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ST. JOSEPH’S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BENGALURU-27

MA ENGLISH – I SEMESTER

SEMESTER EXAMINATION: OCTOBER 2021

(Examination conducted in March 2022)

**EN DE 7418 - World Literatures – I**

**Time 2.5 HOURS MAX. MARKS 70**

**This Question Paper Contains FOUR Printed Pages and THREE Parts**

**SECTION A**

**I. Read the following excerpt from a conversation (in 2011) between David Damrosch and Wang Ning on the topic ‘What Is World Literature'? and answer the question that follows.**

***Wang Ning****: You suggest then that world literature implies not just broad circulation, but also good translations and evaluations. I share these ideas. On the other hand, I also try to develop some of your original ideas. To my understanding of world literature, if we want to judge whether a literary work should be regarded as world literature, we must have some objective criteria, which are of both universality and relativity. In this sense, the first criterion to judge whether a work should be viewed as world literature should be whether it has gone beyond the boundary of nations or countries and languages. That is, it must go through translation.*

*The second is that it must be included in some anthologies, especially some authoritative anthologies of world literature. Many people prefer to spend their limited time reading anthologies in which literary works are carefully selected by literary scholars. In this way, anthologies also imply the standard of both canonicity and readability.*

*The third is to expand the reach of these writings among ordinary readers so that they become the inheritance of different generations of writers. If a work of literature appears in textbooks or major references by university students and teachers, it will also be read and appreciated by large numbers of educated readers.*

*The fourth is that the author must be critically responded to or even debated about by scholars or critics of other countries or cultural contexts, because even if a work causes controversy, it means that the work has certain critical value; people will not spend time discussing a worthless work. On the other hand, I think, to anthologize world literature, we should also include literatures of different countries, especially those that have been relatively ignored. Douwe Fokkema’s history of literature, for example, only devotes 130 pages to Chinese literature, while twelve times as large space is devoted to French literature.*

*To take another example, one book called Weltliteratur by a German theorist does not even touch any literature of non-western countries. So literatures are not equally considered. In this way we could find that to anthologize world literature also implies power relations and ideological tendencies. Do you agree with me on this point or not?*

**David Damrosch**: I do agree. I have been spending a lot of time doing anthologies, first a *large Anthology of British Literature* and then more recently the *Longman Anthology of World Literature* in six volumes, and I have been thinking very hard about that. I think we do have some difference between us and our views, because you emphasize reception and certain authoritative presence in the dialogue. I think that very much describes the sort of works we can call masterpieces of world literature. But there are, in my view, also other ways that works that can be thought of as world literature. In my book *What Is World Literature?* I describe three basic modes: that a work of literature can be classic, or it can be a masterpiece, or it can be a window on the world. The old classical view, which was really disappearing or fading away in Goethe’s time, was an old form of world literature, in which the classic really is something ancient, authoritative, so it would be the Confucian classics, it would be Virgil and Homer- -those are the real works of world literature.

Then comes the modern masterpiece which can be recognized in its own time even before it has been established as a classic. That is almost a more extreme version, a more thorough version of the authoritative quality. The masterpiece was Goethe’s primary idea of world literature, which is an artistically excellent work that is circulating and being recognized by readers in its own time even if there is no great cultural heritage and no large critical discourse on it. Goethe could publish a masterpiece, book reviews can recognize it, it can be translated into six languages, and it could become a work of world literature in the very year of its publication. That is very much the function of the modern literary marketplace. You could say that Voltaire’s *Candide* was translated into ten languages already in the first year or two of its publication, and so it become a work of world literature even before it had been in an anthology or a critical discourse had developed about it. Both because it circulated and because it was recognized for its quality in Goethe’s sense of the masterpiece, it was a masterpiece that became very rapidly world literature.

The idea of literary works as windows on the world is very significant today. Readers can approach world literature just to get a sense of what is going on in the world, what another culture is like. To me a work can function as world literature on a very individual basis for a reader who reads it and who is opened up to part of the world. And this work may be something I chance upon; it may be little known and it has not yet been made a canonical work. As an anthologist, I am playing both sides of this division because the major works that get the most space in the anthology almost entirely are works that fit all of your criteria, that they have been well known for a long time, they are often translated, and there is a lot of critical discourse about them, they are reviewed as artistic masterpieces. So works such as Dante’s *Inferno* or *The Story of the Stone* tend to get most space in my anthology.

But then I also want to put in works I am enthusiastic about. I want them to be read, even if no one knows about them. So I put in Aztec poetry that has never been anthologized before, and I tell my readers: “This is world literature; you should read it.” In a certain sense you can say I want it to become so popular that it changes to fit your criterion eventually: I want the Aztec poems to inspire critical discourse, and more to be translated, but I am already saying: “This is now world literature and I am going to make that claim and I think it is valuable to read.” What I think is important for us as scholars and teachers of world literature is to expand our readers’ horizons and boundaries; we need to do this as translators too. You and I are both involved in translating and publishing and getting works translated, and retranslating works that are not well-translated because the effort of translation is critical to perceiving something of literary excellence of the work. It is important also to assign works on our syllabus and also to get our readers and our colleagues to read more widely, because I think we both find that many of our colleagues settle for a rather comfortable well-known small canon. These may all be very great works, but our colleagues may not always be so curious to read beyond what their own teachers taught them. And so I think this is a very exciting moment of world literature now to give us new contexts, new ways to look at works that may have been sidelined within their own national tradition but become more interesting now when you connect them across boundaries with other works.

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**I. A.** **Answer ANY ONE of the following questions in about 350 words:**

**(1x20=20)**

1. What in your own view are the two or three most important features of World Literature being pointed out here that those being initiated into the field must take note of? Connect them with your own experiences in this domain.

1. What are your views on the challenges posed by the fact that World Literature is almost entirely dependent on translation?

**SECTION B**

**II. Answer ANY FOUR of the following questions in about 250 words each: (4x10=40)**

1. How does Kafka treat the problem of the alienation experienced by a sensitive person at the hands of systems that exploit and de-personalise him?
2. Which two poems of Wislawa Szymborska did you feel strongly drawn towards? What insights into the human condition do you find them offering?
3. With reference to any one text in the self-study component, discuss two features that make the work unique in your view.
4. Comment critically on **any two** of the following themes (or an interrelated set of them) in Homer’s *Odyssey*, citing a relevant episode(s) from the epic: honour, valour, craftiness, loyalty, retribution, fidelity, wisdom/learning/experience.

1. Discuss any three aspects of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* that, in your opinion, are chiefly responsible for its position as one of the most acclaimed novels of all time.

1. How does Milan Kundera in his novel *The Joke* expose the primary drawback of the political system that prevailed at the time in Czechoslovakia?

**SECTION C**

**III.** 9) Here is a poem by Bertolt Brecht (East German poet;1898 – 1956). What connections can you trace between its theme and any other text(s) in this course, as also its relevance to present day situations. **Answer in about 250 words. (10 marks)**

After the uprising of the 17th June  
The Secretary of the Writers Union  
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee  
Stating that the people  
Had forfeited the confidence of the government  
And could win it back only  
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier  
In that case for the government  
To dissolve the people  
And elect another?