World Literature and Postcolonial Studies, Part II

Introduction: “Circulation”

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Part two of the special issue of *World Literature and Postcolonial Studies* comes out during extraordinary times. The world is fighting a global pandemic. “I can’t breathe” and “Black Lives Matter” are no longer expressions that are meaningful only in America. Rather, they have become calls to unite the world against bigotry, racism, and injustice. Meanwhile, Covid-19 has exposed racial, class, and economic inequalities all around the world. If in America, the global pandemic re-emphasized the failing healthcare system, in India it brought forth the biggest movement of people from urban centers to rural communities. Indeed, the migrant crisis in India could only be compared with the plight and tragedy of people during the 1947 partition, many of whom walked for thousands of miles to reach “home.” Though the essays published in this special issue were selected before the global pandemic, the revisions and the preparation of the manuscript took place at a time when events were canceled, air and train travel was impossible, and countries were under lockdown. One cannot imagine bringing out this special issue, which has contributions of authors residing in different parts of the world, working on, to name a few, Korean, Australian, Maghrebi, Syrian, Welsh literatures, had the world not been connected through the circulatory network of the internet.

Not surprisingly, then, the co-editors see the theme of circulation and movement running through the essays collected here. Often world literature is thought in simple terms as a literature in translation, circulating and leaping across national boundaries only in a handful of languages. Postcolonial literature, on the other hand, is usually assumed to be writing back to a colonial center and circulating in colonizer’s languages. Yet both views shouldn’t stray too far from actual realities on the ground. A study of literature in translation

is impossible without engaging with the politics of circulation present in the multiple iterations of the original, or of the translated in the world. Similarly, a postcolonial critique that doesn't engage with the multiplicity and multilingualism in circulation at "home" isn't doing enough writing back to the center, wherever that center might be.

The first essay in this issue looks at the circulation and translation activity in modern Syria, and its intersections with original works. Through his essay, Daniel Behar argues for a return to the multiplicity residing within a postcolonial national setting, as a way of understanding poetic production in interaction with foreign poetries. Behar's essay analyzes circulation and translation in a Syrian periodical through world literary and postcolonial frameworks, while in the next essay Byron Taylor questions the relative meaning of the word "subaltern" as it circulates in postcolonial theories. He reads Immanuel Kant's 1784 essay "What Is Enlightenment?" as influenced by Kant's experience as a subaltern figure on the margins of the Russian empire. By building on the work of historian Alexander Etkind, and critically engaging with Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Taylor examines the ways in which Kant distinguishes between the public and private spheres. Taylor's extended discussion of Spivak's essay questions the legitimacy of Kantian Enlightenment in a colonially divided world, and the scope world literature could offer in historicizing expressions in wider contexts.

Coral Lumbley's essay takes the case of the medieval Welsh text *Mabinogion* to emphasize the value that premodern traditions can bring to inflect modern studies of postcolonial and world literatures. By examining the context, circulation, and reception of Lady Charlotte Guest's English translation of Welsh materials, Lumbley calls for collaborative work on transhistorical world literature that supports acquisition of linguistic skills for reading minority-literature languages such as Welsh as part of responsible distant readings. Next, Ji Hyea Hwang's essay reads Korean literature in conversation with world literature. She examines the much-neglected genre of plays in world literary and postcolonial studies. Utilizing Françoise Lionnet's concept of transcolonialism, her essay looks at the birth of modern Korean drama through the transculturation of Irish dramatic traditions that aided in subverting Japanese imperial power.

The metaphors of circulation and movement are furthered by Mushtaq Bilal in his reading of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. Bilal brings pressure on the categories of national literature and world literature by analyzing Hamid's novel as exhibiting characteristics often associated with a world novel: delocalization and multi-strand narration. At the same time, he implicates Hamid's postcolonial novel in the phenomenon of globalization in terms of its language, circulation, and reception, even as it problematizes the movement of characters from

the Global South to the Global North. If Bilal's essay challenges the categories of national literature and world literature, Nathanael Pree examines literature's position in bringing reconciliation and restitution by comparatively mapping the circulation of memories through the process of remembrance offered in the narratives. He juxtaposes the work of W.G. Sebald with that of the Australian author Alex Miller to extend Aimé Césaire's *choc-en-retour* or "boomerang effect," and Michael Rothberg's iteration of "Multidimensional Memory." This issue concludes with Mustapha Ait kharouach's work on Maghrebi literature, which emphasizes the significance of literary multilingualism while debating the contours of world literature, postcolonial studies, and comparative literature. He suggests that the definition of local literature and world literature changes when literary multilingualism embedded and circulating in Maghrebi literature is given a chance, aesthetically and politically.

The seven essays published in this issue are intellectually diverse, and differ in their approaches to literary material, timeframe, and geopolitical concerns, but they are tied together in their engagement with circulation in varied ways, whether through history, memory, multilingualism, or translation. Taken together, they offer critical approaches to reading literature circulating in the names of world literature, local literature, national literature, Anglophone literature, and postcolonial literature, in a time when both the opportunities and the dangers of worldwide circulation are more significant than ever.