Introduction

The novel's administrative turn

This book explains where contemporary fiction got the idea that novels can contribute meaningfully to interdisciplinary debate about governance. Perhaps the most important source, I contend, is the imperial fiction appearing around the turn of the twentieth century. During those years, fiction took an administrative turn, even as resistance movements and increasing competition were leading Britons to anticipate empire's passing. Edward Said describes writers from this era "substituting art and its creations for the once-possible synthesis of the world empires" (*Culture* 189). In so doing, novelists helped forecast a world after European imperialism by identifying problems with empire's administrative strategies and by laying the conceptual foundation necessary to generate new schemes. Twenty-first-century novels have inherited that legacy and continue to criticize existing policies in order to formulate best practices on a global scale.

No one likely will be surprised to hear that many turn-of-the-twentieth-century novels critiqued imperial rule or that many more recent novels critique neoliberal authority. The burden of my argument will be to show how fiction refurbishes government as well as criticizes it. For a case in point, one may turn to such a foundational work as Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1899/1903), which offers evidence that fiction cared as much about salvaging administration as resisting it. The novella famously turns one colonial station manager's

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complete lack of "restraint in the gratification of his various lusts"
into an occasion for considering the broader state of imperial gover-
nance (131). Readers are well used to understanding how Kurtz's
transformation from paragon of Victorian rectitude into jungle mega-
lomaniac connotes a warning that European empire as a whole was
losing its grip. It could be noted more often, however, that by making
this logical relation intelligible, Conrad connects the familiar novelistic
theme of self-governance to a wider political problem of governing
others. "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz," and the
unmaking of Kurtz signals dire consequences for Europe's ongoing
administration of the larger world (117). "No method at all" sums up
not only Kurtz's failure to manage his own behavior, but also the
absence of a coherent and effective strategy behind empire building in
general (138).

In detailing how things went wrong, Marlow also implies what
might count as improvement, and he thereby demonstrates the limit
of his administrative vision. He is impressed by those few managers
who are capable of self-discipline, an apparently short list that includes
"the Company's chief accountant," who keeps up appearances amidst
"the great demoralization of the land" (Conrad "Heart" 68). Instead
of offering empty promises to justify a "philanthropic pretense,"
Marlow opines that Africa's overseers might better concentrate on
concrete tasks like running an efficient supply chain – thus ensuring
a pilot like himself has the equipment to fix his steamboat with the
appropriate "rivets, by heaven!" (76–83). As Conrad's synecdoche
deftly implies, Marlow seems convinced that task-oriented middle
management would help organize the muddle Europe has made of
central Africa. Conrad's narrator also concludes, however, that a few
competent accountants would never be able to reform imperialism on
their own. "The conquest of the earth," Marlow lectures, "which
mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different

complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much" (50–51). Empire can only be redeemed by a persuasive "idea at the back of it," he proclaims (51). Conrad, ever the master at lending ambiguity a sense of expansive implication, nudges his readers to conclude that absent a revamped theory to guide imperial government, reforming imperial practice will be a waste of time.

"Heart of Darkness" may conclude that good government is incompatible with existing rationales for conquest, but it does not reason in turn that Europe should get out of sub-Saharan Africa entirely. There is no hint of a postcolonial future in "Heart of Darkness," in other words, any more than there is an account of social difference to replace the sometimes casual, sometimes deliberate racism propagated by Marlow and company. That said, as Edward Said maintains, by demonstrating the limited conceptual horizon for an empire that cannot check its "tremendous violence and waste," "Heart of Darkness" helps readers to imagine administrative alternatives that Conrad never could (*Culture* 26).

It is certainly the case that subsequent novels proved eminently capable of picking up where "Heart of Darkness" left off. In the decades since Conrad published his narrative, myriad fictions have described small and large shifts in imperial-era practice and policy, thus explaining how colonial systems transformed into postcolonial regimes. In the chapters that follow, I present an array of novels that describe how groups working with and against British Empire paved the way for postcolonial social order and even presaged managerial conditions that commentators typically associate with globalization – including questions of how to oversee and organize mass migration for work, how to grow and profit from multilateral commercial trading operations, and so forth. Among the novels I consider are contemporary historical fictions such as Amitav

Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000/2002) that depict turn-of-the-twentieth-century empire as being every bit as volatile as it appears in "Heart of Darkness." Where Marlow understands such instability as heralding the end of an era, however, characters in Ghosh's work and in a plurality of other novels take the chance to generate far-flung networks of reformers and activists whose collaborative endeavors promise to reinvent the terms for governing around the world.

It would be wrong to suggest that more recent novels like *The Glass Palace* are derivative of "Heart of Darkness," but right to think of them as committed to reimagining the colonial dynamics Conrad portrayed. Where "Heart of Darkness" stipulated an incompetent but all-encompassing colonizing force and a debased, dehumanized colonized population, novels such as Ghosh's portray colonized characters as more various than victims alone and colonial rule as a demonstrably uneven (not to say unpredictable) social condition. As I show in the fuller reading that appears in Chapter 4, *The Glass Palace* is populated with South Asian characters who cut deals, form friendships, and cultivate associations criss-crossing the divide that in "Heart of Darkness" separates colonized from colonizer. Although more recent novels change both the players and the game, they retain the axiom that in "Heart of Darkness" meant a necessary correlation between self-management and political economic control. Where Conrad established a correspondence between Kurtz's lack of discipline and empire's lack of organization, works such as *The Glass Palace* help make it habitual to think of renovating interpersonal connections as a step towards governmental reform.

Through character interaction in contemporary fiction, readers may discover that sentimental attachments afford opportunities to renegotiate the racial hierarchy that structures relations in "Heart of Darkness." In Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999/2000),

which I discuss alongside *The Glass Palace* in Chapter 4, romantic entanglement between ruler and ruled in colonial Egypt predicts twenty-first-century love between a globe-trotting Arab activist and an American traveler to Cairo. Soueif's narrator, Amal, limns a postcolonial world that Conrad's Marlow could not, even as she also conducts research that enables her to reorganize the colonial state that Marlow critiqued. Amal is a writer and scholar, a figure for the postcolonial novelist. She sorts through a chest full of old documents, engaging in historical-cum-novelistic reconstruction that links contemporary geopolitics to colonial antecedents. The past "lies on the table," she thinks, "journals, pictures, a candle-glass, a few books of history" waiting for an author to "tell the story that they, the people who lived it, could only tell in part" (Soueif *Map* 234). *The Map of Love*, like the host of other contemporary works I consider, treats empire as a treasure trove of stories useful for addressing current administrative challenges, which range in such novels from child soldiers to capital run amok.

To treat empire as such a resource is not, I argue, to suggest that Europe or "the West" haunts all contemporary fiction. I do not think that *The Glass Palace* and *The Map of Love* are trapped in the rhetorical bind Rey Chow refers to as "Post-European Culture and the West." In this familiar paradigm, Chow explains, attempts at postcolonial self-writing still bear "imprints of a fraught and prevalent relation of comparison and judgment," in which Europe represents the "referent of supremacy," the precondition for "linguistic and cultural consciousness" (*Age* 89). I argue, rather, that numerous recent fictions retrace the steps that link contemporary to imperial social order less to demonstrate Europe's ongoing authority than to rewrite colonial history and to undo myths of total European dominion. Without ever disavowing the violence of empire, its racism and its rapacity, contemporary fiction provides

an alternative to the formulation in which Western authority spawns derivative postcolonial discourse. By offering an account of European domination as never fully complete, always historically delimited, and geographically diverse, these books invite us to shake off the stock formulae of core and periphery, self and other. Their revisionist approach encourages rereading of earlier works of fiction, moreover, as I show in each of my genealogically organized book chapters, which follow Chapter 1. I begin each of these chapters with contemporary fiction, only to reveal precedents in earlier novels.

Through these genealogical chapters, I contribute to a growing body of literary criticism that explains how to interpret imperial anticipations of contemporary cosmopolitanism and global network-ing.[1] In their introduction to the edited collection *Geomodernisms*, Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel state their goal as affording "more global and longer histories for modernism" (14). In the opening essay of *Pacific Rim Modernisms*, Steven Yao describes early twentieth-century "interactions among different sites within ... a regional construct [the Pacific Rim] that has received the most attention and elaboration ... as part of the larger discourse of late capitalism" (Gillies, Sword, and Yao 7). In his polemical account of the relation-ship between postcolonial literature and globalization theory, Simon Gikandi argues that "the discipline of English literature at the colonial university was an important precursor to the theories of

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[1] This general objective of uncovering precedence for twenty-first-century social organ-ization at the height of British Empire draws scholars as various as the Marxist sociologist Giovanni Arrighi and the conservative historian Niall Ferguson. Arrighi's claim stems from a cyclical theory of capitalism, which leads him to locate precedence for late twentieth-century American financial experiment in late nineteenth-century British impe-rial financial expansion (*Long* 220). On the other end of the political spectrum, Ferguson finds in British Empire "a form of international government that can work," and that as such yields myriad lessons for the contemporary "experiment of running the world" (*Empire* 362).

globalization" ("Globalization" 651). If previous waves of post-colonial criticism dreamed of putting empire behind us, more recent literary scholarship often seeks to understand the relevance of imperial debate to the questioning of globalization and its attendant social and cultural phenomena.

By specifying how fiction treats governance as a thematic bridge between the global and the imperial, I also contribute to current literary analysis focused on administration. Amanda Claybaugh suggests that the phrase "Government is Good" captures the sentiment behind recent criticism that hopes to save "government from the default academic critiques" and make it "a newly vital topic for scholarship" in the humanities (166). In their introduction to a special issue of the journal *Contemporary Literature* devoted to "Contemporary Literature and the State," Matthew Hart and Jim Hansen catalog existing procedures for weighing "the merits of the state as an analytic paradigm for literary studies in an age of globalization" (495). Some critics detect petitions for specific governmental efforts in recent novels: "the smell of infrastructure" wafts through Jonathan Franzen's *Strong Motion*, according to Bruce Robbins, who hopes that such creative writing rekindles a political passion for public works ("Smell" 25). Other critics understand fiction as calling for a new kind of statecraft: according to Peter Hitchcock, the "wild imaginings" of Nuruddin Farah's prose remind readers that contemporary Somalia needs "more than statistical adjustments and infrastructure plans" ("Failure" 745). Literary study of government is hardly limited to critiquing the bureaucratic *status quo*, moreover. Joseph Slaughter's research into the "mutually enabling fictions" of postcolonial *Bildungsroman* and human rights discourse shows how fiction collaborates with law to help generate the criteria that underwrite non-governmental organizations intervening around the world ("Fictions" 1407). For all of their differences of emphasis and

approach, these critics share a conviction held by others including Ackbar Abbas, Rita Barnard, Achille Mbembe, Sean McCann, Michael Rubenstein, Lisi Schoenbach, and Michael Szalay, all of whom demonstrate that literary endeavor in the twentieth century is shaped by and shapes the theory and practice of governance.[2]

At first blush, such scholarly interest in the everyday successes and excesses of governing might appear to ignore more utopian literary representations. Certainly, an emphasis on administrative practice appears contrary to the mode of critical engagement endorsed by Fredric Jameson, who reads modernism with the goal of marrying "a Poundian mission to identify Utopian tendencies with a Benjaminian geography of their sources" (*Singular* 215). "Ontologies of the present demand archaeologies of the future," Jameson declares in *A Singular Modernity* (215). From science fiction to socialist realism to apocalyptic fantasy, there is no denying the proliferation of twentieth-century novels predicated on the possibility of revolutionary social change.[3] But novels of revolution are not necessarily above pragmatic investment in the techniques and strategies of administration. In such works as H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and Aleksandr Bogdanov's *Red Star* (1908), Douglas Mao discerns "the utopian author's inclination toward problem-solving by clever engineering," an inclination he contends "is nearly always manifest in some administrative structure that will ostensibly put human life on a new and happier basis" ("Romances" 9). By revealing this managerial impulse, Mao shows utopian fiction to be one particularly visible version of a widespread tendency towards literary governmentality.

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[2] See Abbas ("De-Scriptions"); Barnard (*Apartheid*); Mbembe (*Postcolony*); McCann (*Pinnacle*); Rubenstein (*Public*); Schoenbach ("Jamesian"); Szalay (*New Deal*).
[3] See in particular N. Brown (*Utopian*) on the modernist and postcolonial disposition towards utopia.

Like some but not all of the critics who attend to fiction's invest-
ment in administration, I have found that Michel Foucault's work on
governmentality meets the need for an approach as alive to provi-
sional and incremental change as to the wholesale shifts of revolution.
Foucault offers what amounts to a centuries' long history of govern-
mental theory and practice in his 1970s lectures at the Collège de
France, published as *Abnormal* (2003), *"Society Must Be Defended"*
(2003), *Security, Territory, Population* (2007), and *The Birth of
Biopolitics* (2008).[4] I spell out what I take from Foucault in
Chapter 1, where I also detail the wider stakes of understanding
literary practice as a species of governmentality.[5] Foucault's work has
the distinct advantage of encouraging us to question the presumed
antagonism between humanist and social scientific research on gov-
ernment. Accordingly, my book foregrounds the concerns and con-
tentions literary criticism shares with social scientific research on
governmentality by the likes of Partha Chatterjee, Tania Murray
Li, Peter Miller, Aihwa Ong, Gyan Prakash, and Nikolas Rose.

By discovering common ground with social scientists, literary
critics can equip themselves to keep up with the interdisciplinary
research already being undertaken by novelists. In the acknowledg-
ments to *Brick Lane* (2003), Monica Ali thanks Naila Kabeer, a social
economist and lead author of the 2009 United Nations World Survey
on the Role of Women in Development. Ali writes that she "drew
inspiration" from Kabeer's 2002 "study of Bangladeshi women gar-
ment workers in London and Dhaka (*The Power to Choose*)"
(*Brick* 371). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie documents her scholarly

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[4] Important as I think these works are for scholars of twentieth-century literature, they have
been equally salutary for critics working in earlier periods. See, for example, Armstrong
and Tennenhouse ("Sovereignty") on eighteenth-century literary governmentality and
Goodlad ("Pastor") on Victorian modes.
[5] See too my recent essay in *Literature Compass* on what literary scholars might take from
Foucault's lectures ("Literature").

inspiration even more thoroughly, providing *Half of a Yellow Sun*
(2006) with an Author's Note detailing interviews conducted and a
bibliography of works consulted that includes novels and volumes of
poetry as well as political science and history monographs (*Half* 433–
36). In his acknowledgments to *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Amitav Ghosh
notes his "great debt to many nineteenth-century scholars, dictiona-
rists, linguists and chroniclers," as well as a list of more "contempo-
rary and near-contemporary scholars and historians . . . too long to
reproduce here" (*Sea* 469–70). Novelists conduct research and read
widely outside of their discipline. If this is not news, it nonetheless
merits notice. Fiction is as likely to collaborate with social science as it
is to distinguish its formal techniques from more scholarly prose.
Such interdisciplinary collaboration should play a bigger part,
I contend, in critical approaches to contemporary world literature.

"Worlding" may not be the same thing as "governing," but recent
history makes it impossible to dissociate these terms, and scholars
should be more alive to their relationship. I hope to persuade critics
to interpret English-language fiction from around the globe as
a resource for understanding what it takes to administer global affairs.
Existing models for studying world literature are not dead set against
this intervention. Some critics argue that world literature denotes
a genre whose forms are designed for global travel and whose
linguistic contents reveal cosmopolitan interactions. Such novels are
"born translated," as Rebecca Walkowitz puts it; they are "actively
present" beyond their culture of origin, feature hybrid vernaculars
that embed migration, and formalize interconnection in narrative and
verse ("Comparison" 569).[6] Other scholars define world literature

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[6] This is the world literature for a reinvigorated, post-national, post-European comparative
literature. Damrosch belongs in this camp, as perhaps does Dimock, who specifies African-
American "street vernacular as a linguistic form bearing the imprint of many geographies,
many chronologies" (Dimock and Buell "Introduction" 13).