend, we must also reckon with its "comparatively inert challenge to – often embrace of – hierarchies of nationality, race, class and gender." "Literary histories of cosmopolitanism," Goodlad and Wright conclude, "may thus offer a somewhat finite critical project, one compelled to predict the foundering of the ethical aspirations it describes" (14).

The present volume opens with a set of position papers – by Goodlad, James Buzard, and Bruce Robbins – that take up and advance this debate. More broadly, these pieces illuminate how cosmopolitanism acts as a touchstone for issues recently at the heart of Victorian Studies: the intersection of ethics and liberalism; nationalism and gender; imperialism and capitalism.

The essays that follow, influenced by both Anderson's recuperative vision in *The Powers of Distance* and Goodlad and Wright's cautions about the potential limits of this vision in their issue on "Victorian Internationalisms," show how Victorian cosmopolitanisms, even if ethically troubling, might open up questions about the period rather than limit them. Historically speaking, cosmopolitanisms (to adapt Robbins's phrase) "actually existed" in the Victorian period, both as a way of describing global phenomena, and as a way of living and thinking. As such, they influenced many of the period's most prominent writers (Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and William Morris are among those analyzed by our contributors), as well as its most pressing social and political concerns. In this issue, Indian nationalism, abolitionism, Britain's overseas investments, and the epidemiology of cholera are just a few of the Victorian contexts on which cosmopolitanism sheds light.

Understood in all the different ways enumerated above, cosmopolitanism is also an appealing term because it can be seen as intimately connected to nationalism and imperialism: the two social formations that have hitherto preoccupied Victorian studies. Until "the global turn" described above, Britain and its empire have implicitly marked the spatial limits of Victorian studies.[4] Influential critics such as Benedict Anderson, who argued for the central role of the novel in the production of national consciousness, and Edward Said, who drew attention to the wider, imperial framework of the "national" novel, made the ideologies and forms that sustained the nation explicit objects of study.[5] Yet this development also paved the way for the surge of interest in cosmopolitanism that has inspired the present

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issue. Once the nation, and its relationship to literary form, was reified as a subject within the field of Victorian studies and no longer merely the implicit framework of the field, cosmopolitanism – already a key term in theoretical debates about globalization and ethics – could come into view as nationalism's dialectical other, and as a crucial component of its Enlightenment iterations. Cosmopolitanism, after all, was seen by Immanuel Kant, one of its most authoritative proponents, as the natural *telos* of national development. In a world guided by cosmopolitan principles and administered by a universal federation of nations, Kant argues, "every nation, even the smallest, can expect to have security and rights, not by virtue of its own might or its own declarations regarding what is right, but from . . . a united might, and from decisions made by the united will in accord with laws" (34).

Due to a widespread belief in the belated economic (and sometimes evolutionary) development of non-European countries, however, cosmopolitanism was often linked to imperialist thought despite its democratic assumption of equal rights for all nations. The discourse of cosmopolitanism that surrounded the Great Exhibition, for example, made abundant use of Kant's rhetoric of world peace but argued that Britain, with its industrial supremacy, would lead the world towards its egalitarian destiny – not least by aligning its territories with the progressive trajectory of European civilization.[6]

Nevertheless, cosmopolitanism was not merely the cultural logic of empire, for it was dialectically engaged with imperialism as well as nationalism. Empire, after all, was the condition of possibility for all forms of cosmopolitanism, whether conceived as lifestyle, ideology, or knowledge. In Peter van der Veer's phrasing, "Cosmopolitanism is the Western engagement with the rest of the world and that engagement is a colonial one, which simultaneously transcends national boundaries and is tied to them" (166). Even while enabled by Britain's imperial engagements, however, cosmopolitanism – as many of our contributors demonstrate – could be an oppositional discourse: one that contested the very imperialist coercions that underwrote its existence.

It may not be possible to have a perfectly "situated" Victorian cosmopolitanism, then – one that manages to acknowledge all its complicities and to transcend them – but it is possible to *situate* cosmopolitanism, if we recognize it as part of a complex, dynamic, and unfinished dialectic discourse rather than a finite project doomed to failure by its normative ambitions. It is a project that demands our attention, these essays show, not only because it helped to shape the course of British literature but because it helped to call that very category into question.

In this regard, cosmopolitanism should be seen as a methodology as well as a set of ideas, for investigating its incarnations transforms our methodologies as researchers just as surely as it changed the literary strategies of the authors we investigate. The contributions to this issue engage with cosmopolitanism as simultaneously historical phenomenon, theoretical rubric, and methodological practice. Edlie Wong's investigation of "antislavery cosmopolitanism," for instance, requires a mode of research that accounts for historical records, little-known literary texts, and the Atlantic as the space across which records and texts circulated; David Kurnick's essay on George Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868), meanwhile, sheds light on that text's aesthetic peculiarities by showing how Eliot's reckoning with cosmopolitanism requires the kind of generic experiments that make it one of her most underappreciated works. To fully understand Victorian cosmopolitanisms, therefore, we must not only expand our sense of the period beyond the confines of any individual nation but must also perform our own cosmopolitan juggling act, in which we must strive to close-read the aesthetic qualities

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of literary texts within an increasingly complex and far-reaching historical and geographical frame. A "Victorianist cosmopolitan practice" (as Lauren Goodlad writes in her position paper for this issue) is both distinct from, *but tied to*, a "Victorian" cosmopolitan practice.

While this claim might sound predictably contemporary, an inevitable outcome of the "global turn," in making it we are in fact once again following in the footsteps of Victorians. Just as those in the "new" cosmopolitanisms debate rediscover tensions that existed between its various Victorian meanings, our notion of a cosmopolitan methodology was anticipated by Victorians in at least two striking cases.

Cosmopolis, mentioned earlier as one of the journals that used cosmopolitanism as a positive term, went a step further than its contemporaries in celebrating the concept, and used it as the premise for a bold journalistic experiment. *Cosmopolis*'s editor, Fernand Ortmans, wanted the journal to play an instrumental role in the progressive expansion of the public sphere across international space and the development of cosmopolitanism as a method of cultural critique. He divided the journal into English, French, and German sections published in each of these languages; and put his critics and writers into an explicitly transnational conversation. *Cosmopolis* thus attempted to use the miscellaneous format of the periodical form to enact a situated cosmopolitanism, for its structure meant that the national affiliations of literary-critical writings were always evident even as the journal as a whole enacted a transnational conversation with universalist ambitions. While his ambitious plan to expand the journal indefinitely, encompassing more and more countries over time, never came to pass, the journal was critically acclaimed and published some of the most illustrious writers of the period (R. L. Stevenson, Ivan Turgenev, Olive Schreiner, Somerset Maugham, Henry James, Stephane Mallarmé, W. B. Yeats, George Gissing, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Anatole France, J. M. Barrie, Max Nordau, George Bernard Shaw, Edmund Gosse, and Friedrich Nietzsche are examples).

Similarly, the term *cosmopolitan* was used by Leslie Stephen to describe a comparative method of literary criticism. In a review of Joseph Texte's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Literature* (translated by J. W. Matthews in 1899), Stephen explores the ways in which the national and cosmopolitan characteristics of literature interact: "Rousseau shows how one nation may take a hint from another; but shows also how the different national characteristics act as a non-conducting medium. They allow the 'cosmopolitan' or congenial element to pass freely as the Röntgen rays [that is, x-rays] pass through an opaque body" (390). Although Stephen is unsure whether or not the spread of "the cosmopolitan spirit" will benefit literature in the long run (like critics today, he is fearful of the commercialization and homogenization of literature), he sees it as part of the larger set of circumstances we now call globalization and argues that literature must be analyzed in this context: "it is impossible to explain literary changes if the literary movement be taken by itself as an isolated phenomenon" (391).

Stephen's prescient view of literature and cosmopolitanism, together with *Cosmopolis*'s experiments with periodical form, demonstrate the outcome predicted by Irene Tucker in her 2003 critique of the limitations of our field: "In making the case for an internationalist understanding of Victorian culture . . . not only are we likely to emerge with a very different sense of what Victorians were thinking, doing, and imagining, but we are likely to discover unexpected genealogies for our most intimate — and most automatic — critical practices" (689). Following in this critical spirit, our contributors' different uses of cosmopolitanism testify to the term's malleability as both a theoretical tool and a method for analyzing the

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nineteenth century with historical specificity. Rather than evacuating the term of particular meaning, we see this malleability as fundamental to cosmopolitanism itself, marking the term's polyvalent, overlapping, and mutually constitutive categories of thought. We might thus trace through the issue, and imagine as part of larger conversations, multiple strands of cosmopolitan thinking both in the nineteenth century and in our current moment: theoretical, ethical, historical, political, literary, formal. But even within these particular umbrella categories, our contributors stake out widely different uses for the term.

For example, Goodlad, Judith Walkowitz, and Edlie Wong each invoke cosmopolitanism as a tool for reading history, yet in importantly distinct ways. Whereas for Goodlad cosmopolitanism functions macroscopically as a way of bringing ethical thinking into a geopolitical historical framework (highlighting the significance of individual standpoint, agency, and subjectivity), Walkowitz imagines cosmopolitanism in relation to particular urban spaces, and uses the term to describe the gendered nature of late-Victorian urban experiences. Wong elaborates her own distinct use for cosmopolitanism, employing the term to describe an ideal of universal freedom tied to mid-Victorian British nationalism and drawn on by abolitionists as a tool for reform in the American south. These three essays move in radically different spheres – from Goodlad's individualism to Walkowitz's delimited urban environment to Wong's transatlantic political framework – but "cosmopolitanism" functions in each as a historically specific rubric for understanding relations between individuals and communities. When read together, the essays suggest some of the wider valences of nineteenth-century cosmopolitan thought: that geographical and architectural spaces (Walkowitz) might be understood to resonate with transatlantic political interactions (Wong); and that both might be governed by shifting articulations of individual and inter-subjective ethical relations (Goodlad).

Other contributors to this issue see cosmopolitanism as modeling – again, in varied ways – individual political practice. Turning to Europeanism as a model for Victorian cultural and political relations, Regenia Gagnier suggests that cosmopolitanism might be understood as a kind of subject position "serving other ends than conventional hegemony." Sheshalatha Reddy echoes Gagnier in reading the poetry of Sarojini Naidu as a challenge to traditional social structures. As both a prominent figure for Indian nationalism and a contributor to British aestheticism at the *fin de siècle*, Naidu performs what Reddy calls a "cosmopolitan nationalism," framing her project of global humanism within the context of strong national identity. Much as Gagnier – who takes William Morris as her key example – sees cosmopolitanism as facilitating "a conception of individual development that takes the social as the fundamental unit of analysis," Reddy reads Naidu's poetic identity as simultaneously personal and communal, national and worldly. Writing on Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860–61), John McBratney similarly employs cosmopolitanism as a "mode of ethical being that . . . negotiates between competing demands of the individual, on the one hand, and the community, nation, or empire, on the other." Gagnier, Reddy, and McBratney each challenge a view of cosmopolitanism as having more to do with individual experience – or "ethos" – than with communal structures or the relations of individuals in the world.[7] This challenge is endorsed, though in a different register, by Bruce Robbins' thoughts on what might be called *free-trade cosmopolitanism*: a position that names the conflicted attitude of those Victorians who, like George Eliot, voiced ambivalence for cosmopolitanism as an ethos, yet participated in a global, capitalist market that could not have functioned without a cosmopolitan frame. Like Gagnier, Reddy, and McBratney, Robbins urges a more expansive,

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and more complicated, view of the Victorian cosmopolitan; no longer simply an individual at loose in – but ultimately detached from – the world, the cosmopolitan subject here engages actively with the world about her, both politically and ethically, even as these positions collide.

Cosmopolitanism moves to the margins of Victorian culture in essays by Mary Wilson Carpenter, Kimberly Stern, and Sebastian Lecourt. Carpenter makes a case for what she calls "medical cosmopolitanism," arguing that the cholera epidemics that devastated Britain through the nineteenth century were labeled "cosmopolitan" in the worst sense of the term: indiscriminate, impersonal, and destructive in moving among individuals and across national borders. In her reading of Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–72), Carpenter suggests that cholera inhabits a critical space in the novel's peripheries, a figure for rootlessness as applicable to the diseases suffered by Middlemarch's residents as it is to the dubious cosmopolitanism of Eliot's male characters. Stern examines the "aspirational cosmopolitan" of bohemian culture in Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894). By analyzing a Victorian subculture – the artists and performers at the fringes of contemporary London and Paris – Stern echoes Gagnier, Goodlad, and McBratney in reading cosmopolitanism as a model individuals might use to orient themselves in relation to the world. Lecourt's contribution looks at another sort of cultural outsider, the Jew, in tackling the complexity of Matthew Arnold's approach to religion. Religion would seem, on one hand, to embody the sort of cultural universalism Arnold celebrates in, for example, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). On the other hand, however, different religions carve out spaces distinct from, and sometimes at odds with, culture-at-large. According to Lecourt, then, Arnold "construct[s] 'religion' as Culture's ambivalent proxy, the locus of certain energies that in some sense represent the opposites of Culture, yet which also embody key aspects of the work that Culture must accomplish."

Another sort of cultural ambivalence might be traced in the move from Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53) to *Little Dorrit* (1855–57). In reading Dickens's evolution across the 1850s, James Buzard highlights the importance of *nationalism* – as a concept – to the cosmopolitan project. The "anticultural," he writes, acts as "a catalyst of ethnographic imagination"; Dickens arrives in *Little Dorrit* at "an ecology of local, national, and cosmopolitan identities" as a response to the more limited cultural imagination of *Bleak House*. Read alongside Carpenter, Stern, and Lecourt, Buzard's essay reminds us of alternatives to the swashbuckling cosmopolitan whose sense of belonging in the world arises both from confidence in shared, universal values and a general indifference to the lives of others: a strand of cosmopolitanism associated, for example, with Sir Richard Burton, who – as Appiah notes – "[o]ver and over again in his writings . . . passes by opportunities to intervene to reduce human suffering: he records it, sometimes with humor, rarely with outrage. When he needs workers to carry his luggage into the Dark Continent, he buys slaves without a scruple" (Appiah 8).

One last frame for considering the following essays is the formal, the literary structures through which nineteenth-century cosmopolitanism might be read. Focusing on Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy*, Kurnick gestures toward what might be considered a generic cosmopolitanism, a mixing of generic forms that structures – and challenges – the poem's intermingling of cultural difference. According to Kurnick, *The Spanish Gypsy* should be read as a fractured text that complicates Eliot's supposed belief, most often located in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), that "ethnic loyalism can easily cohabit with universal claims." Other contributors likewise turn to literary form to support culture claims: Carpenter's tracking of cholera on the fringes of *Middlemarch*; Reddy's attention to lyric style; and

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Robbins' notion of textual interruption. Like Kurnick's important revision of Eliot, each of these essays excavates a mode of Victorian cosmopolitanism by analyzing formal literary structures. Goodlad, too, in her provocative opening essay to this issue, urges "understanding literature's engagement with history as both structured and subjective, geopolitical and ethical, formal and embodied." To understand the formal dimensions of Victorian literature, and to read what Goodlad calls "cosmopolitan form," is not necessarily to foreswear personal or subjective interpretation; indeed, Goodlad argues, to read formally is to recognize, embodied within literary texts, what Robbins has called "actually existing cosmopolitanisms" – a view born out in the essays that follow by Kurnick, Carpenter, Reddy, and Robbins himself.

In this introduction we have tried not only to emphasize the importance of form for many of our essays but also for how we should think about the forms of our critical practice, something we've tried to do here by calling both our critical method and our subject "cosmopolitan." To acknowledge and even foreground these practices is, we hope, to confront some of the critiques lodged against cosmopolitanism: Gikandi's argument, for example, that it may be impossible to separate cosmopolitanism from its Enlightenment history, and the racist underpinnings thereof; or Brennan's insistence that cosmopolitanism cannot be disarticulated from capitalism, because it is always practiced within the context of capitalism's uneven development (Gikandi; Brennan). Other critics contend that cosmopolitanism is problematic because a true balance between local and global allegiances is impossible, as immediate and proximate loyalties will always trump those more remote and abstract.[8] Our contributors aim neither to overlook nor to dismiss these concerns. Rather, in practicing various forms of critical cosmopolitanism, this issue participates in an ongoing conversation vital to our field. The question now is not *whether* Victorian cosmopolitanism, but *how*; in turning to the essays that follow, we trust that the answers to this question will remain multiple and sometimes contradictory, but always necessary and provocative.

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NOTES

1. See "cosmopolitanism," *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 October 2009.
2. Agathocleous discusses these journals in more depth in *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination*.
3. See Brennan; Cheah; Gikandi; Robbins; Appiah; A. Anderson, *The Way we Argue Now* and *The Powers of Distance*; and Walkowitz.
4. For detailed critiques of the parameter of our field, see Tucker and Marcus.
5. See B. Anderson and Said, respectively.
6. For more on the Great Exhibition and cosmopolitan discourse, see Agathocleous and Young.
7. Both Gagnier and McBratney respond specifically to Goodlad and Wright, who write of "[t]he tendency of cosmopolitanism to evoke individual ethos rather than cultural, social or political process" (7).
8. See, for example, Glazer.

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