

## The Problematic and Pragmatic Pedagogy of World Literature

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**Abstract:** In addressing the reemergence of world literature as a discipline, critics such as Emily Apter and Gayatri Spivak gesture to the problem of the scale of world literature in trying to preserve the value of localized knowledge. For them, deploying English as the language of instruction in world literature courses around the globe disincentivizes the learning of multiple languages in favor of a deceptively accessible English that elides idiom, style, and cultural specificity. This article seeks to examine the above critique in conjunction with the triumphalism of the world literature movement that David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova, and Wai Chee Dimock articulate. As a case study, the article scrutinizes the large-scale English department curriculum changes at the American University of Beirut (AUB) as an Anglophone institution in a non-Anglophone country devoted to scholarship in the humanities. The AUB example exposes the inherent tensions in the desire of global Anglophone institutions to keep abreast of theoretical and pedagogical developments while retaining strong local cultural ties. Ultimately, teaching world literature in the context of AUB allows for the study of a wide breadth of literature while destabilizing and challenging the Eurocentrism of most world literature pedagogy to date.

**Keywords:** world literature, American University of Beirut, pedagogy, Emily Apter, David Damrosch

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World literature has reemerged as a field of study manifesting itself in many forms throughout academia, from the *PMLA*'s forthcoming

special issue “Literature in the World” to the recently revised, multi-volume world literature anthologies by Norton, Bedford, and Longman, the increase of academic job postings for positions in world literature (many formerly postcolonial positions), and an uptick in undergraduate and graduate courses in global/world/transnational literature worldwide. In its most recent guise, world literature asserts the interconnectedness of distinct literatures, peoples, and ideas (among other entities) to an extent that one must think of literature beyond the local and the national in relation to a global scale of circulation.<sup>1</sup> The pedagogical strain of this conversation has cohabitated with highly theoretical articulations and quantitative research to result in an intense and somewhat inscrutable melee between those whom Rey Chow aptly describes as extolling “the euphoria of inclusionist, boundary-crossing thinking” (71), and those, following Gayatri Spivak, who believe that “the arrogance of the cartographic reading of World Literature in translation” undermines the necessarily rigorous core principals of comparative literature that ensure sound cultural reading of texts originally written in languages other than English (Spivak 73).

With some noteworthy addendums, world literature as a field distinct from comparative literature is a relatively recent phenomenon and has been dominated by a handful of major theorists, including (but not limited to) Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Peter Hitchcock, Wai Chee Dimock, Spivak, David Porter, Aamir Mufti, and Emily Apter. Scholars have conceived of world literature as a response to the perceived shortcomings of postcolonial studies and comparative literature. Critics admonish comparative literature for its overreliance on national literatures and for relying too heavily on national literatures as discrete units, while scholars see postcolonial studies as relying on colonial relations and their theoretical underpinnings to address the whole of world literary history, including events and texts that stand outside of the colonial experience or represent colonialism ambiguously. Simply put, world literature as a field asserts that the paradigms of comparative literature and postcolonial studies are outmoded and ill suited for our new globalized world and expanded fields of study.

Despite the field's rise in relevance, a working definition of world literature remains elusive. Does the term encompass all literature in all languages, locations, and time periods? Although such a broad definition may seem purposefully hyperbolic and unrealistic, some scholars, such as Moretti, are intent on such a definition.<sup>2</sup> A more manageable definition selects literary masterpieces to create a world literature canon of significant texts or "great books." To complicate matters further, some understand world literature as a characteristic of postnationalist literature. Such a view limits the temporality of the field and treats as unique the decolonized period of world history. In this view, modern communication, technology, and commerce have created a hitherto unparalleled global connectedness, and this new, increasingly digital, kind of connectedness is the proper study of world literature. In stark contrast to studying all literature in all places and times, this view delimits the field to texts circulating internationally, which represent more than a single tradition. Salman Rushdie's texts are a paragon of this model, as they attempt to float seamlessly between South Asian and English literary and cultural traditions. However, the Rushdie model begs the question that if world literature is only concerned with this kind of postnationalist multivalent literature, are there enough Rushdies to justify an entire field? A wider perspective—the most commonly accepted model of world literature—comes from Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* He defines world literature as "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (9). For Damrosch, world literature is defined by the trajectory of a text from its original context to a foreign context. "World Literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works," therefore, "but rather a mode of circulation and of reading" (17). Movement and circulation are the defining characteristics that make a text global, so that a Laotian text that remains prominent only in Laos is not world literature, but one that circulates abroad would be. Despite a growing consensus toward Damrosch's trajectory-based approach, these shared questions of scale persist in this newly manifesting field and no single method has risen to dominance. Indeed, it is this lack of standard definition that makes

the study of world literature at once vibrant, malleable, slippery, and frustratingly intangible.

Despite the multifarious manner in which theorists articulate world literature, Damrosch and contributors to his publications have become the primary architects for a quickly ossifying world literature pedagogy. The most noteworthy characteristics of this pedagogy are its relative comfort with texts in translation and English as the lingua franca of the field. Furthermore, world literature's pedagogical impetus is dominated by Damrosch's dialogic approach, which clusters texts together to form conversations among texts otherwise foreign to one another. This dialogic approach usually takes a Western text as a familiar touchstone, which enables students to oscillate between the canonical and non-canonical texts for ease in comparing. The structure of Damrosch's *Longman Anthology of World Literature*, which pairs familiar Western texts with unfamiliar non-Western texts rather than follow the format of previous world literature anthologies that focus strictly on region, foregrounds a comparative model in which dynastic Chinese poetry and medieval European texts appear alongside each other, united by common themes and forms. Accessibility for American students is the goal, as well as elucidating formal, thematic, and temporal contexts for texts from significantly different times and places. Although the structure of Damrosch's anthology articulates a de facto pedagogy, he has also edited a companion anthology of pedagogical articles entitled *Teaching World Literature* that more explicitly outlines the dialogic model taking hold in the teaching of world literature.

World literature pedagogy is far from an uncontested field and has in fact garnered harsh criticism from many prominent scholars. In a defense of comparative literature against the encroachment of world literature, Apter argues in *Against World Literature* (2013) that "[i]n their rush to franchise 'global' campus outposts all over the world, universities seize on World Literature as a catch-all rubric for flimsy programs in the humanities that ignore rather than deepen local knowledge" (17). Apter confronts the growing influence of the field of world literature by highlighting several of the field's major weaknesses. The first is the field's reliance on English translations. By its very nature, any course of study that

claims worldliness will depend on translation as no body of students or scholars can be expected to master an adequate number of languages to study literature in a truly global way. For Apter, this reliance on translation is not the manifestation of pragmatism when confronted with the limited linguistic acumen of students but a political attack on the heart of the institution of comparative literature as a field that depends on the mastery of multiple languages. Apter argues convincingly that polyglots produce more nuanced and culturally specific readings than readers of texts in English translation. However, she also imagines a zero sum system in which the more students are allowed to use translations, the less they will learn multiple languages.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, she argues that world literature deters students and scholars from learning multiple languages to such a degree that for Apter, one is either for world literature or for culturally specific and rigorous readings of foreign texts. In tacit agreement with Apter's contention that world literature is unable to account for specificity, Spivak contends that "[y]ou cannot know the whole world" while denying that she and Apter, who she thinks represents "the supplementary anti-system position," must be thought of as the "naysayers" of a new focus on the world as a unit of study (Damrosch and Spivak 471). Instead, Apter and Spivak see themselves as highlighting the inherent narrowness of relying on translation and forming new world literature canons as an unacceptable precondition for its exigence as a field. In other words, the field lacks disciplinary rigor, and they will not accept it as the next best thing to studying texts in their original languages as comparative literature does.

In concrete pedagogical terms, Apter's and Spivak's rigid stance against world literature has lost out to the necessity of offering courses that engage discourses of globalization and acknowledge the global nature of previous eras via texts in English. Apter, Spivak, and similar "naysayers," however, constantly remind the field's most influential proponents of possible missteps and the potential overreaching of classroom work based on translations into English. In a particularly enlightening exchange, Spivak and Damrosch discussed world literature at the 2011 American Comparative Literature Conference in Vancouver. In the exchange, Damrosch's pedagogically orientated pragmatism, with its

focus on how best to expose students to multiple literatures, highlights the exclusivity inherent in Spivak's and Apter's approach. Spivak and Apter imagine the questions of pedagogy seemingly only in reference to comparative literature programs at prestigious universities without acknowledging that world literature is taught at a wide range of institutions, most without comparative literature departments or programs. I experienced this myself early in my career as a master's student at the University of Chicago. I taught world literature at Wilbur Wright Community College where the option of selecting students with suitably diverse linguistic backgrounds to outmaneuver the translation issue was not available. Wilbur Wright has a diverse student body and some students offered cultural and linguistic insight to the texts we used (mainly from *Worlds of Literature* by Roberta Rubenstein and Charles Larson), but the larger point of contention is that many of the students would not have been exposed to Asian, Latin American, African, Oceanic, and other literary traditions without a world literature class taught in English. I doubt the course met the culturally specific standards of Spivak and Apter, but such an engagement that acknowledges its limitations still provides a means for students to encounter a non-Western literary world that many do not experience elsewhere. It is this pragmatic sense of teaching world literature on the ground, in a wide range of tertiary settings, that lends the field its strength when accompanied by a keen self-awareness.

I mention the community college setting because it represents the far end of a higher education spectrum almost entirely left out of this debate. Damrosch, Apter, and Spivak work at Harvard, New York University, and Columbia, respectively. The lack of comparative literature programs and departments at community colleges, small and large liberal arts colleges, and even large state schools in the United States, whose departments and students vastly outnumber research universities, undermines the assumption that the stakeholders of this debate are limited to students navigating the comparative literature/world literature divide. To this point, Ezra Yoo-Hyeok Lee astutely argues that "articles and books which deal substantially with pedagogical issues regarding teaching World Literature in this age of globalization are rare"

(8). The internal machinations of academic departments and the retaining of institutional space and resources are salient to this debate but have often superseded practical pedagogical concerns. World literature anthologies represent and enact a certain pedagogy, which I will discuss below, but how one shapes courses and teaches world literature has been given short shrift in favor of in fighting over the shrinking spoils of the humanities in American academia. For Apter, Spivak, and Damrosch, material consequences exist when deciding how to divvy up resources between comparative literature and world literature. However, the choice for most literature departments is not between comparative literature and world literature but between world literature and no literature from non-Western traditions. When the options are this stark for those teaching and studying outside the comparative literature sphere of influence, the choice makes itself. In this context, being against world literature is taking a stand against worldliness.

Once we begin to question the contexts and stakeholders of this rapidly expanding field, we see many fissures, not least of which is geographic. Pedagogically, world literature has been concerned almost exclusively with how the US academy should approach the field. The geography of world literature pedagogy replicates the very Eurocentrism that exploding the canon and focusing on cultural specificity is meant to overcome. Scholars have not understood the proper pedagogical purview as deciding on a sense of what should be translated and taught for a world republic of students around the globe, but rather they have catered to a distinctly American context. The American university student is at the center of the world literature pedagogical map. Damrosch and his supporters are by no means unaware of the conundrum of conceptualizing a Eurocentric audience for a world literature attempting to shake itself clear of its Eurocentric heritage. In his provocative exchange with Spivak, Damrosch admits that “American specialists presuming to put together world anthologies” is one of his primary concerns (Damrosch and Spivak 457). His self-critique goes so far as to bluntly limit the impact of his own impressive work on the *Longman Anthology* when he states: “What we are really purveying through these anthologies is a vision of the world for a North American audience” (Damrosch and

Spivak 457). Spivak backs Damrosch into a corner as only Spivak can, but his concession is important for the pedagogy of world literature. He creates an opening for scholars to consider the current dominant pedagogy for world literature and how it may act as a catalyst to imagine a differently orientated world literature course, classroom, and curriculum.

In his companion anthology entitled *Teaching World Literature*, Damrosch and others articulate the Eurocentric dialogic world literature pedagogy that is quickly becoming a standard for teaching world literature. This pedagogy takes as its central premise that American university students are the primary stakeholders of the field. As Gary Harrison, editor of the *Bedford Anthology of World Literature*, writes when explaining the implementation of such a method in a world literature course at the University of New Mexico, “the great works of the Western tradition held a central place [and] we increasingly put those works into context with texts from China, Japan, Africa, India, [and] the Arabic and Islamic world” (*Conversation* 207). Harrison used “a center-periphery model in which [he] placed a major canonical text from Europe of the United States into an oppositional or oppositional relationship to a countertext from China, India, Japan, or Nigeria,” an approach positing Europe and the US as normative and central (*Conversation* 208).<sup>4</sup> Although Harrison moves away from a purely Western text/non-Western con-text model, the Western texts remain the site of origin and the non-Western texts (including ones in English) are othered to provide insight into the Western texts. The methodology evokes the antiquated postcolonial trope of “writing back,” in which one reads a non-Western text for its contribution to thinking though race and colonialism in canonical European texts rather than examining the non-Western text for its own merits. Using this model, *Things Fall Apart* is a comment on issues of racial representation in Africa in *Heart of Darkness* rather than a self-referential African, Nigerian, or Igbo novel. In the same way, a world literature that places the interests of US students and scholars at the center of a debate on literature from around the world undercuts its own global project of fostering cultural meetings on a level literary playing field. In the Bedford and Longman anthologies, this methodology has evolved

into the use of “discursive clusters” of texts that all engage with similar themes, forms, or temporalities. Crucially, though, this method fosters the notion that non-Western texts are unknowable without Western reference. As Revath Krishnaswamy remarks in “Toward World Literature Knowledges,”

[i]f the model of World Literature involves sampling texts from different parts of the world, the epistemologies used to interpret them remain predominantly Western or Westerncentric. Assorted texts are not only sorted into genres identified and defined by the Western theoretical tradition, they are also interpreted according to Western theoretical norms. (402)

Krishnaswamy rightly questions the dialogic method of teaching’s claims to responsible and accurate cultural representation of the non-Western if the method’s goal is a blatantly Eurocentric “vision of the world for a North American audience,” in which understanding the other depends on an assumed knowable West and inscrutable, always-othered non-West (Damrosch and Spivak 457). Harrison does provide numerous insights into world literature courses, such as the notion that they might encourage rather than discourage language learning and that to highlight the fraught nature of translation, instructors are encouraged to switch between translations while teaching. However, one wonders how the field of world literature materializes in the world outside the US and how it would require adjustments to avoid an unflattering association with American exceptionalism.

I point out Harrison’s dialogic approach because it represents a quickly coalescing methodology embraced by major anthologies such as *The Bedford Anthology of World Literature* and *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. Anthologies represent a material intervention in the pedagogical discussion concerning world literature and are therefore uniquely influential, and both of the above anthologies deploy non-Western texts in conversation, constellation, or connection with non-Western texts. The dominant pedagogy of world literature in these anthologies retains a clear Eurocentric disposition by considering the canon as a conduit for disparate literatures to communicate with each

other and a central touchstone for evaluating non-Western literature. This paper considers what institutions, departments, and instructors can achieve if we dismantle the Eurocentrism inherent in these systems of the world literature movement.

Having taught world literature under the guise of Global Literature and Social Change and World Literature by Women at the University of Maryland, College Park, I have been faced with the dilemmas Damrosch and Spivak point out. My courses were filled with American students with diverse international backgrounds who offered frequent cultural insights but ultimately were not area experts. In short, these are the students that Damrosch and Harrison imagine for their anthologies. Having since come to Beirut to teach postcolonial studies, world literature, African literature, and gender studies at the American University of Beirut (AUB), my pedagogy has shifted markedly to accommodate my new students, who are by and large either from Lebanon or members of the Lebanese diaspora, the population of the latter being roughly four times the size of the former. My arrival also coincided with a shift in the English department's approach to its curriculum that can inform a discussion of world literature pedagogy not centered on the US.

What follows is an argument of inquiry aimed at considering how one teaches world literature responsibly to non-Western university students via a case study of AUB's approach to various courses, curricula, and teaching strategies. I am making several assumptions. The first is that I do not agree with Spivak and Apter that world literature courses discourage my students from studying foreign languages or engaging with cultural specificity; nor do they unquestioningly bend to a Eurocentric hegemonic project intent on defining and limiting the possibilities of non-Western texts and readers' analysis of them. At AUB almost all students read and write Arabic and many also have a working knowledge of French, an inheritance from the colonial period, to supplement their English. Many also have knowledge of other languages due to the far-flung nature of the Lebanese diaspora, which, at around fourteen million people, is more than three times the population of Lebanon itself (with the largest numbers living in South America and the Caribbean, totaling over eight and a half million) (Yafi).

Recently, the AUB English department implemented a new approach to world literature via a curriculum revision proposal outlined in 2013 by the curriculum development committee. AUB may not be what Apter had in mind in dismissing non-American world literature programs as “flimsy” and merely a means to “franchise ‘global’ campus outposts all over the world that ignore rather than deepen local knowledge,” especially as her own institution opened a campus in Shanghai (New York University Shanghai) in 2012 and a one billion dollar satellite campus in Abu Dhabi (New York University Abu Dhabi) in 2010. However, it would seem that AUB, as an institution founded originally by missionaries dedicated to conversion that has evolved today into an Anglophone outpost for the humanities in the Middle East, is exactly the kind of institution to which Apter alludes.

The large-scale curricula changes in the department are perhaps best reflected in the move away from courses that focus firmly on the West as central to questions of worldliness and globalization. Some courses removed frameworks that imagined non-Western literature as non-normative as well as the de facto identification of English as the linguistic property of the US and United Kingdom. The curriculum has renamed ENGL 205 and ENGL 207, for example, from Introduction to Literature I and II to English Literature I and II and removed deference to Anglo-Saxon literature from the description. The course description for Literature of the Middle Ages has changed from assigning texts “mostly read in modern English translation” to stipulating the necessity of “attention to original language,” meaning that comparisons with the original language can take place in class and in coursework if the student is capable (“Curriculum” 8). Twentieth-Century Literature no longer concentrates on British and American texts but takes “the Anglophone world” as its province. The curriculum has added similar deference to the Anglophone world, rather than to British and American texts, to general courses such as Drama and The Novel, the latter in particular changing from dramatic forms “drawn from British or American literature” to dramatic forms from “the Anglophone world” (“Curriculum” 10). Even more notably, Contemporary Anglophone Literature, focusing on the Middle East, the Global South, and South Asia, has replaced a course

on travel writing. Although the course *Literature and Empire* has retained its name, it has changed from a focus on British imperialism with suggestions to include Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, George Orwell, Joseph Conrad, and D. H. Lawrence to a focus on “literary cultures in comparative historical perspectives” to shift the attention from European readings of the non-West to texts from colonized authors (“Curriculum” 14). The traditional impetus of national literatures from a comparative literature standpoint in the course *Cultural Cross-Currents* has morphed into *Transnational Literatures*, a course that eschews the nation and instead focuses on migration and diaspora. Also moving away from the paradigm of Europe as center, the department’s postcolonial course has changed from an exclusive focus on novels that “write back” to the European discursive tradition toward an examination of fictional and theoretical texts that explore the Global South’s literary legacy in light of colonialism. The department has also introduced two new courses on literatures in translation, characterized by a “particular focus on form and cultural context” and with “consideration of theories of translation, form and cultural context” (“Curriculum” 17). These subtle but important changes signal a move away from viewing English as constitutive of American and British literatures and toward its adoption as a world language to infer that the study of literature in English is not strictly the study of the US and UK. Furthermore, abandoning national literatures en masse, along with removing the notion that non-Western literature responds to the West in the course descriptions, demonstrates a concerted desire to think about non-Western literature outside of a strictly dependent relationship with Western literature—an entirely fitting goal for a university outside the US.

The department initiated the overall project of reimagining the curriculum in order to update the course offerings and keep them in line with international standards, but stressing global contexts while maintaining a clear focus on the local Lebanese context in which students perform textual study clearly stands as a priority in this renovation. Four main intentions guide the curriculum revisions, one of which is “to clarify the vision of what literary study in the twenty-first century, and in Lebanon”

should be (“Curriculum” 1).<sup>5</sup> This focus on the Lebanese context for literary study at AUB is new in the university’s official guiding documents. Rather than pointing to a practice of using Anglophone texts to assert the centrality of American and European discursive and epistemological traditions, as per the accusations of Apter and Spivak, the declaration of the Lebanese nature of the study of Anglophone literature at AUB demonstrates that specificity of place, imagined simultaneously and inseparably as Beirut, Lebanon, the Lebanese Diaspora, and the MENA region, is at the forefront of the institution’s pedagogy. Therefore, the curriculum does not elide specificity in favor of an Anglicized version of world literature, and it further directs professors to account for the local Lebanese reception as well as the cultural contexts of the texts’ initial production and reception.

In keeping with this localized impetus, a new mission statement for the department was also suggested (and since approved) which in part reads: “The complexity of Lebanon’s cultural and linguistic situation informs many of the research projects we are pursuing. Our students also bring to their studies a wide range of lived experiences ensuring that the study of language and literature in Beirut is a rich experience of crossing borders” (“Curriculum” 2). In referring to students, the department acknowledges that Lebanese students are, if not more worldly than their American counterparts, then worldly in a different way. Lebanon is also a small country embroiled in a regional struggle with a neighbor (Israel), flooded with over a million Syrian refugees fleeing chemical and standard warfare, under threat from ISIS and deeply divided by religion despite (and because of) its size. Such situatedness comes to the forefront when I regularly teach the works of graphic novelist Joe Sacco and others. For University of Maryland students, Sacco’s work on Palestine provides an entrance to the Israeli occupation of Palestine—a topic most American students unfortunately know little about. Needless to say, given the geopolitics of the region and the presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, students at AUB do not read Sacco to uncover an unknown subject. The injustice of the Israeli occupation is a given for AUB students and they

consider audience, perspective, and form in a localized manner that advances discussion in the classroom beyond the range of most American classrooms in which, in my experience at the University of Maryland, students imagine that the merits of the occupation are debatable. The way my AUB students analyze Sacco is merely a brief and highly localized example of how AUB classrooms act as specific Lebanese sites of reception. My students at AUB even read postcolonial texts that do not touch on their immediate lives via a different situatedness—they do not regard postcoloniality as peripheral in any way, despite world literature pedagogy dictating as much.

The limits of translation are at the forefront of world literature pedagogy. The department's statement emphasizes the Anglophone nature of the institution, but like responsible readings in translation, it acknowledges the inherent limitations of English as the lingua franca. The revision document specifically addresses English as a useful yet problematic imperative: "teaching literature in English in Beirut will always involve a complex negotiation with place. English is a part of Lebanon, the region and the globe, and the faculty is interested in reading both that influence and that presence critically" ("Curriculum" 4). This last statement of reflexive criticism is particularly important in the context of world literature because it not only acknowledges limitations but also attempts to incorporate the skepticism of Apter and Spivak that English is not simply a benevolent mediator of literary study. English in Lebanon is not simply benign, and the statement encourages faculty and students to take critical approaches to the university's project of Anglophone education in the Middle East. Such self-awareness combines the pragmatism that Damrosch advocates with the skepticism Spivak and Apter demand. One cannot fully account for all cultural contexts when reading in English in Beirut, but an acute and explicit awareness of world literature's inherent limitations at once mediates overstated claims and proves a pragmatic approach to exposing students to a wide range of texts and traditions. Spivak and Apter would surely argue that the incorporation of such a stance within a mission statement at a university with no intention of evolving into a non-Anglophone institution is at best a half-measure, but highlighting one's pedagogical and ideological

limitations demonstrates a self-awareness critical to an operative and responsible global Anglophone pedagogy.

As admirable as the English department's willingness to attempt to bridge the global with the local is at AUB, enacting this pedagogical imperative in the classroom is perhaps even more crucial. The professors' approaches to teaching non-Western literature vary, but a commonality among many professors at AUB, including myself, is their practice of unpacking the dialogic methods espoused by Harrison and Damrosch. The dialogic method remains unconvincing in the American context, but it truly unravels in a context like Beirut's. Writing back and the dialogic approach rest on a notion of the West as known and the rest of the world as unknown or, at best, less known. Students in Beirut do not think of themselves as inscrutable any more than American students do, and they do not consider the West as more knowable or unknowable than other regions. They do profess to be more familiar with some parts of the world than others, but given that Lebanon and the Middle East have been so poorly represented in the West, their ability to see past flaccid stereotypes in order to understand the cultural contexts of disparate regions has been astounding in my experience. In short, my students are fluent in Western cultural norms, but they also imagine themselves in league with the Global South because they see themselves so poorly realized as subjects in Western discourses. The dialogic method, however, does not account for such an eschewing of the center/margin binary and thus elides different (though viable) connections in discussions of world literature.

The above predispositions against Eurocentric methodologies, while maintaining a focus on English as the most accessible language of instruction, dictate that non-Western courses on international literature be taught without mediating Western texts when possible. Often this impetus means creating new intertextualities that circumvent standard approaches like writing back. An example of this is when I teach the seminal postcolonial text *Palace of the Peacock* (1960) by Wilson Harris in conjunction with Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994), a novel quickly gaining critical traction in postcolonial studies and African literary studies. Both feature a group of men journeying from the coast

to a highly tense interior where their lives are at risk. Harris describes Guyana from the perspective of a riverboat crew, while Gurnah describes German Tanganyika, but critical discussions on the two authors have been dominated by readings of how they write back to *Heart of Darkness*. Instead of trying to maneuver the Western canon toward the center of these postcolonial texts that explicitly keep European colonization at the periphery, I ask students to consider how the imagined resolution of the fraught cultural milieu of Guyana of the 1950s in a magic palace in *Peacock* relates to a strikingly similar cultural dynamic in East Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century in *Paradise*. Unlike *Peacock*, *Paradise* ends with an iconic scene of feces eating that has led scholars to read the title as purely ironic and understand the novel's main contribution outside of the European canon as a rebuke of the early Africanist trope of idealizing precolonial Africa. Juxtaposing the novel with English translations of early Swahili texts from the late nineteenth century, I ask my students whether such a dismissal of *Paradise* is prudent. I introduce Salim bin Abakari's "Safari Yangu ya Urusi na ya Siberia" ("My Journey to Russia and Siberia") and Selemani bin Mwenye Chande's "Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika" (My Journey Up-Country in Africa) in *Swahili Prose Texts: A Selection from the Material Collected by Carl Velten from 1893 to 1896* to challenge Eurocentric readings of *Paradise*. Gurnah uses large parts of both of these narratives, sometimes verbatim, to fashion his African landscape while providing new African characters imbued with an interiority that Africans lacked in the original Swahili texts, since these were mediated by colonial officials. Beyond providing cultural and textual genealogies, which would be inaccessible to students without translations, this practice of introducing Swahili texts also illuminates a world literature pedagogy that departs from both the Damrosch and Spivak/Apter methodologies. The removal of a canonical Western touchstone circumvents the drawbacks of the dialogic method while the introduction of different texts, translated into English from a language that none of my students reads, adds a depth of understanding that would be missing if we did not rely on translation. I would prefer that my students (and I) read Swahili, but with the help of translated texts and the teaching of local historical and cultural contexts, students

gain insight into two postcolonial texts that would otherwise be inaccessible or unnecessarily mediated by the Western canon.

Moreover, the Swahili texts complicate scholars' traditional reliance on *Heart of Darkness* in analyzing the ways *Paradise* engages with the East African landscape and multifarious ethnicities and religions. This more complex understanding of Gurnah's novel highlights how *Peacock* engages with the Guyanese landscape in strikingly similar ways to *Paradise*. In short, the supposed lack of positive space for identity formation in Gurnah's East Africa, when read via Conrad and the Western canon, is reoriented to include the possibility of identity construction in magical spaces not unlike those in *Peacock*. I challenge my students to undermine the overly convenient reading of *Paradise* as writing back to the canon and instead explore the benefits of bracketing the West in favor of thinking of the novel as participating in both a self-referential African literary tradition with the Swahili texts and a global conversation via *Peacock*. Unlike my American students, AUB students do not resist or find awkward the decentering of the colonizer's experience. In fact, many students in my class opine that the least interesting aspect of the longue durée of colonialism and postcolonial studies are the colonizers and their inability to understand the places they encounter.<sup>6</sup> What excites students instead is interrogating the ability, and often inability, of postcolonial subjects to articulate their subjectivities and comparing seemingly disparate postcolonial texts and cultures via analyses that are carefully attuned to local questions of place.

Although the above example from my course is anecdotal, it demonstrates the problem of the dialogic approach when applied outside the US as well as the value of mindful uses of texts in translation. I have also adopted comparable approaches when teaching *Season of Migration to the North*, *Our Sister Killjoy*, *The Storyteller*, *Texaco*, and other texts. By abandoning the notion that the non-West either responds to or exists as knowable only in relation to the West, AUB's curriculum catalyzes ways of destabilizing and circumventing the conventional Eurocentrism of world literature pedagogy. In doing so, the curriculum and those who enact it articulate a methodology by which the level playing field of world cultures promised by world literature

begins to bear fruit. Lebanese students understand themselves as legitimate speakers in a global conversation despite *and* because of the use of English as the language of instruction. Although I must admit to partially subscribing to Chow's "euphoria of inclusionists," the de-centering process necessary to teaching Anglophone world literature in Beirut mediates this naïveté that rightly concerns Apter and Spivak. The pedagogical approach laid out in the English department documents and the manner in which instructors deploy this approach in the classroom do not overcome all of the objections by opponents but do represent a responsible and self-aware approach. Such pragmatism, bent as much on disrupting the overreliance on the Western canon as it is on promoting selective use of translations to open new fields of discourse, allows world literature the flexibility, if not a codified methodology, to navigate the nuances of texts in a way that constantly pursues its goal of ethical representation.

## Notes

- 1 Dimock and Nixon invite us to even think beyond the globe to the anthropocene and the cosmic scale of time and space in literature.
- 2 Although this characterization of Moretti seems overstated, his conception of "distance reading" as an alternative to close reading aspires to collect and analyze all the literature it can, using digital quantitative analysis. While incorporating all literature in all times and all places into any analysis is unrealistic, the model of distance reading itself contains no inherent limitations on the number or temporal and geographic types of texts that could be used.
- 3 The causal link she infers is much more tenuous than the straightforward assumption that the less world literature in translation students read the less world literature they will read overall.
- 4 Even works originally in English from places like Nigeria are still placed in such a relationship. Although translation is an important issue and a marker of difference, the axis on which texts are othered is cultural, not simply linguistic. An English language text that does not require linguistic translation is still deemed to require cultural translation via Western texts. Therefore, English language texts from postcolonial sites are no less controversial in this debate.
- 5 The other three intentions of the document are to update the curriculum, diversify course offerings, and promote undergraduate research.
- 6 Such an inherent urge to identify with the colonized as well as to examine the large scale hegemony of colonialism at AUB contrasts with the opposite urge

among my American students, who are more interested in understanding the motivations of the colonizers. Postcolonial studies has moved away from equating the ideological struggles of sympathetic colonizer figures like Orwell with the struggles of the colonized, and guiding my American students in that direction has been more challenging than with my Lebanese students.

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