

Book Reviews

Jahan Ramazani. *Poetry in a Global Age*. University of Chicago P, 2020. Pp. 323. USD \$30.

World literature studies have disproportionately focused on the novel, leaving poetry as often the least theorized form (Sheils 10; Prendergast xii). Jahan Ramazani's *Poetry in a Global Age* inserts poetry into this crucial discourse of world literature and globalization studies through its examination of poetic works from different historical periods and diverse cultural contexts. In his introduction, Ramazani theorizes a "polytemporal and polyspatial poetics": drawing from the premise that "the making of a poem, as of a pencil, amalgamates, reshapes, and compresses materials that span large swaths of the globe" (1). Ramazani asserts that poetry cannot be conceived without the influence of numerous thematic, stylistic, and formal elements from across space and time. This point is necessary for emphasizing poetry's transnational mobility, as other scholars have done with the novel. Ramazani makes the case for a dual understanding of poetry's place in the world: on the one hand, he argues that poems "belong to their immediate historical moment" (3); on the other hand, he acknowledges the "transnational skeins" of poetry (3). These transnational influences manifest in the tropes, forms, genres, rhythms, and even words from other languages that circulate between nations. Ramazani's model suggests that while poetry is local in terms of how thematic and formal elements evolve and are used, it is also transnational in the way these elements circulate from one national context to another. In essence, poetry is both local and global, and there is no tension or conflict in this dual mode of conceiving poetry.

In tracking poetry's transnationality, Ramazani proposes that poetry "participates in global flows, planetary enmeshments, and cosmopolitan engagements" (9), and he demonstrates this by using poems from different spatio-temporal periods. In his approach to operationalizing the global age, Ramazani bypasses conventional views of globalization—in terms of its progressive historical manifestations or its imbrication with post-Fordist capitalism and the digital sphere—and instead uses specific temporal boundaries, from the late-nineteenth century to today, to capture the continuities that produce the global moment. Furthermore, he foregrounds the national as a category that is so deeply interwoven with the global that, in a paradoxical way, even globalization appears to have been produced by the rise of nationalism in the early twentieth century. This perspective has serious implications

for a work steeped in comparative and world literature studies. In many ways, Ramazani stands apart from theorists who think of the national and the global as binary opposites and instead fuses this polarity with the view that both the global and the national are “interlocking and interdependent gyres” (20), thus positioning both as necessary in his comparativist project (20).

There are a variety of formally focused and comparativist approaches that Ramazani takes in pursuing the book’s major claims. The first chapter explores the “cosmopolitan sympathies” evident in the poetry of the First World War (25). His thesis, that even in times of war poetry crosses national boundaries to express a fundamental human relationship, reveals the inherently transnational nature of poetry. His methodology involves reading war poems from the early twentieth century with a focus on their formal elements, in order to demonstrate how writers like Thomas Hardy encode “general human and psychological connections between warring sides” (34) in their poems through language and “chiastic syntax” (35). Although Ramazani demonstrates this claim well, he also emphasizes the fact that “none of these poems aspires to solidarity with, say, a Turkish soldier in the Ottoman army” or others outside the “European and North American sphere,” hinting at the limits of cosmopolitan sympathies in the Global North (46).

In the second chapter, Ramazani investigates the imbrication of the global in the local through “poems of place” (51). Here, he focuses on what he calls “loco-descriptive or topographical poetry” and how it produces place (52). With theoretical insights from geography and critical regionalism studies, Ramazani reads twentieth- and twenty-first century poems “from the perspective of a polytemporal, polyspatial poetics” in order to uncover how “localities are enmeshed within the global” (55). This perspective allows him to interrupt the notion that poetry, especially poetry about place, is deeply steeped in the local. Instead, he proposes that even intensely localized poems are “extra-local” (56) and that places are entangled through a web of “phrases, conventions, images, and techniques attached to other places” (57). Ramazani’s transnational considerations of place and, consequently, of form-attentive poetics demonstrates that places are co-produced by both the local and the “extra-local” (56)—that which is beyond the local. If we begin to read poems less as documentary representations of place and instead focus on how global currents influence poetic forms, we might begin to appreciate the multiple spatio-temporalities that make up any given place, but the question of what place exactly is remains, especially if we think of how it manifests in the local, regional, national, and the transnational. In the third chapter, Ramazani explores poetry’s touristic complicities to reveal how poetry recognizes its “complicity in mass tourism” (81). However, he is not just concerned with

how poetry enacts tourism, but that poetry is in itself a form of tourism (85). In his reading of Karen Press' poetry, Ramazani demonstrates the strained position of touristic poetry by emphasizing how Press' work does not represent the touristic drive in terms of a "desirable location," but rather "uncovers the history of exclusions across several centuries that made it a site of white privilege" (93). Here, Ramazani foregrounds how experiences of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa sprout into touristic melancholia. He reads these poems from postcolonial locations as "sight markers" (98) and asserts that they act as tourist-guides. Despite their local rootedness, they connect with other places within a "global network of interrelations" (99). Whether or not a poem represents a specific locale, Ramazani suggests that poetry could be read as a site of enmeshment within the global.

The relationship between modernism and postcolonialism is the subject of the book's fourth chapter. Here, Ramazani focuses on postcolonial poetry as a form which, through its transnational characters, holds the potential to shed light on global modernism. In his reading of Lorna Goodison's poetry, Ramazani accentuates the indebtedness of postcolonial poets to T. S. Eliot by revealing the significance of Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" in Goodison's Caribbean schoolgirl speaker's "awakening to adulthood and to poetry" (105). Ramazani demonstrates that despite the poem's specific postcolonial context, Goodison's work is entangled with Euro-American modernism, which fuses together "local experience and unfamiliar cultures elsewhere" (106–7) to foreground the pluralistic intersections of modernism and postcolonialism. In the fifth chapter, Ramazani explores how poetic forms move transnationally to influence local contents—literary representations of specific societies by people from those societies. He critiques some theories of world literature for their binarism and instead proposes a "nuanced analysis" that considers the poetic genre as "the macro-level equivalent to the novelistic plot" (125). However, the book suggests that the poem's form be imagined pluralistically and in a "disaggregated way" (125). Against Franco Moretti and other theorists' "foreign form and local content" model, Ramazani offers structural alternatives (such as foreign form and foreign content, local form and foreign content, and even local form and local content) that indicate the possibility and imperative to expand beyond accepted binaries and imagine the circulation of form and content as something that can occur in multiple ways. This is the same thesis that informs the sixth chapter, where Ramazani explores the representation of Asia in W. B. Yeats' poetry in light of Orientalist discourse and world literature. Through this reading, Ramazani suggests that we should "navigate a path between the sensitivity to power and historical injustice in orientalist critique and the neutral tracking of cultural dissemination

and reproduction in ‘world literature’” (151). Such an approach, Ramazani argues, balances discourses of coloniality with contemporary conceptions of influence and cultural circulation across spaces and contexts.

Ramazani moves his attention to the planetary in the seventh and eighth chapters. In the one chapter, he explores the planetary layers and distinctive forms of globality in Wallace Stevens’ poetry, with his analysis accentuating the planet as a conceptual and concrete category that informs poetics. In the following chapter, he reads Seamus Heaney as a global poet whose writing negotiates the local and the global in an ethical way—framed as “etymological cosmopolitanism” (191). Here, Ramazani foregrounds the locality of Heaney’s poetry even as he acknowledges the cosmopolitan openness of such deeply grounded poems. In the ninth and tenth chapters, Ramazani focuses on language through the categories of code-mixing, code-stitching, and (un)translatability. In the ninth, he proposes “macaronic poetics” as a theoretical descriptor of poetry’s inherent code-switching and asserts that even a “supposedly unitary poetic voice” is always “dialogic” (210). In the tenth, Ramazani draws from theories of translation to engage in the debate surrounding the translatability of poetry: discussing poems that, Ramazani argues, gain or are at least “remarkably vivid in English translation,” like the poetry of Rumi and some Persian ghazals (225). The issues with translating poetry are also considered through phonetics and syntax; however, Ramazani inserts himself into the argument by insisting that “excessively domesticating translations can bleach a poem of its particularities, but excessively foreignizing translations can rob it of its pleasure” (233). This nuanced insertion corresponds to his thesis of “hybrid foreignizing-domesticating strategies” that can recover the poem’s particularities through code-switching even while opening it up to foreign readership. However, this approach avoids a crucial question: is a hybrid foreignized-domesticated translated poem the same as the original poem?

Ramazani concludes the book by meditating on the lyric as a transnational form that is open to a “world beyond nation, locality, region, or hemisphere” (245), carefully tying all aspects of the book’s formulation together through an examination of polytemporal and polyspatial poetics. The book succeeds in demonstrating that no matter the tradition, poetry exists in currents that transcend national or local identities and contexts. The selection of works from various contexts and places provides a successful model for world literature studies involving poetry. Indeed, this book inserts poetry into an important conversation about the circulation of literature, national boundaries, and the transnational nature of literary forms, while positioning itself alongside key texts by world literature studies scholars such as David Damrosch,

Pascale Casanova, and Franco Moretti, among others. Yet, despite Ramazani's impressive transcendence of the national as an analytical category, the question of the dominance of the category of "the nation" in reading poetry remains. This is understandable because Ramazani's focus is on a transnational understanding of poetics; however, certain questions remain: if we take the nation as a social construct, how is the national constructed in the postcolonial world? How can we reimagine polytemporality and polyspatiality from the complex discursive construct of the nation, when it is as complex (in many instances) as the very concept of the "transnational"? In his second chapter, for example, Ramazani thinks of place in poetry as both "local" and "extra-local," but he ascribes the extra-locality wholly to the transnational; yet, there is also the possibility of the local interacting with the national as a category, which Ramazani bypasses in his focus on the transnational, thus screening out the many ways the local is posed against the national. If forms are transnational, do they originate from the nation as a community or the nation as a state? These are not questions that Ramazani must or ought to have answered, but further studies certainly warrant a rethinking of globality in a world of solidified nationalisms.

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Works Cited

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Sheils, Barry. *W.B. Yeats and World Literature*. Routledge, 2015.

Kaiama L. Glover. *A Regarded Self: Caribbean Womanhood and the Ethics of Disorderly Being*. Duke UP, 2021. Pp. x, 276. US\$26.95.

In *A Regarded Self: Caribbean Womanhood and the Ethics of Disorderly Being*, Kaiama L. Glover reevaluates provocative works of fiction by the Caribbean writers Maryse Condé, René Depestre, Marie Chauvet, Jamaica Kincaid, and Marlon James, whose female protagonists are often read as problematically narcissistic. These re-readings constitute a critique of the multifarious communalist ethical imperative Glover detects within queer and feminist studies, postcolonial and Global South studies, and more particularly within Afro-diasporic and Caribbean studies—an imperative which requires women to sacrifice part or all of themselves for the sake of communal cohesion and continuity. Glover explores the limits of womanhood in the context of familial,