

# Introduction

This issue of *Textus* is devoted to the ways in which globalisation is changing literature. As has often been the way, literary scholars arrive at a new and urgent subject long after economists, politicians, tourists and, needless to say, criminals have explored the territory before them. We all suspect that globalisation must be affecting literature, but most of us are not in a hurry to define how. It feels safer to go on living in our nineteenth-century departments, those would-be ivory castles that have begun to feel more like ivory basements. But globalisation *is* happening, like it or not, and English is an essential component – linguistically and culturally, in fact, English is *the* central component, a hub every globetrotter must go through to be really global. In this process, the importance of translation, from and into English, cannot be over-emphasised. This is why some of the essays in this volume deal with English translations of non-English authors.

A convenient vantage point for viewing our subject can be found in minority literatures, apparently located at the greatest distance from global literature. The dialectic between local and global is a complex mixture of defensive strategies and attempts at finding one's own particular space in the global scenario. Responses to this conundrum are various and often contradictory, which is part of their fascination, be it the troublesome relationship of Dutch novelists to English in the last decades analysed by Tim Parks, the position of minority-language poets in Ireland, Scotland and Italy discussed by Edoardo Zuccato, or the condition of literature in bilingual Malta outlined in Clare Vassallo's essay. Multilingual nations where English is an official language are privileged areas of inquiry. Eleonora Gallitelli's study on recent fiction in India shows

how profoundly the reality of a global readership can influence our sense of what constitutes literary value.

These issues, however, do not concern minority languages alone. Globalisation is challenging the very notion of minority, since on a global scale English has minoritised all the other languages. Building on the notion that postcolonial writing in European languages amounts to a form of translation without an original, Elena Di Giovanni discusses the meaning and function of translation in Africa with particular reference to Hama Tuma, an expat Ethiopian writer and political activist. And these questions are not confined to literature. The Syrian-American hip-hopper Omar Offendum discussed by Stefania Taviano is a case in point. The hybridity of his art, the practice of self-translation and paratranslation, the combination of text, music and performance, are analysed in relation to each other from what is now a well-established postcolonial perspective. A more traditional confidence in translation is expressed by another Syrian author, the woman poet Al-Masri, whose relation to her work in other languages is the subject of Annalisa Bonomo's essay.

Though globalisation is a contemporary question, it makes itself felt in the way authors from the distant past are translated and received, especially when they come from cultures unfamiliar to Western readers. An interesting example is offered by Car Yue Chan, who discusses the problems posed by the recent English translation of a poetess who lived during the Song Dynasty. Finally, Silvia Pireddu's essay is a linguistic analysis of literary reviewing, a field where changing styles suggest that the effects of global standardisation are not going to stay within the borders of literature itself, but are already spilling over into the terrain of criticism.