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From the “Foreword”

Gönül Pultar

As we move forward into the twenty-first century, the master-word of globalization increasingly looms as an all-consuming process capable of reshaping the world we live in. Attendant and parallel developments, such as the perspectival horizon of transnationalism and the convincing emergence of first-class diasporic authors have helped to collapse the conventional boundaries of national literatures. More and more authors are now writing from “outside the nation,” as Azade Seyhan puts it (*Writing Outside the Nation*, 2001). A new sort of world literature that is very different from the one conceptualized by Goethe has now taken center stage. A product mainly of migration and relocation as well as of the aftermath of the colonial experience, this new literary community is created for the most part by authors writing in a language different from the one they were born into and has given rise to the neologism *literatures in English*.

It is evident that this new literature originates from various non-English linguistic, literary and cultural heritages with authors consciously and deliberately rejecting linguistic and cultural tenets which the Polish-born Joseph Conrad or the Swedish-born Carl Sandburg, to name but two “transplants” on both sides of the Atlantic, had felt bound to when composing in English. Such literature summarily turns away from the traditional study of English literature descending from and involving *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales*—in other words, from Old English and Middle English texts. It also founders the very basis upon which English literature was established, just as it burns all bridges with the recently dominant Arnoldian and Leavisite traditions. What is more, it embodies the *Weltschmerz* of the age, with its representation of a culturally complex world alerting us to power struggles in world cities and postcolonial sites where individuals fight entrenched value systems and undergo experiences of deracination and migrancy. This new body of literary works requires new formulations and a remapping within current cultural and literary studies.

As the special issue on “Globalizing Literary Studies” of the Modern Language Association’s *PMLA* in 2001 illustrated, this is a question that has begun to preoccupy scholars and critics in search of ideas capable of radically revising the by now conventional paradigms of multiculturalism and post-colonialism—the latter having emanated from deconstructionism and postmodernism which themselves have become

passé. Multiculturalism and post-colonialism tend to overlook, when not incriminating, the Western grand narrative that has remained, in spite of postmodernism, very much in evidence and has even been given new life with U.S. president George W. Bush's post-9/11 discourse. Multiculturalism and post-colonialism also acquiesce to the basically imperialist-conditioned position of "subalternity" of those groups in whose name they articulate grievances, thereby reinforcing the "inferior" standing of these.

It is the exhaustion of prevalent approaches that has led Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to write in 2003, "in loving memory" so to speak, of the "death" of the discipline of comparative literature (*Death of a Discipline*), whose concern should have been the emergent fiction, but whose present conceptualization remains far behind and below the reach of this fiction. It is again frustration with current theory that claims to compartmentalize and explain away—within the post-Leavisite, "Birmingham-style" cultural studies context—the new developments in fiction, that has led Terry Eagleton in his *After Theory* of the same year to take for granted this announced death and undertake a post-mortem assessment which offers a rather harsh indictment of the state of the art. The present volume, devoted to "theorizing a bicultural approach to contemporary world fiction," is one endeavor to go beyond tribute and condemnation alike, and offer in turn, in all modesty, an approach capable of addressing the demand for new insights. The deaths in 2003 and 2004 of Edward Said and Jacques Derrida, respectively, herald the end of an epoch and render such search imperative.

One major aspect of the emerging world fiction is the fact that it has increasingly come to require the cognizance and analysis of a culture other than the one in the language it is written. The product of a cross-cultural fertilization and mutual transculturation, this fiction constitutes a meeting ground of cultures and makes possible a juxtaposition that is at the core of the complex relationship(s) between East and West. In addition, such fiction, rather than being "post-colonial," "ethnic" or "multicultural"—all labels under which it has been categorized so far (and that suggest the existence of a putatively hegemonic culture, calling at once for its denigration)—is in reality "bicultural." For, when examined closely this fiction is seen to reflect a biculturalism that is the amalgam of two cultures both of which are hegemonic in their own ways. This volume adopts a "bicultural approach" to study the work of authors who have produced this fiction. Such an approach, while providing insight into the works discussed by uncovering and retrieving elements of the seemingly "other," non-European culture, elevates both cultures to the same level of consideration and confers an equal status on them.

The present collection has its genesis in the very many conferences which I have attended since the mid-nineties, and the many conversations at these venues I had with colleagues who, like myself, were Western-educated but originated from the "rest" of the "West," and who had been following (as best we could) the latest literature in critical and cultural theory. We felt that the well-polished words we were hearing in the sessions somehow did not encompass the whole picture of the works treated in the conference presentations. Edward Said in his seminal *Orientalism* (1978) neglected to underscore the fact that the "orientalized" was also a subject/agent who had articulated over the centuries a more than substantial discourse of his/her own. And although Homi Bhabha rightly criticizes British colonialism in India for having imposed his/her "book" (*The Location of Culture*), he, too, failed to record that the medium which the colonial officers were

tinkering with was no *tabula rasa*: whether as Persian and Arabic poetry, that in Sanskrit and other local languages, or popular literature dating back to *A Thousand and One Nights*, literature in India had a very ancient tradition and an impeccable pedigree.

The “Mughal” Turks erected splendors of architecture in India that the British only knew how to loot and very poorly emulate. Yet none of this was ever pointed out. And we, from the rest of the West, were all too busy going over the twenty-minute presentation we were soon to make, and too happy to have been s/elected by Western colleagues to committees in US- or Europe-based associations, too thankful to them, too much imbued with Eastern *sensibilité*, to protest, and/or oppose prevailing views. Recognition in present-day Ganges or the Bosphorus rests, much more than on the authorship of any dissertation or monograph of whatever merit, on acceptance on the shores of the Thames or Charles rivers—as we have all had occasion to learn, to our detriment. Thus we remained silent, and were even impressed to see our cultures being portrayed by our peers with fashionable buzzwords such as *subaltern* and *hybrid*. We knew, however, that no discussion on Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) could ever be complete or even satisfactory without a consideration in its own right of Eastern oral story-telling in general, and of Indian story-telling and epics, myths and legends in particular. Even the most Western aspect of the novel, its nation-building, “community-imagining” characteristic (that appears to derive from the tradition established by Walter Scott’s novels), needs to be examined *also*, and perhaps before anything else, within the tradition that has produced the Persian-language *Shahnama* (Book of Kings, ca 1000) of Firdawsi (see B.W. Robinson for a recent rendering in English).

In 1998 I organized at the “Crossroads” conference in Tampere, Finland, a panel entitled “World Fiction as Meeting Ground of Cultures: A Bicultural Approach.” The idea for the present volume takes its origin from it and includes some of the essays—subsequently reworked—from the panel and additional ones added later. (My own essay, for example, is based on a presentation I made at the 2000 MELUS-India conference in Hyderabad, India.) I would like to thank the contributors for their important and often incisive essays as well as for the patience and enthusiasm they have shown all along.

The collection includes fourteen chapters written by scholars coming from different cultures, literary traditions and disciplines, who examine authors writing in English, Spanish and Bengali, reflecting a cornucopia of other languages, literary traditions and cultures. So much so that William Boelhower notes in the Introduction “the almost borderless inventory of authors studied here—as if the scholars themselves had met by chance in an airport waiting lounge.” In fact, the contributors were “recruited” through the Internet, in response to two calls for papers, one for the Tampere panel and the other for additional essays for this volume. Indeed, the scholars could very well have met at some airport waiting lounge, ready to depart for a destination in some out-of-the-way site, an “exotic” postcolonial metropolis somewhere between Rushdie’s real-life Mumbai and a Marienbad imagined by Kazuo Ishiguro, to attend a conference at which they would be presenting their latest work.

What the Tampere panelists, the later contributors, and I have tried to underscore here is that there exists a growing body of fiction that possesses a significant dimension other than the one quite manifest for the linguistic culture—the so-called home audience—in which it is published. As one reads the chapters in this volume, one will

find discussions about an immensely rich and effervescent world, a universe teeming with a variety of individuals and their passions, an almost boundless space inflected with innumerable hues, sounds and smells. In fact, although only fictional works are examined (mostly novels, but also an occasional play or poem), what emerges is larger than fiction, whether mimetic or postmodern. For example, one can catch a glimpse of the late Andreas Papandreou, who will go down in history as prime minister of Greece, while yet married to a WASP American woman, chairing the department of economics at Berkeley University, with “his Adlai Stevenson liberalism and rhetoric from the Berkeley free-speech movement,” espied by his son in the seclusion of their home dancing the *zebekiko*. One will also encounter the wife of Tagore’s elder brother, closer in age to Tagore than her own husband and therefore bonded in friendship (and perhaps more) to Tagore rather than her husband, later committing suicide when Tagore in turn gets married. In short, as the reader will bear me out, a whole teeming humanity is here, feeling, suffering, and revealing for the reader sentiments and scenes ranging from tragedy to the joys and pathos of everyday bicultural life.

From the “Introduction”

William Boelhower

Today, many of the writers who have contributed to the burgeoning canon of international literatures in English—such as Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, Marjorie Agosin, Iva Pekarkova, Eva Hoffman, Manthia Diawara, Yvonne Vera, and a host of others—have become, in the critic Tim Brennan’s phrase, “Third World cosmopolitan celebrities.” In confirmation of this, where we once focused our critical attention almost exclusively on immigrants, the processes of assimilation and acculturation, and the ideological division of nations into two blocks, we now talk of migrants, flexible citizenship, and the global civil society. And where once ethnic authors were studied solely in literature departments, writers like those mentioned above are now discussed in cultural, postcolonial, critical theory, and gender studies courses. Criticism of literature also has developed radically new premises; figures like Franz Fanon, C.L.R. James, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Mary Louise Pratt, Elleke Boehmer, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, to name only a few, have revolutionized the way we talk about texts, their worldliness, and our own ethical standpoint as gendered readers. It is on the foundations of this vast overhauling of literary studies that the present volume of essays, edited by the well-traveled cosmopolitan scholar Gönül Pultar, builds.

The essays Pultar has brought together here concentrate their attention on elaborating a bicultural approach to a wide-ranging, international pantheon of authors including the Greek American Nikos Papandreou, the New Zealand Maori writer Patricia Grace, the Turkish American Güneli Gün, universally recognized cosmopolitan stars like Salman Rushdie, Arundati Roy, and Vikram Chandra, the Chinese American Maxine Hong Kingston, the Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong’o, the Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, the Danish writer Isak Dinesen, the Indian writers Attia Hosain, Manju Kapur, Rabindranath Tagore, the black British writer Caryl Phillips, and the Japanese American John Okada. Perhaps only a decade ago, such an ambitious, world-spanning project

would have seemed absurd outside a congress of anthropologists or bankers. Today, it represents a state-of-the-art sensibility reflecting the efforts of an equally various geocultural assembly of scholars. The implications for a community of readers not only interested in but competently sensitive to such far-flung narrative geographies is equally stunning.

And yet, if we look at recent attempts in the social and political sciences to theorize postnational (and transnational) exchanges in our now rather visible global village and compare them with this volume's table of contents, it is immediately evident that there is a rather strong homology between the study of "world literature" in English and the space of flows we take for granted when talking about financial markets, the internet, or even the more arduous flow of migrants following the global job market. How, for that matter, could it be otherwise, when it is in the very nature of literature to construct a detailed and synthetic *mundus* out of the existential, social, political, and economic forces at work in the structures of our infra-ordinary lives. As the world goes, so goes its literature; and students of the latter, conscious as never before of their place in the world, are patently caught in between. Evidently, it is with this self-reflective burden in mind that Gönül Pultar has provided four topical groupings for the essays here: 1) biculturality; 2) transculturation and cultural translation; 3) hybridity, / interculturality; 4) transnationalism / postmodernism. How these categories are employed by the individual contributors and how successful they are in labelling an as yet largely inchoate global reality marks the challenge and the achievement of these essays.

Having started by noting the almost borderless inventory of authors studied here—as if the scholars themselves had met by chance in an airport waiting lounge—I should immediately add that the above topical ordering already provides us with what is arguably the most nuanced vocabulary that an equally cosmopolitan criticism has so far cobbled together. And it is to the credit of many of the contributors that they have used these categories not only to explore their chosen set of texts but also, in doing so, to test the usefulness and limits of the heuristic tools themselves. In effect, both the new conditions brought about by globalization and social science theories with a cosmopolitical reach start from the same scripts describing what happens when individuals, coming from different cultures and speaking different languages, encounter each other as they travel and work their way around the globe.

The converging linguistic particles "bi-," "trans," and "inter" in the section titles of this volume apparently anticipate what these scripts counsel when it comes to learning how to positively in a plural society with cosmopolitan, rights-based underpinnings. And for the most part the essays confirm that they do, especially when it comes to rethinking what kind of subject is best fitted to live in a fluid and increasingly rootless world as a protagonist. Here theoretical meditation on the nature of the bicultural subject is mandatory, and many of the essays (Mita Banerjee's, Esther Alvarez Lopez's, and Theodora Tsimpouki's, for example) are interesting precisely for their sustained discussion of a certain performative lightness of being typical of a postmodern, high-riding subject. While fluidity, hybridity (the condition as well as the art of "in-betweenness"), and empathy are important traits of the bicultural subject, there is also a less buoyant, more conflictual, side that has been expressed in terms of identity politics, the politics of recognition, or in more extreme instances, cultural survival.

In her essay on the Maori writer Patricia Grace, for example, Paloma Fresno Calleja discusses a major issue in postcolonial politics and literatures, namely the fight to take back what was lost—not only land but also a people’s cultural heritage. In such struggles, the central subject is usually a community or at least a transindividual collectivity and herein lies the very strength that is needed to carry on a lengthy, sustained battle on several fronts. In these large battles, the individual subject is often the spokesperson for a set of values handed down from a timeless past. And the issues are national and often revolutionary. For the individual to aspire to universal values or to want to rise above the ethnic limitations of a narrowly observed parochial tradition may lead to tragedy, as it does in Arundati Roy’s linguistically exuberant novel *The God of Small Things* (see Lalitha Ramamurthi’s essay). For Roy, history seems cyclical, and caste, class, and religion weigh in heavily when it comes to an individual’s freedom of choice.

In Sriparna Basu’s discussion of the work of Rabindranath Tagore, we are presented with a cultural trajectory that begins in universal humanism (his first novel *Gora*) and ends in a tragic split between East and West (his novella *Char Adhyay*). At first Tagore believed in the value of empathy and the possibility of constructing a transnational hybrid subject in India, but as time passed cultural nationalism and the agenda of revolutionary struggle gained the upper hand. Basu also explores what this means at the symbolic level for the feminine subject, used by Tagore to filter and distinguish between cultural and political nationalism. The regimenting effects of anticolonial struggle on theories of free-forming subjectivities can also be looked at in other ways, such as the face-off between tradition and modernity (see Nadia Ahmad) or the restraining role such categories as gender and race often have on women and people of color.

In effect, the category of culture looms as large as any of those used to head the various sections of this volume, and all the contributors find themselves having to deal with it either directly or indirectly. In some instances, for example Rachel Trousdale’s essay on Dinesen’s *Out of Africa*, it seems that a hybrid culture can be invented without too much sacrifice by taking into account the talents and knowledge of all those living together in a given place and according to a shared economy. This symbiotic achievement is a hard-won victory of sorts and even then one on a very small scale. But when it comes to such large Orientalist divisions as East versus West, colony versus mother country or, much more generally, the traumas suffered by first generation immigrants in any of the big industrialized nations (see Paul Smethurst’s essay on the oeuvre of Caryl Phillips and Fu-jen Chen’s fresh reading of John Okada’s powerful novel *No-No Boy*, then we are dealing with an altogether steeper challenge.

If we consider culture as somehow equivalent to Manuel Castells’ space of flows, Arjun Appadurai’s global ethnoscapes, or James Clifford’s poetics of travel and then reposition these in terms of, say, the category of diaspora, quite a different set of questions regarding culture emerges: questions that summon up tragic histories, particularly those of the Jews and then the Africans in the centuries-long build-up of the slave trade. There are, of course, numerous other “lesser” diasporic experiences that could be cited here. In truth, there is enough hard evidence in many of the essays in this volume to stir us to be vigilant as we entertain new interpretative paradigms engendered

by globalization, cosmopolitics, and other effects resulting from our now living in a global village.

Diaspora evokes broken histories, the obligation both to remember and to forget in order to move forward in time, and the moral call to serve as a witness and to shoulder the burdens inherent in belonging to a community. All of these diasporic-related commitments tend to discourage any attempt to create an exclusively formal theory of biculturality. In addition, the ethical responsibilities of diaspora remind us how thoroughly embedded *all* of Gönül Pultar's topical categories—not only biculturality but also transculturation, hybridity, interculturality, transnationalism, and postmodernism—are. What is more, both Edward Said's example of critical worldliness and the very nature of literature as a webbed *mundus* of countless details call for this same embeddedness. Nowhere is this shared ontology more evident than in the painstaking deliberations of translation, as Katrina Daly Thompson's important essay on how Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* became *Tsanga Yembeu* demonstrates.

Translation, Thompson notes, is a productive struggle sanctioned by the patronage of the African trickster Legba. This lexical "warfare" is further explored by Dora Sales Salvador in her informative discussion of the notion of "living translation." She focuses on the recently revalued Peruvian writer José María Arguedas and the Indian writer Vikram Chandra, both of whom belong to two language-cultures and create a unique literary poetics by translating their knowledge of oral and folk traditions from one language into another. As the etymon of the word *translation* suggests, the translator is saddled with the burden of carrying something, whether that be from one language to another or from one culture to another. In her engaged scrutiny of Latina writers in the United States, Esther Alvarez Lopez weaves psychic and geographical space into one discursive strategy and uses the concept of "mestizaje" as an ideal interstitial site for defining the role of both writers and readers. As Lopez (and earlier, Mita Banerjee argues, identity itself requires constant negotiation and translation as we move from place to place. Here, then, is the connecting link between the work of textual translation and that of cultural translation, both of which had an important role in creating an influential school of border studies.

Almost all of the essays included in this volume make it quite clear that a superficial understanding of biculturality will end up drowning in its own shallows. A full reading of them reveals how again and again the authors insist on linking cultural strategies and subject performances to location, standpoint, community, region, nation, and beyond. The notion of "world literature" is as much a critical construct on trial as it is a global reality in the making. In probing it with their worldly, self-conscious questioning, the volume's contributors have no intention of taking this phenomenon as something merely given. For that matter, the writers they study certainly require new readerly skills and multidisciplinary competencies. As Gönül Pultar points out in her smart reading of Güneli Gün's entertaining novel *On the Road to Baghdad*, the ideal reader must truly be bicultural in order to catch the uniquely Turkish American playfulness and postmodern sleights of hand at work in it.

Pultar shares with Kuldip Kaur Kuwahara, who offers us an instructive reading of Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*, what is perhaps the central aim of this volume, namely that in moving from the national to the cosmopolitan scale of attention, the reader should

simultaneously seek to deconstruct any ethnocentric *forma mentis* harboring a set of cultural values the provenance of which remains unexamined. If, as Kuwahara suggests, it is the vocation of art to transcend reality through stories, then it must also be said that it does so through synthesis, syncretism, disjunctive ploys, and radical criticism.