Melancholy Cosmopolitanism:
Reflections on a Genre of European Literary Fiction

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> 'Therein lies the melancholy that accompanies all such works, as of all things which can come to fruition only through time.'
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> Marcel Proust, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower* (1918)

In European novels written and published towards the close of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first, there exists an undeniable strain of melancholy aesthetics in various linguistic and cultural contexts. We need look no further, for example, than the amnesiac narrators and protagonists of novels by Patrick Modiano such as *Voyages de noces* (1990) and *Fleurs de ruine* (1991), or *Dora Bruder* (1997), which elaborates the 'melancholy history' of its narrator's investigations into the disappearance of a Jewish girl during the Nazi Occupation while reflecting on his own troubled postwar upbringing.[1] W. G. Sebald's gloomy perambulations around abandoned areas of the county of Suffolk in *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995) begin with ruminations on Thomas Browne's quintessentially melancholy work *Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial* (1658) and over the course of its narrative a haunted picture of an interconnected world ravaged by modernity unfolds.[2] Sebald's last novel *Austerlitz* (2001), which stands as a mediated account of the eponymous protagonist's unending investigations into the traumatic events of his early life, similarly constitutes a series of fraught attempts at reconciliation with the events of twentieth-century history to such an extent that Austerlitz describes his discovery of a hidden Jewish cemetery in London as if he were entering a melancholy 'fairy tale which, like life itself, had grown older with the passing of time'.[3] Spanish novels, such as Antonio Muñoz Molina's *Sefarad* (2001), in which the 'melancholy of a long exile' is elaborated through a plethora of empathetically imagined accounts of the lives and fates of key European cultural figures such as Jean Améry, Walter Benjamin, Margarete Buber-Neumann, Victor Klemperer, Milena Jesenskà, Franz Kafka, and Primo Levi,

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[1] See Patrick Modiano, *Dora Bruder* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 52.

[2] See W. G. Sebald, *Die Ringe des Saturn* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995).

[3] W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2001). For further discussion of this, see Ian Ellison, '"eine Märchenerzählung, die […] älter geworden ist mit der verflossenen Zeit": W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* as a melancholy *Kunstmärchen*', *Oxford German Studies* 49, no. 1 (2020), pp. 86–101.

among many others, also exemplifies this tendency towards melancholy in European novels.[4] Javier Marías's semi-autobiographical accounts of his scholarly exile in Oxford, *Todas las almas* (1989) and *Negra espalda del tiempo* (1998), or even his *opus magnum*, the three-volume *Tu rostro mañana* (2002–2007), regularly embark upon digressive disquisitions on the past which haunts the narrative's present.[5] Further afield, melancholy aesthetics manifest themselves in the works of writers such as Orhan Pamuk, whose œuvre may be conceived of as an enactment of the Turkish concept of *hüzün*, a term signifying a form of collective melancholy, which, as Pamuk himself explains, 'is meant to convey a feeling of deep spiritual loss'.[6] Each of these novels and many others—not least, for example, the two most recent winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature Peter Handke and Olga Tokarczuk, as well as other authors such as Karl Ove Knausgård, Imre Kertész, Lázló Krasznahorkai, Péter Nádas, or Dušan Šarotar, perhaps—in a variety of ways achieve a distinctly melancholy tenor in their prose. No doubt there are many more.

Such examples of European fiction, this essay contends, exhibit a melancholy understanding of history, such that the past itself is understood as melancholy. This both expresses and responds to a discernible post-1989 moment experienced profoundly across Western—and, most especially, Western European—culture as the arrival of the millennial caesura inculcates a simultaneous sense of finality and transition in many literary artists, compelling them to examine the events of twentieth-century modernity in a world where Europe is no longer the centre of a global order. Written from the perspective of comparative literary studies, the present essay is an attempt to consider how various European novels written and published around the turn of the millennium may be grouped together as an historically and geographically contingent literary genre, while also reflecting on the implications of this. In order to best define this collective of literary works as a genre, this essay coins the term 'melancholy cosmopolitanism', for reasons that will become apparent in what follows. Having delineated salient characteristics and features of this literary genre, this essay will consider the implications of naming a group of melancholy literary works 'cosmopolitan', a term which is as limiting as it is liberating, encapsulating what Martha Nussbaum understands as a 'noble but

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[4] See Antonio Muñoz Molina, *Sefarad*, ed. Pablo Valdivia (Cátedra: Madrid, 2013), 746.

[5] See Javier Marías, *Todas las almas* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1989), *Negra espalda del tiempo* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998), and *Tu rostro mañana I: Fiebre y lanza* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2002), *Tu rostro mañana II: Baile y sueño* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2004), and *Tu rostro mañana III: Veneno y sombra y adiós* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2007).

[6] Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 111. For further discussion of the term *hüzün*, see Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), 149–50.

flawed ideal'.[7] Ultimately, 'melancholy cosmopolitanism' emerges as a genre grouping that suggests, on the one hand, that the sense of melancholy obsolescence articulated by various European novelists is not confined to each writer's discrete national literary context; on the other hand, it also implies an effective form of solidarity among these writers and their works, such that they collectively suggest a potential to overcome the melancholy of history precisely through the points of aesthetic similarity among their literary explorations of it. Contemporaneous melancholy works of European literature are understood here as 'cosmopolitan' in a hermeneutic sense, insofar as their aesthetics resonate with each other beyond discrete national literary contexts, while also exemplifying individually assumed poses of melancholy amid a broader collective of works. The present essay is not an attempt to delineate an all-encompassing theory of European literature at a particular moment in time, but rather to outline a trend or tendency that has coalesced into a genre exhibiting what Erich Auerbach in the epilogue to his monumental study *Mimesis* (1946) describes as 'trends and tendencies, which cross and complement one another in the most varied ways'.[8]

The Melancholy of History

In the final decades of the twentieth century, many psychologists and sociologists suggested that the period of anxiety experienced across Europe in the aftermath of World War Two subsequently led to a new age of melancholy in Western society.[9] This sense of societal and psychological melancholy was engendered by many potentially catastrophic events pertinent to the post-industrial societies of late-twentieth-century Europe, including growing political and military tensions between the West and the East, terror at the prospect of imminent nuclear annihilation, the threat of economic crisis, environmental disaster, and exponential population explosions. In a literary context, such a sense of melancholy relates to and is reflected in the cultural and historical sense of lateness documented in works produced during this time. If, as George Steiner observes, there is 'a core-tiredness' in Western European culture at the close of the twentieth century, then, he argues, this is undoubtedly because 'we are, or feel ourselves to

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[7] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).
[8] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 556.
[9] See, for example, G. L. Klerman, 'Is this the Age of Melancholy?', *Psychology Today* 12 (1979): 36–42; Olle Hagnel, Jan Lanke, Birgitta Rorsman, and Leif Öjesjö, 'Are We Entering an Age of Melancholy?', *Psychological Medicine* 12 (1982): 279–98; and Anthony J. Marsella, Norman Sartorius, Assen Jablensky, and Fred R. Fenton, 'Cross-Cultural Studies of Depressive Disorders: An Overview', in *Culture and Depression*, ed. Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 299–324.

be latecomers'.[10] With the impending turn of the millennium, Steiner heralds the arrival in European culture of what he terms 'the eclipse of the messianic'.[11] Understood in either a personal or metaphorical sense, the 'messianic' signifies in Judeo-Christian religion and culture a sense of rejuvenation, the end of historical temporality, and the coming of a new world. For Steiner, the events of the twentieth century have done away with this optimism, not so much in the sense of history collapsing into a stagnant present without past or future, as François Hartog has conceptualised, but rather such that the present is inundated and overwhelmed by the history that precedes it.[12] Steiner's notion of the eclipse of the messianic is therefore far more melancholy in tone than, for example, Francis Fukuyama's much-derided—and, indeed, later recanted—thesis of the 'end of history', which, in optimistic Hegelian fashion heralds the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution with the end of the Cold War and the arrival of Western liberal democracy as the final and ultimate form of human government.[13] For Steiner, however, the darkness of his eclipse, and its concomitant sense of ending, is ongoing and insoluble.[14] Yet, while suggesting that the notion of the messianic may be eclipsed at the close of the century, Steiner nonetheless acknowledges that 'the forces emanating from the eclipse of the messianic will find manifest expression', thereby anticipating the potentially generative qualities of melancholy that this essay hypothesizes.[15]

In proposing the existence of a literary genre of melancholy cosmopolitan novels, this essay necessarily limits itself to presenting a general survey of characteristics of said genre and situating them in their historical context, since in-depth close reading of particular novels would exceed the limits of its synoptic purview. Nevertheless, in approximating the genre's historical period of emergence, as well as its cultural and geographical milieu, this essay seeks to stake a conceptual claim in the hope that subsequent scholarship will further explore the territory mapped here. Without recourse to a plethora of examples, the difficulties of arguing for the existence of a literary genre—in the manner of science fiction, romantic fiction, crime fiction,

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[10] George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 2.

[11] See ibid., 7–8.

[12] See François Hartog, *Regimes of History: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016).

[13] See Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 16 (1989): 3–18 and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1992). Although Fukuyama's vestigially Hegelian view of history and his optimistic endorsement of Western hegemony appears naïve at best with the benefit of hindsight, the suggestion in his work that the future would remain haunted by Nietzschean spectres (300–27) is, this essay submits, not so wide of the mark.

[14] The phrase 'sense of ending' is consciously borrowed from the title of Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), which considers modern and historical modes of apocalyptic thought in literature as the millennium approaches. See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[15] Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*, 8.

and so on—is self-evident. Nevertheless, this essay understands melancholy cosmopolitanism as a literary genre *ab initio*, not least because, as will become apparent, its key features constitute both a way of reading and a means of classifying novels, just as a literary genre may both describe and prescribe literary texts. Insofar as a group of works exemplify what Tzvetan Todorov calls the 'codification of discursive properties' that are realized historically, and encapsulate what Gérard Genette terms the meeting point between the texts' 'mode[s] of enunciation' and their thematic specificities, then melancholy cosmopolitan novels can be understood as a genre of European literary fiction that emerges around the turn of the millennium.[16] If, as Astrid Erll has observed, 'genres are conventionalized formats we use to encode events and experiences; and repertoires of genre conventions are themselves the contents of memory', then literary genres constitute a taking up of patterns that already exist and a reworking of them into new transformations that feed back into literary culture.[17] Just as, in Erll's words, 'the emergence of new genres can […] be understood as an answer to mnemonic challenges', so the emergence of melancholy cosmopolitanism as a literary genre might be understood as a response in the narratives of European novels to the mnemonic challenges of a particular moment in time, its literary Zeitgeist, and the approach to history shared by these novels.[18] Further research might uncover more details regarding how and why this genre recurs in European fiction published at the turn of the twenty-first century, as well as its influence on these texts' canonization, commodification, and circulation beyond their original contexts. For the purposes of the present essay, however, it will suffice to identify and explore the notable attributes of melancholy cosmopolitan novels and their implications.

Although not unique to European culture, melancholy aesthetics have enjoyed a longstanding and diverse history in European letters, from the early modern period, through the Renaissance to Romanticism, and up to and beyond modernity.[19] Indeed, for Matthew Bell, melancholy may be understood as 'the Western malady'.[20] Although scholarship on melancholy

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[16] Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Origin of Genres', *New Literary Histories* 8, no. 1 (1976): 159–170, esp. 162 and Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 61–2.

[17] Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 147–8.

[18] Ibid., 149.

[19] For further discussion on the development of melancholy from the perspectives of various thinkers, see Jennifer Radden, ed., *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For further discussion of how engagement with history in modernist literature in particular is closely entwined with the history of melancholy in European art, see, for example, Sanja Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For a concise overview of the emergence of melancholy in relation to European rationalism and Enlightenment thought, see Roger Bartra, *Angels in Mourning: Sublime Madness, Ennui and Melancholy in Modern Thought*, trans. Nick Caistor (Chicago, MI: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[20] Matthew Bell, *Melancholia: The Western Malady* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

and its aesthetics in European literature has until now principally remained confined to discrete national contexts, melancholy may be considered a prevalent European aesthetic attitude, especially given the evident interconnectedness of national literary traditions in Western Europe and, indeed, beyond.[21] Nonetheless, the term itself is inherently slippery since it has been redefined and reappropriated over the centuries through religion, medicine, and the humanities. While understandings of melancholy have altered over time, however, its symptoms have remained the same: affected sadness and fear, expressions of grief and of a desire for solitude, which results in an inability to act and a loss of interest.[22] The figure of the melancholy creative genius, moreover, who always desires to know more than the world will allow, recurs again and again across European art and intellectual history and is perhaps best exemplified in the seminal study *Saturn and Melancholy* by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl in their analysis of Albrecht Dürer's 1514 engraving *Melencolia I*, which depicts a gloomy angel staring beyond the apparatus of art, alchemy, and geometry scattered before her.[23] If melancholy, broadly defined, constitutes an affective withdrawal from the world, then it is one which, as Mary Cosgrove notes, entails 'a contemplative response to recent history that is embedded in the ancient cultural traditions of writing about and depicting the universal human experience of sorrow'.[24] Drawing inspiration from Walter Benjamin's study of German tragic drama

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[21] For recent examples of studies of melancholy aesthetics in various European national literary contexts, see Ross Chambers, *The Writing of Melancholy: Modes of Opposition in Early French Modernism* (Chicago, MI: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Roger Bartra, *Melancholy and Culture: Essays on the Diseases of the Soul in Golden Age Spain*, trans. Christopher Follett (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008); and Mary Cosgrove, *Born under Auschwitz: Melancholy Traditions in Postwar German Literature* (New York, NY: Camden House, 2014). Recourse to these studies is not to suggest in any way, however, that melancholy aesthetics have an exclusively European provenance. Beyond Europe, the poetry of many Chinese authors writing after the Tang or Song dynasties, for example, as well as the works of contemporary scholars of their poetry, would serve as a corrective to the notion that melancholy ought to be associated exclusively with, or be considered constitutive solely of, any presumed European cultural identity. For further discussion of this, see, for example, Fusheng Wu, *The Poetics of Decadence: Chinese Poetry of the Southern Dynasties and Late Tang Periods* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 146 and Sylvia Van Ziegert, *Global Spaces of Chinese Culture: Diasporic Chinese Communities in the United States and Germany* (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 119.

[22] For further discussion of the symptoms and history of melancholy, see Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[23] See Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art*, ed. Philippe Despoix and Georges Leroux (Chicago, MI: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 284–375.

[24] Cosgrove, *Born under Auschwitz*, 9. Cosgrove's study opens with a comprehensive introduction to melancholy as a performative affected mode, as well as a history of melancholy through Antiquity, the Renaissance, and Modernity, with a focus on its conceptualizations in psychoanalysis, religion, and medicine. The present essay follows Cosgrove in consciously preferring the term 'melancholy' over 'melancholia', since, as Cosgrove explains, 'while it was a synonym for "melancholy" during the Renaissance, its [melancholia's] application, in other epochs, has often been restricted to descriptions of disease' (9). For further discussion of melancholy aesthetics in a distinctly Germanic context, see also Mary Cosgrove, 'Introduction: Sadness and Melancholy in German-Language Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present: An Overview', in *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, vol. 6: *Sadness and Melancholy in German-Language Literature and Culture* (New York, NY: Camden House, 2012), 1–17.

Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels, his habilitation thesis submitted to the University of Frankfurt in 1925 but not published until three years later, which in parts also engages with Dürer's engravings, Cosgrove rightly observes how, over the course of European modernity 'melancholy becomes much more than just a persistent and doleful mood [...]. Instead, it stands for the work of culture itself: the quest for meaning'.[25] The emergence of melancholy cosmopolitan novels after the cataclysmic events of twentieth-century European history, after an apparent end of grand narratives, and in the shadow of the Steinerian 'eclipse of the messianic', thus constitutes a literary response to the burden of engaging with earlier historical events through the affectation of a melancholy aesthetic attitude.

The idea of Europe has long been one of a continent and culture that is 'weighed down by the burden of its history', to use Paul Valéry's concise summation, which itself echoes Friedrich Nietzsche's reading of European modernity as an age that is oversaturated with history.[26] Writing towards the perceived end of an era, it is perhaps unsurprising that the narrators of novels such as those mentioned above should adopt such a melancholy outlook on the past thematized in their narratives. Aleida Assmann, drawing on the work of Hartog and Reinhart Koselleck, describes how the emergence of modernity from the nineteenth century in the wake of both the French and industrial revolutions encouraged an understanding that 'with the split between the past and the present time could now be seen as an ever widening gulf, reflected by a new historical consciousness and temporal alienation'.[27] The historical consciousness of the narrators of melancholy cosmopolitan novels, which emerge towards the close of the twentieth century, constitutes a melancholy perspective on the past determined by a sense of loss and separation, of irrecoverability and irreconciliation with history. History itself may thus be construed as melancholy. Indeed, as Peter Fritzsche argues, 'the losses of the past are irreversible; this is what constitutes the melancholy of history'.[28] Writing after the catastrophes of European twentieth-century history and distanced from the past that precedes them, the narrators of melancholy cosmopolitan novels such as *Dora Bruder*, *Austerlitz*, and *Sefarad*, for example, appear to engage with and attempt to work through the legacy of modernity, partly driven by their late historical location at the century's end. As Fredric

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[25] Cosgrove, 'Introduction: Sadness and Melancholy', 9.

[26] Paul Valéry, *Cahiers/Notebooks*, vol. 4, trans. Paul Gifford, Robert Pickering, Joseph Rima, Norma Rinsler, and Brian Stimpson (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 521. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[27] Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 81. See also Hartog, *Regimes of History*.

[28] Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1–10, esp. 8.

Jameson notes, 'the more we seek to persuade ourselves of the fidelity of our own projects and values with respect to the past, the more obsessively do we find ourselves exploring the latter'; for Jameson, this constitutes 'the latecomer's melancholy reverence'.[29] Such a reverential focus on the past relies on temporal distance and separation from earlier events, which is to say, on a fundamental understanding of one's present as unavoidably and irrevocably separated from the past. Accordingly, these narrators and their narratives are at once separated from and (over-)determined by events that came before them. Melancholy aesthetics in recent works of European literature thus emerge as intrinsically bound up with a narratorial self-conscious awareness of historical lateness.[30] As Walter Moser argues, melancholy, along with nostalgia, might be thought of as the 'affects' of lateness, although he defines the two terms in contradistinction to one another: if nostalgia expresses a desire to return to the past, then melancholy, according to Moser, is the recognition that this is impossible, that the past and the present cannot be reconciled.[31] The narrators of novels such as those mentioned above therefore exhibit melancholy aesthetic attitudes insofar as they acknowledge, encapsulate, and reflect the mutual irreconcilability of the past and the present.[32]

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[29] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 24.

[30] For further discussion of the significance of lateness in a European literary context, see, for example, Ben Hutchinson, *Lateness and Modern European Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), which argues that modern European literature repeatedly defines itself not as a sequence of attempts to assert successive styles of writing as new, but rather as shifting manifestations of a sense of senescence or epigonality. See also Ben Hutchinson, 'Afterword', in *Late Style and its Discontents: Essays in Art, Literature, and Music*, ed. Gordon McMullan and Sam Smiles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 235–9. Elsewhere Hutchinson argues that the scholarly discipline of comparative literature in the twentieth century may be conceived of as a school of 'late reading' and thus as a hermeneutic counterpart to the artistic concept of late style, such that it derives its interpretative force from its consciousness of coming at the end of the tradition of European high culture. In this regard, the present essay may be considered an act of *later* reading. For further discussion of this see Ben Hutchinson, 'Late Reading: Erich Auerbach and the *Spätboot* of Comparative Literature', *Comparative Critical Studies* 14, no. 1 (2017): 69–85. For further considerations of the significance of lateness within a specifically Germanic cultural context, see also, Karen Leeder, 'Figuring Lateness in Modern German Culture', *New German Critique* 125 (2015): 1–30; Anne Fuchs and J. J. Long, eds., *Time in German Literature and Culture, 1900–2015: Between Acceleration and Slowness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and Anne Fuchs, *Precarious Times: Temporality and History in Modern German Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), esp. 75–82.

[31] Walter Moser, 'Mélancholie et nostalgie: Affects de la *Spätzeit*', *Etudes littéraires* 32 (1999): 83–103. Cited in Hutchinson, *Lateness*, 13 and 26.

[32] This is not to suggest, however, that such a melancholy perspective on history may only be construed as debilitating and passive. Such melancholy aesthetics as elaborated in this essay should be as quite distinct from manifestations of melancholy such as the resignation encapsulated in Benjamin's left-wing melancholia, which condemns the political left's nostalgia-inflected tendency towards backward-looking and conservative attachment to the way things used to be or might have turned out had history followed a different course. The 'left melancholic', as Benjamin tersely notes, 'takes as much pride in the traces of former spiritual goods as the bourgeois do in their material goods'. Loss and melancholy are central to Benjaminian thought and, although his writing on melancholy is not explicitly acknowledged as a response to Freud, Benjamin's observations build on Freud's earlier work. However, where Freud views melancholy as a condition to be diagnosed in an individual, Benjamin sees melancholy, particularly the left-wing variety, as an historical problem related to the experience of modernity. See Walter Benjamin, 'Left-Wing Melancholy', in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton

For Fritzsche, the disconnection between past and present renders history an object of intense scrutiny for cultural practitioners in the present, and this is certainly true in the case of the literary genre of melancholy cosmopolitan novels. However, this essay posits a different characterization for the self-understanding of literary artists and the present they inhabit. While, for Fritzsche, 'insofar as the present was characterized by the new, the past appeared increasingly different, mysterious, and inaccessible',[33] a reading of the present not as *new* but as *late* further underscores the bereft sense of coming after articulated in novels such as those mentioned above, intensifying their conceptualization of history *as* melancholy. Franco Moretti suggests that by understanding that literature '*follows* great social changes—that it always "comes after"', then it is able to not only repeat or reflect the problems of history, but to resolve them.[34] That such resolution should be automatic is perhaps overly optimistic. This essay therefore prefers to qualify the causality expressed by Moretti, arguing that in coming after—or, indeed, later—and being self-conscious of this, novels which exhibit in various ways a melancholy aesthetic and a melancholy perspective on history, collectively express a possibility for the resolution of historical problems and the potential for a generative sense of future renewal in literature to emerge. Such potentiality is perhaps best exemplified in Sebald's understanding of his own literary project as 'Ein Versuch der Restitution', as his final public speech at the opening of the Literaturhaus in Stuttgart attests.[35] Such a project holds that the recovery, restoration, and reparation of historical damage may be enacted through fiction, thereby meaningfully moving closer towards the rectification of the catastrophes stemming from what J. J. Long has termed the 'meta-problem' of modernity that haunts Sebald's œuvre.[36] For Long, the melancholy aesthetics in Sebald's work constitute an epiphenomenon of his thematization of this meta-problem. At least in the Sebaldian case, melancholy may thus be understood as a potentially restorative aesthetic form, a means of recognition and of bearing witness that allows the meta-problem of modernity to be articulated, as well as an active response, both affective and effective, to its legacy of destruction and loss. This essay's conceptualization of melancholy cosmopolitanism draws partly on the notion of a literature of

Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 304–6, esp. 305.

[33] Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*, 7.

[34] Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1996), 6. Emphasis in original.

[35] 'An attempt at restitution'. W. G. Sebald, 'Zerstreute Reminiszenzen: Gedanken zur Eröffnung eines Stuttgarter Hauses', *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, November 18, 2001.

[36] J. J. Long, *W. G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1. See also, Stuart Taberner, 'German Nostalgia? Remembering German-Jewish Life in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*', *Germanic Review* 79 (2004): 181–202.

restitution, but expands the focus from the reparation of historical calamity to include the potential restitution of literary form and style. If, as well as the restoration of property to rightful owners, the term restitution may connote, as Russell Kilbourn argues, the restoration of works of art, then novels such as those mentioned above may be understood as offering recompense to works of European literature and culture, which both carry the burden of modernity's damages and thematize this in their narratives, by dint of their narrators' self-consciously melancholy aesthetic attitude.[37]

If there is a distinctly Germanic flavour to the articulations of melancholy referenced in this essay, then this is most clearly evoked in another saturnine angelic figure, who acts as a modern counterpart to Dürer's engraving: Benjamin's celebrated Angel of History. Blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress, the *Angelus Novus* presides over the ruins of modernity's failures, fixedly contemplating history while inextricably moving away from it.[38] Such an awareness of the past's irreconcilable and unbridgeable distance from their present lends the narratives of these end-of-the-twentieth-century novels a melancholy perception of history. If Benjamin's Angel thus acts as a metaphor for modernity's progress, metaphysically presiding over the destruction wreaked by Western advancement, then melancholy cosmopolitan novels' later echo of this cultural embodiment of the modern and the European endows them with further pathos.[39] The view of history expressed at such a late hour in novels

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[37] Russell J. A. Kilbourn, 'The Question of Genre in W. G. Sebald's "Prose" (Towards a Post-Memorial Literature of Restitution)', in *A Literature of Restitution: Critical Essays on W. G. Sebald*, ed. Jeannette Baxter, Valerie Henitiuk, and Ben Hutchinson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 247–64, esp. 261.

[38] It is worth quoting the translation of the ninth thesis on the philosophy of history in full to appreciate the scale of the melancholy separation of the past, the present, and the unseeable future Benjamin evokes: 'A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress', Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1968), 253–64, esp. 257–8. For the original German, see Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), vol. 1, 697.

[39] It is interesting to note that, even only a few years after Sebald's untimely death in 2001, theorizations of his work in relation to Benjamin's Angel of History were already being perceived as tired reformulations in some quarters. In an early piece of Sebaldian scholarship, for example, Julia Hell takes the Angel of History as evoked by Sebald in his lectures on *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999) as a point of departure but prefaces her essay by warning that she is 'not proposing another reading of Sebald through the lens of Benjamin; on the contrary, I would like to find out what this cultural icon of the (academic) left—by now so worn out, so terribly fatigued— might be glossing over, if not concealing'. In the wake of the reams of subsequent Sebald scholarship engaging with these very notions (which, of course, includes the present essay), this statement has acquired a wry ambiguity: is the Angel of History, Benjamin, or Sebald himself understood to be the fatigued cultural icon? See Julia Hell, 'The Angel's Enigmatic Eyes, or The Gothic Beauty of Catastrophic History in W. G. Sebald's *Airwar and Literature*', *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004): 361–92, esp. 361 and 380.

such as those mentioned above gestures towards a way of understanding melancholy aesthetics in European fiction as moving towards a form of potential restitution for European literature. Such melancholy—such grief over history and the inability to reconcile past and present in literary works—suggests, when they are read alongside one another, neither a loss of interest nor an inability to act as they might individually articulate, but rather a generative potential to salvage something from the wreckage of European literary modernity.

Beyond the Benjaminian *Angelus*, this generative potential of melancholy to articulate a sense of commonality and futurity in European literature through self-consciousness of precisely said melancholy outlook on the past also echoes the Nietzschean figures of *Spätlinge* ("late-comers") and *Erstlinge* ("first-comers").[40] Although he would later move towards a criticism of modernity as decadent, in Nietzsche's earlier work—particularly in *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (1876) and *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878)—his perception of nineteenth-century Europe as oversaturated with preceding cultures leads him to critique modernity and modern writers as epigonal, as well as encouraging modern man's understanding of himself as a latecomer.[41] For Nietzsche, such lateness and epigonality has both positive and negative implications, however. From a philosophical perspective, epigonality is entirely unproductive. 'The belief that one is a latecomer of the age is', Nietzsche argues, 'paralysing and depressing: but it must appear dreadful and devastating when such a belief one day by a bold inversion raises this latecomer to godhood as the true meaning and goal of all previous events, when his miserable condition is equated with a completion of world history'.[42] Nonetheless, Nietzsche considers epigonality and lateness as essential and productive categories for modern poets, who 'have to be in many respects beings facing backwards [*rückwärts gewendete Wesen*], so that they can be employed as bridges to quite distant ages and conceptions, to dead or dying religions and cultures. They are, in fact, always and necessarily epigones'.[43] Accordingly, in order to overcome the anxiety of arriving at the end of the century and the immensity of what has gone before, Nietzsche advocates that modern writers become self-conscious of their lateness and epigonality, making these the preconditions for cultural renewal. 'The thought of being epigones, which can often be a painful thought, is also capable', Nietzsche observes, 'of evoking great effects and grand hopes for the future in both an

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[40] For further discussion of Nietzsche and the 'latecomers' of modernity, see Hutchinson, *Lateness*, 198–213.

[41] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 81–90.

[42] Ibid., 104.

[43] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 81. Cited in Hutchinson, *Lateness*, p. 4 and 204.

individual and a nation, provided we regard ourselves as the heirs and successors of the astonishing powers of antiquity'.[44] Self-conscious awareness of lateness and epigonality on the part of the narrators of such novels as those mentioned above, along with the melancholy anxiety caused by their historical position, may then be worked through, such that, 'even if they themselves are late born [*Spätlinge*]', as Nietzsche declares of modern poets, 'coming generations will know them only as first-born [*Erstlinge*]'.[45] As Ben Hutchinson also observes, for Nietzsche, 'truly strong moderns will not look to bury the past, but rather to generate the future'.[46] Rather than attempting to forget the past and ignore one's late historical position and sense of epigonality, the self-conscious acknowledgement of these factors—and, by extension, of the melancholy view of the past that may emerge from them—has the potential to suggest both a shared futurity and the possibility of renewal.[47]

By collectively grouping together melancholy European novels, and by appreciating them alongside one another, it is possible, the present essay ventures to suggest, that their shared melancholy sensibility may be understood as 'cosmopolitan'. To do this, it will be helpful to consider a corollary figure to Nietzsche's backward-facing modern poets: the 'good European', for whom personal stylization and self-consciousness are essential. Through the ethos of the 'good European', Nietzsche imagines a community that has risen above nationalism, since this figure was initially conceived as a response to the emergence in the late 1800s of nationalist tendencies across Europe. Nietzsche claims that by being 'undaunted in presenting [one]self' as a good European, it is possible to exhibit a self-consciously cosmopolitan European identity.[48] It is the right and responsibility of each individual, Nietzsche argues, to make themselves and their lives more aesthetic, more artistic, more poetic, and more beautiful, thereby enriching the totality of European culture and society. The 'good European' is, as Martine Prange has noted, 'the exemplary *cosmopolitan* practitioner', and his form of cosmopolitanism is a highly individual praxis, the focus of which is self-consciousness and self-

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[44] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 103–4.
[45] Ibid., 106–7. Cited in Hutchinson, *Lateness*, 203.
[46] Hutchinson, *Lateness*, 203.
[47] Given the time- and location-bound nature of cultural and historical constructions of melancholy cosmopolitanism, it may seem anachronistic to draw on Nietzsche's thoughts from the end of the nineteenth century to elucidate the aesthetic attitudes of novels written over a hundred years later. Needless to say, the Europe of Nietzsche's day was markedly different to that of the end of the twentieth century and in this hundred-year interval, Nietzsche's future-oriented philosophy for European culture and society to exist beyond the limits of nationhood never became a reality. This, however, is precisely why it is not only useful to consider Nietzsche in order to understand these novels' melancholy cosmopolitanism, but arguably essential.
[48] Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 228. Emphasis added. (Original German: 'so soll man sich nur ungescheut als *guten Europäer* ausgeben').

renewal, but within a collective of similarly self-conscious practitioners.[49] Through their narrators' self-consciously assumed stance of melancholy with respect to the past, which already contains the seeds of possible renewal and the (re)generation of the future, novels such as those mentioned above thus encapsulate a particular form of European cosmopolitanism. This is not to argue that the narrators or, indeed, the authors of melancholy cosmopolitan novels are themselves actively striving to embody the figure of the good European, however. Rather, it is to suggest that, when viewed through a Nietzschean lens, it is precisely out of a self-consciousness of their melancholy perspective on the past that an understanding of this group of European novels as cosmopolitan may begin to coalesce. When they are read alongside one another, such works echo Nietzsche's suggestion of the potential for an aesthetic literary community to exist beyond individual national contexts and traditions without being lost in the totality of humanity. In doing so, novels such as those mentioned above, whose aesthetics are grounded in the melancholy of history, collectively suggest the possibility of overcoming this through their self-conscious narrative explorations of it.

European Cosmopolitan Fiction

Emerging from melancholy self-consciousness, the form of cosmopolitan literature hypothesized in this essay is understood to be a distinct feature of European fiction. The adjective 'cosmopolitan' is employed alongside 'melancholy' in an attempt to best encompass this aesthetic attitude, rather than in any explicitly political or philosophical sense—such as in notable theorizations by Immanuel Kant or Jürgen Habermas, for example—or as an overtly anthropological, ethical, or sociological descriptor.[50] Nevertheless, the use of the term 'cosmopolitanism' to describe a melancholy aesthetic attitude and to circumscribe an emergent literary genre requires substantial legitimization and defence, not least because the idea of qualifying or quantifying 'cosmopolitanism' may initially appear to be at odds with the universalizing impetus of the term itself, while also not directly corresponding to the desire for isolation common to a melancholy sensibility. Etymology will provide a helpful point of departure here. Beyond its literal translation from the Greek as 'citizen of the world', the term cosmopolitanism, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, has been understood since at

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[49] Martine Prange, 'Cosmopolitan Roads to Culture and the Festival Road of Humanity: The Cosmopolitan Praxis of Nietzsche's Good European against Kantian Cosmopolitanism', *Ethical Perspectives: Journal of the European Ethics Network* 14, no. 3 (2007): 269–86, esp. 270. Emphasis added.
[50] See, for example, Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', in *Political Writings*, ed. H. S. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 41–53 and Jürgen Habermas, 'Towards a Cosmopolitan Europe', *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 4 (2003): 86–100.

least the early 1840s in Europe as an adjective denoting 'the characteristics that arise from, or are suited to, a range over many countries'.[51] This usage is borne out by the *Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales*, which claims that as early as 1825, the word 'cosmopolite' was understood in the following terms: 'où coexistent des éléments de plusieurs nations'.[52] Even on a purely semantic level, therefore, 'cosmopolitanism' may not only denote universalist ideas of 'world citizenship', or the ethical, philosophical, and political imperatives of recent discourses such as 'cosmopolitan memory'.[53] It might also signify characteristics arising out of more than one national context, as well as those which are suited to multiple—but not necessarily all—national contexts. The forms of melancholy in novels such as those mentioned above relate not only to the specific national literary contexts out of which they emerge, but are also common to more than one national literary context within European literature.

Highlighting the aforementioned usages is not merely an attempt to make a pedantic point about the history of the word's etymology, especially since such definitions are neither binding nor exclusive. However, it does reveal a particular significance of the word 'cosmopolitan' within the European milieu in which this essay situates itself, not least that in spite of superficially transparent etymological roots, 'cosmopolitanism' has long been a term weighted with a multitude of implications.[54] When attempting to navigate the substantial discourse on cosmopolitanism, therefore, it is important to recall that 'there are multiple forms of cosmopolitanism which relate quite differently to the particular and the other, to the nation and the world', as Stuart Taberner notes.[55] All of these forms of cosmopolitanism articulate in various ways a move away from nationalism, imagining a form of community that transcends national and linguistic boundaries. Although universalist notions of cosmopolitanism are often all too utopian or abstract for practical use in comparative literary study, defining the term within a particular epistemological context may threaten to impede its inherent openness. Since the multifaceted epistemology of 'cosmopolitanism' is one of its inherent qualities, however, it

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[51] <www.oed.com/viewdictionary/Entry/42259>, accessed August 24, 2020.

[52] 'Where elements of several nations coexist'. <www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/cosmopolite>, accessed August 24, 2020.

[53] For further discussion of this, see Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, 'Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory', *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 87–106, esp. 88–9.

[54] As Stefano Evangelista and Richard Hibbitt observe, throughout the long history of cosmopolitan thought, the term 'has kept generating provocative questions about the ethics, aesthetics and politics of belonging, community, citizenship and humanity'. See Stefano Evangelista and Richard Hibbitt, 'Guest Editors' Introduction: *Fin-de-siècle Cosmopolitanism*', *Comparative Critical Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 123–138, esp. 134.

[55] Stuart Taberner, 'Memory, Cosmopolitanism and Nation: Christa Wolf's *Stadt der Engel* (2010) and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999)', *Comparative Critical Studies* 11, no. 1 (2014): 49–67, esp. 50.

offers a lens through which comparative literature, freed from the rigid restrictions of theoretical frameworks, may perceive and reimagine literary works in new ways, while simultaneously offering specific insights into the notion of 'cosmopolitanism' from a particular—in this case melancholy—epistemological purchase. For better or for worse, cosmopolitanism is a term defined by its limitations and specificities as much as by its capaciousness.

Fittingly, given this essay's earlier evocation of Nietzschean *Spätlinge*, literature is, as Kristian Shaw observes, 'a late arrival' to the field of cosmopolitan studies, whose values attempt to preserve individual cultural heritages while acknowledging the existence and validity of disparate cultures in the new millennium.[56] Particularly in recent Anglophone literary scholarship, cosmopolitanism has gained wide currency via a plethora of theorizations in the past twenty years. In Shaw's own work, British and American novels are understood to be examples of cosmopolitan fiction when they respond to the accelerated changes in world society that led to a sense of cultural fragility at the turn of the millennium by imagining new configurations of cultural identity and community, as well as socio-political interdependence. While Amanda Anderson attends to the ways in which cosmopolitan practices in nineteenth-century British culture are informed by ideals of critical detachment, Jessica Berman explores how many modernist writers such as Henry James, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein developed cosmopolitan models for social organization, since their writings return again and again to issues of commonality, shared voice, and exchange of experience.[57] For Alan McCluskey, meanwhile, the notion of a modern cosmopolitan novel is inherently connected to questions of materiality in contemporary fictional works, such that the unconventional stylistic techniques of authors such as J. M. Coetzee, Caryl Phillips, and Philip Roth elicit a critical and materially attentive engagement with issues of race, gender, and class, which thus qualifies them as cosmopolitan.[58] Berthold Schoene, furthermore, suggests that Britain's historical complicity in colonialism and imperialism marks the nation as a prime example of cosmopolitan cultural relations. Concentrating on the importance of cosmopolitanism to nation-state paradigms, Schoene recognizes that narrative imaginings of global community in British fiction are increasingly localized and pragmatic, moving away from what he perceives to be utopian naïveté, while remaining focused on combatting the worst effects of globalization through what

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[56] Kristian Shaw, 'Teaching Contemporary Cosmopolitanism', in *Teaching 21st Century Genres*, ed. Katy Shaw (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 167–185, esp. 169.

[57] Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[58] Alan McCluskey, *Materiality and the Modern Cosmopolitan Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

he calls the 'cosmopolitan imagination'.[59] Responding directly to Schoene, Fiona McCulloch offers further readings of the ways in which identities are imagined in contemporary British fiction through the lens of cosmopolitan political theory, arguing that empathetic shifts from entrenched territorialism to an idealized all-encompassing planetary impetus may enable a curative response to capitalist globalization.[60] McCulloch also takes Schoene to task for his 'phallocratic' attempt to 'pin down and fix a definition to a concept that should remain open'.[61] Indeed, if one thing can be drawn from all of these scholars' accounts, it is that the term "cosmopolitan" and the ideas it denotes are so inherently capacious that they sometimes threaten to become impractically nebulous. Yet, seen in another way, its potential disadvantages might in fact be regarded as advantageous, since cosmopolitanism's intellectual pliancy may open up new ways of imagining literature, illuminating facets of certain literary works that otherwise would not have come to light.

What is immediately striking in the theorizations of cosmopolitanism in literature sketched out above is not only how these readings focus almost exclusively on Anglophone novels, surely revealing an implicit but nonetheless relevant limitation to the cosmopolitan ideal they pursue, but also how the discourse around cosmopolitanism swelled around the turn of the millennium. Given the historical situatedness and perspective of the present essay and the novels that inspired it, this is both fitting and revealing. Beyond the Anglophone literary sphere, and returning once more to German-language literature, David D. Kim's analysis of what he terms 'cosmopolitan parables' in twentieth-century German literature from Hans Christoph Buch's *Die Rede des toten Kolumbus am Tag des Jüngsten Gerichts* (1992) and Michael Krüger's *Himmelfarb* (1993) to W. G. Sebald's *Die Ringe des Saturn* brings sociological and political formulations of the cosmopolitan to bear on literary analysis of trauma and memory. For Kim, these novels 'produce dissonant social relations through which readers are able to reflect on their own implicated relationships with strangers in pain'.[62] The cosmopolitan forms of world citizenship extrapolated from these novels, Kim argues, exhibit a principally didactic impetus, with Sebald, for example, producing in what is arguably his most ambitious work 'a fugue of international voices or a mosaic of cross-referential claims to truth in world citizenship'.[63] For Kim, the form of cosmopolitanism in these post-*Wende* German novels is

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[59] Berthold Schoene, *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), esp. 180–6.
[60] Fiona McCulloch, *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction: Imagined Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[61] Ibid., 7.
[62] David D. Kim, *Cosmopolitan Parables: Trauma and Responsibility in Contemporary Germany* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 185.
[63] Ibid., 181.

principally rooted in traumatic memories and imagined experiences, which haunt the present and provide a foundation for cosmopolitan political action. For the purposes of the present essay, however, the conceptualization of melancholy cosmopolitan novels as a literary genre is less concerned with attempting another theorization of a political or philosophical cosmopolitan ethos through literary works and more geared towards describing and examining a literary sensibility or aesthetic attitude that emerges among novels written around a similar time in discrete national literary contexts within a broader European cultural milieu. And it is here that the assumed pose of self-conscious melancholy and the praxis of European cosmopolitanism come together.

Such an adopted stance is not unlike that of Nietzsche's "good European". Indeed, as Rebecca Walkowitz argues, not only do 'cultural strategies of posture have a significant role in cosmopolitan paradigms', but, in fact, 'cosmopolitan literary style emerges 'as [an] attitude, stand, posture, and consciousness'.[64] Any literary style understood as cosmopolitan ultimately constitutes, as Pieter Vermeulen has suggested, a defence of cosmopolitanism as aestheticism, in that it privileges a 'rarefied repertoire of aesthetic postures, gestures, and styles'.[65] However, as Vermeulen goes on to remark, the critical potency of such aesthetic styles and literary postures is not to be disqualified outright by its elite provenance. Even if a form of cosmopolitan aesthetics is identifiable with a literary elite, this does not automatically render it invalid and unable to provide deeper insights into literary works. Rather, it shifts the focus, as Bruce Robbins argues, towards identifying 'a proper tone in which this can be acknowledged'.[66] Studying aspects of literature that might be considered cosmopolitan is naturally suggestive of a normative notion of literature without borders or boundaries. Nevertheless, this easily attracts accusations of elitism that cast it as a product of Western expansionism and an excuse for cultural imperialism, even as it attempts to resist monocultural nationalism. Reading melancholy cosmopolitanism in European fiction is thus a means of revealing and cataloguing

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[64] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 6 and 17. In the final chapter of her study, Walkowitz's analysis focuses exclusively on Sebald's *Die Ringe des Saturn*, arguing that in this novel Sebald both 'enhances and disables the place of national fiction' through its attempt to understand how people's lives in one place might be reliant or contingent on the lives of others in a different place. What Walkowitz identifies as the cosmopolitan style of Sebald's prose is thus reliant on the reassertion of the value of aesthetic culture—the stylized literary pose of the European cosmopolitan writer—at a time when contemporary society refuses to do so. For further discussion of this, see Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 170.

[65] Pieter Vermeulen, *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 89.

[66] Bruce Robbins, 'The Village of the Liberal Managerial Class', in *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker (London: Routledge, 2001), 15–32, esp. 16. Cited in Vermeulen, *Contemporary Literature*, 90.

constitutive tensions at play between the European and the national within European literature by containing this analysis within a European context. As Moretti notes, 'the nation-state… found the novel. And vice versa: the novel found the nation-state. And being the only symbolic form that could represent it, it became an essential component of our modern culture'.[67] This has its roots in earlier forms of European culture, not least given the emergence of European literature alongside the rise of the vernacular languages in Western Europe as a container for national literatures, as Walter Cohen argues.[68] All of which is to say that the study of forms of literary cosmopolitanism must be culturally grounded within particular contexts, as Bruce Robbins argues, especially if the novel is to prove to be a testing-ground for cosmopolitanism, as Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests.[69] In the late twentieth century, as Walkowitz asserts, conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism and the development of modern European literature are closely intertwined.[70] Such literary cosmopolitanism, this essay has suggested, is overwhelmingly melancholy. Accordingly, the literary genre hypothesized here constitutes a distinctly European and literary cosmopolitan pose grounded in a melancholy aesthetic attitude emergent in fiction written around the turn of the millennium.

Concluding Remarks

An essential element of this essay's hypothesis is the multiple valences and limitations cosmopolitanism in spite of its implied universalism, as well as the ways in which it constitutes a stance or attitude that may be qualified, such that melancholy aesthetics may emerge as a unifying feature of novels from various national, cultural, and linguistic contexts. If, as Alexander Beecroft observes, 'cosmopolitan literatures, almost by definition, represent themselves as universal, and yet their very reach often brings them in touch with rival cosmopolitanisms', then cosmopolitanism in literary works may be both defined by hyperbole and demarcated by its own limitations while remaining legitimately cosmopolitan.[71] For Beecroft, literature that may be classed as cosmopolitan includes works that emerge 'wherever a single literary language is used over a large territorial range and through a long period of

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[67] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1997), 17.
[68] Walter Cohen, *A History of European Literature: The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), esp. 81–116.
[69] See Bruce Robbins, 'Comparative Cosmopolitanism', *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 169–86 and Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Cosmopolitan Readings', in *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker (London: Routledge, 2001), 197–227, esp. 207.
[70] Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style*, 20.
[71] Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London: Verso, 2015), 35.

time'.[72] Recalling both the synchronic and diachronic aspects of melancholy novels outlined above (and stretching the definition of the word 'language', which is suggestive of a common speech among literary works in spite of the different languages in which they were originally composed, to include aesthetic elements), novels written within a European cultural context at the close of the twentieth century that exhibit melancholy aesthetics may fulfil Beecroft's criteria of the cosmopolitan, since they emerge across a broad expanse of multiple European nations and tongues, but speak a common aesthetic language. Novels inflected by melancholy do not therefore constitute anything resembling a failed form of cosmopolitanism through their (over-)determination by a particularly European past, insofar as cosmopolitanism always inevitably falls short of its universalist intention of world citizenship. As Mariano Siskind observes, although any notion of literary cosmopolitanism may fail to realize its maximalist universal purpose, it 'nonetheless widens the margins […] and illuminates new meanings by reinscribing cultural particularities in larger, transcultural networks'.[73] Not every European novel written around the turn of the millennium falls into the literary genre proposed above. Nevertheless, this essay has suggested, a collective of self-consciously melancholy novels may be conceived of as cosmopolitan in spite of—or, perhaps better, by virtue of—their own limitations. The tension, therefore, between the nation and a broader European context, not its resolution, emerges as an essential element of the aesthetic practices of certain significant works of European fiction around the turn of the millennium.

If, as Aleida Assmann has suggested, the concept of 'cosmopolitan memory' provides a language for articulating traumatic historical events of the past century, then the literary genre of the melancholy cosmopolitan novel may provide a language for discussing European literary fiction written around the turn of the millennium.[74] Delineating this genre constitutes a heuristic manoeuvre that enables acknowledgement of history's melancholy in European fiction, while also suggesting that the adoption by various writers of a melancholy aesthetic pose in their works is indicative of a wider sense that the meta-problem of European modernity that these novels aim to confront is not confined to distinct national literary contexts. In construing this European melancholy as cosmopolitan, then, the literary genre of melancholy cosmopolitanism proposed by this essay suggests that mutual articulations of melancholy aesthetics in various European novels collectively imply a potential for the melancholy of history to be overcome.

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[72] Ibid., 35.

[73] Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 21–2.

[74] Aleida Assmann, 'Europe: A Community of Memory?', *GHI Bulletin* 40 (2007): 11–25, esp. 14.