



Rebecca L. Walkowitz. *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*

Rebecca L. Walkowitz. *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 336p., ill. ISBN 9780231165945 (cloth). US \$40.00.

Rebecca Walkowitz's conceptually ambitious, provocative, and deftly argued book, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*, examines the evolution of the novel genre, the global marketability of Anglophone writers, and the significance of acts of translation in the current production, distribution, and consumption of literature. Walkowitz frames the study in the long history of the novel and its global circulation. In the twenty-first century, simultaneous translations and digitization have accelerated the creation of many books out of one, thereby complicating the very notion of the original, as well as readers' sense of the writer's "native tongue," and their own. Walkowitz recognizes English as world language; however, her study illuminates the ways in which English has become provincialized, made local and minor, and has had its history of global and commercial dominance challenged and exposed by a diverse array of world writers' imposed and inherited encounters with the language. Writers aware of the migrant character of language and literature inflect their English language novels with varieties and differences: the acknowledgement of imperial, pidgin, polyglot, imperfect, commercial, and orally expressive Englishes.

Her emphasis on varieties of English, on processes of communication in the study's featured novels' architecture and form, privileges writing and reading as on-going acts of transmission, adaptation, and exchange. Born translated works also highlight the collaborative nature of a novel's production and circulation; translators, editors, typesetters, and designers of paratextual elements of the book each contribute to its range of articulations. The chapter 'The Series, The List, and The Clone' includes a set of international illustrated covers of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), a narrative that explores the ethics and politics of denigrated copies (the cloned children) and cherished individuals/originals. Translation "allows the author to consider how the logic of individuality has shaped both the politics of imperialism and the politics of art, and indeed also to think about how claims for art's uniqueness have served, rather than blocked imperialism" (95). The authors examined in *Born Translated* include writers from formerly colonized countries: Jamaica Kincaid, Meena Alexander, Moshin Hamid, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; writers from settler colonial countries like J. M. Coetzee; and a range of English, American, ethnic, and international



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writers who incorporate into their fictions a global postmodern consciousness, an awareness of English as a world force and, potentially, as an engine of migrant communications and proliferating translations (Junot Díaz, David Mitchell, Kazuo Ishiguro, China Miéville, Amy Waldman).

The philosophical and ideological implications of writing, publishing, translating, and consuming novels, and of recognizing writing itself as translation are potentially transformative. The chapter 'Sampling, Collating, and Counting' accentuates the future possibilities of a comparative literature that emphasizes language, authorship, and publication as unbounded from place, as collective productions. One crucial value of novels that make acts of translation implicit and explicit is that they "explore translation by asking how people, objects, ideas, and even aesthetic styles move across territories, and how that movement alters the meaning and form of collectivity" (123). Such novels jumble traditions and abandon attachments to a national literature model; they violate borders and traditions of genre; they aggregate, compare, collect, and collate linguistic and literary varieties.

Walkowitz advocates for an unsettled embrace of "relative fluency" in an increasingly connective world; she urges readers to reimagine the foundations of the native and the foreign by challenging intrinsic reading practices. What if we learned to recognize and read the foreign in the familiar and accept the translation as another "potential original" (177)? What might the benefits of this kind of rehabilitated reading be? "What would reading in translation look like if we did it all the time?" Walkowitz asks (177). She provides some compelling answers. We would acknowledge variant editions of novels; we would be more aware of historical changes to language and among languages; we might expand senses of citizenship, affiliation, and belonging. *Born Translated* argues that books create audiences *and* alternative affiliations; translations enhance possibilities of meaning *and* making. In the midst of virally resurgent nativisms and ethnocentric nationalisms, these fluid modes of reading-in-translation might make worldly receptivity something more socially significant than the mere consumption of cosmopolitan style.

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