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READING WITH ONE EYE, SPEAKING WITH ONE TONGUE: ON THE PROBLEM OF ADDRESS IN WORLD LITERATURE

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In 1959, Frantz Fanon delivered his essay titled “Sur la culture nationale” in a speech to the Black Writers’ Conference in Rome. Cast against the backdrop of the ongoing colonial struggle in Algeria, the ambitiously crafted remarks set out to redefine national culture, examining the dynamic relation of national liberation and cultural production as well as proclaiming the creation of a new public [“un nouveau public”]:

La cristallisation de la conscience nationale va à la fois bouleverser les genres et les thèmes littéraires et créer de toutes pièces un nouveau public. Alors qu’au début l’intellectuel colonisé produisait à l’intention exclusive de l’opresseur, soit pour le charmer, soit pour le dénoncer à travers les catégories ethniques ou subjectivistes, il adopte progressivement l’habitude de s’adresser à son peuple.

[The crystallization of the national consciousness will both disrupt literary styles and themes, and also create a completely new public. While at the beginning the native intellectual used to produce his work to be read exclusively by the oppressor, whether with the intention of charming him or of denouncing him through ethnic or subjectivist means, now the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people.]¹

Not only does Fanon characterize the past, when the colonized intellectual [“l’intellectuel colonisé”] produces work intended exclusively for the oppressor [“à l’intention exclusive de l’opresseur”], he also gestures toward a future

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moment when the colonized writer progressively addresses his own people ["il adopte progressivement l'habitude de s'adresser à son peuple"]. It is striking, however, that these remarks, so emphatic as to resonate throughout the third world, were first delivered in Rome, where, one might imagine, the words fell upon ears distant from the Algerian people to whom the passage makes reference.

When, two years later, "Sur la culture nationale" was included in Fanon's book, *Les Damnés de la terre*, it was none other than the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote the preface. He did so, however, by underscoring how unnecessary his preface was, particularly given the address of the book: "Ce livre n'avait nul besoin d'une préface. D'autant moins qu'il ne s'adresse pas à nous" (54) ["This book had not the slightest need of a preface, all the less because it is not addressed to us" (24)]. What is curious is that Sartre, in speaking of how Fanon's essay addresses a new public, frames this address in terms of its relevance for the European reader, on behalf of whom he asks, "Qu'est-ce que ça peut lui faire, à Fanon, que vous lisiez ou non son ouvrage?" (42) ["What does Fanon care whether you read his work or not?" (12)]. Sartre offers two answers to this question, both of which turn on an emergent self-understanding. First, Fanon's essay reveals "le mécanisme de nos aliénations" (43) ["the mechanism by which we are estranged from ourselves" (13)], and second, "Fanon est le premier depuis Engels à remettre en lumière l'accoucheuse de l'histoire" (44) ["Fanon is the first since Engels to bring the processes of history into the clear light of day" (14)]. In either of these two cases, the immediate historical situation of Fanon's essay becomes important for the European in so far as it functions dialectically toward self-understanding. Strangely, we might say, Fanon's call for the emergence of national address is meaningful in the preface when taken up obliquely by a reader who falls outside the scope of the national public. At the point of publication, the new public at stake in the crystallized national consciousness seems overdetermined by structures of transnational politics, wherein the engaged French philosopher writes his openly self-effacing preface.

Viewed from the perspective of French politics during the period, it is, in effect, little surprise that a figure like Sartre would publish a preface to Fanon's collection of essays. Years earlier, in 1948, he composed "Orphée noir" as a preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre*, and in 1958, he wrote a preface to Henri Alleg's widely circulated *La question*, which offered an account of torture at the hands of the French in Algeria.² One easy way of explaining Sartre's prolific prefaces could point to his institutional positioning in the French literary market, both as a founder of *Les temps modernes* and as one of the most influential, if not the most

widely cited, writers of postwar French thought. His prominent positioning within a French-language literary market meant that his prefaces served not only as an endorsement of certain writers, but also as a crucial affirmation of their presence in and relevance to a French-reading public. Sartre's range of intellectual commitments, implicated as they were in a colonial context, extended beyond the geography of his immediate situation and contributed to his often-transformative solidarity across national borders.

Beyond an immediately historical explanation of Sartre's significance, though, it is worth asking how and in whose terms the problem of address gets spelled out. What happens between Fanon's address to the national public and Sartre's framing of it for the European reader? How does this translation (notably not between languages, but between situations) generate a common idiom of engagement? How might we, in turn, read Fanon's text as readers outside of the particular historical moment of the text's articulated project? Faced as we are with the forked tongue of address from within the opening pages of the book, what might we make of the problem of address, especially when, as readers, we only ever read obliquely?

The gravity of these questions hits at the prevailing assumption that national readers better understand the address of a national text that speaks from and within a culturally intelligible frame. A figure such as Benedict Anderson, who links the emergence of print culture to the imagination of the national community, even suggests an intricate bind between structures of address and national readership.³ The wealth of literature on the cosmopolitan, while aiming for a possible rubric for complicating national models of address, also tends to bracket slippages between reading and addressing.⁴ For all of the important questions these various studies raise, they all tend to skirt the full potential of the nonnational reader or, perhaps more precisely, the reader who is not addressed explicitly by a literary work. More important, however, this reader is at the heart of what gets termed world literature—that most delicate field within which reading and addressing never quite align. And it is this nonnational reader who, intentionally or not, pulls national literature apart at its seams, taking the urgency of a historical situation and reading it otherwise.

Framing world literature as a matter of addressing and reading shifts our understandings of it in crucial ways from some more contemporary formulations. Recent debates often gesture toward the transnational dimension of specific literary texts as a thematic through which to complicate the conventions of national literature. We might think, for example, of critical works that focus on transcultural migration, exile, or displacement and explore the interstitial positioning of a narrator. These studies, often situ-

ated critically against the orthodoxy of national literature, help examine a displaced subject's point of view described within a literary text, but they also have a fairly instrumentalized conception of literature. First, they tend to focus on realist novels or, at the very least, texts whose referentiality bears some resemblance to a knowable location or identity, even if the text itself complicates or nuances the terms of this recognition. Second, they tend to perform literary readings of specific passages, taking as given a definition of literature that presumes and, to a certain extent, universalizes a historically specific practice of literary reading.

Alongside the closely textualized approach is a range of studies that address world literature in terms of globalized networks of literary circulation. Emily Apter, Frederic Jameson, Masao Miyoshi, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Christopher Prendergast, Bruce Robbins, and Haun Saussy each in their own right furnish accounts of how globalization alters the field of literary study.⁵ For many of these scholars, networks of exchange and distribution, often based on economic principles, are emphasized, or interwoven, alongside examples drawn from individual texts. Vilashini Cooppan's notion of "reading globally," or even Emily Apter's efforts to contrast Eric Auerbach and Leo Spitzer in Istanbul, underscores a move to see comparative literature in its integral relation to globalization and to focus on literary texts within a global frame.⁶ Such studies drive the consideration of textuality from a simple contextualization within the nation and instead consider the dynamics of cultural exchange, often by reorienting close reading toward the analysis of cultural fields and models of literary circulation.

While ultimately sympathetic to these efforts at questioning the boundaries of national literature, I want to shift emphasis here. Rather than draw attention to the local conditions of literary production (where a literary text is written), I will focus on the misalignment in the reception of world literature (the location from which a literary text is read). On the one hand, how does a reader make sense of a text when necessarily outside the parameters of address? And, on the other hand, what is the assumed literacy necessary to read a work of world literature? Must a reader experience the text's cultural context in order to be a literate reader? Must all literature be read according to the same literary parameters? What are the limits to literary reading, and in what ways and according to what conditions is literary reading itself globalized? Does the field of world literature presume the universality of literary readers?

In what follows, I hope to trace the implications of the relation between addressing and reading. My first question centers critically on the problem of

address, but also asks how Sartre and Fanon reflect on the noncosmopolitan reader, at once addressed by a literary text but outside the parameters of its assumed literacy. My second line of inquiry moves from the question of address (that is, to whom a text speaks) toward the question of reading (that is, how—and in whose terms—a text is understood). The latter is meant to touch on not only the destined readers of a text but the cultivation of the terms under which this reading occurs. The divergence between these two questions—the first, focused on the conditions of address, and the second, on the conditions of reading—has implications that far exceed the bounds of the specific authors at hand, ultimately driving toward an effort to objectify the cultivated practice of literary reading and the horizon of illiteracy in world literature.

Reading with the Heart

When Sartre published *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* in 1948, he formulated a principle of engaged writing that has subsequently inflected the works of a number of supposedly engaged writers—from Frantz Fanon to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ghassan Kanafani, and Mahmud Darwish.⁷ Sartre's book, comprising four essays, specifically addresses the postwar European writer, whom he urges to take a position with regard to the world, historical conditions, and a concrete public. Against tendencies of what he describes as Heideggerian negativity and eventually links to surrealism, Sartre addresses the writer and argues against any disembodied notion of writing and language. The engagement of the writer for Sartre, as for Fanon, has much to do with the urgency of the immediate situation, understood both in terms of a writer's ethical positioning vis-à-vis the historical moment and the public for whom he or she writes.

For all of the intricacies in Sartre's argument, it is often tempting for critics to focus exclusively on the most polemical—and most quoted—passages. One such example is Sartre's attack on certain schools of modern literature, which he famously characterizes as "a cancer of words" ["La littérature moderne, en beaucoup de cas, est un cancer de mots"] (281). He follows this discussion by proclaiming his disgust for the phenomenon of poetic prose: "En particulier, rien n'est plus néfaste que l'exercice littéraire, appelé, je crois, prose poétique, qui consiste à user des mots pour les harmoniques obscures qui résonnent autour d'eux et qui sont faites de sens vagues en contradiction avec la signification claire" (281) ["There is nothing more deplorable than

the literary practice which, I believe, is called poetic prose and which consists of using words for the obscure harmonics which resound about them and which are made up of vague meanings which are in contradiction with the clear meaning" (228)]. What emerges as engaged literature revolves around the use of language for the purposes of communication, signifying, clearly, against the obscure harmonics ["les harmoniques obscures"] of poetic prose. This distinction, addressed critically by Roland Barthes in *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*, reemerges in Sartre's earlier discussion of his preference for prose (which makes use of language) over and against poetry (of which language makes use) (20–25).⁸ Most crucial is that Sartre, like Fanon, addresses his argument to the writer over and above the reader of literature, and, as a result, the ethical imperative to communicate is a burden for the writer, who is to make the written work understood.

If Sartre deals at length with the responsibility of the engaged writer, he leaves relatively unexplored the question of what constitutes a situated reader. We might ask, though, is there such a thing as engaged reading—or to pose the question more directly, is a reader *ever* situated? What is it to fall within the scope of address? Sartre's preface to Fanon, we might recall, is a moment when one engaged writer marvels at another but falls outside the public described in the essay. An emphasis on reading, as opposed to writing, shifts the terrain of engagement quite radically—what, for the intended national reader, is a matter of coming into consciousness is, for the nonnational reader, a matter of ascertaining the lived reality to which engagement corresponds. Sartre's preface is no exception. The stakes of Fanon's work are explained for the nonnational reader and, as in "Orphée noir," the value for the nonnational reader is grounded on dialectical self-understanding.⁹ The question that Sartre's preface to Fanon seems to raise is not only what constitutes engagement but, almost as urgently, what constitutes being situated, especially when the reader falls outside of the nation addressed.

An answer to this problem emerges, almost tentatively, in a section of Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* titled "Pourquoi écrit-on?" Here, in a more extended manner than in any one of the prefaces, Sartre unravels his concept of the split public. He begins by asking to whom the American writer Richard Wright addresses himself. Sartre notes that Wright does not address a universal man, nor the Southern racialists, but instead the cultivated blacks of the North and the white Americans of goodwill ["il s'adresse aux Noirs cultivés du Nord et aux Américains blancs de bonne volonté"] (86). But Sartre also adds that Wright's extraordinary popularity in Europe does not contradict this mode of address so much as it points to a certain instrumentalization of the reader in the broadening of a possible public: "Ce n'est pas qu'il ne

viser à travers eux tous les hommes: mais ils les visent à *travers eux*” (86) [“It is not that he is aiming through them at all men but it is *through them* that he is thus aiming” (79)]. Thus, it is not a matter of aiming at a universal and abstracted audience through the particular, but a matter of aiming *through* the universal and abstracted audience at the particular.

Sartre, though, does not leave his argument with the abstraction of the general and particular, but drives instead toward the horizon of Wright’s readership. Sartre goes on to add, noting the delicate dynamics of literacy that circumscribe possible publics: “Les paysans noirs analphabètes et les planteurs du Sud représentent une marge de possibilités abstraites autour de son public réel: après tout un illettré peut apprendre à lire” (87) [“The illiterate Negro peasants and the Southern planters represent a margin of abstract possibilities around its real public. After all, an illiterate may learn to read” (79)]. The boundaries of the real public (those European readers of Wright) and the potential public (those illiterate readers who may learn to read) are not absolute; moreover, they by no means limit, in Sartre’s argument, the impact or engagement of Wright’s work. The public described here by Sartre is composed both of actual readers of the text and the potential readers most intimately engaged by the text’s address.

Toward the end of his discussion of publics, Sartre suggests that Wright shares a common experience with those whom he addresses in his literary works. He is thus seen to mediate a particular mode of experience, leading his intended audience to “understand with their hearts” [“avec leur cœur”]: “Pour Wright les lecteurs noirs représentent la subjectivité. Même enfance, même difficultés, mêmes complexes: ils comprennent à demi-mot, avec leur cœur” (87) [“For Wright, the Negro readers represent the subjective. The same childhood, the same difficulties, the same complexes: a mere hint is enough for them; they understand with their hearts” (79)]. Here we turn most intriguingly from the discussion of the boundary between literacy and illiteracy to a particular experience capable of being understood, by virtue of a common situation, with the heart. This turn to the common situation, itself with vast implications for literacy, shifts the terrain toward what Sartre calls, via Baudelaire, “a double simultaneous postulation” [“une double postulation simultanée”], which leads in turn to “a split public” [“un public déchiré”] (88).

We have, then, if we are to speak of split publics, one public for whom the text is a matter of reading and another public for whom the text is a matter of intimate understanding. An engaged writer, it seems, speaks closely to those who can intimately understand while being read by readers outside the immediate situation. Reading properly, in this bifurcated formulation of

literacy, entails ascertaining the appropriate situation for the text to resonate as it would for those who understand with their hearts. Sartre's split public carries with it implications for the problem of world literature, the readers of which are torn between the imagined proximity of intimate address and the conditions of foreign empathy with the particular situation. Seen in this light, fractured between feeling and reading, the line between literacy and illiteracy falls apart. Literacy, in Sartre's analysis of Wright, tends not to be a matter of trained understanding, translation, or deciphering, but a matter of feeling with or being at one with the community of the writer. In a curious twist from Sartre's own engagement within a range of causes, the literary field he unfolds is, at the moment of address, torn between the public of world literature and the public of literary engagement.

Fanon's Experiential Reader

If Sartre is careful to delineate the split public (which he does most frequently when discussing "racialized" writers), then Fanon is less so, leaving addressing and reading entangled in the future project of the nation. In fact, Fanon's essay, which claims to address a national culture, curiously invokes few, if any, national writers. The essay, though, does not simply advocate a global cosmopolitanism so much as it suggests the importance of the national as a crucial site for international struggle. As part of this emphasis on the nation, over and above transnational solidarity, Fanon casts aside the tendency of colonized writers to appeal to the colonizer, and he is also critical of movements such as pan-Arabism and Negritude, which he sees as "more and more cut off from the events of today" (217) ["de plus en plus coupée de l'actualité" (263)]. Fanon carefully distances himself from an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature: "La culture nationale n'est pas le folklore où un populisme abstrait a cru découvrir la vérité du peuple" (281) ["A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature" (233)]. The question of address, then, is not some mystically conceived solidarity on the basis of abstracted categories of identification, but is directly linked "to the ever-present reality of the people" (233) ["rattachable à la réalité présente du peuple" (281)]. National literature, as Fanon tells us, "calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation" (240) ["convoque tout un peuple à lutter pour l'existence nationale" (288)]. It is the calling, coupled with the urgency of the liberation struggle, that ultimately helps Fanon differentiate

his national culture from the static modes of nationhood at play in other studies. In his formulation, the nation is not something to be described and analyzed as though it exists as a sort of given so much as that which needs to be called into existence.

Fanon thus situates the nation in the future as the most concrete set of experiences for people engaged in a common situation. What is especially revealing is the role he ascribes to literature in this common, national situation. As part of a turn toward national literature, Fanon describes the role of storytellers, citing the “example of Algeria” (240) [“l’exemple de l’Algérie”], where: “A partir de 1952-1953, les conteurs, stéréotypés, et fatiguants à écouter, bouleversent de fond en comble et leurs méthodes d’exposés et le contenu de leurs récits” (289) [“From 1952 on, the storytellers, who were before that time, stereotyped and tedious to listen to, completely overturned their traditional methods of storytelling and the contents of their tales” (240–41)]. He goes on to suggest, “Le colonialisme ne s’y est pas trompé qui, à partir de 1955, a procédé à l’arrestation systématique de ces conteurs” (289) [“Colonialism made no mistake when from 1955 on it proceeded to arrest these storytellers systematically” (241)]. The storyteller, in this account, curiously takes on significance at the moment of national crisis, when the traditional methods are completely overturned. Fanon does not invoke any national canon, accumulating heroic writers from the past, nor does he celebrate the storytellers in any traditional terms. Instead, noting how the storytellers abandon their methods and contents, Fanon suggests that national literature emerges at the point it addresses the people in a meaningful way—that is, not “cut off from the events of the day” [“coupée de l’actualité”].

Midway through his essay, Fanon goes on to cite a literary example, which he transposes in its entirety. Most intriguingly, for an essay on national culture, he does not draw from an Algerian literary text, but instead from a poem by Keita Fodeba, minister of internal affairs for what was then Guinea:

Si j’ai choisi ce long poème, c’est à cause de son incontestable valeur pédagogique. Ici, les choses sont claires. C’est un exposé précis progressif. La compréhension du poème n’est pas seulement une démarche intellectuelle, mais une démarche politique. [...] Il n’y a pas un colonisé qui ne reçoive le message contenu dans ce poème. (279)

[If I have chosen to quote this long poem, it is on account of its unquestioned pedagogical value. Here, things are clear; it is a precise, forward-looking exposition. The understanding of the poem is not

merely an intellectual advance, but a political advance. . . . There is not a single colonized person who will not receive the message that this poem holds.] (231)

The problem of reading properly takes on almost mythical proportions—to be able to understand this specific text, not as an intellectual exercise, but by virtue of how it speaks to the public: “Il n’y a pas un colonisé qui ne reçoive le message contenu dans ce poème.” First, it would seem that the “colonized person” here comes to take the place of the national subject, addressed by national literature, and second, that a certain, altered conception of literacy is at stake. At this instant, addressing seems to foreclose the possibility of *a* reading, and any interpretive struggle seems subordinate to the capacity of the work to call to its readers, united in a common experience of colonization. It is interesting to note here that Fanon does little by way of exploring any hermeneutic questions. The reception of a literary text, throughout his argument, derives less from any trained interpretation than it does from common experience, framed here as the proximity of a text to the people and the historical urgency of their condition.

As though a reverberating echo of Sartre’s reading of Richard Wright, Fanon celebrates the engaged writer, in this case Keita Fodeba, for the commitment to a particular set of experiences indelibly linked to the audience most closely addressed. For Fanon, like Sartre, comprehension appears less a matter of textual analysis than a common set of experiences—figured here not in terms of the nation, but in terms of the colonized person. With a distinction drawn between intellect and politics, and with politics rooted in the grounds of common experience, we are led to ask what mode of analysis is at stake in this figuration of those addressed. In what way does a text call out to be understood, and are there multiple possible readings of a single text? Who or what speaks on behalf of the experience to which an engaged literary text is tied? Are unintended readers left grasping at the historical situation within which every text must be understood? Is the appropriate ground for this situation always necessarily one of experience—and among those addressed, are all experiences necessarily common? These questions open further when one considers how the language in which Fanon’s essay is written delimits its public—that is, how an essay written in French addressing the national public of Algeria articulates the intricate problem of national literacy among Arabic, Berber, and French.¹⁰

While Anderson—and, to a certain extent, those working under the rubric of cosmopolitanism—describe reading communities, Fanon speaks directly to the writer about conjuring a nation in the future anterior made

possible by how the text itself speaks to its immediate community. No longer a question of the reader in any given or predisposed sense, Fanon's future focus introduces the possibility of a completely new public. We might say, in other words, Fanon entwines the problem of reading and addressing not in terms of who has read or is reading a certain text, but in terms of who will have read it. Fanon's essay, then, seems to oscillate between two publics, speaking descriptively of what has been and what is, while at the same time calling for a prescriptive refiguration of the national-cultural terrain. Implicit in this argument is a horizon where the potential reading public (those who are addressed and yet unable to read) will become actualized readers.

Reading with One Eye, Speaking with One Tongue

Published in 1969, ten years after Fanon's talk in Rome, al-Tayyib Salih's *Marwsim al-hijrah ila al-shamal* is a novel read across the Middle East, outside of its Sudanese national culture, and, thanks to Denys Johnson-Davies' translation (*Season of Migration to the North*), in English departments across the United States.¹¹ If Fanon and Sartre link engagement to the particularity of a historical situation, then Salih's novel appears to operate outside the possibility of a singular context, dealing as it does with a dislocation that results from the interstitial positioning between the Sudan and England. The novel, richly analyzed by scholars in Middle East literatures and postcolonial studies, unfurls the converging stories of the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed, who, having stood trial in England for the supposed murder of a number of women, returns home and ignores his previous life abroad.¹² When Mustafa Sa'eed dies, he leaves the narrator to take care of his family, and the narrator, unable to act, allows Mustafa Sa'eed's widow to be remarried to an older and notably disrespected man in the village, Wad Rayyes. With a dramatic murder at the novel's conclusion, a number of critics have been intrigued by the dynamic interplay of colonial desire and violence, as well as the novel's often explicit flirtation with other literary texts such as William Shakespeare's *Othello* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Part of what fascinates so many readers of the novel, above and beyond its literary and psychoanalytic dimensions, is also how it plays out the position of the internally exiled—a narrator who is at once part of and separate from his homeland. Persuasive and intriguing as these readings are, I want to focus here more closely on how the novel stages within it a problem of address. In fact, embedded in the novel, in a manner unlike either Sartre

or Fanon's essays, is a theory of the conflicted reader. At the heart of the story is not only the clandestine solidarity between two English speakers but also a secret notebook whose pages are empty with the exception of a dedication.

First, much of the novel focuses on the shared secret between the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed, both of whom come to know of the time they each spent abroad in London. The secrecy of this bond, in turn, leads to a sort of private mode of address, one that most often occurs in English and in terms outside the immediate national public presented. In an especially revealing scene, the novel's narrator opens the door to the secret room of Mustafa Sa'eed, using a key left to him upon Mustafa Sa'eed's death. For once, this almost mythological figure we have come to know through stories, accounts, and testimony is made intelligible through his collection of objects—photographs, books, and letters—all of which have been secretly hidden away. The narrator, himself deeply implicated in the life of the deceased, wanders into the room, where, as he tells us, he was met by dampness and an odor like that of an old memory [رطوبة من الداخل ورائحة مثل ذكرى قديمة استقبلتني (161)]. As he explores the darkened room, he rummages through old letters, photographs, and paintings, many of which resonate quite strongly with what we, as readers, have come to know about Mustafa Sa'eed over the course of the narrative. Without any light by which to see through the darkness of this abandoned room, the narrator lights matches, which flicker here and there, as he explores Mustafa Sa'eed's peculiar archive of the mysterious.

This scene is remarkable not only for its curious writing style, which tends to employ the nominal sentence here more than anywhere else, but also for its unique manner of staging objects and memories. What we encounter is not so much stories of Mustafa Sa'eed, but his quasi-Proustian memorabilia, intelligible to the narrator by virtue of his knowledge of the alternate context within which Mustafa Sa'eed lived. As the narrator rummages through the room, he eventually comes across a notebook, which he, as a literate reader, is able to discern:

و فتحت كراسة وقرأت على الصفحة الأولى : << قصة حياتي – بقلم مصطفى سعيد >> .
و في الصفحة التالية الإهداء : << إلى الذين يرون بعين واحدة ويتكلمون بلسان واحد و يرون
الأشياء أما سوداء أو بيضاء أما شرقية أو غربية >> (179)

[Opening a notebook, I read on the first page: "My Life Story—by Mustafa Sa'eed." On the next page was the dedication: "To those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue, and see things either as black or white, either Eastern or Western."] (150–51)

More than almost any other object in the room, the notebook unfolds the problem of reading as it relates to questions of address, implicating the narrator in a curious bind. On the one hand, he is privy to the secret room, capable of reading the history of the various objects and deciphering the words of this life story. On the other hand, though, this literacy itself becomes the limit of address and contributes to his realization that the notebook, as such, is not meant for him. What is more is that the notebook, as the narrator tells us, is completely blank, hollow with the exception of the title and the dedication. What matters, then, is not so much what is written between the pages, but the reader to whom they are addressed: "To those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue, and see things either as black or white, either Eastern or Western." [>> إلى. الذين يرون بعين واحدة ويتكلمون بلسان واحد و يرون الأشياء أما سوداء أو بيضاء أما شرقية أو غربية <<]

I settle on this particular moment in this rather intricate novel, in part, because this scene has had a rather crucial critical afterlife. Saree Makdisi's thoughtful essay ends with a reference to the dedication of Mustafa's notebook: "While Mustafa Said's [*sic*] life story is dedicated to a reader who could not possibly exist, *Season of Migration of the North* is dedicated to readers who do not yet exist; those who can simultaneously see with two eyes, talk with two tongues, and see things both as black *and* white."¹³ The tendency to shift from this scene toward a larger moralized reading of the novel, awaiting its reader, is further elaborated in Patricia Geesey's analysis. Her essay is explicit in its citation of Makdisi:

For Makdisi, the moral of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* may be found in a paraphrasing of Mustafa Sa'eed's dedication. Instead of the riddle's expressed singularity of seeing with "only one eye" (150), Makdisi proposes that the message Salih intended for readers of his novel is that the work is dedicated "to those who can simultaneously see with two eyes, talk with two tongues, and see things both as black and as white" (820). This ideal reader then, will acknowledge the hybridity and duality of all cultural forms and experience.¹⁴

From Makdisi's conclusion, echoing Fanon's invocation of a reader yet to come, Geesey shifts to the problem of the "ideal reader," which she in turn links to the "hybridity and duality of all cultural forms and experience." What is striking is that both Makdisi and Geesey rely in their respective analyses on an outright disavowal of the dedication. Both, in their own right, take the dedication of Sa'eed's notebooks as an absurd quotation, one that is necessarily inverted in the narrative logic of the text.

It is interesting that *Mawsim al-hijrah ila al-shamal* does stage the problem of address so prominently in this empty notebook within a novel. It is also striking that, for a novel so tied to the role of storytelling, this scene is one of the only when we see the narrator as a reader being addressed through the reading of a book. And yet, we might wonder what it is about the status of the dedication, its confessed singularity, that causes critics to explode it beyond its bounds and to see in it nothing but a most absurd invocation of nativism. What, for example, would differentiate Fanon's new public from the reader Makdisi imagines? How does the forked tongue of Sartre's preface relate us to the dynamics at play in this particular scene and the critical readings of it? At this most curious moment in *Mawsim al-hijrah ila al-shamal*, how are we to understand the disavowal of literacy—the legible, but unintelligible dedication to the reader who will not be able to read it?

For one, both Makdisi and Geesey look to expand the scope of the reader, insisting that the novel stages within itself the problem of intercultural positioning. They, in turn, do what Sartre did not. Each insists that the novel is, in effect, destined for the global reader—a reader who would be, in other words, cosmopolitan. What we do not see, then, is a reading of the notebook that would reveal Sartre's response to Fanon, claiming that this text is not addressed to you, but may still hold its critical importance. Second, and perhaps most important, these various analyses of the dedication take the reader as such, without pushing further to investigate what types of reading are at stake in what is termed literacy.

The very gesture to correct the type of reader described is symptomatic of broader tendencies in the field of world literature, which, with the best of intentions, tries to expand the scope of literature to be as inclusive as possible. The tendency to think through hybridity, multilingualism, transnationalism, or cosmopolitanism, for example, calls into question the role of the nation and national belonging, but it leaves intact a certain privileged role for literature itself—as the domain within which these questions are asked and negotiated. In the instance described above, however, the journal delimits its public in a contradictory form of impossible address as the readers to whom the text speaks are unable to read the text itself. Rather than assuming that world literature is some transcendent field of potential readers, it is worth considering the conditions by which literary reading is made possible and some of the ways, in instances such as the one above, that literature posits its own limitations. Here, we might point at once to the impossibility of a text's direct address and to the question of what is excluded from the horizon of literary reading. This limitation, raised in al-Tayyib Salih's novel, returns us

once again to the conundrum formulated in the split public at stake in the work of Fanon and Sartre.

The Limits of Cosmopolitanism

While throughout this essay I have gestured toward the oblique relation of reading and addressing, I would like to close by considering ways in which the Sartrean split public, torn between those who read analytically and those who read with their hearts, actually disrupts any cosmopolitan vision of world literature. If, in one account, reading is a matter of evaluating a text based on inferences of its situation, then, in another, reading appears as a sort of pure address within which the mediating structures of language disappear, taken over by common experience. There is, of course, an absurdity in the opposition between these two types of reading, and certainly a supposedly analytic reading always entails its own passionate relation. We might recall, for example, those moments when Sartre's passionate engagement derives from a heartfelt reading of a text for which he is assumedly outside the parameters of address. What I want to question, though, are the terms of responding to and resolving the conditions of this sort of affective relationship to world literature.

One means of responding to the opposition of analytic readers and heartfelt readers would necessarily turn back on a hybrid model where learning about the cultural context of a literary work enables the reader to be moved as would someone from within the parameters of address. Students of world literature, the answer goes, through the study of many languages and histories, can learn to approximate an intimate response to the text. Seen in this light, literature and its capacity to move the reader become the domain of a universalized, cosmopolitan discourse of the value of culture. In this formulation, learning to read is a precondition to a certain type of learning how to feel, and the most effective texts of world literature are those that move the reader in spite of where they are written or on account of how they articulate the particularity of the location they inhabit. Here, legibility is as much a matter of affirming literary norms that structure the possibility of particularisms as it is a matter of appealing to supposedly universal human sentiments.

I want to point to another possible response to the split between addressing and reading. Rather than argue for the incorporation of differences within the field of the literary, might there be a way in which literature can

begin to question the terms of its exclusions? Mustafa Sa'eed's dedication is, after all, less a text awaiting a cosmopolitan reader, who sees with two eyes and speaks with two tongues, than it is a text awaiting its impossible reader, who reads with one eye and speaks with one tongue. Perhaps what is needed, above and beyond Geesey's universalization of the hybrid, is a more acute sense of the noncosmopolitan—that is, what lies outside a global literary paradigm. Whether the novel is the place to look for such formulations of exclusion is a fair question.

It strikes me that one way of responding could look to how novels framed as stories of literacy construct or represent the illiterate. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, whose title is drawn from Sartre's preface to Fanon, recounts the story of a young woman going through a system of colonial schooling and growing increasingly alienated from her family.¹⁵ The novel's narrator, Tambu, tells us of her coming into literacy and how, at the same time, her mother, initially shown as caring and concerned, develops (what is for Tambu) an incomprehensible skepticism of her daughter's literacy. Herein the novel unfurls the conditions of its own iterability—the legibility of a point of view with which to empathize.

Part of analyzing the problematic aspects of reading and addressing, I would argue, lies in isolating how these stories, spoken through the paradigm of a modern educational program, are themselves implicated in the conditions through which they are told. The challenge here is to puzzle over how a position of illiteracy is rendered comprehensible in the novel and how, in a certain sense, a form of novelistic knowing is always already engaged in the construction of its epistemological other. The limit of literary experience, then, is the illegibility of the untold story of the illiterate—that is, those characters, such as the narrator's mother, who point to the seeming impossibility of a form of empathy on her own terms. She cannot, after all, be the subject that her daughter becomes through a form of literate address, inscribed in this first-person testimonial.

Beyond locating examples of characters representing illiteracy, though, a second response might stem from an inquiry into the epistemological presumptions of what gets termed proximate experience and, in turn, engagement. What sorts of experience does literacy—or more particularly, a form of writing in the novel or the essay—make conceivable? Is there a difference between the experience of Wright's illiterate public or Fanon's national readership and the student of world literature? These questions necessarily bracket the problem of engagement in order to ask about the conditions through which engagement is understood. What is the role of literature in the construction of experience, and does a literate experience differ from an

illiterate experience? How does an understanding of experience inflect the sense of a text's engagement? Were answers to these questions to stem solely from within the parameters of literature, then the very critical crux of the questioning might fall by the wayside. For literature to understand its implication in the hegemonic vocabulary of what it means to feel, experience, and act as a subject, it is necessary to ask, perhaps with heightened sensitivities, what is excluded from the paradigm of world literature. Far from marveling at a range of novels from around the world, it is worth asking what forms of experience are constructed in literature and how these forms of experience ground a particular—and not necessarily universal—relationship to the world and to the supposedly human subject.

Even though both Sartre and Fanon appear to inscribe a common conception of engagement closely linked to the situation of the writer and the immediacy of those addressed, they each, in their own way, end up, intentionally or not, complicating the cosmopolitan readership within which they are themselves embedded. In a common concern for the mechanisms of address, both Sartre and Fanon end up privileging a certain intuitive reception of a text. Literacy, for both writers, is intricately entwined with the ability to understand not only the language and phrasing of a text but, more fundamental still, the lifeworld from which it emerges. In this sense, Sartre's heartfelt readers (who understand with their hearts) and Fanon's apparent antiliterariness (in which a poem is not *merely* an intellectual advance) inaugurate the formulation of an alternate horizon of literacy, one that throws into question the terms within which so-called literary—dare I say cosmopolitan—readings occurs.

What the intuitive readership of Sartre, Fanon, and, to a certain extent, al-Tayyib Salih unravel is the problem by which literature, at its most engaged, tries to erase the conditions of its possibility—the assumed literacy of its public. If cosmopolitanism is the dream of a world republic of letters and if each of these three texts gestures toward a form of pure address to a noncosmopolitan public, then the tension plays out not so much on the level of who reads and who does not, but, more crucially, on the level of what gets deemed authentic experience. And if experience is at stake, then it is a matter of questioning what experience counts as proximate and how literature stems from this fiction, in the literal and figurative sense, of proximity. In each of these texts, the experience of the reader is oblique in that it does not align with the fiction of the pure public who lives what the literary text can, at its best, only ever describe. This fiction—the situated text and its indelible relation to the experience of a people—is, I would argue, a prevailing presumption of world literature and integral to conceptions of engaged writing.

It would be tempting, of course, to read these moments of impossible address as possible contradictions or as digressions from a main line of argument regarding engagement. And yet, such formulations, counterintuitive though they may seem, actually lead us to a series of key questions about those literary texts that are taken up now as much as ever by readers outside the immediate national audience. The schism between an impossible address (to those readers who cannot read) and the universalization of a potential public (of those who will have learned how to read) guides us beyond the blank pages of Mustafa Sa'eed's notebook and into the larger frame within which world literary texts are read. At a time when literary markets actively exceed national borders, the often-oblique interplay between reading and addressing compels us to consider not only the dynamics of a global public and the limits of cosmopolitan readership but also the grounds of literacy, politics, and engagement.

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Notes

1. Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 288, trans. by Constance Farrington as *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 240. Hereafter, these works will be cited together, with the page number of the original preceding that of the translation.
2. See Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948); and Henri Alleg, *La Question* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1961). For a useful anthology of Sartre's writings on colonialism, see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 1991).
3. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991).
4. See Carol Breckenridge's edited collection, *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002); Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997); and Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998).
5. See Emily Apter, *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999); David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003); Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998); Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel* (New York: Verso, 1998) and "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* (January/February 2001); Christopher Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature* (New York: Verso, 2004); Bruce Robbins, *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York: New York UP, 1999); and Haun Saussy, ed., *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006).
6. Vilashini Cooppan, "Ghosts in the Disciplinary Machine: The Uncanny Life of World Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 41.1 (2004): 12; Emily Apter, "Global Translation: The 'Invention' of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933," *Critical Inquiry* 29.2 (Winter 2003).
7. For insight on Sartre's impact on a number of third world writers, see Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1987).

8. Published in 1953 as a book and previously published piecemeal in the journal *Combat* (1947 and 1950), Roland Barthes' *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1953) offers astute reflections on a whole lineage of literary history with attention to style, form, and poetics (Sartrean taboos), as well as a particularly overt critique of Sartre's landmark *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*

9. See Senghor, ix–xlv.

10. Fanon, who was born in Martinique, lived in France during the war, and then moved to Algeria, spoke French but virtually no Arabic. His interviews with Algerian soldiers, many of which compose the bulk of anecdotal references in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1952), were made possible via translators.

11. See al-Tayyib Salih, *Ma'wsim al-hijrah ila al-shamal* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, n.d.), trans. by Denys Johnson-Davies as *Season of Migration to the North* (London: Heinemann, 1969). I am thinking here, for example, of the range of non-Arabophone critics who have taken up this text in recent years such as Gayatri Spivak, who draws from the novel in her assessment of comparative literature in *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003).

12. See, for example, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, "Legacies of Darkness: Neocolonialism, Joseph Conrad, and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*," *ARIEL* 30.4 (Fall 1999): 7–33; John E. Davidson, "In Search of a Middle Point: The Origins of Oppression in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*," *Research in African Literatures* 20.3 (1989): 385–400; Sonia Ghattas-Soliman, "The Two-Sided Image of Women in *Season of Migration to the North*," in *Faces of Islam in African Literature*, ed. Kenneth W. Harrow (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 91–103; and Muhammad Siddiq, "The Process of Individuation in al-Tayyib Salih's Novel *Season of Migration to the North*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 9 (1978): 67–104.

13. Saree Makdisi, "The Empire Renarrated: *Season of Migration to the North* and the Re-invention of the Present," in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 547.

14. Patricia Geesey, "Cultural Hybridity and Contamination in Tayeb Salih's *Ma'wsim al-hijrah ila al-shamal* (*Season of Migration to the North*)," *Research in African Literatures* 28.3 (Fall 1997): 138–39.

15. Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1989).