

# The Cosmopolitan Imagination in Philip Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic"

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*As a practice, too, cosmopolitanism is yet to come, something awaiting realization.*

Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, & Chakrabarty (2000)

A GREAT DEAL has been made of an article written a decade ago which sets out to confront cosmopolitanism's elusive nature: "We are not exactly certain what it is" adding that "specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an unc cosmopolitan thing to do" (Pollock et al., 2000, p. 577). In her study of cosmopolitanism and education, Sharon Todd (2009) echoes this stance, but in more disconcerted if not resigned terms: Because of its "double commitment" (p. 5) to the local and the global, to the universal and the plural, "cosmopolitanism is not easy to define" (p. 2). Todd sees cosmopolitanism as a "conceptual split" (p. 29) and "deep ambivalence" (p. 28) toward cultural diversity which undermines serious attention to human plurality (p. 31). In much of current scholarship on the subject, other attempts have been made to do possibly the undoable, define seemingly the indefinable. Such stances range from underscoring cosmopolitanism as a project for solidarity (Appiah, 2006; Todd, 2009), as a practice from the bottom-up for global justice (Kurasawa, 2007), as a state of mind and body eager to engage otherness (Nava, 2007), as a worldly sensibility (Pinar, 2009), and as an instrument for social change (Cheah, 2006; Popkewitz, 2008). Drawing from a Kantian-Enlightenment perspective, the latter—i.e., seeing cosmopolitanism as a means to construct sociability through schooling and beyond—attempts to nail down cosmopolitanism in absolute terms, an argument that leaves no room for the spontaneity of the human spirit which might or might not have a cosmopolitan sensibility.

Somewhat different from these variations, I am interested in exploring the cosmopolitan literary imagination and its intersection with curriculum theory by drawing from three works mentioned above: Nava's, Kurasawa's, and Pinar's, each of which underscores cosmopolitanism's *lived* experiences in unique ways. As such, special attention will be paid to Nava's (2007) psychoanalytical discourse on cosmopolitanism which examines the "unconscious factors" and "the non-intellectual, emotional, inclusive" and "intimate" features of an individual's "feelings

of attraction for and identification with otherness” (p. 8), Kurasawa’s (2007) political perspective on what he calls “critical cosmopolitanism” (p. 194) exercised through “public discourse and action” as a “form of world-making” (p. 88), and Pinar’s (2009) emphasis on a cosmopolitan education in which “curriculum design is not a matter of psychological manipulation but of the esthetic juxtaposition of academic knowledge addressed to students who may already be worldly-wise” (p. 11). Looked at together, these contributions from different disciplines provide a particularly rich platform to engage the cosmopolitan imaginary paradox, powerfully illustrated in Philip Roth’s (1959/1987) long short story “Eli, the Fanatic.” As such, this piece of literature will be examined as a curricular case study which requires a brief summary of the story’s plot.

With the Holocaust as the unspoken backdrop, “Eli, the Fanatic” challenges the protagonist, Eli Peck, and the student of literature to consider the (un)ethics of a group of assimilated, secular Jews who as “*hote*” (Derrida, 2000, p. 125) become increasingly hostile to their unassimilated Jewish neighbors, fearing the rise of anti-Semitism in their quiet, mixed community. Eli plays the role of lawyer-spokesperson for the suburban Woodenton Jewish community, “lay[ing] down the law” of “conditional hospitality” (Derrida, 2000, p. 123) toward the Yeshiva and the Holocaust survivors who live and learn there. Speaking for his neighbors, Eli demands in a formal ‘legalese’ letter that the displaced person (DP) no-name “greenie” trade in his traditional Hasidic garb for modern day attire. The twist in the story takes place when the box Eli had handed over to the Yeshiva which contained a “greenish tweed suit” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 269) from his own closet meant for the greenie had unexpectedly been returned to him, now housing the greenie’s old clothing, suggesting that the DP greenie had “give[n] up,” had “surrender[ed]” (p. 286) to the demands of Woodenton. In a spontaneous about-face, Eli slides inside the DP’s outfit and proceeds to walk through town in it, the performance-act itself causing surprise and outrage along the way, ending with him in a hospital being sedated for his fanatical behavior.

Not an abstract principle or ethic to guide one’s actions, the cosmopolitanism found in “Eli, the Fanatic,” is both psychic and performative, providing productive juxtapositions of the spiritual and the sensual, the *Bildung* self-formative aesthetic tradition articulated by Herder (as cited in Autio, 2006) which “is a non-political concept that focuses on the individual’s process of inner self-development, unfolding, [and] self-cultivation—in accordance with an organic concept of nature and natural development” (p. 2) and a politicized, world-making performance artistically rendered in the actions of Eli Peck. What makes Roth’s story a particularly provocative instance of the paradox of cosmopolitanism is Eli himself, a character who both negotiates and embodies a series of contradictions such as self and other, private and public, sacred and profane, the latter particularly timely in curriculum studies as Pinar (2009) points out: “[s]pirituality, sexuality, and sustainability are among those structures of subjectivity the present historical situation fractures” (p. 5). And yet stories like “Eli, the Fanatic” beckon scholars, teachers, and students alike to contemplate together the complexity of the cosmopolitan imagination, which in itself is an exercise in self-formation and world-making.

“Eli, the Fanatic” summons both the self-shaping *Bildung* tradition and an education cultivated in and for the common, public realm of appearance-action “which comes from being seen and heard by others” and which most often occurs in “storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 50). Not instrumentalized to create educational objectives and outcomes, a cosmopolitan education requires critical, rigorous attention to “subjectivity’s engagement” (Pinar, 2009, p. vii) with the world. Such erudition derives from insight into the “subjective and the social.” “[T]he book, necessary and precious as it is, was also at the same time a very special point of entry into the worldliness of the world’

(Radhakrishnan, 2008, p. 117)...schooling is not about itself; it provides passages to the world” (Pinar, 2009, p. 145).

Literature, in its “outstanding permanence” as a “work of art” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 167), can function as what Kurasawa (2007) calls “aesthetic cosmopolitanism” when it “nurture[s] the formation of global imagined communities” (p. 187) and an “ethos of openness” (p. 188) that does not require geographic travel (Nava, 2007). “Cosmopolitanism” can and does “take place at home, in the family, in the neighborhood, in the interior territories of the mind and body” (p. 12). It also takes place in the classroom. The literature classroom, in particular, provides a unique place for the cosmopolitan spirit to be kindled because this space provokes learners to confront, consider, and embrace an imagined human plurality in storytelling *and* a material one embodied in the “lived experience” of the curriculum and “transaction that takes place among teachers and students” (Grumet, Anderson, & Osmond, 2008, p. 138). “Speech and action” which occur in classroom transactions, “reveal this unique distinctness” of the “paradoxical plurality of unique beings” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 176). What literature does require is the use of the reader’s traveling imagination, which is central to “the production of insight” (Sumara, 2002, p. 5) in literary interpretation; such insight, I would add, takes on cosmopolitan qualities in the case of “Eli, the Fanatic,” as the ensuing textual analysis will demonstrate.

For Sumara (2002), “literary interpretive practices can transform imaginative occasions into productive insights” (p. 5). Pressing Sumara’s notion of productive insights further, these occasions become cosmopolitan when centered on the juxtaposition of self and other, material and spiritual, personal and political, which constitute preconditions for worldliness (Pinar, 2009). A “worldly imagination,” says Pinar, drawing from Radhakrishnan and Greene, “is not to be encouraged uncritically” because it “is not necessarily benign” (p. 7). “Hannah Arendt,” who also “promoted ‘worldliness’...as ‘chief’ among cosmopolitan virtues” (p. 28–9), also placed great value on “the faculty of the imagination,” which is the “gift of an ‘understanding heart’” and is “far removed from sentimentality” (Arendt, 1994, p. 322). In the climactic moment of “Eli, the Fanatic,” Eli exhibits an “understanding heart” through his “desire for merger *with* the other, about the desire to *become* different” (Nava, 2007, p. 40). And this merger—going beyond Nava who underscores the visceral aspects of cosmopolitanism—is simultaneously sacred and profane; as such, it is an instance of the cosmopolitanism elucidated by Pinar (2009) in his three biographical sketches of “passionate lives in public service” whose lives are a cosmopolitan curriculum, the life and death of Pier Paolo Pasolini, “a most ‘excellent pedagogist,’” (p. 99) captures the sacred-profane qualities of cosmopolitanism most profoundly.

To be clear, a cosmopolitan education in the sense being used here is distinct from a sentimental education. Todd (2009), on the other hand, ascertains that “most educational initiatives...reflect more clearly the classical strand of cosmopolitan thought” (p. 29) which “base their views on appeals to universal humanity” (p. 25) and feel-good language. It seems to me that such a normative view of cosmopolitanism—which, for Todd, is “couched in some nice language of ‘care,’ ‘love, or ‘empathy’” (p. 20) is closely linked with sentimentalism as purported and supported by Richard Rorty in moving people to moral action (Jollimore & Barrios, 2006). For the sentimentalist, “literature moves people to moral action by operating directly on their sentiments; and this, at least in terms of moral education, is its sole function” (p. 365). Rather, a cosmopolitan literature education cannot be reduced to sentimental, overly romantic instruction or instrumentalism as “Eli, the Fanatic” demonstrates, with its unpredictability and indeterminacy.

As a former high school and college English teacher, ESL instructor, and curriculum developer, I maintain that teaching toward an end, such as social engineering for cosmopolitanism, runs counter to my own experiences and “subjectiv[e] engagement” (Pinar, 2009, p. vii) with the world. While I chose to teach certain texts that have a cosmopolitan sensibility or characteristics—Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, Roth’s *Eli, the Fanatic*, and Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* to name a few<sup>1</sup>—each student in each class brought her or his own unique experiences to these texts so that discourse rarely ever ended in agreement about, for example, Shylock—arguably one of literature’s most unpredictable, problematic characters. More often than not, students’ conversations about cosmopolitan literature often (though not always) ended in respectful disagreement, which, according to Appiah (2006) is what inevitably happens when encountering others: “[i]f we are to encourage cosmopolitan engagement, moral conversation between people *across* societies, we must expect such disagreements: after all, they occur *within* societies” (p. 46). “The struggle,” Appiah (2006) adds, “is not to agree but just to understand” (p. 47). Such a perspective on cosmopolitanism is particularly applicable to those exchanges that take place in literature classrooms, making ideological “educational initiative[s]” to use Todd’s (2009) word choice, challenging to say the least. Nevertheless, such encounters have provided a space for my own students and—based on my experiences as a teacher supervisor who observed other literature classrooms in action—other students alike to recognize and appreciate Difference found within course readings and the conversations which arose from out of those readings. It is Pinar (2009) who points out, “[a]s rich and varied as the scholarly literature on cosmopolitanism is, I realized quickly that what it lacks is attention to subjectivity and its cultivation through education” (p. x). It is here where I bring my own subjective reading to a cosmopolitan story, “Eli, the Fanatic.”

In the story’s climax-crisis, Eli suddenly finds himself inside the greenie’s Hasidic garb; “*it* smelled deeper than blackness” (p. 286). What is the italicized “*it*” that smells darker than the depths of darkness? Does “*it*” beckon Eli to confront the recent atrocities committed against European Jewry? Does “*it*” signify Jewish religious traditions which are a distant, dark reminder to the Jews of Woodenton from whence they came? And/or is the “*it*” a representation of an embarrassing Self that the assimilated Jews reject? Following this latter line of questioning, “Eli, the Fanatic,” contradicts normative notions of cosmopolitanism which situates the Other as beyond, if not alien (Kant, 1983) from, oneself. Speaking from a modernist perspective and within the context of colonialism and slavery, Kant frames cosmopolitanism as a code of ethics on the subject of hospitality to foreigners who, as fellow human beings, have “common ownership of the earth’s surface” (p. 118). As such, Kant creates a separation between the host and the hosted, the familiar and the foreign, situating “Eli, the Fanatic,” in this particular framework, outside cosmopolitanism’s domain.

A closer reading of the story, however, begs a reconsideration of what constitutes the cosmopolitan self-other encounter. If we situate otherness, like Kristeva (1991) does in her psychoanalytic reconceptualization of cosmopolitanism, as an “uncanny” encounter with the self, summoning “the foreigner...within us” (p. 191), then the desire to become different takes on paradoxical implications. For Kristeva, otherness is not beyond the self, it also “refers to the very unconscious dimensions of human experience that condition each individual’s existence” (Todd, 2009, p. 41). Kristeva (as cited in Todd, 2009) makes the “paradoxical assertion that ‘if I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners...we are all foreigners’” (p. 41). With this reading of cosmopolitanism in mind, Eli’s act of breathing in and wearing another person’s clothing, would be a visceral cosmopolitan one as it signifies, paradoxically, a desire for merger with a distant self

and a “desire for the other, for something different” (Nava, 2007, p. 40). Because the clothing has religious significance, the act also takes on spiritual resonance. Immanent and transcendent, earthly and holy, Eli, as a character study, is a curriculum for cosmopolitanism. And Philip Roth as artist-writer plays between the local anxieties of an imagined town and the beyond-the-local proclivities of a character.

As “a novelist whose cosmopolitanism has for too long been hidden under the familiar rubric of Jewish American[ism]” (Posnock, 2006, p. 3), Roth once ascertained that the “writer’s imagination falters in the face of...the grotesque and the outlandish” (as cited in Lasch, 1984, p. 130), such as the Holocaust. “In their bafflement and disgust, many writers turn away from the ‘grand-er social and political phenomena of our times’...and ‘take the self as their subject’: the ‘sheer fact of self, the vision of self as inviolate, powerful, and nervy, self as the only real thing in an unreal environment’” (as cited in Lasch, 1984, p. 130). “Eli, the Fanatic,” a complicated, “nervy,” yet recognizable self-subject character study for a 1959 post-Holocaust reader and beyond, also speaks to the “inward concept of *Bildung*...as inner sanctum [which] came to dominate educational debate in the search for the scholarly establishment of education and pedagogy as a discipline” (Autio, 2006, p. 2): “the *Bildung*—discourse became pregnant by the expressions like self-determination...freedom, emancipation, autonomy, maturity/responsibility...reason, self activity. *Bildung* was to be understood as a capability or competence to self-definition that means the liberation from outer determination to inner-directedness” (p. 3). While Roth indicates that writers—in “an age of extremity” (Lasch, 1984, p. 130)—retreat to the individual, to self-empowerment, “Eli, the Fanatic” does have socio-political implications.

Eli’s resistance to and freedom from the “assimilationist egalitarianism” of the Woodenton Jews, which is premised on “cultural similarity as a precondition for the production of a sense of togetherness and responsibility for the...welfare of all” (Kurasawa, 2007, p. 170), takes place when he proceeds to walk through town in the religiously inspired clothing, a self-actualizing, emancipating and political, world-making provocation. “Spirituality can inspire political action” (Pinar, 2009, p. 5). In their desire to eradicate difference, are the Woodenton Jews eradicating an embarrassing self, as well? Is this desire to destroy a consequence of living in “an age of science” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 286) where “medieval...superstition” (p. 278) won’t be tolerated? This paradoxical intolerance does contradict juxtapositions (e.g., self and other) which constitute preconditions for normative interpretations of cosmopolitanism. Yet, in light of Kristeva’s (1991) reconfiguration of cosmopolitanism, the “destructive and untamable aspect[s]” (Todd, 2009, p. 41) of human existence such as those performed by Eli “can actually give rise to a remapping of the terms of cosmopolitan coexistence” (p. 41). Indeed, Eli’s act of walking through town in the greenie’s clothes inspires such a remapping.

For Pinar (2009), “[c]osmopolitanism confounds conformity”; a “cosmopolitan education invites an ongoing self-reflection associated with solitude while engaged with others” (p. ix). Speaking for his neighbors in the letter he writes to the head of the Yeshiva, Leo Tzuref, before his “revelation” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 291), Eli parrots assimilationist rhetoric: “Woodenton is a progressive suburban community whose members, both Jewish and Gentile, are anxious that their families live in comfort and beauty and serenity...both Jews and Gentiles alike have had to give up some of their more extreme practices in order not to threaten or offend the other” (p. 261–2). The hostility to self-other exhibited by Eli’s neighbors heightens when the guy with “the crazy hat” (p. 259), “dressed like 1000 B.C.” in his “funeral suit” (p. 275) is seen tramping through town. “Goddam fanatics...This is the twentieth century, Eli...Pretty soon all the little Yeshiva boys’ll be spilling down into town. Next thing they’ll be after our daughters” (p. 258).



The story not only provokes a reconsideration of modern values, it also calls for a recovery of the spiritual in curriculum studies. A writer whose characters are often considered rebellious and “rude” (Posnock, 2006, p. xi), whose writing is built on “the art of immaturity,” Roth invites his readers to consider why Eli exhibits a “dumb, weary stare” (p. 249), a stare I suggest is world-weary, as he enters the Yeshiva for the first time. Is Eli’s world-weariness an indication that the “common sense” (p. 278) demands placed on him by Woodenton, a modern, assimilated community, trigger his desire for something *different*, something less tangible than the legal documents he hands to Tzuref which call to shut down the Yeshiva?

A precursor to Kurasawa’s (2007) discourse on critical cosmopolitanism as an alternative to assimilationist egalitarianism (p. 170–3), Jean-Paul Sartre (1946/1967) wrote about “the policy of assimilation” (p. 57) in the United States as Europe was experiencing the aftershocks of the Second World War and as displaced persons were just beginning to find their way to the shores on the Americas. For Sartre (1946/1967), “the failure of the democratic point of view” is that it:

Wants to separate the Jew from his religion, from his family, from his ethnic community, in order to plunge him into the democratic crucible when he will emerge naked and alone, an individual and solitary particle like all the other particles...there may not be so much difference between the anti-Semite and democrat. The former wishes to destroy him as a man and leave nothing in him but the Jew, the pariah, the untouchable; the latter wishes to destroy him as a Jew and leave nothing in him but the man, the abstract and universal subject of the rights of man and the rights of the citizen. (p. 57)

In the foreground storyline, the Woodenton Jews function like Sartre’s democrat in their desire to (literally and figuratively) strip and destroy their neighbors’ “extreme practices” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 262). In the letter he writes to Tzuref, Eli suggests that these same practices led to their persecution in Europe (p. 262).<sup>2</sup>

The unspoken, deeper storyline, however, is more complicated; while he appears to have little to no connection to his Judaic roots, Eli suddenly becomes “tempted” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 286), possessed without conscious understanding in his act of slipping on the greenie’s “special” (p. 286) clothing—a temptation which is both earthly and holy. Eli, who complains to his wife, Miriam, that he does “*everything* in moderation” (p. 272)—a moderation that leaves him empty inside, “[t]hat’s my trouble,” he says—initially represents the successful appearance of Sartre’s democratic crucible, which demands uniformity and complacency. Is it modern, secular existence which propels Eli to radical action? “To think that perhaps he’d chosen the crazy way. To think that he’d *chosen* to be crazy. But if you chose to be crazy, then you weren’t crazy. It’s when you didn’t choose. No, he wasn’t flipping” (p. 295) despite the fact that “adults whispered of his strangeness and children made ‘Shame...shame’ with their fingers” as he walked through town wearing “that black suit” (p. 293).

“A cosmopolitan habitus,” says Nava (2007), “does not consist only of feelings and practices of inclusivity; it is also the breeding ground of loss, humiliation, and rebellion” (p. 14). It is this sense of cosmopolitanism which sheds light on Eli’s personal and political “strange” act. “The personal is political” in “relation to cosmopolitanism” (Nava, 2007, p. 14). In speaking toward the cosmopolitanism of London during the Second World War when many African-American servicemen found their way to British shores, Nava (2007) points out the “remarkably warm welcome” (p. 9) they received by British women: “affective cultures are deeply implicated in political resistance and transformation, in *antiracism* as much as racism” (p. 14). Perhaps the

same can be said for the *anti-anti-Semitism* and anti-Semitism found in “Eli, the Fanatic,” the latter position, as Sartre notes, not that different from the democratic one.

Eli’s emancipation from assimilation’s “demand [for] cultural sameness or neutrality” (Kurasawa, 2007, p. 170) invites the student of literature to ruminate on the cosmopolitan imagination, which is a “structure of feeling” (Nava, 2007, p. 12) of hospitality to otherness, a desire “to engage with different lifeworlds” distant “from one’s ‘native vantage-point’” (Kurasawa, 2007, p. 173), and a pedagogical project that does not serve an end goal but is an educational experience unto itself. Pinar (2009) implicitly notes, however, the grim reality of current public education which has been “reduced to a means to an end,” “stripped of its sacred meaning” (p. ix) because of governmental “insistence on linking instruction to test scores” (p. xi). It seems, then, that public schooling and cosmopolitan worldliness are functioning at counter perspectives—counter to Popkewitz’s (2008) questionable assertion which links the two together (Spector, 2010). The former is highly institutionalized and instrumentalized—e.g., standards based reforms such as “examination driven curricula [which] demote teachers from scholars and intellectuals to technicians in service to the state” (Pinar, 2004, p. 2)—the latter “is a retrospective judgment” (Pinar, 2009, p. 7). Judgment which looks backwards does so in order to cultivate ethical foresight.

For Kurasawa (2007), after bearing witness and forgiving, the third component to global justice is foresight or “farsighted cosmopolitanism” (p. 95) to help detect and prevent human rights violations. In his articulation of foresight, Kurasawa turns to the dystopian novel, a form of literature which projects a bleak “catastrophic” vision of the future, to “call upon audiences’ moral imagination so as to plunge them into their descendants’ lifeworlds” (p. 113). The dystopia is meant to function as a “catalyst to public debate and a spur to action” (p. 103) against global injustices. While not a warning sign, doomsday story, “Eli, the Fanatic” offers its readers something less didactic, less instrumental than the dystopian imaginary. With its cosmopolitan sensibility, Roth’s story leaves the reader to contemplate interminably the story’s essence,<sup>3</sup> part of which is artistically rendered in a series of juxtaposed light and dark images which highlight Eli’s hybridized inner-*Bildung* and outer-performance journey—a journey which becomes a curriculum for cosmopolitanism. According to Autio (2006), the *Bildung* tradition has been met with “a host of critical questions” due to the “history of the present education theory and practice of globalization” (p. 4). Because *Bildung* is situated in the realm of aesthetics, says Autio (2006), it has suffered from a lack of political relevance. I argue that a cosmopolitan education bridges the aesthetic-political gap.

While Roth (as cited in Lasch, 1984) observes that the writer’s own imagination implodes due to monstrous, real-life unrealities, Arendt (1994) suggests that the human imagination is concerned with “the particular darkness of the human heart and the peculiar density which surrounds everything that is real” (p. 322). The philosophical Arendt and literary Roth seem to be in conversation regarding this point. While we can be sure of “darkness and density,” Arendt (1994) goes on, we can never be so sure of the “‘essence’ of the thing” (p. 322); “imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective” (p. 323). In “Eli, the Fanatic,” the image of darkness is overtly illustrated in the form of the town irritant, a “fanatic” who “at first seemed only a deep hollow of blackness.” Frightened, “Eli hurried to the lights” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 253), a symbol of his heart-numbing home and hounding neighbors. The blackness that he avoids functions ironically, however, for it is in the dark, ugly crevices where truth-enlightenment is found, returning the reader’s attention to the story’s silenced subject: the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> Arguably the most poetic of philosophers, Nietzsche (1978) poses a series of ques-

tions in “On the Three Metamorphoses” of the spirit which calls to mind Eli’s own crisis. What is the heaviest burden that weighs upon the reverent spirit, asks Zarathustra? “Or is it this: stepping into filthy waters when they are the waters of truth, and not repulsing cold frogs and hot toads?” (p. 26).

Turning from the “lights” of Woodenton to the dark, “filthy waters...of truth,” Eli opens the box containing the greenie’s clothes.

Inside the box was an eclipse. But black soon sorted from black, and shortly there was the glassy black of lining, the coarse black of trousers, the dead black of fraying threads, and in the center the mountain of black: the hat...For the first time in his life he *smelled* the color of blackness. (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 285)

Eli’s “revelation” (p. 291) is that he sees through the “density” Arendt (1994) speaks of, though he (and the reader) cannot fully grasp its “essence” or the horror-truths that it holds. While Pinar (2009) suggests that “a cosmopolitan education invites an ongoing self-reflection associated with” (p. ix) the world outside, recalling King Solomon, Arendt (1994) poses the argument that an “‘understanding heart,’ and not mere reflection or mere feeling, makes it bearable for us to live with other people, strangers forever, in the same world, and makes it possible for them to bear with us” (p. 322).<sup>5</sup> As such, she presses both Pinar’s (2009) invitation to “self-reflection” and Nava’s (2007) “feelings” (p. 12) of cosmopolitanism even further, arguing that the use of one’s imagination is the only thing which can “catch at least a glimpse of the always frightening light of truth” (Arendt, 1994, p. 322).

At best reluctant, at worst skeptical, Todd (2009) argues that cosmopolitanism is a “comforting philosophy” (p. 20) which “displac[es] the problem of humanity onto abstract notions that fail to respect the very particular ways humanity is itself ‘revealed’ in the tangible relations in which we find ourselves” (p. 21), adding in the conclusion of her study that cosmopolitanism’s “double demand inevitably creates a contradictory logic that cannot be remedied by emphasizing one commitment over the other without, it seems to me, sacrificing the project” (p. 139) altogether; yet in the cosmopolitan literary (rather than philosophical) imagination we speak of here, such an argument does not hold up. Artworks are *particular* expressions and engaging these particularities constitute a tangible, lived curriculum (Grumet et al., 2008) which goes beyond formal schooling. Hence, Todd’s (2009) generalization that “most educational initiatives...reflect more clearly the classical strand of cosmopolitan thought” (p. 29)—i.e., universal appeals to world citizenship which necessarily take on an instrumental, “in order to” quality—is not accurate if we see curriculum practices as educational initiatives.<sup>6</sup> “Eli, the Fanatic,” and for that matter other pieces of small and large great works of literature, are rarely comforting. At the same time, cosmopolitanism’s advocates must be careful to not articulate a pedagogical project that sounds overly appealing and sensible (nothing good is that simple) such as that elucidated by Appiah (2006) who exhibits a prose style that is so lovely and luring that it can come off as beguiling. While the aesthetic quality to Appiah’s prose might be accessible (dare I say enjoyable) to a general audience, its content suggests that cosmopolitanism is cultivated through rigorous intellectual curiosity, cross-cultural exchange, and/or travel to distant lands. (As a case in point see Appiah’s chapter “The Shattered Mirror: A Traveler’s Tale” in *Cosmopolitanism*). Yet, cosmopolitanism can also be found not only in engaging people across the world or, its contrast, in the neighborhood, as Nava (2007) points out, but it can also be found in the most



unexpected places on earth, such as Auschwitz.<sup>7</sup> And Auschwitz is the geographically distant yet psychologically close underbelly of Roth's story.

Auschwitz's psychological proximity to Woodenton comes to a head when Eli finds a pair of "khaki army socks" in the pockets of the DP's trousers and "slipped them over his toes" (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 287), making him "almost cry." "The threaded tassels jumping across his heart" (p. 288), Eli ran toward the Yeshiva, whispering "Sholom" to a stranger on the way and to the greenie when he arrives. "The recognition took some time... And then Eli had the strange notion that he was two people" (p. 289)—a psychological manifestation that resonates with Kristeva's (1991) cosmopolitanism which situates "foreignness in ourselves" (p. 191). He tells the greenie that he will take care of his suit. "Look..." he says. "He reached inside his shirt to pull the frills of underwear in the light. 'I'm wearing the special underwear, even'" (p. 290). "Tell me, what can I do for you, I'll do it..." (p. 291). The host has become surprisingly hospitable.

In forming her own psychoanalytical analysis of cosmopolitanism, Nava (2007) asks the question: "What unconscious mechanisms are involved in the emotional and libidinal attraction of difference?" (p. 71). Certainly an intimate (and perhaps homoerotic) act, Eli's clothing swap is a "visceral cosmopolitan" "structure of feeling" that "takes place in the interior territories of the mind and body" (Nava, 2007, p. 12)—a marked character-sketch departure from globetrotting, polyglot Sir Richard Burton (Appiah, 2006, p. 1–8). Appearing to have no libidinal attraction for his wife, whose "mother brought to this marriage—a goddam New School enthusiasm for Sigmund Freud" (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 259),<sup>8</sup> the only thing that seems to move Eli, that acts as a "source of temptation" (p. 286), is the excavation of his body and spirit, aroused through his alter-self, the DP greenie; a "strange notion" (p. 289) indeed as Leo Tzuref turns Eli's words back on him when arguing about how to interpret local law: "I am them, they are me, Mr. Tzuref," Eli says. "Aach!, You are us, we are you!" (p. 265) his interlocutor retorts. Is this then an encounter with alterity or solidarity, or, perhaps, the paradox which constitutes cosmopolitan engagement?

Surprisingly, the paradox of cosmopolitanism, artistically rendered in "Eli, the Fanatic," is understood as an irreconcilable contradiction by two scholars in the field of education. For Popkewitz (2008), cosmopolitanism contains a problematic "double gesture" which simultaneously includes and excludes children from educational projects. While there is little question that schooling contains exclusionary qualities, the argument that this is an outcome of cosmopolitanism falls short in this particular study (see Spector, 2010). Like Popkewitz, Todd's (2009) focus is on what cosmopolitanism holds for educational institutions and is doubtful that "education can negotiate between these two poles" (p. 49)—i.e., the universal and the plural. Perhaps the problem with these two studies are that they understand cosmopolitanism in abstract, arguably reductive terms, choosing not to turn to material or imagined examples that speak to a more nuanced, complicated understanding of contradictions which feed rather than fail the human spirit and the projects the spirit creates. Literature professor, Ross Posnock (2006) understands contradictions altogether differently: "[s]ince the motor of Roth's sensibility is contradiction...the regional and cosmopolitan interact—the one containing the other—in productive ferment" (p. 7).<sup>9</sup> Overlooked in Posnock's study of Roth's art as *novelist*, "Eli, the Fanatic" captures these productive cosmopolitan, contradictory qualities in a more condensed package.

Pinar's more intuitive study of cosmopolitanism invites a kind of "creative tensionality" (Aoki, as cited in Pinar, 2009, p. 154) exhibited by a writer like Philip Roth. "As intellectual labor rather than bureaucratic protocol, juxtaposition constitutes an aesthetic-inspired reconfiguration of scholarship that invites complicated conversation among students and teachers focused

on the texts that speak to them and through which they find their voices” (Pinar, 2009, p. 154). If we are to take curriculum seriously and the transactions that curriculum inspires just as seriously, “educational initiatives” do not necessarily “reflect more clearly the classical strand of cosmopolitan thought” as Todd (2009, p. 29) claims. “Eli, the Fanatic” is a curricular case in point.

Eli’s visceral-spiritual cosmopolitanism becomes a political act of resistance to “assimilationist egalitarianism” (Kurasawa, 2007, p. 170–2) at the moment of his “strange, dreamy” “revelation” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 291) which propels him to walk through town wearing the DP’s traditional garb. “He did not question his understanding, the substance or the source.” “He knew what he did was not insane” (p. 293)—despite the fact that everyone in town believes he is “having a nervous breakdown,” (p. 287)—“though he felt every inch of its strangeness. He felt those black clothes as if they were the skin of his skin” (p. 293). For Arendt (1958/1998), “the greatest” work of man that doesn’t come from “his hands or...his body” “is his own appearance and actualization” (p. 208) in the world of speech and action. “Action...corresponds to the human condition of plurality” and it cannot take place “if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model” (p. 8). As Pavlovian lawyer-laborer for those he works for, Eli initially reifies assimilationist rhetoric, his sense of individuality and spirituality nearly eradicated; as Arendt (1951/1973) notes, “to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man’s power to begin something new out of his own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events” (p. 455). Putting on the clothes of the other is *the* spontaneous, epiphanic moment that defines Eli’s sense of humanity and freedom, his “subjectiv[e] engagement” with the world; “worldliness summarizes the subjective consequences of such educational experience” (Pinar, 2009, p. vi).

Eli’s impetuosity is a free-spirited, human response to Enlightenment rationalism-science as depicted in the “modern community[’s]” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 249) desire for “order,” “serenity,” (p. 261) and “moderation” (p. 272), calling in to question, as Hume did, how much Reason really guides our actions. Ironically, Roth turns our conventional understanding of iconoclasm on its head: Eli is a destroyer of 20<sup>th</sup> century western secularism; he is also a provoker of “the right’s hysterical allegiance to abstinence” (Pinar, 2009, p. 7). With Eli ‘the rebel’ in mind, Roth moves his students to a ‘sacrilegious’ engagement with the visceral in public school literature education and reminds scholars of the theological in Curriculum Studies. “Sexuality must be studied” (p. 7), Pinar states candidly. And “spirituality and sexuality [are] two sides of the same coin” (p. 6).

In “Education and Spirituality,” Huebner (1999) points out the educator’s premature question: “What is to be taught” (p. 407)? Before this question can be asked, he says, “there is a prior realm of thinking and imagining, which if by-passed, ignores a crucial starting point.” Huebner’s larger than life presence in the theological in Curriculum Studies was a watershed, which Pinar (1999) recognizes has not earned the same status as other “‘giants’ in the field: Bobbit, Dewey, Tyler, Schwab,” (p. xv), yet it is Huebner who sheds light on the cosmopolitan in Curriculum Studies:

Where do we start to think about the content of education? The religious journey, the process of being educated, is always a consequence of encountering something that is strange and different, something that is not me. That which is “other” and strange can be part of the I. In the infant the “other” is the hands, the sounds made, the feet that move; in childhood it might be feelings; in adolescence sexuality. The internal “otherness” continues throughout life as shadow, as thoughts, as dreams, yearnings and desires that frighten,

shock or stir us. Usually we think of the “other” as something in the external environment that is unknown, strange, new. Hovering always is the absolute “other,” Spirit, that overwhelms us in moments of awe, terror, tragedy, beauty, and peace. Content is the “other.” (p. 408)

Apart from the most obvious resonance his discourse on the theological has with the self-other cosmopolitan presence in “Eli, the Fanatic,” Huebner also draws attention to the importance of the imagination, to the *process* rather than *ends* of education, calling into question those scholarly arguments linking cosmopolitanism to Enlightenment instrumentalism. For example, part of Popkewitz’s (2008) thesis rests on the claim that “the narratives of the Enlightenment’s cosmopolitanism were to transcend the parochialism of the nation through inserting a grand narrative about humanity and progress” (p. 46). Cheah (2006) argues that while new cosmopolitanism (i.e., 1990s and beyond) “is no longer grounded in universal reason, it is a more expansive form of solidarity that is attuned to democratic principles and human interests without the restriction of territorial borders” (p. 19). What is different between these two latter studies is that Popkewitz (2008) targets cosmopolitanism as the impetus behind modern school reforms without taking into consideration the unmistakable role that Taylorism and more recently, neoliberalism, have played in those same reforms (Spector, 2010). Drawing from Marx, Cheah (2006) concludes that cosmopolitanism is indeed inextricably linked to “capitalist globalization” (p. 20) and human capital. While the “democratic principles” Cheah speaks of might not be precisely the same as those found in the imagined town of Woodenton, nonetheless, democratic practices instigate Eli’s desire for something “unknown, strange, new,” (Huebner, 1999, p. 408)—i.e., his cosmopolitanism—creating altogether radically different meanings from Cheah’s deterministic interpretation of the subject.

In trying to define cosmopolitanism—an utterly unc cosmopolitan, impossible thing to do—scholarship shows its instrumental interest in compartmentalizing, in tidying-up, in clarifying that which can’t be done as cosmopolitanism acts differently depending on time and place (see Nava, 2007, p. 93); it is without boundary. Perhaps its boundlessness is precisely the cause for anxiety about it—not unlike the kind of emotions which become triggered when viewing 1950s cultish science-fiction, horror film *The Blob*, whose catchy theme song “Beware of the Blob” could be remade and marketed as: “Beware of Cosmopolitanism.” As Britzman’s (2006) research in psychoanalysis and education teaches us, “...we are apt to miss what anxiety putting things in their proper places defends against: an encounter with the groundlessness and insecurity of subjects who think” (p. 2). As if the two texts were in conversation with each other, Pollock et al. (2000) remind, “cosmopolitanism is not some known entity existing in the world” (p. 577)—there is no “proper place” for it.

Shifting back to the cosmopolitan, worldly imagination in Roth’s art, a conceptual, albeit historically distant, parallel can be drawn between Eli’s appearance in public—which demands *material* submission-conformity at the story’s close—and the “dangerous mere appearance in public” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 218n.) of Roman slaves who had been emancipated from their labor but who hadn’t been “admitted to society” as such:

At that time a proposition was laid before the senate to have slaves dress uniformly in public so that they could immediately be distinguished from free citizens. The proposition was turned down as too dangerous, since the slaves would now be able to recognize

each other and become aware of their potential power...What the sound political instinct of the Romans judged to be dangerous was appearance as such. (p. 218n.)

Like the Roman slaves, Eli becomes emancipated from his own labor as lawyer for the “modern community” (Roth, 1959/1987, p. 256) he represents; donning the religious attire is deemed dangerous simply because of its “mere appearance in public” which has the potential to incite zealotry. Although his act is self-determining (in the *Bildung* sense), there is no free world in the Arendtian sense which he has been liberated to. “To be free” in ancient Rome “meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another and not to be in command oneself. It meant neither to rule nor to be ruled” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 32). The town of Woodenton functions more like Sartre’s (1946/1967) democratic crucible which strips all uniqueness and collectivities away, leaving only “a single example of the universal traits which make up human nature” (p. 55). For Arendt (1958/1998), “the social” (i.e., mass society) has replaced both the public and private realms in the modern world. “The realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development, reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength...society has conquered the public realm” (p. 41). In this bleak depiction of modernity, an image which Roth wrestles with in a short story, a glimmer of hope for solidarity and plurality is nonetheless kept alive in “Eli, the Fanatic.”

While Eli’s journey is self-formative and world-making, the story itself is also a worldly work of art by celebrated novelist Philip Roth, “to shine and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to speak and to be read” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 168). It is also a cosmopolitan curricular example, which contains no “‘objective’ for which teachers can be held ‘accountable’” (Pinar, 2009, p. vii), but, rather, resonates with what Kurasawa (2007) calls “the work of global justice [which] is always in the making, incomplete and partial, for it dwells in inescapable aporias” (p. 210). Likewise, Roth (1959/1987) leaves us with an aporia, an ambiguity in the story’s last words—“they tore off his jacket—it gave so easily, in one yank. Then a needle slid under his skin. The drug calmed his soul, but did not touch it down where the blackness had reached” (p. 298)—leaving the reader in abeyance to contemplate, to reflect on the human spirit and the cosmopolitan imagination.

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### Notes

1. The setting of *The Merchant of Venice* is arguably the most cosmopolitan City-State of its time; for an explanation on Kazuo Ishiguro’s cosmopolitanism, see Walkowitz (2006).
2. Differently, Nava’s (2007) study of cosmopolitanism links class-oriented British interwar “fantasies of assimilation” (p. 80) to the travelling imagination and “a new ‘else awareness’” (p. 78). For the British at this time, the United States operated on a mythical, social class level in which “a working class girl could marry a millionaire” (p.



80). Linking assimilation with cosmopolitanism is where Nava's study diverges from the arguments I'm raising about Roth's cosmopolitanism, further indicating that what is considered cosmopolitan in one locale is not necessarily the case in another, making cosmopolitanism problematic to define as Pollock et al. (2000) surmised at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nava (2007) also reiterates throughout her study that the "cosmopolitan consciousness" of England and its "modernity has been a distinctive formation" (p. 93).

3. As Sumara (2002) reminds, the labor of literary interpretation "can transform imaginative occasions into productive insights" (p. 5).

4. Agamben (as cited in Spector, 2009) notes a similar resistance to turn away from incomprehensible horrors in his discussion of Auschwitz. For Agamben, "the atrocities in the camps were so great, so beyond the human capacity to grasp that one could not comprehend what one saw" (Spector, 2009). Agamben attempts to make the unintelligible intelligible through the use of the Gorgon as metaphor. The Gorgon "represents the impossibility of vision...what cannot be seen" (53). "That at the 'bottom' of the human being there is nothing other than an impossibility of seeing—this is the Gorgon, whose vision transforms the human being into a non-human. That precisely this inhuman impossibility of seeing is what calls and addresses the human, the apostrophe from which human beings cannot turn away—this and nothing else is testimony. The Gorgon and he who has seen her and the *Muselmann* and he who bears witness to him are one gaze; they are a single impossibility of seeing (54)" (as cited in Spector, 2009).

5. James Macdonald (as cited in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004) "considered the key question in curriculum: How shall we live together" (p. 218)? Influenced by transcendentalism, Macdonald's own question seems to coincide with the importance that Arendt (1994) places on an understanding heart in order for people to live amongst each other.

6. Regarding human rights education, Todd (2009) mentions that she "delves into reams of educational material on the subject (e.g., teaching manuals, curriculum guidelines, action plans)," which she felt demonstrated an "uncomplicated manner in which rights themselves were treated" (p. 51). In a footnote to this point, Todd adds: "Between 2001 and 2004 I was head of a project that involved investigating notions of justice as they were portrayed in Human Rights Education policy and curricula in both Canada and Sweden" (p. 64n). While there is little reason to doubt the veracity of her claim, citing and interpreting these documents would certainly strengthen her argument, while one must also keep in mind that her study is not empirically-driven. That said, a (curriculum) document is only a document no matter what it says; how it gets interpreted in educational practices is another story. Nonetheless, distinguished curriculum studies scholar Dwayne Huebner (cited in Pinar et al., 2004) does point out his general irritation regarding "the basic assumptions of curriculum thought" which understands educational initiatives in the Tylerian, outcomes-based vein. "How could one plan educational futures via behavioral objectives when the mystical literature emphasized the present moment and the need to let the future care for itself?" (p. 214). Huebner expressed education as praxis, as phenomenological, and "[t]he journey" he recalls, "has been lonely at times, but the direction feels right even though it seems veiled in a 'Cloud of Unknowing.'"

7. In his chapter entitled "Making Conversation," Appiah (2006) articulates a cosmopolitanism which encourages cross-cultural encounters despite the possibility of them ending in disagreement. Perhaps peculiar if not radical texts to align—but isn't this what juxtaposition and paradox is ultimately about?—in his chapter similarly titled "Communicating," Italian Jew and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi (1986/1988) discusses the human desire to communicate, helping us to further understand the cosmopolitan value of "'conversation' not only for literal talk but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experiences and the ideas of others. And I stress the role of the imagination here because the encounters...are valuable in themselves" (Appiah, 2006, p. 85). To illustrate, in "The Canto of Ulysses," Levi (1958/1986) recounts that he and another prison inmate—who knows not one word of Italian but is hungry to learn the language (a hunger, as recalled by Levi, that seems to go beyond their literal hunger) and discuss Dante's poetic imagination while they wait in line with the other "sordid, ragged crowd of soup-carriers" all the while facing the stark reality that "tomorrow he or I might be dead, or we might never see each other again" (p. 115).

8. In her critique of the 1930s English "new 'else awareness'" (p. 78), Nava (2007) explores how travel "made possible the break from home and a new beginning." Quoting W.H. Auden who left England for Berlin, "[t]he real-life wish is the desire for separation from the family...and from the immense shadow of one's home" (p. 79). Eli's home life is not a distant cry from that which Auden also speaks.

9. Like Posnock, Ellsworth (2005) considers the notion of a paradox to be productive rather than irreconcilable. While her study focuses on public pedagogical sites (that might or might not be cosmopolitan) to examine the challenges of teaching and learning, her understanding of contradictions also speaks to the arguments I'm raising about the paradox of cosmopolitanism. Ellsworth contends that the power of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's pedagogy "lies in its indeterminacy" (p. 100). "[F]ar from leading to paralysis or despair...the paradoxes of teaching and learning can be productive and can assist teachers and students in accessing moral imperatives without



absolutes” (p. 100). Like the un-ending of “Eli, the Fanatic,” the museum contains a “paradoxical possibility, of a narrative without closure” (p. 104).

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