WORLD LITERATURE AND DIASPORA STUDIES

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The idea of world literature emerged contemporaneously with innovative modes of conceptualizing the dynamics of world history, from the idealism of Hegel to the materialism of Marx and Engels. This affiliation has endured as the intellectual descendant of the nineteenth-century world-historical imagination, "world-systems theory, has gained traction in literary studies" (Apter 2009: 45). The large-scale displacements and migrations produced by and productive of the modern world economic system have deeply imprinted global literary production: the African, Chinese, and Indian diasporas fueled by colonial political economy, for example, have attained an expansive and overlapping textual presence throughout Europe and Asia, Africa and the Americas. Both bearing witness to dispersal and fashioning its literary implications, ancient and modern diasporic formations cut across geopolitical as well as aesthetic categories. If in many ways it appears, though, that diasporic writing manifests the border-crossing promise foundational to the world literature idea, it just as reliably forges a counter-discourse challenging the temporal and spatial trajectories operative in Eurocentric theorizations of world literature and its history.

In one of the earliest reflections on the modern circulation of world literature, Goethe (see Pizer in this volume) took the French interest in his play *Torquato Tasso* as indicative of a new moment in global letters, offering "a broader view of international and human relations" (Goethe 1973: 5). He tied this moment to the exchange of goods and ideas made possible by post-Napoleonic economic development. As Fritz Strich and others have noted, the economic scenario underwrote Goethe's proclamation that "National literature means little now, the age of world literature has begun; and everyone should further its course" (Strich 1949: 5; Goethe 1973: 6). Goethe participated in what he imagined to be, in the words of Vilashini Cooppan, "a conversation conducted between nations through their most representative and greatest works of literature, a vision that at once overflows national boundaries and confirms them" (Cooppan 2001: 24). This conversation leads from a collection of national masterpieces, embodying what Goethe calls "the true inner soul of a people" (Goethe 1973: 5) to world literature, what various scholars have referred to

as "a dream of works yet to be written" (Cooppan 2001: 17) and "a literature to come" (Lawall 1994: 13). In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels echoed Goethe and extended this forward-looking view when they wrote: "National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature" (Marx and Engels 1978: 476). A similar teleology operates in the works of the contemporary theorist of world literature Pascale Casanova. In her elegant study *The World Republic of Letters* she traces the gradual emergence of a world system of literary value with New York, London, and Paris as centers, and writers from the margins who, despite the operation of certain feedback loops, overwhelmingly accumulate literary capital by way of said centers.

In these understandings, international circulation and translation become hallmarks of the modern literary era, catalysts for a world literature made possible by an economic system under European dominance. Diasporic perspectives, however, call into question the nation-based, proleptic emphasis of world literature, and the modernity of the world economic system that underpins it. Rather than a literary history comprised of national masterpieces that will be surpassed by transnational expressions, diasporic writers conjure a literary past marked precisely by the circulation, translation, and revision which Goethe identifies as a hallmark of the contemporary era of world literature. For writers of the African diaspora, an evocation of the world literary past, furthermore, retroactively asserts a place for Africa and Africans excluded by the narrative of a Eurocentric historiography from meaningful contributions to the world's cultural heritage. One way this literary past is evoked is through allusions to lines and spaces of narrative exchange whose archives, often transmitted orally, may or may not have survived. Thus, throughout her literary and ethnographic work, Zora Neale Hurston will connect African diasporic folklore about Moses back to Moses' place in the narrative pathways of the religious and popular imagination of Africa and the Middle East.

Another way writers of the African diaspora conjure a deep history of world literature is through intertextuality with multinational compendia including the *Panchatantra*, *Kalila wa Dimna*, *Aesop's Fables*, and the Anancy tales of West Africa. With a chorus of frogs emitting "Greek-croak! Greek-croak!" (Walcott 1971: 85), Derek Walcott's "folk" drama *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* conjoins the African-derived Caribbean krik-karak story-telling tradition to the ancient Greek comedies of Aristophanes, thereby evoking a circum-Mediterranean exchange of animal tales linking together the story-telling worlds of ancient Africa, Europe, and Asia, and, eventually, the American New World, as Walcott's own work illustrates. Unstable collections of animal tales, like reconstructed transmissions of Moses stories, waver between orality and textuality, reading and performance, local and cosmopolitan scenes. Out of this wavering, the writers under consideration shape a poetics of the African diaspora and a revisionist sense of world literature.

The works of two Jewish writers, the Argentine Juan Gelman and the Iraqi-born Israeli Shimon Ballas, also embody at the formal level the overdetermined genealogies – the irresolvably entangled sources – of the literary past, in which diasporic literary, linguistic, and identitarian formations consistently disrupt and supplement nation-based discourses. In his 1994 poetry volume *Dibaxu*, Gelman writes in *sefardí*, one of

many names for Ladino, the language of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. The roots of Ladino not only reach back to translations of scripture into a medieval Spanish vocabulary with Hebrew syntax, but also incorporate the unstable regional varieties of the Latin-derived Iberian vernaculars. Ladino's diversity intensified as communities of Sephardic Jews settled throughout North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. Gelman, an activist writer exiled from Argentina by the military dictatorship that assumed power in 1976, explicitly embraces *sefardí* as an act of racial-ethnic border crossing (his family's origins being Ashkenazi and Yiddish-speaking) and a rejection of dictatorial nationalist monoglossia (Gelman 1994: 7; Balbuena 2009: 295). *Dibaxu*, with its companion volumes *Composiciones* and *Citas y comentarios*, uses a diasporic language in order to bear witness to the overdetermined origins of Castilian language and poetry, and to displace the illusory certainties of racial, ethnic, and national belonging.

Shimon Ballas executes a similar project in his Hebrew-language novels from *The Transit Camp* to *The Outcast*. Mourning his exile from storied Baghdadi and Arabic literary culture, and responsive to the anti-Mizrahi (eastern Jewish) discrimination and anti-Arab racism of Israeli society, Ballas' writing "brings Hebrew closer and closer to Arabic," a project he connects to learning the language from "the sources, the Bible and the Mishnah" (Alcalay n.d.). The resonances between Hebrew and Arabic composition and sensibilities were an assumed starting-point for centuries of Jewish poets, writers, and rabbinic scholars in their Arabic-speaking homelands (Anidjar 2008: 84–101). Ballas decries how such resonances have been excised from a Modern Hebrew designed to serve the Eurocentric, ethnic nationalism of the Zionist project of "return" (Alcalay n.d.). Thus, rather than show Modern Hebrew serving as a language of homecoming, Ballas' texts enact an exile into Modern Hebrew that marks the ironies and tragedies attendant upon the upheavals in Israel–Palestine since 1948.

Notably, Ballas' intervention in this linguistic drama struggles against illegibility in translation. The histories of diaspora violently create such linguistic dramas while also testing the capacity of translation to mediate them across the internal fractures of diasporic identities. Francophone Algerian literature emerged as a consequence of the brutal repression of Arabic literacy since that nation's incorporation into *la plus grande France* following a ten-year "pacification" campaign from 1830–40. With strong anti-colonial impulses, writers such as Kateb Yacine and Assia Djebar trenchantly, beautifully deformed and Arabized French language and syntax in works such as *Nedjma* and *L'Amour, la fantasia*, and their work affected Francophone writers from West Africa to the Caribbean. After Algeria achieved independence in 1961–62, a massive Arabization campaign worked to bring literacy and literature back into the Arabic fold. Published after her own diasporic sojourn in France, Ahlām Mustaghānamī's best-selling Arabic novel, *Dhākirat al-jasad* (*Memory of the Flesh*), has been read as one of the fruits of that campaign. Formally and thematically, as Elizabeth Holt has made clear, the novel turns on the linguistic drama between French and Arabic, intertextually inserting itself into the modern Arabic canon as an assertion of Algerian literary-linguistic independence. Yet the French translation renders Mustaghānamī's intervention into this drama illegible, obscuring for readers of French that this novel was even written in Arabic. Even more

troublesome, this illegibility for French readers of Algerian descent poignantly highlights the diasporic ruptures of Algerian national identity in the aftermath of empire.

Literary and historical wakefulness to the diasporic itineraries of people, texts, and languages attune the field of world literature to precisely such slippages. The multiplicity of Jewish and Algerian diasporic experience finds a counterpart in the literature of the Indian diaspora, especially in its influential Anglophone trajectories in Britain, Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States. Trinidad-born, Canada-based writer Shani Mootoo's short story "Out on Main Street" limns a paradigmatic series of misrecognitions. Confusion over the proper names for sweets marks the chasm between the Trinidadian narrator, whose Indian culture has been extensively creolized after more than a century in the Caribbean, and her male servers, recent South Asian immigrants. As the servers begin to make advances upon their female clientele, a nascent pan-diasporic feminist identification promises to link the protagonist and her friend to a group of Indian-via-India women at another table. However, as a lesbian couple enters the sweet shop and outs the narrator and her friend to the table of women, the feminist overture retreats and the Indians-from-India, male and female, reconsolidate. Finally, a drunken pair of Anglo-Canadian men arrive, and their clumsiness in the face of racial and gender difference prompts a universal sense of community in everyone else, overriding each of the previous contests. In "Out on Main Street," as an Indian diaspora gets relayed into queer and Caribbean diasporas, identitarian conjunctures and disjunctures multiply. Indo-Trinidadian Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Indian-born Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* take up precisely such multiplications as they play out in London. While ostensibly explorations of immigrant and minority cultures in a specific national context, the diverse "roots and routes" (Clifford 1994) of the diasporic characters quickly "world" these texts, pushing the readers outward to the disjunctures and conjunctures of colonial, religious, and racial-ethnic subjectivities.

For a closer look at an exemplary diasporic figure, in the following pages I will consider the novels of the Francophone, Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé, who has emerged as a seminal author of African diaspora literature and criticism. Her broadly intertextual strategies, weaving together multiple global diasporas and narrative cartographies, paradigmatically bring into focus the slippages and blockages, the circulations and overdeterminations, that mark the terrain of world literature. Her novels *Segu* and *Windward Heights* allow particular insight into the textual mechanics that frequently unfold out of diasporic formations. Accessing long-lived dynamics of the world economic system, these revisionist texts highlight transnational narrative histories that complicate Eurocentric hierarchies of value and originality.

Condé's personal history parallels the models of transnational circulation correlated here with diasporic perspectives on world literature. She left Guadeloupe for Paris in 1953 to continue her studies, first at the Lycée Fénélon and then at the Sorbonne. She remained in Paris until 1959, when she moved with her first husband to his native Guinea. Afterwards, she lived in Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Mali. She later resided in the United States and returned to Guadeloupe in 1986, since that time spending part of the year teaching at American universities and traveling extensively. Her years in West Africa provide the setting for her early

novels *Hérémakhonon* (1972), *A Season in Rihata* (1981), and the two volumes of *Segu* (1984, 1985).

Segu recounts the decline of the Bambara kingdom in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in what is now Mali. These two volumes were bestsellers in France and are frequently taught in US college courses. *Segu* follows the progeny of Dousika Traoré through the turmoil of religious wars, encroaching European colonialism, the slave trade, and the countless smaller events that shape the lives of its characters. The descendants of Dousika get scattered throughout North and West Africa, England, Brazil, and Jamaica. Some remain in or return to Segu, the capital city of the Bambara kingdom; many do not. The story of the Bambara kingdom, though, does not simply paint the decline of a static ancestral homeland suddenly shaken out of its equilibrium. If *Segu* offers a partial, metonymic genealogy of modern Africa and the African diaspora, it does so without leveraging what Edouard Glissant calls "a return to the dream of origin" (Glissant 1997: 56).

Segu does not present the journey back in time as a return to an organic wholeness. We encounter Bambara history *in medias res*. When the book opens, the Scottish explorer Mungo Park waits on the other bank of the Niger/Joliba River, minarets rise from within the walls of polytheistic Segu, and Quranic verses decorate the body of the Mansa, the ruler of Segu. Demystifying Africa as a mythical place of origin outside of history, Condé's portrait foregrounds the instability and diversity of Segu, a result of its place in global networks of economic and intellectual exchange. Siga, a son of Dousika Traoré, is a narrative cipher of Segu's involvement in these overlapping networks of language, economy, and culture. Having moved from Segu to Timbuktu and then to Morocco, he participates in an economic system reaching from sub-Saharan Africa to the Mediterranean shores of North Africa all the way to the Levant:

Abdallah had recently put him in charge of his dealing in salt. Twice a month he went to Tegahaza or Taoudenni with a caravan to be laden with bars of salt, seeing to it that they were properly bound together so that they didn't suffer damage in transit. At those times he ruled over a whole company of slaves, who carried the bars to and fro and marked them with black lines or diamonds to indicate to whom they belonged. Then he brought the bars back to Timbuktu and sold them to merchants from Morocco, or even from the Middle East and North Africa. It was hard work, but he liked it. As he supervised the slaves and bargained with the merchants he had a feeling of usefulness, if not of power. He was part of a great system, a grand network of exchanges and communications that extended across the universe.

(Condé 1996: 120, translation modified)

Siga's role in the salt trade echoes his intertextual role in *Segu*, suggested by the doubly significant statement: "He was part of a ... grand network of exchanges and communications that extended across the universe." The text emphasizes that not only commodities are being exchanged; Siga's plot-line dramatizes processes of world literary communication that recast the narrative link between Africa and Europe. Siga leaves his brother Tiekoro in Timbuktu and moves to Fez, where he works in the

bazaar shop of Abdallah, a cousin of the Timbuktu merchant he worked for previously. Fatima, the daughter of a wealthy and immensely powerful woman who prepares high-born brides for their nuptials, falls in love with him, and he with her. Under the irresistible pressure of Fatima's mother, though, Siga ends up involved in a sexual affair with both mother and daughter, dangerous liaisons that, were either to learn of the other, could jeopardize his life. In the midst of apprehending this danger, "an old man sat down beside him, dressed poorly in an old burnous and a cap without earflaps." A dialogue ensues, and the old man grabs Siga and says:

"Run away! That's the only thing you can do!"

Siga sat down again.

"But what about Fatima?"

"Take her with you. Abduct her. Put the Sahara between you and the mother ... "

He realized it was an ancestor in disguise who had come to show him what he should do, and a great calm swept over him.

(Condé 1996: 190–91)

As advised by his ancestor, Siga plots with his friends to abduct Fatima and flee by boat to the other side of the Sahara.

In a revealing if somewhat deceptive interview, Condé claims to have drawn from the nineteenth-century French novel such narrative elements as these "coincidences, sensational developments, dramatic turns of events, and unexpected encounters" (Pfaff 1996: 49). At the same time, however, another source should come to mind, what with the bazaars, the merchants, the lurid escapades, the djinn-like intervention of the ancestor, and the escape by sea – *A Thousand and One Nights*. This compendium of oral and written tales mediates between Condé's African saga and its supposedly European narrative devices. *Segu* directly links this mediation to the way merchants like Siga mediate "a grand network of exchanges and communications that extended across the universe." Condé's conjunction of material history and intertextuality recalls the crucial role Robert Irwin assigns to merchants in the proliferation of "the sea of stories" that traverses Africa, Europe, and Asia (Irwin 2004: 81). Walter Benjamin, too, mentions the "by no means insignificant share which traders had in the art of storytelling ... They have left deep traces in the narrative cycle of *The Arabian Nights*" (Benjamin 1969: 101). Condé places *Segu* in the thick of this network of economic and narrative exchange, complicating the interplay of sources that inform this historical saga.

Condé, again, comments: "Like everyone else, I had read Alexandre Dumas's works, such as *The Three Musketeers* and *Twenty Years After*." As scholars from Muhsin al-Musawi and Roger Allen to Roland Barthes and Peter Brooks note, Alexandre Dumas and Honoré de Balzac in turn had read and drawn upon *A Thousand and One Nights*. Condé's assertion in her interview that she relied on the nineteenth-century French novel to structure *Segu* could be read as a sort of strategic omission, neglecting to mention explicitly what the saga suggests implicitly: the indebtedness of the nineteenth-century French novel to *A Thousand and One Nights* (on the centrality of this seminal work to literary tradition, see Naddaff in this volume). This collection belongs to a historic, world literary scene of circulation and

translation that crucially involves Africa and Africans. It also suggests an overdetermined narrative genealogy that formally reflects the heterogeneity of Segu and West Africa, a diasporic retort to discourses of rootedness and authenticity that the novels' rigorous historicization insists upon as well.

Condé's novel *Windward Heights* similarly mediates and decenters questions of influence and intertextuality so crucial to the world-systems approach to literary study. Condé dedicates *Windward Heights* to the author of its source text: "To Emily Brontë. Who I hope will approve of this interpretation [lecture] of her masterpiece. Honour and respect!" This enthusiastic salute suggests that the reader might not be in for the expected postcolonial re-reading, the sort of re-reading that "makes explicit what is latent, invisible, or otherwise suppressed in canonical texts and traditions, revealing the ways these texts and traditions are formed or deformed by the exigencies of European imperialism" (Yelin 2004: 84). Yet the tradition of postcolonial revision looms large over the critical reception of *Windward Heights*. There is a critical desire for Condé's text to write back to the empire, to exact a textual revenge for the "racial scripts that are barely hinted at" in the canon (Lionnet 2003: 50). Yet Condé's treatment of *Wuthering Heights*, precisely a novel about Heathcliff's revenge, disrupts the narrative logic of vengeance and the linear sequencing it depends upon. It does not offer "satisfaction" either to Razyé, Heathcliff's counterpart, or to the postcolonial reader. Leaning on the same sort of overdetermined, multidirectional narrative traffic encountered in *Segu*, *Windward Heights* not only deactivates the revenge plot within the narrative structure of the book, it deactivates the meta-narrative revenge plot between itself and its source text. Painting the gothic as a world literary genre, Condé's text reroutes lines of narrative influence along the lines of global economic exchange and thereby complicates nation-based as well as dichotomous metropolitan-provincial models of literary exchange prevalent in articulations of literary world systems.

Windward Heights incorporates numerous devices of English gothic fiction to establish an unhierarchical common ground between the two geographies. By aligning the Caribbean *habitation*, or plantation house, with the European castle, manor, or country house, Condé invites readers to perceive overlapping histories of terror and violence. On her wedding night, Condé's mulatto Cathy ruminates on the history of Belles-Feuilles, her new home that corresponds to Thrushcross Grange in Brontë's novel:

Slaves raped by sadistic planters. Mistresses poisoned by a rival and dying in unspeakable suffering at the banquet table. Virgins sold to old men for money and parcels of land. Sisters lusted after by their brothers. Mothers by their sons ... After slavery was restored by the infamous Richépanse, some Mandingo women strangled themselves rather than go back into irons. And discerning these walls and sighs amidst the echoes of the wedding feast, Cathy realized she was taking her place of her own accord in a long procession of victims.

(Condé 1999: 49–50)

Rather than reading the Caribbean *habitation* as uniquely steeped in blood, these gothic elements recall the sadistic impulses given free rein at *Wuthering Heights* and

Thrushcross Grange. And just as *Windward Heights* highlights how Caribbean economics form part of this gothic weave of sex and blood, Condé's mode of referentiality prompts us to identify the same trends in the English gothic. Indeed, Raymond Williams has tracked the shifting legibility of violence in the English literature of the country house since the sixteenth century. He writes:

It is not easy to forget that Sidney's *Arcadia*, which gives a continuing title to English neo-pastoral, was written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village and evicting the tenants. The elegant game was then only at arm's length – a rough arm's length – from a visible reality of country life.

(Williams 1963: 22)

In the work of poets such as George Crabbe, Williams finds an attack (albeit limited) on this mystifying exorcism of economic violence within the English literary tradition. The gothic novel, from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and J.W. Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), goes much farther in showcasing the potential for violence in castles, manors, and country houses. However, the gothic sensibility of Condé's novel also involves transnational displacements that reorient the lines of influence that would exclusively find in the English tradition the origins of the Caribbean gothic.

Windward Heights does not depend on the European gothic for exaggerated passions, supernatural beings, and records of violence and bloodlust. Five hundred-odd years of Caribbean history have offered plenty, and *Windward Heights* paints popular oral traditions as the bearer of this history. Echoing *Wuthering Heights*, a series of *récits* structure the novel, belonging primarily to the *mabos* (nannies and ladies-in-waiting), the fishermen, and the peasants whose lives intersect those of the main characters. The novel thereby offers a popular oral commentary on its action, filtering the plot through Guadeloupean gossip and public opinion. Gossip, public opinion, and popular supernatural philosophies mark the gothic as a local form, unsettling the genealogical indebtedness of Caribbean gothic to the English gothic tradition. In fact, *Windward Heights* suggests that the lines of indebtedness run both ways.

The phantasmagoric, Creole pantheon evoked in the novel – “*esprits et volans*,” “*jans gajé*” – demarcates a local tradition antedating Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker. Furthermore, Joan Dayan argues that the phantasmagoric pantheon of the Caribbean and Europe derives from oral and written discursive contests in the West Indies over the illogical and contradictory system of racial taxonomy developed under colonial slavery:

The figures of blackness imagined by the white colonialist exposed how unnatural became the attempt to sustain “natural” distinctions between races of men. This kingdom of grotesques would resonate in later supernatural “fictions”, rooted quite naturally in the need for racist territoriality: Bronte's Heathcliff, not “a regular black”; the blood taint lurking in Dracula's not-quite-right white skin.

(Dayan 1995: 61)

Addressing the popular counter-discourse that inverted the values of the white colonialist taxonomy, she writes:

The gods, monsters, and ghosts spawned by racial terminology redefined the supernatural. What colonists called sorcery was rather an alternative philosophy. The most horrific spirits of the Americas came out of the perverse logic of the master reinterpreted and exposed by slaves who had been mediated to their bones by the colonial myths.

(Dayan 1995: 66)

Caribbean society produced a host of gothic figures ("gods, monsters, and ghosts spawned by racial terminology" in Dayan's words) that traveled the lines of exchange and communication between Havana, Point-à-Pitre, Port-au-Prince, and New Orleans to New York, Liverpool, and Bordeaux. Both the legal taxonomies and popular oral traditions of the Caribbean, Dayan argues, fed the gothic literary imagination.

For this reason, Condé does not need to exact a revenge on her literary predecessor. *Windward Heights* does not seem driven by a sense of belatedness, of not having had the first word, of needing to set the record straight. The novel prompts us to recognize parallel, intersecting, and overdetermined narrative genealogies of the gothic. From Slavic vampire legends to the duppies, zombies, and *jans gajé* of the Caribbean basin that cumulatively fired trans-Atlantic popular and literary imaginations, multiple histories of internally riven societies soaked in blood draw *Windward Heights* and *Wuthering Heights* together. Rather than seeking revenge, Condé's novel asks us to attend to those histories with "honour and respect."

Both *Windward Heights* and *Segu*, then, generate an economically inflected sense of literary history marked by recursive, transnational circulations and local appropriations. The works of Condé, like writers of the Algerian, Indian, and Jewish diasporas discussed above, animate the "roots and routes" of texts, tales, and traditions. If David Damrosch has helpfully suggested understanding world literature "as an elliptical refraction of national literatures, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone" (2003: 283), diasporic literature supplements a further refraction as it marks the transnational flows and formations constituted by and constitutive of diasporic space. Conjuring world systems "before European hegemony," deconstructing metropolitan/provincial figurations of literary genealogy, and disrupting nationalist identifications, diaspora studies refract through an alternative set of spatial and temporal coordinates the mapping of world literary systems.

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