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Changing Spaces: Canonization of Anglophone World Literature

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Abstract: Canonization, understood broadly as the complex processes in which some works and authors obtain a privileged position in literary culture, while others become less and less visible, takes place continually in the interplay between preferences among readers, critics and institutions. These can now be studied better thanks to new digital resources and social media. The canonization of world literatures is particularly complex as it traverses notions of national canons and sits uneasily between integration with Western literature and a counter-canonical stance. This article considers the uses of a differentiated view on canonization and how data resources that have been made available on the circulation and readership of authors can be used to qualify canonization. The relationship between the locally and globally oriented Anglophone writers and the growing importance of migrant writers is investigated, as well as the influence of world literature in English which is included for its influence not only on Anglophone canons but also canons of non-English literary cultures.

1 Introduction

Whether one is sympathetic or critical to canonization, it is hard to disregard that canons are being made. This happens both in top-down movements when institutions determine a curriculum, and in a wider and much more complex way when numerous agents in the literary field make preferences that create hierarchies that are difficult to ignore, yet open for criticism. It is possible for a critic to put Ben Jonson higher than William Shakespeare, but not to claim that this would be a generally accepted idea. A rough history of the modes of the past fifty years of studying literature beyond the nation should at least include two significant challenges to the structure of canons. First, there was the challenge of postcolonial literature to the British and American dominance of literature in English. The reaction to this dominance became established at the end of 1970s and opened a

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new space within Anglophone literature. Second, the turn towards world literature began in the late 1990s, emphasizing the inclusion of literature in translation as well as the integration of Anglophone literature into a common space rather than the separate domains of British, American and postcolonial literature. While World Literature is notoriously difficult to define, there is a general agreement that the renewed interest in world literature studies should both avoid the idea of universal world masterpieces on the one hand as well as an unqualified inclusion of all the world's literature on the other. The conflict lines between these different modes of studying literature, which could be summoned up as Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Studies and World Literature, are still active and reveal different ideas about the approach one should take.

Each of these paradigms supports different ideas of canonization: Broadly speaking, Postcolonial Studies came into being as a reaction to an established canon and faced the prospect of either merging with or supplementing established canons with works that go back centuries. World Literature studies are a reaction to the divide between the Western canon and the postcolonial canon. As such, they seek to find a new space where this division is less important and to enable an opening towards migrant writers and literature in translation, which have traditionally been treated only marginally by Comparative Literature. Adding to the complexity of this, the national literary fields are still important to the canonization of works, and often present preferences different from the international circulation and valuation of literature. So what is the shape – in all meanings of the word – of Anglophone canons in world literature today? It is certainly an important issue as the cultural impact of the English language increases rapidly: commercials in China are often bilingual (a poster for a private university, for example, somewhat sarcastically stating: 'In education we trust'). Switzerland, where the German-speaking population would have French as their second language and vice versa, now finds itself with English as its common language. Also, European language and literature departments across the world are struggling to enrol students, except in English.

Erich Auerbach famously wrote in 1952 that the growing influence of English would at the same time realize and destroy the idea of world literature (Auerbach 1952/1969: 3). It would give the world a common language and the ability to read across national borders, but it would also kill the linguistic diversity and limit the expression of literature. This conflict very well defines the state of world literature today, and it is a concern that has been echoed by for example Emily Apter in *Against World Literature* (2013) and Aamir Mufti in *Forget English!* (2016: 17). The debate on what gets lost and what is gained in translation has been taken up many times and will not be dealt with in detail here, but Auerbach's prophecy did not take into account that translation would still flourish, and not only as a one-

way traffic towards the Anglisation of world literature. Even though literature in English can be read by the majority of the world's academics, and is being read for leisurely enjoyment by millions of non-native readers, the number of translations from English into other languages is the most dominant stream of cultural transformation, accounting for more than 60 % of all translations in Europe, for example (Literature across Frontiers 2010: 7). Linguistic diversity has survived, but one should not be naïve regarding some of the consequences. Hubs for the translation of literature are increasingly dominated by the British and American markets, and the preferences of these markets are also shaping the literature that will be translated to other languages later on.

This article will first consider the concept and uses of canonization in world literature, in particular with respect to the challenges posed by postcolonial and migrant writers, as well as the obstacles they face. Following that, it will be argued in the third and fourth sections that more widespread access to digital resources can help refine, revise and expand the view on canonization processes and circulation of literature. The fifth section takes up the debate on postcolonial writers and the divide between national and cosmopolitan identity, before bringing attention to how migrant writers are becoming more and more important to Anglophone literature. Finally, in the seventh section, the case is made for the importance of English to non-Anglophone literatures whose canonization and access to world literature relies increasingly on the English language, and which conversely expands the realm of world literature in English.

2 What's in a Canon?

What is the relationship between a long, but by nature of canonical dynamics, narrow canon of literature in English, and the wide range of literature that has emerged? The contemporary has always appeared broader and more messy than the past, where processes of canonization have worked to reduce complexity and also, following Frank Kermode, taken part in modernizing and extracting works from the past that are compatible with contemporary values, ideas or aesthetic regimes:

There is no escaping it: if we want the monuments, the documents we value, we must preserve them in spite of their evil associations, and find ways of showing that their value somehow persists in our changed world. Moreover we cannot avoid seeing them as inter-related, as of the same family by reason of their distinctive features and qualities. So we have somehow to place them in relation to one another; and the way we do that will help to determine our attitude to the past. The canon, in predetermining value, shapes the past and makes it humanly available, accessibly modern. (Kermode 1989: 117)

The concept of canonization is a complex and essentially unavoidable aspect of literary history and literary studies (Rippl and Winko 2013). Canons function to order the past, but inevitably they also exclude works and authors. Canon formation deals with the power to deem works valuable, but the source of this power is itself up for debate. As John Guillory summed it up, the author is no longer seen as much as a genius but as a representative of social identity (Guillory 1993: 10). Yet that leaves a number of questions concerning the mechanics of these processes: Are institutions more influential than the multitude of individuals who express their preferences by buying, reading and writing about works? Is the urge to think of recent works as being instantly part of the canon just as problematic as the generational struggle over established works that once seemed essential but now appear less immortal? These questions are already difficult enough to answer within the confines of canons defined by nations, whose legitimization of providing national identification is under pressure in a time when regional and national canons seem less relevant or at least insufficient and a cosmopolitan outlook also appears to be of national interest. Hence questions of how canons are created and maintained become even more diffuse and relevant, not least because there are separate overlapping canons at work. The old distinction between national literature and world literature still holds to some degree, but literature in English is a particularly complex phenomenon because there are numerous relatively recent literary fields which have arisen with a multitude of attachments: to a new nation, a region, a continent, a formation in international canonization, or as part of world literature in English.

In “World Literature in a Postcanonical, Hypercanonical Age”, David Damrosch proposes three concepts that make the idea of canons more nuanced and less binary. The hypercanon designates authors and works, which, as time goes by, receive more and more attention compared to less canonical and non-canonical authors. There are tendencies to a winner-takes-it-all logic in the way readers and critics increasingly direct more and more attention to a narrowing field of works and authors – a dynamic in the cultural field also suggested by James F. English (English 2005: 334). Damrosch mentions Salman Rushdie, William Wordsworth and Chinua Achebe as examples of these, arguing that literary studies should be aware of this gravitation towards the hypercanon and seek to become more diverse, not least in teaching (Damrosch 2006: 50). With limited time to read – in classrooms and in private – the logic of the hypercanonical seems unavoidable, but not without consequences. Much burden is bestowed upon such works that may have to represent in some distant contexts more than they set out to: there is more to Indian Anglophone literature than Rushdie, more to Africa than Achebe. Even if these writers are not read as representatives of their country or continent, the relative dominance at the cost of other authors repre-

sents a problem to the diversity of world literature. On the other hand, one has to take seriously the fact that some works have a particular appeal, both thematically and formally, which catapults them into a different sphere in the literary field, and also, of course, consider whether these works are actually somewhat similar or distinctively different to the literature from which they came. In many cases it is possible to point to certain traits where there is a significant variance in the hypercanonical works.

Damrosch suggests two other variants of canonization to supplement the hypercanonical: the shadow canon encompasses authors who are no longer unquestionably canonical and whose relative importance or visibility has diminished, also because they do not offer something significantly different – aesthetically, thematically – compared to the hypercanonical works. The counter canon, on the other hand, consists of works that can be actualized as competitors to the hyper-canon and would offer a different perspective on literary history. It is:

[c]omposed of the subaltern and “contestatory” voices of writers in languages less commonly taught and in minor literatures within great-power languages. Many, even most, of the old major authors coexist quite comfortably with these new arrivals to the neighborhood, very few of whom have yet accumulated anything like their fund of cultural capital. (Damrosch 2006: 45)

Most often they will not end up replacing the hypercanonical works; nevertheless, the challenge to the established canon is important, not least in order to reflect upon the changing preferences literary communities is built upon, both in terms of formal and thematic qualities.

A central question in world literature studies is where canon formation takes place. In the first phase of opening up the Western canon, the labels of Commonwealth literature and, most importantly, postcolonial literature carved out a new space for works that both took part in the formation of new local canons and were part of an international canon formation which, to some degree, was dependent on academics outside the new nations. This split identity has only been reinforced by the internationalization of literary studies which are facing an increasing struggle to justify the idea of national literature without being very keen to contextualize it, whether it be as part of world literature, as a part of a region, or within more diffuse literary networks such as magical realism or literature on atrocities (English 2005: 263).

Anglophone literatures have produced hypercanonical authors – Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott and Salman Rushdie being four obvious examples of internationally circulated authors – who also attract significant critical attention. It can also be argued that a shadow canon is beginning to emerge as the literature matures, and writers from the 1960s and 1970s may not

be considered as important by the next generations. The postcolonial canon was established as a counter-canon, but the question is whether it remains a counter-canon or has become part of an internationally wide-ranging canon, and whether postcolonial literature has matured to produce its own countercanons. The difference between migrant and non-migrant writers suggests one line of conflict that will be examined later in this article. However, the most important element of a counter-canon would consist in insisting on a broader concept of canonization. Yet, this is easier said than done when looking at the way literature of the recent past is being circulated.

3 Canons by Numbers

Determining what *de facto* counts as canonical and not is a task of varying degrees of difficulty. It is not difficult when it comes to hypercanonical authors who date back more than a century. When critics of Harold Bloom question his Western canon, it is not Dante and Shakespeare that are doubted but the wider selection of predominantly British and American authors as well as the whole idea of an authoritative canon along with the preference for a Western canon. The central point of canons and classics is that they are not individual but shared. An idiosyncratic canon does not make sense except as a shorthand for one's personal favourites. Debates about what counts as canonical, what should count and to whom a canon may apply is notoriously complex; however, with new digital resources it is possible to better qualify the sense of what is important with a variety of indicators of what is being read, circulated, appreciated and criticized. The figures that arise from translations, references and sales are not facts about the canons or an exact science, but they can be helpful in tracing changes over time and how the current interest is shaped.

The use of the idea of canons and classics has spread into contemporary literature of which it may be too early to tell whether it will be read in fifty or a hundred years from now. This, however, would be one defining trait of canonical works: that they are capable of staying relevant to future generations. On the other hand, the process of canonization is ongoing, and works that fall into oblivion within a few years have historically had a very hard time returning to the spotlight of literary history. Even though there are myths of the unexpected comeback to the pinnacle of literary history, such cases are rare and usually overstate the lack of recognition and sales prior to the eventual inclusion canonical works.

In recent years it has become possible to study processes of canonization with more data-driven approaches, which both provide a better grasp of the present valuation of the past and a longitudinal view on how preferences change and how

some works fall into oblivion. Franco Moretti's metaphor of the slaughterhouse of literature seems apt here. Ted Underwood and Jordan Sellars have traced the inertia in critical acknowledgement over decades in "The *Longue Durée* of Literary Prestige", arguing that "patterns of reception do change over time. But they change quite slowly, at a pace that might be difficult to distinguish from permanence using our ordinary critical toolkit" (Underwood and Sellers 2016: 333). Stanford Literary Lab's *Pamphlet 11* delves into differences between canonical and archival texts, observed from a linguistic standpoint, finding that redundancy is more frequent in less canonical works. The publication also charts works from the 19th century, according to both recognition and popularity based on scholarly articles and reprints of works (Moretti 2016: 4), providing an interesting way of representing the literary field. This builds on Pierre Bourdieu's well-known charts, but with access to the data behind.

There are many more sources and data that could be used to give a better picture of how institution, critics and readers react to and preserve literature in different ways, and it will be important for literary studies not to shy away from the opportunity to better understand the dynamics of readership, not least in relation to the ways in which hierarchies (or canons) are being built on multiple levels. Not just among authors, but also within authorships where the attention paid to certain works and even passages in works can be too disproportionately high to ignore. Inversely, there are genres and nations that may be more or less significantly studied and read than conventional wisdom holds.

4 What Data Counts?

One incomplete yet telling way of figuring out what counts as canonical literature can be surveyed through various editions of Wikipedia. While controversial for its user generated and edited content, Wikipedia is a prominent example of a source for peeking into the wisdom of the masses, rather than the preferences of a few. At <http://data.weltliteratur.net/ranking.html> the data from a mining of fifteen editions of Wikipedia is ordered with the top 25 authors from each edition. The rankings vary according to the seven different mining methods that include both page-ranking among authors and to the general encyclopaedia, as well as ranking based on the number of actual searches by users in 2012–2014. It is both telling and under-informing of the impact of Anglophone world literatures and their place in the general canonization of literature. There is little inclusion of colonial and postcolonial writers, with Rabindranath Tagore occurring most regularly, not least in actual page views, and Salman Rushdie as the most frequently appearing contemporary writer. Authors such as V.S. Naipaul or Anita Desai do not figure

on the list, while J.M. Coetzee only appears once among the 2625 listings. As such, it is a story of a lasting orientation towards national literature and a Western canon in world literature.

Other sources tell a different story. A novel like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has established itself as a work that has survived generations and continues to be among the bestselling books in the world. On 11 August 2016 it was the 62nd bestselling book overall on amazon.com, surpassed only by a few other novels and a generous selection of self-help and business books, demonstrating a remarkable presence in at least some markets. It is also safe to bet that Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* will stay on for some time, but again this is not really the interesting part of the development of canons. Damrosch mentions the huge academic interest in Rushdie's work compared to other writers who, under other circumstances, could have been the subject of a similar academic interest but happen to have received only a small fraction of the interest bestowed upon Rushdie's work (Damrosch 2006: 50). Even very prestigious prizes, such as the Nobel Prize for literature or the Booker Prize, are not stable predictors of future canonization in the sense of becoming an active part of literary cultures. This should be seen as good quality in the dynamic process of valuation of the past, and a sign of the healthy distrust of institutional canonization among readers (Engdahl 2012: 326). However, with the media circulation and the orientation among readers towards the present, the formation of canons is more and more left to the educational system and academia, which on the other hand is a substantial subculture (and market) of its own. The sales ranks at Amazon's different national outlets give revealing information about the interest in works and whether a presumed classic is 'alive', while library holdings that can be accessed through worldcat.org provide other indicators such as the purchase of volumes and the number of editions of individual works.

Google's enormous collections of data are also relevant for canonization studies. Google Trends shows the global, contemporary interest in phenomena and is very well suited for revealing the reach of interest for individual authors. Google Scholars (and other academic bibliographies) traces the interest from criticism into authors, while the Google Books Ngram Viewer discloses, more or less accurately, long-term trends in the attention devoted to authors and works. A Google Books Ngram is also telling of the influence of writers, again not to be read as facts but as a compilation of general trends in the attention paid to various authors over time. The illustration below shows the representation of the books of five Anglophone writers in English between 1965–2008, suggesting that all five are frequently referred to, but also with significant differences among them.

Figure 1: Books of five Anglophone Writers in English (1965–2008)

Graphs like this do not prove anything, but they are part of an effort to find ways of relying less on intuitions about how canonization works and more on a multitude of sources that ultimately rely more on readers and groups of critics than institutions and individual scholars.

Goodreads is particularly interesting as a user driven forum that has generated a critical mass of enthusiastic readers. Statistics from the website show the evaluations and interests of a large community of readers, which may of course be biased but nevertheless produce useful indicators of what a variety of people find to be of interest. Their interest reveals a remarkable difference in the attention paid to different works. Within authorships, the drop from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, with almost 200,000 ratings, to his second most rated work, *No Longer at Ease*, which has a bit more than 4,000 ratings, is almost a difference by a factor of 50, while Salman Rushdie has a slightly less steep drop rate with several volumes over 10,000 ratings, although still far from the 77,000 of *Midnight's Children*. Other seminal writers, such as Nobel laureate Derek Walcott, Anita Desai, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, have no more than 3,000 ratings for their most popular works, suggesting an ongoing division into a hypercanon and a shadow canon. However, on Google Scholar the numbers are more evenly distributed, with much more comparable attention brought to the other writers, albeit still with a preference for Rushdie and Achebe. When interpreting these new floods of data it is crucial to use numerous approaches ranging from the number of translations, sales, quotations in other works to social media and internet search interest, as there is no single way to determine influence, recognition or readership, but the inclusion of multiple datasets can bring light to the ways literary cultures operate outside of the more narrow circuits of academia.

5 From Postcolonial to Cosmopolitan?

The conflict between opinions about which canon is the right one has been put forward forcefully by Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*. Here, Boehmer contrasts politically engaged writers who are based in their young nations with cosmopolitan migrants who explore their complex sense of belonging and whose writing is inspired by South American magical realism. Although, of course, it is not as clear-cut a distinction in reality, which Boehmer acknowledges, there is much to ponder in this contrast between the two approaches to writing. Going beyond the question of literary quality, these different writers also become expressions of the values one hopes to find in a barely established canon of writers from contemporary literature. Boehmer makes a case for more engaged, political literature, arguing that to some degree cosmopolitan, postcolonial literature will be read more by a Western elite than people of those nations which offer a backdrop in the fiction. In particular, Boehmer questions the relevance of migrant writing to the Global South, albeit acknowledging the creative potential of a cosmopolitan approach (Boehmer 1996: 236–239). Mufti rightly questions the universality of world literature in *Forget English!*, criticizing the paradoxical thinking of the particular and the universal, between the local and a one-world cosmopolitanism as being a European idea that has been exported across the globe (Mufti 2016: 12).

Many questions are entangled in this divide: for whom is canon relevant? Are national canons relevant in a globalizing era? Who are the agents that essentially canonize authors? None of these questions are trivial, particularly since past decades have reinforced some of the tendencies Boehmer singles out, not least the steadily growing influence of migrant writers on international book markets. The literary windows from the West to the Global South would often be the eyes of an immigrant writer or a writer with an immigrant background. These writers have an advantage in publishing in an international market and drawing on the cultural capital of being a part of the big book markets centered in New York and London. They are more likely to be part of the international Anglophone canon than writers whose writing is based in their own nation. The discrepancy between authors writing in English and in their native language remains most significant for Indian writers, where international impact and possible canonization is much more likely for English speaking (and writing) authors than for others. Sentiments regarding this are mixed. Are migrant writers who stage the experiences of a hybrid protagonist with roots in more than one culture, and perhaps more than one language, not the most interesting expression of what is happening to human identity in a globalizing world? And if they are the most talented and ambitious writers, pursuing the prospect of a large audience, should that count against

them? J.M. Coetzee chose to write in English – as well as Afrikaans – in order to reach more readers. Many young Africans consider French or English their natural language and a language of a global culture, which they, like many others, want to be a part of.

There are redeeming counterarguments to paying attention to texts engaged with cultural meetings that are expressed in global languages. In *What Is World Literature?* Damrosch suggests a plausible shift in the attitude towards world literature (2003: 133). Formerly, two very different attitudes dominated world literature studies and were also highly influential in the formation of canons: either one looked for literature that resembled Western literature with its preferences for genres and motifs, where the difference was not overwhelming – in fact, often underwhelming – or one would seek out works that provided the maximum distance to the Western traditions as a display of true cultural difference and exoticism. These attitudes, both problematics, have been replaced by an interest in works that are located in between, where the cultural meeting also takes place in the text. For better or worse, this may be the defining feature of the current canonization of world literature.

6 Migrants

Rebecca Walkowitz's *Born Translated* (2015) and Sigrid Löffler's *Die neue Welt-Literatur und ihre großen Erzähler* (2014) both put migrant writers at the center of their studies in contemporary Anglophone world literature. Language shifters and bilingual authors are among the most prominent authors in both studies, alongside migrant writers such as Teju Cole and Jamaica Kincaid. Walkowitz has made a case for looking upon Anglophone literature more broadly and also taking into consideration the strategies and marketing behind the works, and the way writers are located. In addition, she points to works that were written with translation in mind and not just for a local audience.

World-shaped novels incorporate global audiences in order to emphasize the role of readers and translators in the production of literary works. By reflecting on the circulation of books and other media, these works identify translation as a source of literary and political collectivities. They also imagine themselves as part of future collectivities in several languages and traditions. (Walkowitz 2015: 162)

The final step in Walkowitz's investigation of the broadening of literature in English is based on works that deliberately incorporate languages other than English. This strategy is not new, and it has been very successful in canonical hindsight, with James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall*

Apart as two prominent works that are not exclusively written in English. It is a style that has been taken up by numerous writers since, very recently by Chigozie Obioma in *The Fishermen*.

In an era of accelerated migration and globalization, not least culturally, it makes sense that writers who are able to take on the complex ways in which identity is constructed and challenged are also writers who gain attention among readers in various literary cultures. They also have a number of advantages over writers oriented towards a single place: they can explore linguistic borders and playfully include more languages, signifying a split identity but also acting as a genuine, creative device in literary discourse; they can create characters who are not completely at home in any culture, neither the one they left nor the one they have come to; and they are proponents of an anti-nationalistic view of the world, countering a perspective that has done much harm to the world and still struggles to be formulated in the form of a benign patriotism.

The rooted cosmopolitanism, as coined by Kwame Anthony Appiah, may be the best attempt to express a new viable ideal (Appiah 2005: 256). On all these parameters the migrant writers can make the case of breaking boundaries – between languages, between cultures, between nations – rather than fortifying nationalism. But for all the qualities and good intensions that can be attached to literature which is ‘born translated’, or a ‘new world literature’, it is legitimate to ask whether there is a problem with the way this literature represents cultures on the literary world stage that is biased towards a cosmopolitan perspective and stories of uprooting rather than belonging.

International recognition has a vast influence on the perception of writers in their own nations, sometimes to the degree that the international breakthrough of an author has led to belated national recognition, as is the case with William Faulkner or Jorge Luis Borges. This is even more obvious when it comes to those who are not considered Anglophone writers from the outset, but whose trajectory has been strongly determined by the reception of their work in English.

7 Anglophone Influence on World Literature and back

How does the international canonization of certain writers affect national canons? Aleksandar Hemon is a Chicago-based writer who writes in English, but he is also by far the most famous author out of Bosnia in the past five decades. Hemon has written about the trauma of the war in the 1990s and about migration, and he frequently refers to Bosnian culture, but his work cannot be separated from his

American experience. In the 1930s onwards, Karen Blixen, aka Isak Dinesen, wrote her works in English before translating them into Danish, and the interplay between international recognition and national canonization is complex but certainly existing. The most extreme example of this dynamic between international influences and national canons may be found in Romania, whose most internationally recognized writers, measured by the number of translations, are Mircea Eliade, Eugene Ionesco and Paul Celan. Each of these established themselves in other languages but remain identifiable with Romania, particularly from outside of the country.

There are numerous examples of authors who are among the foremost representatives of the literature of their respective nations, yet characterized by an unusually strong engagement with, or influence from, the Anglophone world of letters. This does not make them Anglophone writers, at least not all of them, but they are an expression of the wider influence of the Anglophone in world literature. One example of this influence is the process through which an author achieves international recognition. Hans Christian Andersen, whose fairy tales are among the most translated works of literature, wrote in a culture dominated by German influences, at a time when English was far from being the second language of Denmark, as it is now. However, Mary Howitt's far from perfect 1846 translation of his fairy-tales, published as *Wonderful Stories for Children*, opened up a door to the Anglophone world. Since then, Andersen's international influence has, by all measures, been greater in English speaking countries than in other major European language areas. Furthermore, the continued influence of Andersen in China also relied on English translations, as he became a prominent literary figure alongside the likes of Oscar Wilde and the brothers Grimm following the 1911 revolution.

There are a number of authors whose ties to British and American culture are unusually strong compared to other writers working around the same time. There could be a lengthy debate about whether these authors were better and more prolific, having responded to outside ideas and impulses which, in turn, made them more interesting to the international literary community, or whether they have become internationally recognized because they engage with recognizable themes and forms, but in their own voice. Both explanations probably hold some truth, but what is important is the fact that they stand out in contrast to other writers in their literary field. There are numerous examples of this. The contemporary Japanese author Haruki Murakami is particularly influenced by Western culture to the extent that there are inscribed distinct references in his titles, such as *Kafka on the Shore* and *Norwegian Wood*, a reference to The Beatles. The same can be said of Yukio Mishima who simultaneously embraced archetypal Japanese traditions, including *seppuku* after a failed coup in 1970, and reacted against the

westernization of Japan. At the same time he was deeply inspired by a range of Western influences in literature, art and lifestyle (Shabecoff 1970). His 1965 play *Madame de Sade*, which is still being performed internationally, obviously refers to a controversial but canonized French writer, and his recognition in the West came early and was fuelled by his own interaction with Western writers. The case for the importance of writers oriented towards the English-speaking world, and subsequent international and national canonization, can be made for a number of other writers such as Fernando Pessoa and Rabindranath Tagore. It is also telling that the growing importance of literature written in other languages but translated into English is reflected in new institutions such as The Man Booker International Prize which, since 2005, has been “rewarding an author for a body of work originally written in any language as long as it was widely available in English” (<http://themanbookerprize.com/international>). Although a number of the recipients have originally written in English, the prize is a significant gesture towards a new way of envisioning the literary field and an international literary field of world literature in English.

8 Conclusion

There are a number of imbalances in canons, the origins of which may be easy to spot, while a ‘cure’ might be more complicated to contrive. The dual nature of canonization is that institutions use their power to select from above – through curricula, publication, translation, inclusion in literary histories, etc. – at the same time as canons grow from below through the choices made by individuals. In the end, the latter is probably the more powerful influence on canonization.

This article has dealt mostly with geographical and linguistic biases in world literature, but there are others that are worth mentioning, in particular genre and gender. Poetry does not rank highly in contemporary literary cultures, receiving little interest from commercial publishers and the mass market. The genre is also hugely underrepresented in translations, which again cuts it off from the cultural capital of international recognition. However, it would be too easy to blame the market alone for this. While great poetry is still being written, the overall direction of literary culture is turning towards prose, also among academics and critics, just as the orientation toward contemporary literature, which Auerbach lamented already in 1952, is part of the structure of the literary field as it is constituted now.

The discrepancy between male and female writers is another significant issue, also with regard to the older canon where gender bias is due in part to the dominance of male writers overall. The representation of the genders in contemporary literature seems to be more balanced, but one could be worried about the

canonical representation of female writers in the international circulation of Anglophone literature written from the 1950s to the 1980s. This period gives an indication as to which writers stand a chance of becoming part of a canon, beyond the first years of publication. Many of the mechanisms Joanna Russ pointed to in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* still seem prevalent today and their presence could continue to result in the lack of models that she describes (Russ 1983: 89).

The canonization of postcolonial literature finds itself in a complex situation. It has been successful in changing the idea of the space of literature in English, but it has not been able to change the canons dramatically and let its counter-canon make inroads into the hypercanon of literature in English overall. The postcolonial space is well-established but also divided by numerous senses of direction towards integration with a wider field of literature in English, and the solidification of the space, as well as the inner complexity prompted by desire for stronger national identities. It is by no means an innocent process, as Mufti has argued:

The ongoing discussion about world literature has thus been both hugely encompassing and strangely timid: it seems unaware of the enormous role played by literature as institution in the emergence of the hierarchies that structure relations between societies in the modern world. The integration of widely dispersed, varied, and heterogeneous sociocultural formations into a global ensemble has taken place, especially at the most decisive periods in this historical process, disproportionately on and through this terrain. (Mufti 2016: 97)

The new frontier of migrant writers and language shifters, and the recognition of works written in languages other than, but soon translated and circulated in, English, has opened up a new space for writers who can claim just as much authenticity in their experience of the world, and who have come up with ingenious artistic solutions to express stories without sacrificing a political dimension. If nothing else, there is a lineage in the canon-formation of the past century for heroes of the periphery: from exiled Irishmen, a Jew writing in German in Prague, over innovative Latin Americans to postcolonial writers, and now a range of migrant writers who explore the in-betweens of languages and cultures. But again, it is too early to tell of the past decade or two what will be canonical in the long run, whereas the maturation for better and worse is showing contours of an international Anglophone canon. Canons are always being made and remade as part of a complex discussion of what has value and for whom it is valuable, and this process should take place with only a fitting measure of nostalgia and room for renewal, as Italo Calvino suggested:

There is nothing for it but for all of us to invent our own ideal libraries of classics. I would say that such a library ought to be composed half of books we have read and that have really

counted for us, and half of books we propose to read and presume will come to count – leaving a section of empty shelves for surprises and occasional discoveries. (Calvino 1986: 133)

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