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The Cultural Industry and Digital World Making

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This chapter addresses the dynamics of world literature from a postcolonial angle, integrating the role of the cultural industry in the dynamics of literature across borders. It focuses on the acceleration of production and consumption of world literature, while also highlighting the persistence of the postcolonial agenda as a field of resistance to dominant and hegemonic forms of cultural appropriation.

For this purpose, it might be useful to reframe the debate between world literature and postcolonial literature, which as categories include almost everything, in order to specify how the cultural industry operates across the two fields. Though the debates are quite complex and sophisticated (see the discussion in Damrosch and Spivak 2011), what is relevant is that postcolonial literature resists universal claims, and though aimed at transcending the local, is strongly inflected by the relevance of the particular and always engaged with the political in the broadest sense (Young 2011).

The field of world literature has many aspects that overlap with postcolonial literature, but also features that are distinctive and specific. According to Damrosch, world literature refers to literary texts which have traveled beyond their culture of origin, generally in translation (the aesthetic dimension), and that offer a "window on the world" presenting different places and cultures in an assimilable way (the sociological/anthropological dimension) (Damrosch 2003). This refers not only to literatures from the former empires, or categorically from the non-European, non-Western world, but also to canonical literatures from the West. In this sense the worldliness of world literature can be captured more under the aegis of what makes a classic stand

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the test of time, following Coetzee's discussion that a classic achieves its status by being "read" through different generations (1993). There is no guarantee that circulation of a text as a classic will hold through time.

The postcolonial cultural industry refers not only to the operations of commodification of the East and the Global South in general (neo-orientalism and exoticism branding) but also to the more technical and commercial relationship between postcolonial culture and its redistribution via commercial structures such as publishing, film and music, art and museums (Ponzanesi 2014: 10). Though resonant of Adorno's notion of the "culture industry," which theorized the emerging relationship between art and production in the 1930s, seen as a manipulation of the capitalist system for ideological goals, the postcolonial cultural industry entails the possibility of resistance and subversion within commercial distribution. In short, culture critique remains vigilant within the process of commodification and globalization of the postcolonial cultural field.

For world literature the cultural industry is, instead, part of its essence, as the market makes sure that certain classics reach beyond their area of origin through renewed translations and reprints or becoming part of anthologies and institutionalized curricula. The translatability of a text is also neither neutral nor immune to the logic of the market place (Apter 2008). Neither is the selection made in anthologies. In that sense, Spivak's warning that anthologies of world literature put up a particular map of literature, "of" the world and "in" the world, is not unfounded:

> They do so linguistically, presenting, and hence reducing all the world's literature to, in essence, "in English" literature, and they do so culturally, by "US-style" world literature becoming the staple of Comparative Literature in the Global South. (Spivak 2003: 39)

However, also following Spivak's concerns, the notion of world literature is approached not only for its material capacity to circulate and follow networks that are shaped by both cultural and economic patterns (the cultural industry), but also for its cosmopolitan dimension, expressing and rendering worldliness through its literary imagination.

Pheng Cheah's critique of the notion of world literature is relevant here. Firstly, there is the contradiction of the capitalist world-system that allows for the greatest extension of the global reach of some, while severely undermining that of others, therefore not creating genuine global unity. It is important, therefore, to understand the notion of worldliness from the perspective of the postcolonial South and see the narratives that attempt to remake the world

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against capitalist globalization. Secondly, world literature should be understood in connection with new notions of cosmopolitanism that account for economic globalization, transnational migration, and global communication (Cheah 2016: 2):

> The deeper reason for the missed encounter between world literature and cosmopolitanism is that neither field of study has carefully examined the key concept common to them, *the world*. Cosmopolitanism is about viewing oneself as part of a world, a circle of political belonging that transcends the limited ties of kinship and country to embrace the whole of deterritorialized humanity. (3)

According to this definition, cosmopolitanism allows us to perceive the world through our imagination. Theories of world literature have greatly expanded since its inception. They refer not only to the circulation of texts that cut across national borders and are expressed in multiple languages, but also to texts that generate new cartographies that go beyond the relations between north and south (such as the oceanic, the hemispheric, the transregional, and the multi-sited), embracing global challenges that are human in nature but planetary in scale (global conflicts, humanitarian crises, environmental migration, and natural catastrophes), that are ideal for multimedia adaptation, and that use different technologies of circulation, which have increased exponentially with the digital revolution (Saussy 2006, 2009; Ganguly 2016).

Yet for Cheah, world literature should be not only about the inclusion of world issues in its themes but also about acknowledging the impact of world literature on the world, focusing on the power of literature itself to generate new worlds (2016: 3). The shortcomings here lie in equating the world with a global market and in having a restricted understanding of the relation between literature and capitalist globalization.

> Instead of exploring what literature can contribute to an understanding of the world and its possible role in remaking the world in contemporary globalization, theories of world literature have focused on the implication of global circulation for the study of literature. They have turned away from questions about literature's worldly causality and avoided examining the normative dimension of worldliness. (2016: 5)

The understanding of world literature in terms of the circulation of commodities, and as an expression of transnational market exchange, resonates with the discussion around the cultural industry. So if, from the postcolonial side, we have the resilience of national literatures and the oppositional politics of subaltern voices, there is within the regime of value of

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postcoloniality a booming "otherness industry" that thrives on the invention and admiration of exotic traditions and the fetishization of difference. But the commercialization and distribution of postcolonial texts, often facilitated by the recognition and garnering of Western prestigious literary prizes such as the Booker, the Nobel, the Neustadt, and Pulitzer among others, does not necessarily allow them access to the pantheon of world literature, unless the very notion of world literature is revisited.

The Culture Industry

The term "culture industry" was originally coined by Theodor Adorno in the 1920s and was later elaborated by Max Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* ([1947] 1996). They saw the culture industry as a persuasive structure that produced cultural commodities for mass audiences, while supporting dominant political and economic interests. Their pessimistic thinking was deeply influenced by the dark times they were living in – the rise of Nazism in Germany, their exile in the United States as Jews, and their experience up close of a society in profound transformation, in which art as a critical tool had been replaced by art as a commodity.

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that cultural forms create a means of income for their creators, so profit has become more important than artistic expression. Hence, culture has turned into an industry and cultural objects are looked at as products. Paintings are turned into posters, music into records, and novels into films. In this respect, through its use of technological rationality, the culture industry brings forth standardization, commercialization, and popularization, eliminating the critical power of consumers.

> Movies and radios need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just businesses is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished product is removed. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1996: 121)

Though pessimistic, slightly elitist, and rather obsolete in a digital age that promotes participatory culture, Adorno and Horkheimer's thinking is still relevant to addressing patterns of domination and control within global flows. Is art just a lucrative business in the modern economy or is it pure entertainment? Can it still operate autonomously and has it retained its critical edge? Is there still a division between elite and popular culture, or

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bourgeois and everyday culture, or do we need other paradigms to account for culture in an age of globalization?

As celebrated national figures, postcolonial authors are elected as spokespersons for their nation by powerful global literary brokers. Yet these authors are sometimes disliked in their home countries, often because they are seen to be part of a cosmopolitan intelligentsia that sells out to the demands of Western markets. But underlying this is a more substantial question of hybridization – that is, of the translation and transformation of local issues into those of global resonance. Many authors of postcolonial provenance focus on cosmopolitan practices for the purpose of transgressing, and thereby altering, existing literary canons and narrative strategies. The successful work of prize-winning migrant authors shows how recent marketing campaigns and critical appraisals can help shape the definition of a new cosmopolitan aesthetics by questioning the desirability of national canons.

The exploration of new cosmopolitan spaces in contemporary culture is revitalizing both for the classic definitions of cosmopolitanism and for ongoing debates about place, identity, and cultural difference. An open question that remains is the extent to which European culture and literature have been transformed by the cultures they colonized, and how the notion of cosmopolitanism has become qualified by those spaces (colonial periphery, third world metropolis, inner-city suburbs) and identities (migrants, women, ethnic minorities) which had so far been considered marginal or relegated to their peripheral national canons. The exploration of these entanglements with the cultural industry is essential to understanding postcolonial cosmopolitans as complicit with the glamorization of migration and the marketing of otherness for the purpose of bland multiculturalism and transnationalism. The argument here asserts that cosmopolitanism from below is a valuable concept with which to radically contest histories of domination, without necessarily giving in to a poetics of marginalization (Ponzanesi 2014).

This is also particularly relevant to the debate on Afropolitanism and the way in which it tackles the glamor of origins with the patina of globalization. For Achille Mbembe, "Afropolitanism" is the cosmopolitan awareness of African origin, which rejects the essentialistic and nativist discourse of Négritude and Pan-Africanism. To him, embracing Afropolitanism is a way of renouncing pernicious racialized thinking in favor of more fluid and interconnected identities, as also theorized by Paul Gilroy in the seminal *Black Atlantic*, where the notion of "black race" is rejected as a unifying code. Mbembe is very wary of the mythology around African traditions and

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reminds us of Fanon's warning against the pitfalls of nationalism (Fanon [1963] 1968).

But Afropolitanism also has a lighter and more commercial tone. It often refers to a classy African citizen of the world (see figures such as Teju Cole or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Taiye Selasi, or NoViolet Bulawayo, who are "Afropolitans," the new successful representatives of the African diaspora). The issue here is not just the trendiness of Africans outside of Africa; it is more about a poetic and aesthetic that rewrites African modernity. It connects to multiple ways of belonging without necessarily doing away with the politics of oppression and the violence inflicted on the writers' continent and their people. There is ample criticism of the fandom around Afropolitanism and many reservations about its consumeristic nature. Some see it as a boutique for African commodities packaged in intellectual attire (Dabiri 2017). Though empowering and clearly celebratory, the term, which was coined by Taiye Selasi and seems to have appeared for the first time in 2005, is replete with neoliberal ideology. According to Dabiri, the Afropolitan class, which in the end is the elite class, replicates many of the clichés and privileges associated with Eurocentric notions of cosmopolitanism. It does not help to lift up the rest of the continent through Western eyes, and it does not relieve the continent from the operations of the IMF, the World Bank, and the neocolonial forces of China's new investors.

For Dabiri, Afropolitanism is too glossy, polite, and compromised by its associations with big business and capitalism, and too much a digestible narrative of Africa on the rise that the West is eager to promote and embrace. But it is also important to point out that Afropolitanism is far from being a homogenous field; instead, it works as a general umbrella term under which many issues related to the cultural industry are framed. Even though it may not be an alternative to Adichie's "danger of a single story" (2009) and is too close to African narratives of Afro-pessimism and poverty porn, it is also a phenomenon that conveys the power of resistance and criticism, and it cannot be simply reduced to a "stylistic" embrace of a "hipster" African experience (Ponzanesi 2017).

This is the warning that Ellis Cashmore raises in his book *The Black Cultural Industry* (1997), that the commodification of hip-hop and rap has not meant financial revenues for either the black groups or their surroundings but has instead primarily generated income for record labels, often controlled by white people, providing an illustration of Adorno's warning about the record industry specifically from a race perspective. This is because the consumption of "black music" has not automatically fostered cultural integration or

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understanding among different groups but, as Cashmore writes, has created a cordon sanitaire around the dangers and risks of blackness by consuming, at a safe distance, some of its products and spirit. The visibility of black culture in the entertainment industry might prove to be far from emancipatory given that power relations remain, in the end, essentially unchanged. As Cashmore writes, if alterity is remade by Western market forces against the backdrop of escalating racism, xenophobia, and restrictive immigration policies, then something has gone awry in the "postcolonial" turn in cultural studies, and a new critical awareness needs to be raised (Cashmore 1997: 3).

This is a position shared by Paul Gilroy, who argues that commodification has destroyed what was wonderful about black culture to the advantage of corporate interests, though he stills see the contradictions and potential of music as a unique transmitter of cultures across diaspora. In his book *Darker than Blue* (2010), Gilroy explores the ways in which objects and technologies have become social forces that can ensure black culture's global reach while undermining the drive for equality and justice. Gilroy considers consumerism, consisting of luxury cars and branded items, as having diverted African Americans' social and political aspirations. The result is a weakened sense of citizenship and diminished collective spirit. Gilroy notes that much of what is now considered part of US worldwide culture – jazz, rap, hip-hop, and blues – stems from Afro-American origins. While many see this as a triumph of counterculture, Gilroy raises concern about black music's capacity to maintain its oppositional thinking in the face of its commodification by the global cultural industry (Gilroy 2010: 172).

The postcolonial cultural industry is not just about the trendiness of third world culture on sale, but also a way of striking back by "formally" abiding by the rules of the marketplace while undermining the very system from within. It would be unfair to dismiss a writer such as Chimamanda Adichie and her critique of Western visions of race and African identities as merely cool and trivial just because of her great popularity and success among Western readers. Many successful texts are not celebrated only for their exoticism or out of political correctness but because they offer a counter-narrative to dominant European civilizational discourses about race and culture.

We could read the specific dynamics of the "postcolonial" culture industry as being double-edged: on the one hand, exploring how postcolonial texts shape and interact with the cultural industry, therefore claiming a positive and active role in the form of participatory culture, and how bottom-up participation can change the structure of market forces (Rheingold 1995; Jenkins 2006); and on the other hand, accounting for how cultural difference,

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so central to postcolonial critique, itself becomes commodified (Gilroy 1993; Cashmore 1997; Hutnyk 2000; Huggan 2001; Brouillette 2007; Ponzanesi 2014; Lau and Mendes 2011).

In this way, the making of world literature is not left only to the mechanisms of circulation, exchange, and reception but also entails the integration of a cosmopolitan dimension that aspires to a world without borders, which is both a part of new imaginaries and of a politics of contestation. The shaping of new cosmopolitan imaginaries has also become much easier thanks to the use of digital technologies that manage to compress space and time and create forms of connectivity which were not possible before, reconfiguring diasporas into virtual communities and offering new strategies for approaching mobility, migration, and networks – these are also central to the debates of world literature.

The digital revolution has changed the ways in which texts can be distributed and reformatted (digitalization of archives, open access, e-publishing, free downloading), greatly contributing to world literature's idea of texts going beyond their point of origin. However, it has also changed the nature of publishing and reading altogether, not only through literature that is published directly online and read through new devices (the Kindle, other e-readers, etc.), but also by inserting the interactive and user-generated aspect of the Internet into the novel format (Murray 1997; Ryan 2001; Brillenburg et al. 2018). Questions of hypertext, immersion, interactivity, and participation have contributed to the mediatization of literature through the Internet. Furthermore, digitalization has eliminated many of the usual cultural industry intermediaries (publishers, agents, editors, critics, translators, reviewers, judges). Today many of these intermediaries are working on websites, blogs, email, e-zines, bulletins, listservs, and social platforms at large.

We also need to consider the rise of the digital humanities that has made digital tools an integral part of studying literature (through machine learning, data mining, and visualization), allowing for the investigation of literary and cultural macro-phenomena: e.g., the evolution of genres, the affirmation of a style and its reception, the recurrence of content or themes, and the notion of influence and intertextuality, therefore emphasizing the sociological aspects of literature. This model of "distant reading," introduced by Franco Moretti, focuses on analyzing computationally massive amounts of textual data, and adopting quantitative methods to examine a determined set of quantifiable textual features. This quantitative formalism is often seen as a powerful means to map world literature without restricting one's attention to the canon of the "great works" or limiting the scope to close reading (Moretti 1998). The idea behind distant reading is that there are synchronic or diachronic literary and

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cultural facts and phenomena that cannot be detected through the modes of close reading. Through the automated scrutiny of hundreds or thousands of texts and documents, we can gain access to otherwise unknowable information that plays a significant role in tracking and making sense of literary and cultural facts in the literary development across time and space, creating a different literary atlas. In his later work, Moretti points to the relationality of literature as explainable through trees and waves. The tree describes the passage from unity to diversity, the branching out; the wave is the opposite; it produces similarities by engulfing differences. Trees need geographical discontinuity in order to branch out; waves go beyond barriers and thrive on geographical continuity. Trees and branches are what nation-states cling to, waves are what markets do (Moretti 2000, 2005).

Though these digital developments allow for new forms of connectivity, participation, and classification, the Internet does not do away with forms of inequalities that are retransmitted in the digital sphere. As Roopika Risam writes, "digital humanities practitioners, therefore, must also interrogate colonialist and neo-colonial politics through projects designed to intervene in the epistemologies of digital knowledge production" (2018: 19). Colonialism and digital humanities are both projects in worldmaking, and postcolonial digital humanities, Risam claims, "emphasize the possibility of creating new worlds that resist inscriptions of colonialism in the digital cultural record" (20). To underscore the role of colonial violence and representation in the digital archive is central to avoiding the allure of digital methods and digital humanities as revitalizing humanities education without considering the political, ethical, and social justice-minded approaches to digital knowledge production.

In the next section, following Cheng's notion of worldmaking, I will focus on the power of digital technologies not in order to establish how they heighten and accelerate the circulation of world texts, but rather as a feature within the literary text itself that helps to shape new cosmopolitan imaginaries and generate new worlds. Cosmopolitanism is a viable paradigm for a digitally connected and highly mediatized world, in which the worlding of texts is enabled by the technical and at the same time utopian possibilities of digital media, while still considering the ethical dimension of digital knowledge production.

World Literature in the Making: Digital Homecomings

In this section, the role of digital technologies is explored through new narrative strategies and tropes. The texts chosen negotiate the space of

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migration and diaspora in interesting and challenging ways. In them, technology serves as an active medium through which postcolonial worldliness is articulated. My case studies are Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2014), in which blogging is used as a form of advocacy, Moshin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), which introduces the expedient of magic doors as portals to overcome the sense of stagnancy in migration, and the poems of Warson Shire, who emerges as a prominent new Instapoet capable of cutting across audiences, generations, and media platforms.

Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah,* Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction[1] in 2013, is a successful novel by the Nigerian-American writer, who can be considered to be part of the Afropolitanism movement. The novel's protagonist is Ifemelu, a Nigerian migrant in the United States who grapples with the difficulty of racial identity by starting a blog. She returns to Lagos in the end as a successful Afro-American, and the novel seems to reach full circle by finding a balance in which imperfections are embraced and a wholesome sense of identity is realized. *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and The National Book Critics Circle Awards, and is winner of the LA Times Book Prize for fiction. *Exit West* is a spellbinding wartime romance. The war is represented by an unnamed refugee crisis in an unnamed city, where Saeed, who works in advertising, meets Nadia, an insurance agent, in a class on "corporate identity and product branding." While the city is increasingly under siege, daily activities like going to work or meeting outside become increasingly impossible, and what was routine now requires major effort and great risks. The two lovers decide to flee. With great sadness they leave their families behind. They go through a magic door that works as a "portal" and get teleported to the "West."

To turn to my third author, Warsan Shire, she is a prominent British-Somali poet, born in Kenya and now living in London and Los Angeles. She was the Young Poet Laureate for London in 2013–14. In 2009, Shire wrote "Conversations about home (at a deportation centre)," a piece inspired by a visit she made to the abandoned Somali Embassy in Rome which some young refugees had turned into their home. In an interview, she told the reporter that "The night before she visited, a young Somali had jumped to his

[1] The National Book Critics Circle Awards are a set of annual American literary awards to promote "the finest books and reviews published in English." The National Book Critics Circle comprises more than 700 critics and editors from leading newspapers, magazines, and online publications. https://lithub.com/here-are-the-finalists-for-the-2017-national-book-critics-circle-awards/

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death off the roof." The encounter, she says, opened her eyes to the harsh reality of living as an undocumented refugee in Europe: "I wrote the poem for them, for my family and for anyone who has experienced or lived around grief and trauma in that way." This poem became the basis for "Home" (Bausells and Shearlaw 2015). "Home" has been shared widely across media and has been read in a range of public spaces, including London's Trafalgar Square.

The connection of these writers to the notion of world literature and the cultural industry is due to their successful circulation, translation, and reception, facilitated also by their garnering of prestigious literary prizes such as Neustadt, National Book Critics Circle Award, the LA Book Prize, and the distinction of Poet Laureate. However, it is also due to their shaping of new cosmopolitan imaginaries, crafted through literary experimentation with digital modes.

Blogging

Western stereotypes of Africa are debunked throughout *Americanah*. A central way in which those stereotypes are questioned is through the characters' use of technology. A crucial factor is Ifemelu's blog, for it is there that she finds her voice while navigating a culture largely determined to silence it. Her blog serves as an outlet for her reactions to life in America and, of course, also as her primary source of income before she returns to Nigeria. The Internet allows Ifemelu to speak to a much wider audience than she could otherwise reach. Blogs are excellent ways to share experiences and ideas with people who possess a wide range of backgrounds and ideologies, something Ifemelu may not be able to do within her own circle of friends. Moreover, Ifemelu may not feel completely comfortable discussing her ideas and experiences with everyone around her and thus turns to the Internet as a forum for discussion and sharing.

The space articulated through blogging, and the use of the Internet, is therefore not a simple trick to construct a modern version of the classic novel interspersed with epistolary moments, nor is it simply meant to lend an autobiographical dimension in the form of a testimonial to the novel. It is more of an essayistic addition, like a journalistic opinion column, which follows no restrictions and is a kind of stream of consciousness for the digital era:

> I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America . . . But we don't talk about it. (Adichie 2014: 290)

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Ifemulu's blog becomes a mirror in which to examine various issues of race, feminism, and identity in America. On the topic of blogging in *Americanah*, Serena Guarracino states that it serves as "a space, both embedded in but also outside creative writing, and as a place where social realities of race can be discussed without the trappings of character and action" (2014:. 2). The social reality of race is clearly that there is an expected way to perform that must be learned as yet another splintered identity. Blogging in America is a "Way of Writing Back." According to Mary Joyce, "a blog is a great advocacy tool because it allows any individual with an Internet connection to launch a campaign for social change with a potentially global reach. It gives ordinary citizens incredible power to question authority, act as alternative sources of information, organize supporters, and lobby those in power" (2015: 3).

The separation between blogging as metanarrative device and the rest of the narrative in *Americanah* is very much embedded in a new cosmopolitan vision of blackness and identity from an Afropolitan perspective. As the novel progresses, its social commentary moves back and forth between the act of blogging and the main narrative, thus gradually blurring the line between blogging as social advocacy and literature as worlding.

Hypertext to the West

In Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, migration does not involve life-or-death journeys in the backs of lorries, rubber rafts, or on flimsy dinghies. There are no middle passages or bodies washed ashore, but rather, "doors that could take you elsewhere, often to places far away." This trope renders the cognitive shock of having been freshly transplanted to tough new terrains tangible but makes forced migration more relatable. Hamid pictures a world in which doors replace passport control with the promise of a new life on the other side. In theory, these are doors to a better world. But they are one-way: once you step through them, there is no way back. Prior to its release, Hamid said, "Everyone is a migrant, even people who are in the same place, because that place changes over decades" (Tahir 2018). And: "If we can have this shared notion of migration, it becomes easier to have a conversation" (Milo 2017).

Exit West has all the tropes of world literature: a love story set against generalized violence and apocalypse; it is also a daunting political allegory with some special magic realist effects. But it is also a very captivating and intelligent novel; it spins new narrative strategies that surpass the effects these tropes generate. Familiar as the trope of doors may be as thresholds to our privacy and safety as well as hospitality and welcoming, in Hamid's novel

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they become forces of estrangement as well as openings toward utopian vistas.

The idea of doors in the novel functioning as portals – technically hypertexts that link one world to the next in cyberspace – is a way of intensifying displacement without becoming prey to the nitty-gritty of migratory journeys and dangerous crossings. These magic doors are therefore an ingenious way of describing in a different manner the common plight of refugees, who are normally given attention more for their risky itineraries than for the potentialities of arrival. In *Exit West*, Hamid's use of magical quick-access doors humanizes refugees and shrinks the inaccessibility of the world that so many people experience.

Throughout Saeed and Nadia's story, Hamid intersperses vignettes of magic realist migration, in which the circumstances and desires that govern the outcome of each crossing are always unpredictable. Hamid is very skilled at evoking the almost contradictory nature of Nadia and Saeed's digital life (their phones are "antennas that sniffed out an invisible world" and transport them "to places distant and near"), and whose broadband freedoms contrast with the roadblocks, barbed wire, and camps they face in what passes for reality. Saeed and Nadia smoke joints on their dates and text each other at work and order mushrooms online. But the Internet quickly becomes a luxury of the past as their mobile phone services are abruptly interrupted:

> Deprived of the portals to each other and to the world provided by their mobile phones, and confined to their apartments by the night-time curfew, Nadia and Saeed, and countless others, felt marooned and alone and much more afraid. (2017: 60)

In the absence of mobile phone signals, "it was as if they were bats that had lost the use of their ears, and hence their ability to find things as they flew in the dark" (61). This sense of cyber dislocation also triggers an emotional dislocation, for without their smartphones, Saeed and Nadia cannot perform their daily routines of meeting: "The day after their phone signals died Saeed went to their usual burger joint at lunchtime, but Nadia did not show up, and the day after that, when he went again, the restaurant was shuttered, its owner perhaps having fled, or simply disappeared" (61). Once the smartphone infrastructures are jeopardized, Saeed and Nadia disconnect from each other not only spatially, but also emotionally. This disconnection is part of the novel's realistic framework in an account that imitates a real-life situation of vulnerability and stuckness. According to Ghassan Hage, "stuckness," or the desire to avoid it, is one of the primary motivations for movement. Hage

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claims, "People engage in the physical form of mobility that we call migration because they are after existential mobility. . . . They are looking for a space and a life where they feel they are going somewhere as opposed to nowhere, or at least, a space where the quality of their 'going-ness' is better than what it is in the space they are leaving behind" (Hage 2009: 98).

Some migrants may be made more vulnerable to waiting, especially when they do not know when or if a door, either real or digital, might open for them again. *Exit West* finds its way out of "stuckness" by way of magic doors. The narrative strategy of compressing the refugee's journey into brief temporal vacuums follows this same logic of hypertext. As portals between faraway places spread out spatially, the doors compress time, defying the borders between the past, the present, and the future, as well as those between the East and the West, conflict and peace. Randomly appearing, the doors merge beginnings with endings. Upon Saeed and Nadia's first passage from their home to the Greek island of Mykonos, the narrator claims that "[Nadia] was struck by [the door's] darkness, its opacity, the way that it did not reveal what was on the other side, and also did not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end" (103). The expedience of passing through special "doors" seems like an element from magic realism, but as a "portal," the door can also be seen as a metaphor for an electronic entrance and a switching from one system to another, a way of carrying and transferring information as well as identities, through a doorway or gate, as well as through an internet site providing access or links to other sites, and thus acting as a pathway to other content.

The portals that allow entry from poor to rich nations are heavily guarded, but they appear suddenly and unpredictably. Hamid's trope of "migrant doors" resonates with the digital notion of the hypertext, which is also a useful metaphor. Figuratively speaking, hypertext can be understood as a nonhierarchical and a-centred modality. Hypertext incorporates multiplicity; different pathways are possible simultaneously, as hypertext has "multiple entryways and exits" and it "connects any point to any other point" (Landow 2006: 58–61). Feminist theorist Donna Haraway recognized the dynamic character of hypertext: "the metaphor of hypertext insists on making connections as practice." However, she adds, "the trope does not suggest which connections make sense for which purposes and which patches we might want to follow or avoid." We can begin to see the value of approaching the Internet from the perspective of hypertext to make an "inquiry into which connections matter, why, and for whom" (Haraway 1997: 128–30).

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This is also in line with the theorizing of postcolonial scholar Jaishree K. Odin on how hypertextual webs might benefit subjects "living at the borders." She describes how subaltern subjects, by weaving their own hypertextual path, can express their multivocality and negotiate cultural differences. Odin suggests that the web reflects a new mode of postcolonial embodiment, as hypertext "is composed of cracks, in-between spaces, or gaps that do not fracture reality into this or that, but instead provide multiple points of articulation with a potential for incorporating contradictions and ambiguities" (1997: 598).

Although in *Exit West* the interactive dimension of the hypertext is limited to one-way traffic, it retains the possibility of entering different realms, and this has the effect of propelling the protagonists into yet other worlds that would not otherwise have been possible or predictable. And so the trope of "digital technology," a transmitter of possibilities and escape routes, aptly represents the worlding of literature as the shaping of imaginaries that go beyond boundaries and current realities.

Instapoets

This circulation of the diaspora both digitally and offline raises questions about the ways in which diaspora also becomes a property of the cultural industry and subject to the rule of economic exchange. The issues of fetishization and the appropriation of "diasporic" stars like Chimamanda Adichie need to be considered when looking at the worlding of postcolonial authors. Excerpts from Adichie's essay "We Should All Be Feminists" were integrated by Beyoncé in her song *Flawless*, in order to show solidarity among transnational feminists across different race and social backgrounds, as well as to draw attention to the exploitation of diaspora for commercial purposes.

Beyoncé also used the work of Warsan Shire in her video album for "Lemonade," causing Shire's profile to go stratospheric. Between the songs about anger, heartbreak, and betrayal, Beyoncé read Shire's poems such as "For Women Who Are Difficult to Love," "The Unbearable Weight of Staying (The End of the Relationship)," and "Nail Technician as Palm Reader." Shire has mobilized women from African and Somali diasporas in digital media platforms worldwide, and she is championed as a poet whose visceral work encompasses, among many other things, issues of race, sexuality, immigration, politics, and being a Muslim woman.

Shire uses social media as one of her platforms. She is also part of a new generation of "Instapoets," writers publishing verse primarily on social media and finding audiences far beyond the usual bookshelves. These new writers

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are redefining the scene and making it relevant to a fresh generation of readers, making poetry hip and fashionable again. According to the *New York Times*, three of the top ten best-selling poetry books (in the USA) have been written by Instapoets: that is, young emerging poets whose medium includes Instagram (Larouci 2018).[2]

Thanks to the emergence of platforms like YouTube and Instagram, there is an upsurge of postcolonial poets, female poets, and trans writers who share their creative and untold stories and lead the way to a new generation of young writers, making the poetry world more accessible, less elitist, and less rarefied than traditional approaches to poetry in the classroom. These new platforms allow for experimentation with a lower threshold, opening the doors to new sorts of skills and opportunities. Self-publishing becomes a viable option to the more impermeable world of the publishing houses and prestigious literary festivals. Just as budding musicians put their own work on YouTube and other channels, and avoid the constriction of the big record labels, Instapoets circumvent the cultural industry by playing by their own rules and becoming a new generation of self-published, DIY contemporary poets, symbolizing an era of radical change in the history of the global cultural industry.

Social media has made it possible to reach readers, who would not normally read poetry, by offering humor and playfulness. Besides the instantaneous and interactive character of the social media platforms, there are also different grammatical and spelling conventions on these platforms that allow for alternative approaches to punctuation and capitalization. Communication is more direct and emotional, and the new medium allows for experimental form as well as language.

> Instapoems tend to be short enough to fit neatly into a single Instagram photo (often in pseudo-typewriter font) and simple enough that readers can instantly grasp the meaning while scrolling on their iPhones.
>
> (Edwards 2017)

Of course, poets have been using experimental punctuation for years in poetry, but Twitter has also made poetry new and fresh, an adaptation of

[2] In Samira Larouci's article "About Instapoets" (2018), Rupi Kaur, the 25-year-old Indian-Canadian poet, is mentioned as the most successful Instapoet. Her bitesize poems tackle themes of misogyny, heartbreak, and violence. She has been number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list for 77 consecutive weeks. Kaur sold over 1.5 million copies of her debut book "Milk and Honey" and she has 5 million followers on Instagram. www.vogue.it/en/news/vogue-arts/2018/05/14/about-instapoets-vogue-italia-may-2018/.

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haiku in digital times. This also enables rap poetry, poetry slam, and spoken word poetry to reach a completely new circuit of distribution and reach. But in parallel with the harsh criticism of chick-lit and its trivialization of feminism and literary standards for the sake of commerce,[3] Instapoetry has received harsh criticism alongside praise:

> Poets and readers have been divided on the rise of performance poets in print. Younger poets using social media to gain an audience – Tempest and McNish on YouTube, and Kaur on Instagram, where she has more than two million followers – have been dismissed as populist, while their often extremely autobiographical poetry has been variously praised as brave, or criticised as simple and solipsistic.[4]

In her essay "The Cult of the Noble Amateur," published in the poetry magazine *PN Review*, Rebecca Watts slammed the mostly female-led Instapoetry movement (which includes Rupi Kaur, Hollie McNish, and Kate Tempest) as "consumer-driven content" (2018). Watts sets out a provocative case against the "cohort of young female poets who are currently being lauded by the poetic establishment for their 'honesty' and 'accessibility'" – qualities that Watts associates with the "open denigration of intellectual engagement and rejection of craft that characterizes their work."[5] The essay seems to have opened a whole floodgate of opinions, rebuttals, and responses, especially online, with reactions that either embrace Watts's interventions as "brave" or accuse her of defending the status quo of aesthetics above commerce. Responses often show little solidarity and flexibility toward the emergence of new literary voices and genres.

Even *The Times Literary Supplement* joined the debate, with Michael Caines asking what is at stake in recent disputes about literary fiction and poetry. He asks whether the new generalizations and critiques about "Web 2.0" are not slightly out of sync with what poetry does on Twitter. Why should poetry, he asks, "of all the literary forms," supposedly "have the best chance of escaping social media's dumbing effect"? Whether social media has a dumbing effect

[3] This reminds one too of the debate started by bell hooks on whether Beyoncé's album *Lemonade* is not a sell-out to the cultural industry. bell hooks even called Beyoncé "a terrorist, especially in terms of the impact on young girls" by upholding impossible standards of beauty (hooks 2016). Here more issues are at stake that pertain to intergenerational politics of race and ethnicity as well as of media representations and, indeed, the cultural industry. Beyoncé's messaging is an attempt at balancing the feminist Beyoncé with the businesslike Beyoncé. And ultimately, that's *her* business, according to Crosley Coker (2014).

[4] See Flood and Cain 2018.

[5] The *PN Review* wrote a careful editorial as a response to the avalanche of critiques and endorsements, including the biting response from instapoet Hollie McNish herself (2018).

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or not is a larger issue, but it is clear that Caine finds Twitter more entertaining and informative than daft:

> On both sides of the "noble amateur" debate, if that's what this is, there is, of course, fault to be found, but also virtue: as above, Watts has been accused of sour grapes and everything else, whereas, even if her views seem incorrect, she might just as well be admired for intellectual honesty, as McNish is, and for defying the popular way of thinking. And the ensuing commotion has brought out some excellent, passionate commentary – all on social media, strangely enough – on both sides, as well as the customary chippiness.
>
> (Caine 2018)

Though there is stern criticism from traditional highbrow critics, the power of these Instapoets to reach new audiences for poetry is undeniable. Warsan Shire can broadcast her work to nearly 90,000 Twitter followers and 43,000 Instagram followers.

The placing of a poem in a real-time setting can be extremely powerful, for example, for comments on current affairs and events that call for a response besides the more pervasive journalistic forms. Social media has made poetry relevant again: the poems that go viral are often a response to big happenings in the world, as well as a manifestation of the worlding of literature that trespasses the traditional forms of circulation, distribution, and/or translation that constitute the more traditional notion of world literature. Indeed, what is the role of digital media and social media platforms in the crossing of national boundaries and institutionalized cultural industries? Is this time for revolutions or just an adaptation of intellectual labor now in the hands of the big five (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Google, and Microsoft)?

Conclusion

In his influential and authoritative book *What Is World Literature*? (2003), David Damrosch points out that the term was and remains highly elusive. What does it mean to speak of world literature? Which literature and whose world? "What relation to the national literatures whose production continued unabated even after Goethe announced their obsolescence? What new relations between Western Europe and the rest of the globe, between antiquity and modernity, between the nascent mass culture and elite productions?" (1).

To this line of questioning I have added the postcolonial intervention made by Pheng Cheah in adding another dimension to the notion of world

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literature, as a cosmopolitan aspiration to envision and make new worlds, therefore, expressing and rendering worldliness through its literary imagination. Pursuing this line of thought, I have also emphasized the importance of digital technology, not as a tool that facilitates or accelerates the making and distributing of literature but as a narrative strategy that can achieve a worlding effect across boundaries and genres.

Blogging as advocacy, doors as passports/portals, and refugee poems as viral poetry constitute some of the new postcolonial worldliness that allow for a rethinking of here and there, individual and communal identities, borders and boundaries. This is due to the embedded role of digital technologies that are testimony to the continuum between the online and the offline in everyday practices, as well as to the use of technology to guarantee co-presence and continuity.

Though the novels and the poem discussed here deal with mobility and migration as a form of displacement, they also allow us to rethink the here and the elsewhere, origin and destination, along other coordinates. Hamid's fantasy trick of teleporting refugees to a better world through magic doors underscores the principle that the "world" is not what it used to be and that the cosmopolitan imaginary needs to be rethought as virtual and transient.

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