

Pheng Cheah: Tools for Rethinking Postcolonial World Literature

Worlding and Becoming the Whole World [devenir tout le monde]

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World literature studies and postcolonial literary studies have a tense relation because the former's dominant strand focuses on the global circulation of literary texts, mostly in English, whereas the latter is concerned with the role of literature in struggles against colonialism, neocolonialism and Northern global capitalist hegemony. While world literature studies have examined the undoing of national literary traditions by globalization, postcolonial critiques of world literature have argued that participation in global literary exchange is structured by exclusions that reflect the hierarchies of colonial power and the global economic divide of North and South. This talk seeks to move beyond this impasse by elaborating a normative conception of world literature in which postcolonial literature is world literature in the sense of literature that seeks to remake the world created by contemporary capitalist globalization to enable the emergence of postcolonial peoples. Postcolonial literatures that participate in the temporal process of world creation are immanent to concrete struggles within a specific field of forces and also resist being arrested in a geographically bounded and determinable subject-object such as a nation, a continent or a region.

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