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10-21-2016

World Literature Today

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Panel: World Literature Today: Cross-currents

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Recommended Citation

Ahmed, Wasi, "World Literature Today" (2016). *International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work*. 940.

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World Literature Today

In today's globalized world, literature is more accessible than ever before. With technology working wonders, our individual and collective endeavors are increasingly reaching a wider public. However, the idea of globalized literature, compared to globalized trade or a globalized financial regime, is not a simple task of literary "export and import," but something more complex as a platform of harmony and coherence.

There is no doubt that world literature today is an open window. Anyone eager to look in can find it easy to familiarize himself or herself with the contents, craft, and cultural milieu, and benefit from sharing vastly diverse experiences as a reader, and also as a writer.

For a writer, it is imperative that he or she is presented with the opportunity of freedom and the choice to break free of any definitive model, or the legacy of literary tradition he/she may have been rooted in.

What is interesting in today's contiguous world is that different types of writing, literary trends, and traditions of various regions are shared and experimented with almost simultaneously all over. This sharing is amazingly enriching, and it is up to writers to find their own voices in their respective settings, which in turn can render their work distinct and unique.

This is happening in most places. Writers are into finding their own voices. It is here that despite the many asymmetries among countries categorizing them as "advanced or less advanced," writers in all their varied genres are increasingly becoming independent of the baggage their countries are laden with, especially countries in the so-called Third World. So, writing in these places is of every conceivable (or inconceivable) variety. There is, of course, the omnipresence of popular writing, meant to cater to market demand. But what in the past was dubbed, wrongly or rightly, "mainstream writing" is reaching out beyond its traditional terrains, making room for what was once called (wrongly or rightly) "experimental writing."

As a writer of fiction from the aforementioned Third World, I don't find myself caught within the limits of geography, like some of my predecessors might have been, thanks to global accessibility and openness. Bangladesh, a developing country in South Asia where I'm from, has to grapple with a lot of problems day in and day out. And since a sense of place is integral to a writer, I do take cues from the situations that drive me in my country, because that's the place I know the best.

In my case, reality is important inasmuch as it stokes the sparks that launch me into writing. But reality, for me, tends to remain, for the most part, a narrative of things on the surface only. This surface reality has its limitations, in that it can at times be a misrepresentation of the inner, true essence—a simplification, so to say. I sometimes tend to see it as the reality of the unreal, for surface reality can be deceptive, or, at the very least, it's unable to lend a deep, critical understanding of the inner content. How much does a visual object tell us about what it's actually about? This might have prompted W. B. Yeats to write: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

In fact, all a writer can hope to achieve from writing is to share with readers the self-questioning he/she confronts—the skepticism that gets in the way of decisive judgment. Faced with self-questioning—more importantly, a skeptical approach—the writer is well poised to examine what there is to interpret in the

Iowa City Public Library and the International Writing Program Panel Series, October 21, 2016
zp (Priya) dala (South Africa), Zhou Jianing (China), Eros Atalia (Philippines), Shibasaki Tomoka (Japan), and Wasi Ahmed (Bangladesh)

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ways he/she considers appropriate. It is here that techniques emerge as important tools. One writer may find intertextuality a fitting method, while others use parables, metafiction, or any other device.