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ENGL 877

Reading Response 3

I enjoyed this week's readings and discussions over the two articles.  Birgit Neumann and Gabrielle Rippl covered a lot of ground and gave a bunch of definitions to terms that I sort of knew about but never really did too much thinking about in the pages of "Anglophone World Literatures: An Introduction."  My biggest takeaway, which was solidified by chatting with a few classmates on Tuesday, was that the biggest step taken so far in terms of re-defining world literature is by simply making it plural, leaving it more open and inviting for everyone, especially marginalized groups.  I think it's super important to open up "the canon" so to speak and make it as inviting to academics, authors, and everyone else who wants to be part of the story.  Ronjuanee Chatterjee, Alice Mireles Christoff, and Amy R. Wong really grabbed me with their approach to, as the dubbed it, "Undisciplining Victorian Studies."  As someone who only had been exposed to Victorian authors by choice (either in a college elective course or because I wanted to include them as choice books in my creative writing classes that I was teaching), it was pretty eye-opening to see scholars tackle the almost invisible presence of non-white/English-speaking characters present in a sub-genre that is widely regarded an almost instantly-accepted as part of "the classics."  As a teacher and a graduate student primarily in English and humanities worlds, I have often been exposed to the idea of "othering" but to see non-tenured female professors of color tackling these issues so carefully, it really shows the need for classes like this one.  People should not be afraid to have tough conversations, but I completely understand not wanting to put a target (or maybe even an additional target) on yourself when you are trying to build a career and live your life.  I appreciated that these critics are not calling for abolishment of classic texts, but a re-examination of them from multiple lenses.  They aren't saying that the feminist lens or lens of poverty or even the portrayal of a very specific (albeit narrow) group does not hold value.  A connection between the two texts we read for class this week exposed a massive blindspot for people like me who have surrounded myself with books and literature (and people who discuss them daily) in terms of people who don't talk/look like me.  I think they are onto something important, because I think a lot of educators (even the most stuck-in-their-way or even curmudgeonly) would be more on-board with re-examining the classics, rather than replacing them with contemporary books just because they feature characters who are not-white/English-speaking.  The easy answer is always more new books to replace outdated classic texts.  The tough answer (and in my opinion, probably the right answer) is more new books on top of the classics, which should be taught through as many lenses as possible.  Looking forward to continuing these tough talks throughout the rest of the term and beyond.