

Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature (Literature Now)

By Rebecca L. Walkowitz



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As a growing number of contemporary novelists write for publication in multiple languages, the genre's form and aims are shifting. Born-translated novels include passages that appear to be written in different tongues, narrators who speak to foreign audiences, and other visual and formal techniques that treat translation as a medium rather than as an afterthought. These strategies challenge the global dominance of English, complicate "native" readership, and protect creative works against misinterpretation as they circulate. They have also given rise to a new form of writing that confounds traditional models of literary history and political community.

Born Translated builds a much-needed framework for understanding translation's effect on fictional works, as well as digital art, avant-garde magazines, literary anthologies, and visual media. Artists and novelists discussed include J. M. Coetzee, Junot Díaz, Jonathan Safran Foer, Mohsin Hamid, Kazuo Ishiguro, Jamaica Kincaid, Ben Lerner, China Miéville, David Mitchell, Walter Mosley, Caryl Phillips, Adam Thirlwell, Amy Waldman, and Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries. The book understands that contemporary literature begins at once in many places, engaging in a new type of social embeddedness and political solidarity. It recasts literary history as a series of convergences and departures and, by elevating the status of "born-translated" works, redefines common conceptions of author, reader, and nation.



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Editorial Review

Review

A work of resounding insight and unremitting freshness, *Born Translated* matter-of-factly deconstructs the assumption that national belonging is natural to literature, showing how this assumption structures the sense we make of contemporary world fiction and how much more sense that fiction makes without it.

(Bruce Robbins, Columbia University)

Erudite and meticulous, with a comfort zone extending from Cervantes to Roberto Bolaño, Orhan Pamuk, and Haruki Murakami, Rebecca L. Walkowitz gives us a theory of world literature based on works that are 'born translated,' incorporating cross-lingual circulation as part of their compositional processes. Eyeopening and field-defining.

(Wai Chee Dimock, Yale University)

Walkowitz transforms our understanding of the contemporary novel by demonstrating how far translation has become its engine rather than its afterthought. We cannot think of the history of the novel any more without considering its intimate and dynamic relation to translation. A remarkable tour de force.

(Robert J. C. Young, Julius Silver Professor of English and Comparative Literature, New York University)

An excellent proposition for literary history.

(Will H. Corral World Literature Today)

An ambitious work that strives to redefine not just one field but two: world literature and contemporary fiction.

(Sarah Chihaya Contemporary Literature)

One explosive conclusion [from *Born Translated*] is that a novel's surface is no more important than other larger, more overlooked stylistic units.

(Adam Thirlwell *Times Literary Supplement*)

Born Translated is about a kind of multilingualism internal to contemporary English-language novels, and like the works it studies, the book seeks to deprovincialize anglophone literature from within.

(Dora Zhang Public Books)

Walkowitz's engaging book gives enlightening close-readings-at-a-distance of many novels.... Walkowitz's readings move both writers and translators into a collective of writing, publishing, and reading that deemphasizes sources and celebrates their interaction.

(Geoffrey C. Howes *Translation Review*)

Walkowitz's book is well informed by theories of world literature and translation, and her prose is never less than readable and accessible. She shows us in *Born Translated* how important the role of translation is in contemporary Anglophone literature and, at the same time, how it complicates that very notion.

(The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory)

Review

Born Translated offers a fresh approach to contemporary fiction. Among the first to offer a convincing explanation of how national traditions morph into the world novel, Walkowitz succeeds in showing?brilliantly, to my mind?how novels by J. M. Coetzee, Kazuo Ishiguro, David Mitchell, Kiran Desai, Peter Ho Davies, Caryl Phillips, and W. G. Sebald force us to confront a world where languages, territories, and nations no longer line up.

(Nancy Armstrong, Duke University)

About the Author

Rebecca L. Walkowitz is professor and director of graduate studies in English and affiliate faculty in comparative literature at Rutgers University. She is the author of *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (2006) and the editor or coeditor of several books, including *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism* (2016, with Eric Hayot). She is the past president of the Modernist Studies Association.

Users Review

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