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Rossella Ciocca and Neelam Srivastava, eds., *Indian Literature and the World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 288 pp., ISBN: 978-1-137-54549-7

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Rossella Ciocca and Neelam Srivastava's *Indian Literature and the World: Multilingualism, Translation and the Public Sphere* offers a cross-sectional and interdisciplinary perspective on contemporary Indian literary production. In bringing together research by scholars who have been working in traditionally bisected fields of expertise (namely, South Asian/Oriental studies and Post-Colonial studies), this volume provides a fresh working model of contemporary Indian literature characterised by a polyvocal and comparative dimension.

The volume explicitly positions itself as the counterargument to Rushdie's statement according to which "‘Indo-Anglian literature’ represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books" (x).<sup>1</sup> Undermining the hegemony of Indian literature produced in English and the nationalistic rhetoric of a monolithic literature as a symbol of state unity, the volume aims to construct a pan-Indian literary canon which may enable readers to approach India's linguistic and cultural complexity. In order to do so, the volume analyses a variety of Indian texts written in the *bhashas* (indigenous languages), in English, and in their English translations from the vernacular languages, positing that by juxtaposing a close reading of both indigenous and Anglophone literatures, distinctive (but at times, juxtaposed) perspectives of major historical events can be gained. Moreover, the studies in this volume are not restricted to one literary genre, but span from the novel to the subaltern autobiography, from the folk tale to the long essay, from the short story to poetry as to capture and emphasise the multiplicity and complexity of voices and forms of the Indian literary canon. Due to the abundance of languages and literatures across the subcontinent and due to the difficulty of using a single paradigm for their categorisation, these works address theoretical and methodological questions concerning the definition of literature in the Indian context. Moreover, they contextualise their interpretation of Indian literatures in relation to the European understandings of literary culture, ultimately feeding into wider theoretical questions in the study of World Literature, Multilingualism and Comparative Literature.

The volume is divided in three interlaced sections corresponding to the subthemes of the title, Multilingualism, Translation and the Publish Sphere, in which the categories of transcreation, non-translation and untranslatability, and the relationship between literature and sociopolitics are respectively investigated. The regional areas covered by the present set of studies ranges from the Northern State

<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie, "Introduction", in Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997* (London: Vintage, 1997), ix-xxii.

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<sup>2</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Vintage, 2010), 13.

of Punjab, via Uttar Pradesh, the North East and West Bengal, to central Maharashtra and Southern Tamil Nadu and Kerala — also envisaging the transnational dimension of the diasporic experience in the UK and back home. Here, the narrative of an Indian country completely rooted in its soil and its languages is interwoven with the narrative of India as an ‘imaginary homeland’ and a ‘rhetoric of exile’, in which ‘chutnified’ English is the only possible space for identity retrieval after losing one’s past history and languages. Yet, “description is itself a political act”,<sup>2</sup> and all the works presented in the volume show how both narratives have actively participated in the elaboration of a new literature imbued in the political and public sphere by dealing with major Indian historical events (from Partition to Emergency, from tribal and peasant insurgencies to the spread of guerrilla warfare, from the sectarian religious upheavals of the 1990s to ecological and environmental disasters). Diverse narratives, however, may address the same issue differently: Stefania Cavaliere, for instance, provides a case study on the works of the Hindi novelist Krishna Sobti, who approaches Partition as a collective tragedy rather than a ‘mere’ political event, thus registering its direct and traumatic impact on civil society. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, on the other hand, offers a comparative reading of Qurratulain Hyder and Salman Rushdie’s major works and provides an enticing representation of two diverse narratives sharing, however, an identical commitment to nationalist ideals of secularism, cosmopolitanism and syncretism. By investigating issues of gender, caste and Hindi-Muslim coexistence in the rural and village life of Awadh, Francesca Orsini offered a comparative analysis of three pre- and post-Partition novels aiming at giving *all* Indians a common past to identify with. In order to do so, the immense body of Indian writings has to be addressed in the plural form —Indian *literatures*— as to highlight the polyvocal, multilingual and multi-authored contemporary Indian literary production.

All the texts examined by the volume contributors show a *fil rouge* between the ‘Indo-Anglian’ and the vernacular narratives for both their guiding the reader in the understanding of and in the debate around societal and cultural issues and for their polyphonic and multi-perspectival approach in the narration of the private and the public. Mara Matta’s examination of an heterogeneous corpus of literary writings dealing with India’s north-east nationalist movements in the aftermath of Partition focuses on the communal intent of diverse authors to reconceptualise identity formation in the borderlands and the performance of indigeneity. By focusing on the transformation of post-independence luminous Bombay to present-day sombre Mumbai, Rossella Ciocca’s in-depth analysis of the Bombay/Mumbai novel as a distinctive literary genre shed light on the way in which the city’s shift from a modernist capital to a dystopian megalopolis is reflected in its highly iconic but yet problematic identity epitomised by the 1992-1993 bloody trail of terror. Refocusing the debate around tradition and modernity, the private and the public and the individual and the collective, Maryam Mirza provides a case study on Manju

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Kapur's family novels, ultimately revealing the complex position of the individual today, placed in a tradition-modernity continuum. By linking female subjectivities to issues of displacement and (un)belonging, Clelia Clini aims at challenging and subverting any easy celebration of the diaspora as the nomadic and post-modern condition, finally reminding that the diaspora is an uneasy place, even more so for woman.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Venuti, "Introduction, Special Issue on Translation and Minority", *The Translator*, 4.2 (1998), 135-144.

Following the *mantra* 'the personal is political', and with the rise of nationalism in the 20th century, Indian writings became more prominently connected to social activism. For this reason, the brutal realities of village life and the concealed stories of modern slavery had to be narrated using the language of the oppressed. Alessandra Marino, for instance, reports on the case of Mahasweta Devi's prose, in which diverse registers of Bengali are interlaced with the languages of the tribes, thus reflecting on the linguistic multiplicity of India.

Bilingual creativity and literary bilingualism are closely examined throughout all the volume contributions. Udaya Kumar's compelling reflections upon the compositional choices made in Kamala Das' early work, for instance, shed new light on the very essence of being bilingual in India. By presenting the author's personal narratives as expressed both in English and in Malayalam according to the literary genre, Kumar posits that active bilingualism points to "be housed in languages in diverse ways" (88). The question of translation often recurs due to the many interconnections between translational and multilingual practices in literary texts, exemplified, for instance, by cases of code-switching and linguistic borrowings both from the *bhashas* and from English and between *bhashas*. On the one hand some volume contributions demand attention to the phenomenon of translation as an increasingly cohesive factor in the definition of an Indian-specific contribution to the theorisations of World Literature and as a means of fostering international development and visibility of subaltern writings. Lakshmi Holström, for instance, reports on the major role translation has acquired in the modern Tamil novel, and similarly, Neelam Srivastava examines the case of subaltern Dalit literature positing that it is in the context of translation that Dalit emerges as a politically resistant Pan-Indian category. On the other hand, some works point to the importance of non-translation and untranslatability from the *bhashas* into English since "the multitude of native voices [...] cannot be encompassed in the homogenizing representativeness of the English language" (155). Both translation and untranslatability, thus, acquire a political function in the Indian literary production. Most interestingly, Rossella Ciocca and Neelam Srivastava place translation at the centre of the theorisation of Indian literature, due to the centrality that multilingualism acquires both in the literary production and in everyday life. In a country in which many writers and readers are bilingual, the translating process becomes a necessity rather than an option. For this reason, the works presented in the volume do not privilege English as *the* language of translation to the detriment of the *bhashas*, but rather approach translation as a way to 'vary the language' (137).<sup>3</sup>

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The volume's reclamation of linguistic expertise is not meant, however, to exclude English from the pan-Indian literary canon, but rather to assess its relative importance in the Indian multilingual scenario.