



Where East Meets West: Cultivating a Cosmopolitan London in the 1920s

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ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the transmutable nature of London's cosmopolitan status in 1920s society and culture. It specifically examines the literary and filmic iterations of Wonderful London, which have often been overlooked by historians, juxtaposed with contemporary primary sources. The inter-textual exploration reveals both explicit and implicit ways in which London was depicted as an ideal metropolitan society. I argue that in 1920s British popular culture, a cosmopolitan London was generally perceived as propitious, although fears over miscegenation, immigration and a deeply engrained division between West and East London existed. While contemporary cosmopolitanism was rife with tensions, it was also celebrated and it was a blending of national and international elements that yielded London's illustrious reputation.

KEY WORDS: Cosmopolitanism; film



In her first landmark speech on the UK's exit from the European Union in September 2016, Prime Minister Theresa May addressed the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham arguing that a decisive break from the bloc was ineluctable. At the pitch of her speech she stated, "If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what citizenship means" (*The Independent* 2016). Such a remark stunned many across the country and set the nation on a clear journey away from the principal of 'freedom of movement' within the EU, a pillar of its governance. British scholar and poet Jeremy Adler harangued May's speech, and the above line in particular, as a "rejection of Enlightenment values" (*The Guardian* 2016). Liberal Democrat politician Vince Cable MP remarked that her address "could have been taken out of *Mein Kampf*" (*The Independent* 2017). Almost two years later the nation remains largely entrenched in its polar positions of remaining or leaving, opinions often entwined with preceding views on immigration and cosmopolitanism. Taking a historical view, such debates have been heard before across the region, the country, and in particular the many towns and cities which have been the crucible for an open-borders policy. Studying how different social groups were portrayed in the past, and how they co-existed, can shed light on present discussions.

Published in the *Birmingham Gazette* in 1923, almost ninety-five years ahead of May's speech at the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham, English novelist and social critic H.G. Wells proclaimed, "I am an Englishman and a Cosmopolitan, a good Englishman, and I hope a good Cosmopolitan" (1923: 4). For Wells, one could be a citizen of the world, and also a citizen of somewhere. "For what is Cosmopolis," Wells asks, "but the City of the World, and what can a Cosmopolitan be but a good citizen wherever he goes?" (4) Wells, a staunch opponent of nationalism, perceived London as one such Cosmopolis, one that was open to visitors and migrants from all over the globe. "London is mine," he writes, "as no other city can ever be; I have seen it grow and change and become even more wonderful and beautiful and dear to me since first I came up to it [...]" (4)

By the 1920s, London had gained a reputation for being a truly modern and global capital city, surpassing Paris and New York in many instances. Its cosmopolitan status, however, was equivocal. Judith Walkowitz (2012) draws a distinction between two theoretical approaches to cosmopolitanism. The first, made prolific by philosophers and literary critics, relies on a limitedly highbrow distinction of cosmopolitanism as "a privileged, ethical or aesthetic form of thinking and textual practice" (Walkowitz 2012: 4). The second, approaches cosmopolitanism as a social and cultural experience, with anthropologists and cultural scholars privileging less highbrow social products, revealing a more capricious definition of cosmopolitanism (4). The latter method, which Walkowitz adopts, forms the approach of this paper in which popular, literary and filmic culture products will be examined to reveal the double-edged nature of 1920s cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism was both lauded and lambasted; extolled and feared. However, London as a truly cosmopolitan city was generally perceived as propitious, a position that can encourage the people of today.



A COSMOPOLITAN THROG

London of the 1920s was a vastly growing and modernising capital city. Table 1 presents the numerical growth of Greater London. In 1901, the population was 6.5 million, which White (2008: 4) notes was “six times greater than a century before”, or in other terms, “one in five of the people of England and Wales.”

	Greater London	Inner Boroughs	Outer Boroughs
1901	6,509,574	4,533,181	1,976,393
1911	7,162,419	4,517,276	2,645,134
1921	7,387,123	4,480,553	2,906,570
1931	8,110,135	4,393,424	3,716,711
1939	8,614,800	4,010,354	4,604,446

Table 1.1 London’s population growth, 1901-1939 (Source: Greater London Council Research Memorandum, 1978)

By 1921, the population of Greater London had reached over seven million and continued to grow steadily until 1939, where midyear estimates reveal a population size of 8,614,800, the highest population figure tabularised in the twentieth century, and rival only to the population of Greater London today.

London’s overall population growth during the inter-war period was driven by a combination of sources including an increase by natural incident, as well as migration from parts of England and other countries. Refugees from war-ravaged Belgium and other nations were displaced as early as 1914, many of who were placed in refugee camps in London (Purseigle 2007: 432). Intended to be a temporary solution, many remained even after the fighting desisted. Wartime demand for greater numbers of seamen led to increased numbers of men from British colonies in India, Africa and China (Bland 2005: 34). At the end of the war, many of these men returned to the port cities of Britain, including London. London’s continual urban development, new housing opportunities and employment prospects yielded a desirable draw for those seeking new opportunities from home and abroad.

A vastly expanding and modernising city, London had gained standing as a cosmopolitan capital city, its cosmopolitanism linked not only to its urban status, but also to its ability to integrate domestic and foreign influences into its social and cultural clime. The influx of people and assets from the recesses of the British Empire and beyond served to cement London’s cosmopolitan reputation. The increasingly visible multicultural nature of the capital was generally seen as positive, a unique attribute belonging only to London. As a reporter for *The Daily Herald* boasted, “one may, in the course of an hour, hear conversation in as many different languages as there are tongues in Europe” (1921: 8). Similarly, *The Sunday Post* reported, “[P]ractically all European countries, and enormous contingents from the United States and South America are represented in the cosmopolitan crowd” (1920: 8). Finally, as *The Courier* proclaimed,

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"London is now the Mecca of a cosmopolitan throng [...] with all the languages of the universe" (1921: 6). The diversity in language and nationalities was advantageous to many reporters of the time and oft celebrated.

A reporter for the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* similarly lauded London's cosmopolitan quality in 1924 when he wrote:

Now and again the Londoner himself is startled by the unexpected evidence he comes across of the cosmopolitan nature of the great community in which he lives. There was one of these instances this morning in the Italian quarter of the Metropolis. It was a religious procession, which, for colour and picturesqueness and for its aspect of devotion, was more remarkable than those we frequently see. It was the Italian celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel [...] It was a long and glittering array which might have been transplanted from the streets of some Mediterranean city (1924: 4).

Cosmopolitanism, in this regard, was tantamount to multiculturalism. The ability to engage with unfamiliar cultures and customs within a short stroll was one of the many appeals of the capital city.

In contemporary contexts, cosmopolitanism was also considered an antithetical response to nationalism and patriotism. A reporter for *The Sketch* (1920: 76) recounted an afternoon in the Knightsbridge area of London, in which over the course of an afternoon he observed two Frenchwomen, two Americans, a Serbian and a Swiss all contained "in the area of a few square yards." His conclusion, "Really London is beginning to deserve the title of a truly cosmopolitan city [...] So perhaps post-war London is more cosmopolitan than ever, instead of the national stronghold prophets expected after the war" (76). Cosmopolitanism in this situation was something both desired and something needing to be earned. London, for this reporter, with its international constituency, had merited its cosmopolitan status, its multicultural features an extolled answer to the prophesied nationalism that might have resulted from the First World War.

Cosmopolitanism, however, was not without its complications, opponents and biases. In particular, certain immigrant communities were the target of much anxiety and hostility in the wake of the Great War. Lucy Bland has chronicled the increase in xenophobic apprehensions tied closely to miscegenation in interwar Britain. Bland suggests, there "was an historical specificity to the miscegenation anxieties of the immediate post-war period that related to the shifts in race relations on the one hand, and in gender relations on the other" (2005: 30). The situation reached fever pitch in 1919 when race riots erupted in Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, London and five other port towns. From January to August, African, Afro-Caribbean, Arab, Chinese and South Asians were targeted because of the perceived notion that they were 'stealing' the jobs of white, native British workers. Bland notes in nearly all cases the violence "was instigated by white men" (2005: 35).

Miscegenation was not only a threat to the deteriorating sense of white-maleness, but also a perceived threat to the social order. The solution was to introduce repatriation,



which benefited both government officials and maritime employers (Bland 2005: 38). Much of this was tied to the fear of interracial relationships and mix raced offspring, which was intrinsically intertwined with fears over modern muliebrity, a liberalised form of femininity induced by the war years. As Jon Burrows has argued, "Concerns about the hedonistic and libertine behaviour of young women in wartime partly motivated the criminalisation of opium and cocaine possession in July 1916" (2009: 284). "The term 'yellow peril'", as Bland asserts, "combined sexual anxieties (on par with those constitutive of the term 'black peril') with a fear of the 'inscrutable' magically dangerous and duplicitous Far East" (2005: 43). For Burrows, the physical site of 'yellow peril' was Limehouse, London's original 'Chinatown'. "When it came to both the traffic in drugs and the traffic in immigrant men," he states, "all roads seemingly led back to Chinatown" (2009: 284). Consequently, Limehouse in popular culture is portrayed in a particular way, with Limehouse itself often serving as the villain. Limehouse's Chinatown was vilified, Burrows contends, because it "compromised the sacred binary divisions of East and West, and jumbled the centre and the extreme peripheries of Empire together" (2009: 283).

Limehouse, of course, was not the only site of contention in 1920s London. Soho, bordered by London's highly commercialised West End, with its migrant population, growing sex trade and incidence of crime came to epitomise "a bad or dangerous cosmopolitanism: a debased condition of transgression, displacement and degeneration" (Walkowitz 2012: 6). Approaching Soho as a microcosm of London's cosmopolitan transformation, Judith Walkowitz shows that the area's foreignness and permeability were crucial to its cultural renaissance in the interwar years. Over time, however, Soho acquired a "reputation for being simultaneously safe and dangerous, securely English and enticingly foreign, sedately old-fashioned and scandalously modern" (2012: 7). Soho perfectly encapsulates the double-edged nature of 1920s cosmopolitanism. This ambiguous characterisation, complete with complications, can be found throughout popular culture from the 1920s with cosmopolitanism being commended and dreaded.

WONDERFUL LONDON IN PRINT

Wonderful London first materialised as a twenty-four issue fortnightly magazine in 1922. Edited by St. John Adcock, readers were treated to articles by contemporary authors and critics, as well as stunning views of the city processed in Photogravure (1922: ii). Each issue contained roughly five articles, which either detailed historical or modern insights into the capital city, as well as providing travel advice and points of interest. Like today's television cliché 'to be continued', the publishers included only half of each final article, with the remainder printed at the beginning of the subsequent issue. Travel guides, such as "From Mayfair to Whitechapel" and "Shopping East and West", provided walking tours and practical tips to readers, while articles on theatre performances and dance clubs provided recommendations from 'locals'. "London Types" by humourist Barry Pain,

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detailed unique individuals found in the city, while other articles told the history of landmarks and institutions – for example, The Lord Mayor, The Tower of London, Westminster Abbey and St. Paul’s Cathedral.

Articles such as “The Magic of London” and “The London that I Love” read as love letters to the city and are laden with platitudes. London was the ‘city of cities’, a city ‘unlike any other city’, and a ‘patchwork’ of things old and new. Richard Curle (1922: 28) writes:

When we think of London, that name in our thoughts covers a true identity, a city unlike all other cities; but when we ask ourselves what is it that makes London unique, what is it that gives it its particular individuality, we discover there is no short answer, and that though we can feel London’s personality, we can only describe it by describing all those different aspects which, together, unite into one great living whole.

London, as described in the magazine series, was a multitudinous metropolis. But it was also the combination of dissimilar aspects into a unified whole that gave London its unique status.

In addition to the literary and photographic platitudes, *Wonderful London* offered readers tourist tips from prominent ‘locals’. In “From Mayfair to Whitechapel”, published in the sixth installation of the magazine, author William Pett Ridge, a regular contributor to the magazine, provides readers with a walking trip from Hyde Park Corner in the west of the city to Barking Road in the East. A roughly nine-mile walk (which would take over three hours to complete) is presented over four pages of text, interspersed with photographic images of notable landmarks mentioned in Ridge’s piece. Ridge’s article is similar to others found in the series in its content, but also in its propagation of the West/East divide.

Ridge’s walk begins at Hyde Park Corner in West London. He pauses to note The Wellington Statue and the Royal Artillery Memorial, and then continues down Piccadilly, littered with its grand clubhouses. As Ridge and his readers ramble from West to East, his tone decidedly changes. In the West, he is mostly adulatory, with a penchant for the more historic institutions. Piccadilly Circus and the new cinemas nearby seem garish in his opinion, but the vast improvements and urbanisation of Fleet Street, “prosperous, with everyone receiving an excellent wage, and newspaper offices that are larger than ever” (Ridge 1922: 266) are a welcomed upgrade. Upon his arrival in the historically multicultural East London, Ridge’s admiration dithers. The description becomes more akin to someone reading from a map as he takes his readers into the “foreign quarter” (267), long established in the East. In Shoreditch, the shops suddenly turn foreign, with journals and posters printed in Russian and Polish. He describes the young men as “black-haired, clean-shaven, and openly interested in boxing” and the elderly men as wearing “tangled beards” (267), both coded phrases for the local Jewish population. Ridge answers his readers’ potential objections as to whether the area may be deemed dangerous. In his opinion the immigrants that populate this area are far too hard



working, striving to educate themselves, learning the vernacular and pleasing their employers. Eventually, they will become “more English than the English” (267), subtly showing Ridge’s predisposition towards assimilation.

The walk continues towards Limehouse, London’s original ‘Chinatown’. Ridge notes, however, that this community has moved (although more likely pushed out) to Pennyfields, further southeast. The “Chinaman”, Ridge contends, “is a quiet, unobtrusive individual” (1922: 267), contrary to what readers may expect from romantic fiction and, perhaps, the Limehouse melodramas of the time (Burrows 2009: 282). The younger men dress in the latest London fashions and may even wed a “Limehouse lady” (Ridge 1922: 267). The children would attend local schools, showing “gentle manners” and possessing “sweet singing voices” (267). Ridge, here, seems to allude to fears of miscegenation, although not as hostile in reaction as some of his contemporaries. Ultimately, however, his fear is overcome by the promise of assimilation.

“From Mayfair to Whitechapel” presents a mostly adulatory depiction of London. Ridge praises the city’s modern and swift transportation, its historical sites, its expanding infrastructure, and its growing industries. There exists, however, an inherent divide between West and East. If West London is populated by the rank and fashion; the rank and file inhabits East London. If West London, with its private clubs and expensive shops, is exclusive and elusive, East London is the heart of the working class and the foreign. The West is distinguished in its art galleries, shops, cinemas, and theatres; the East is obscured with foreign shops, factories, and docklands. The further East Ridge and his readers travel, the more lingual accents, edifices and languages change. The foreign other, however, in Ridge’s description is not inherently unfavourable. In each description William Pett Ridge notes their admirable characteristics – the hardworking Russians and Poles, the quiet and unassuming Chinese, and the tall and fair Scandinavians. What is problematic, however, is Ridge’s insistence on their willingness or need to assimilate. It would appear that immigration is desirable, but only if those who move to the city are willing and able to adopt the language, values and customs of their new home. Cosmopolitanism was, thus, desirable but with the caveat that within a few generations, foreign differences would be absorbed.

Other articles, similarly, draw distinctions between West London and East London. Stephen Graham’s “London that I Love” likewise maintains the distinction. It is “the quiet squares and stately streets, the serenity of the garden at Berkeley Square in the morning, the bird choruses in Soho Square in the afternoon” (Graham 1922: 297) that are the foundations on which his metropolitan ardour is based. His adoration lies solely within the West End with its lush parks, its tradition and its steadfast Englishness. In “London Types”, Barry Pain (1922: 51) writes, “London is not English any more than New York is American – both are international. Nor is the vast alien population of London by any means confined to the East End; some make money and come West” (51). Pain boasts that within a generation or two, the sons of immigrants may even attend Eton or Harrow, two of the most exclusive public schools in England. Gentrification, however, is contingent upon gaining a certain level of affluence, and only then as a parvenu will they become “almost English” (1922: 51). Those who remain in the East End retain their



nationality. Their unwillingness to adopt the customs of their new home exclude them from traversing to the other side of the city. Pain concludes, "They are in London for their own purposes. But they are not of London" (51).

Although it is the East that is most often associated with immigrant communities, Soho in the West End of London was also considered a 'foreign quarter'. Alec Waugh's description of the area in "Round About Soho" is particularly disquieting. In the article, Waugh seeks to dispel any Romantic associations readers may hold. In Soho, everything is different, other – the shops, the restaurants, the air. The discordant jazz music, the bargain frock pedlars, the disreputable nightclubs, the dilapidated domiciles all lead Waugh to inveigh Soho as "peculiarly un-English" (Waugh 1922: 129). Although geographically central, Soho is described similarly to East London, set apart from its immediate surroundings. Waugh's opinion upholds Soho's "bad or dangerous" cosmopolitan status grounded purely in its un-Englishness.

Wonderful London as a magazine series is, thus, rife with tensions. While authors, journalists and critics adulate the growing metropolis – its transportation, urbanisation and growth – there still exist anxieties over the increasing foreign element. East and West do not converge, but exist alongside each other, separate and distinct. In reading the series, it becomes apparent that those of an older literary tradition, such as Ridge, Pain and Waugh, prefer the 'English' West to the 'foreign' East. This dichotomy, as will be shown, was not isolated to the magazine series, but also extend to its cinematic counterpart.

WONDERFUL LONDON ON SCREEN

Wonderful London as a short film series appeared on British screens as early as May 1924 and ran throughout 1926. Produced by Harry B. Parkinson and directed and arranged by Frank Miller, the short films (about ten minutes each in length) formed part of a larger cinema programme and were shown before the comedies and the main feature (Dixon 2012: 1). Film scholars such as Dixon have asserted that the film series was based on the eponymous magazine. While there is no direct evidence, in comparing the two incarnations, the connection between St. John Adcock's magazine series and the travelogue films is uncanny. Much of the films' subject matter often seems literally taken from the pages of the magazine. For instance, Barry Pain laments, "The internal combustion engine wiped out some interesting London types. We had the driver of the horse bus, swift in repartee and able to do miracles." In *London Old and New* and *London's Contrasts*, the narrative follows a London horse bus driver as he takes a couple throughout the city, a dying breed thanks to the modern engine. Many of the shots in the films furthermore echo the photographs found in the magazine – the Tower of London, Royal Albert Hall, Albert Memorial and Rotten Row in Hyde Park to identify a few.

Regardless of their origins, both the magazine and films series convey an inter-textual construction of 1920s cosmopolitanism. News of the film series' production was



released in 1923, and a reviewer (1923: 5) for the *Gloucester Citizen* recounted:

Indeed, an American who has seen the films at a private view tells me he would name the pictures 'London-Round-the-Corner.' For they reveal the little things that strangers often miss, and the Londoner himself fails to notice on account of their familiarity [...] The Sunday crowds, the cosmopolitan quarters, the suburbs and out-of-the-way beauty spots are all revealed, perhaps for the first time to a large number of spectators.

The series is watershed in this regard and the reviewer is astute to note the audience potential of the series. The films were screened throughout Britain in countless cinemas – from The Shaftesbury Hall in Portsmouth to The Majestic in Yorkshire, from St. George's Theatre in Canterbury, to the Palace Picture House in Bridlington.

They were also exported to other territories within the British Empire, which at the time was an invaluable market for British-made films. In Australia, *Wonderful London* was exhibited as a "ten reel super feature" (1926: 11), with all episodes being combined into a feature-length film shown as the main attraction rather than supporting content. *Wonderful London* was shown for one week, typically at a matinee and evening viewing, in town halls and theatres across Australia. The film played to a "crowded and enthusiastic audience" at his Majesty's Theatre in Brisbane (1926: 12), while the Queen's Hall in Perth was "thronged with delighted patrons" (1926: 8).

Because it was the feature film in these performances there are multiple contemporary reviews that indicate how critics received the film and how London's cosmopolitan construction was exported to parts of the British Empire. Most of the reviews were highly adulatory, with reviewers praising its artistry, photography and realism. A journalist for *The Hebrew Standard of Australasia* remarked, "The living throbbing story of the greatest city in the world is portrayed with a minuteness of detail and a wealth of historical tradition that leaves one spellbound at the almost superhuman conception of the producer" (1926: 5). *Warwick Daily News* reported, "never before in the history of the motion picture has there been an attempt on the screen to film the soul of a metropolis" and concluding, "A landmark in filmdom has been set up by Wonderful London" (1926: 3).

In viewing the series as a whole, London is presented as a multifaceted city, oscillating between a historic city of the past and a modern cosmopolitan city, containing both urban and rural spaces. In *Barging Through London*, viewers are invited on a trip through London's canal system, which dates back to the early nineteenth century. Placed atop a narrow boat, the camera shows the dockyards of Limehouse, the inner workings of the Mile End lock, a bustling Whitechapel, the "mountainous" Kentish Town, the "Sylvan reaches" of Regents Park, and ends at Paddington Basin off Edgware Road. The emphasis in this episode is the more bucolic aspects of London, although shots of congested thoroughfares seem almost unavoidable. The sublime is similarly celebrated in *Flowers of London*, in which shots of "dank, dirty" London are interspersed with close-ups of flowers and long shots of gardens. In *Along Father Thames to*



Shepperton, the “jaded Londoner finds relaxation” along the Thames. A boat takes viewers up the river, revealing picturesque shots of Canbury Gardens, grand houses, and well-known beauty spots.

With the exception of the three aforementioned episodes, the other nine accentuate the city’s metropolitan facets, creating a visual definition of cosmopolitan London. Many of the films in the series, whether intentionally or inadvertently, uphold the binary between East and West. In *London’s Sunday*, for instance, shots of East London are consciously intercut with shots of West London to emphasise their similarities rather than their differences. *Dickens London* invites viewers on a tour of Dickensian sites and indiscriminately oscillates between East and West, creating a unified representation of the city. *Cosmopolitan London*, however, takes as its impetus the lesser known, foreign areas of London. Through an exploration of its form, content, and historical context, a visual and inter-textual exegesis of 1920s cosmopolitanism emerges.

COSMOPOLITAN LONDON

Some elements of *Cosmopolitan London* are problematic (especially to modern day viewers, film historians, and critics). The film, however, presents unequalled views of lesser-known areas of London. Unlike *Known London*, which consciously depicts images of familiar sites, such as The British Museum, Marble Arch, Hyde Park and Piccadilly Circus, *Cosmopolitan London* invites viewers to explore less recognisable aspects of the city. The film, like articles in the magazine series and contemporary news stories, takes for granted the deeply ingrained binary between West and East London, emphasising the latter’s contributions to London’s cosmopolitan status. Similar to other films in the *Wonderful London* series, *Cosmopolitan London* lacks a narrative structure and instead invites viewers on a visual tour of the city via simple cinematic form of short actuality sequences intercut with intertitles. The footage, as Sandhu (2012: 11) has observed, is at times insincere, but nevertheless, fascinating.

The film begins with an intertitle announcing, “To the Londoner all things are possible. If he wearies of the sameness of his surroundings, he need but walk around the corner or invest in a two-penny bus ride – and at once he is among strange faces and scenes reminiscent of foreign climes.” Immediately, the film takes as its focus the foreign elements of the cosmopolitan capital city. Viewers begin their journey across London’s exotic regions in Soho where images of restaurants serving foreign cuisines are shown in steady succession – Isola Bella (now a Gourmet Burger Kitchen) at number 15 Frith Street and an Italian butcher next door; Gallina’s Rendezvous Restaurant on Dean Street; and Restaurant Salonika, an orderly building bearing letters of the Greek alphabet. To contemporary viewers, these establishments would have been familiar. By 1920, Soho with its intimate and affordable restaurants and cafes had assured its reputation as “London’s cosmopolitan center of culinary delights” (Walkowitz 2012: 110). Punters could indulge in tastes from countries around the globe including Chinese, French, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. Despite this diversity, *Cosmopolitan*



London only depicts three of the dozens of options – The Rendevous, a successful Franco-Italian restaurant; Isola Bella, an Italian eatery; and Restaurant Solonika with its Greek gastronomy. The film ignores some of Soho's more salacious sides as mentioned in Walkowitz's monograph, and instead celebrates the unrivalled access to foreign gastronomic delights.

A sequence detailing Erskine's Restaurant in the "unsavoury Whitcomb Street district" presents a more problematic view of London's cosmopolitanism. Viewers are told not to linger in this area, home to a "notorious" cafe bar known for its "negro clientele". An exterior shot reveals the grand menu and darkened windows as a man and two women enter. "White Trash," an intertitle warns, "are not encouraged here." An intertitle interestingly places Erskine's Club in the Whitcomb Street area, near Leicester Square and closer to Soho. Perhaps a simple mistake, or sheer ignorance, but in actuality, Erskine's was located on 143 Whitfield Street, off the Tottenham Court Road, in the West End. It would seem Erskine's problematizes the image of a polished and commercialised West End, for Erskine's was an establishment that catered to black clientele, one of relatively few in the 1920s. As *The Daily Mirror* notes, the club was frequented by black men and "white girls of from eighteen to twenty-five years of age" (1925: 2).

In November 1924, police raided the café, after which they reported "coloured men and white women were caressing at the club, and there was dancing and a jazz band playing" (1925: 2). Uriah Erskine, the proprietor and man of colour, was arrested for selling "intoxicating liquor" without a license (4). The scandal of young, white women cavorting with black men was not only used as fodder for newspaper columns, but also as evidence in Mr. Erskine's trial (Matera 2015: 168). Through this lens, Erskine's comes to incarnate anxieties over 'Black peril' and miscegenation, to which the film intimates, but does not concede. The film literally does not linger here and hastily moves onto another location.

On Berwick Street in the West End, which an intertitle deems "the Ghetto of the West"; viewers are shown images of a humming market with stalls manned by pedlars, selling a myriad of goods. The sequence remarkably captures the kinetic and frenetic energy of the space as men, women and children shuffle along the rows within the tightly-packed frame. Walkowitz, quoting travel writer Thomas Burke, describes Berwick Street Market as "chiefly kept by Jews, but its patrons are cosmopolitan – French, Swiss, Italian, Greek and suburban" (2012: 156). This is juxtaposed with a similar shot of Whitechapel Road, the "Ghetto of the East". A row of stalls line the exteriors of storefronts as the "swarming hive of Jewish humanity" pass in front. In this sequence, East and West are not so dissimilar. In these two markets, people from different religious, ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds could interact freely, a truly cosmopolitan feat.

Looking down a road in Clerkenwell, viewers are shown a bustling street. Shop fronts line either side of the road while a group of small children play in the foreground. An intertitle informs viewers, "This is Little Italy, famous for its macaroni, chianti, hokey-pokey and ice-cream..." Cutting back to the same shot as before, the group of children are now dancing, occasionally glancing towards the camera. Viewers are invited to meet Saffron Hill's oldest inhabitant. An elderly woman sits with her hands crossed in front of



her, her eyebrows furrowed, as she looks into the lens. She blinks but once and does not smile. A moustachioed man to her left (the viewer's right) glances up from his newspaper and over to the woman. He quickly returns to his reading. The children, elderly woman and her woolly friend are never identified by name. The camera sits removed, capturing its subjects as some sort of intangible ideal or example of a different culture. While the Italian quarter can be viewed through a curious and light-hearted lens, the intertitle commentary and shots of subsequent areas are more problematic.

In the quarter by Limehouse Pier, the film focuses on Lascars; Indian sailors employed as inexpensive labour aboard British merchant ships (Visram 2015: 190). An intertitle informs viewers, "Here's a cheery soul whose business it is to manage the only institution of its kind in the world – the Home for Asiatics." Looking down a long balcony, the film shows a rotund, white man walking from the back of the frame towards the camera. He is garbed in a grin and a bowtie as he nonchalantly swaggers towards the viewer. He pauses in the middle of the frame and looks at young Indian men and boys lounging below. The overseer's position is clear; he is there to look after the young men. In actuality, the Strangers Home for Asiatics was a missionary establishment provided government-subsidized shelter to Lascars, as well as a site of Christian proselytism – a location, thus, for assimilation.

After a brief encounter with the Scandinavian Mission Hall designed to "protect foreign sailors against the crimps and harpies of the district" and the Scandinavian Temperance Home – "a charming spot amid a wilderness of squalor", the film enters 'sinister' Pennyfields, a Chinese community in the docklands of London.

Intertitles imply that community members are reluctant to be filmed, either running away or erupting into hysterical protest at the sight of a camera. "But perhaps," an intertitle proclaims, "he has a reason for his dislike of publicity!" While the meaning may not be initially clear to modern viewers, the film continues, "Dim and mysterious is London's Chinatown – and in Limehouse Causeway, one gets the tang of betel-but, of bhang, and of – opium." Jon Burrows has charted in his article on Limehouse melodramas, contemporary anxieties over 'Yellow Peril', which seem to coalesce around Limehouse's Chinatown. Repeatedly in film and literature of the period, Limehouse, whether explicitly or implicitly named, and its migrant Chinese population were associated with fears over drug use, especially by young, white women. In *Cocaine* (1922), for instance, a Limehouse dealer – "a deformed hunchback, who is clearly intended to represent the 'true' face the Chinaman [...]" (Burrows 2009: 286) provides the drugs later sold to a young woman. In the end, she is saved from the advances of Chinese nightclub owner by a police raid, only to later die from an apparent overdose (287).

The suggestions to contemporary audiences would have been clearer. The film offers an image, however, to counter these associations. After being convinced by the filmmakers, a young Chinese woman with bobbed hair stands nervously before the camera. She holds a small child in her arms and eventually relaxes into a smile. There is a performativity to this sequence in the Limehouse area. An unnamed woman asked to pose for the camera, as a representative of her community, much like the older woman



in Saffron Hill. It's soon revealed, "We manage to persuade these two to pose for us – but then, you see – they are half English!" Her hesitation to be filmed is overcome, thus, by her English side. Yet, there is no shame associated with miscegenation, in particular the fear of mixed-raced offspring.

The journey ends with a sequence at Horse Guards Parade, "something which reminds us that there is still something British in Wonderful London!" A succession of shots shows a changing of the guard ceremony with tourists milling around the square. Throughout the journey, it is clear the white, British and colonial areas (mostly in the West) are prized over the mysterious, foreign areas in the East. The content and form of the sequences in the French, Italian, and Strand areas are gentle, with playful intertitles and a moderate pace. As the film takes viewers further East, the frames are filled; the subjects are unidentified and removed. Old biases and anxieties linger, but viewers are nevertheless given intimate glimpses of London's cosmopolitan quarters.

Cosmopolitanism in its 1920s context was a phrase rife with contradictory connotations. Often associated with London's multicultural elements, cosmopolitanism was oftentimes celebrated not only for its cultural imports, but also as an anecdote to unwanted nationalism. More problematically, xenophobic stereotypes and images still lingered in popular culture of the time. London, nevertheless, was where East and West met, forming a unified, cosmopolitan city and the interrelation between the two yielded London's most distinguished characteristics. London would thrive and decline throughout the twentieth century, but its cosmopolitan status would remain intact.

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