



The Pagan Writes Back: When World Religion Meets World Literature (Studies in Religion and Culture)

Zhange Ni

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In the first book to consider the study of world religion and world literature in concert, Zhange Ni proposes a new reading strategy that she calls "pagan criticism," which she applies not only to late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literary texts that engage the global resurgence of religion but also to the very concepts of religion and the secular. Focusing on two North American writers (the Jewish American Cynthia Ozick and the Canadian Margaret Atwood) and two East Asian writers (the Japanese Endō Shōmei and the Chinese Gao Xingjian), Ni reads their fiction, drama, and prose to envision a "pagan (re)turn" in the study of world religion and world literature. In doing so, she highlights the historical complexities and contingencies in literary texts and challenges both Christian and secularist assumptions regarding aesthetics and hermeneutics.

In assessing the collision of religion and literature, Ni argues that the clash has been not so much between monotheistic orthodoxies and the sanctification of literature as between the modern Western model of religion and the secular and its non-Western others. When East and West converge under the rubric of paganism, she argues, the study of religion and literature develops into that of world religion and world literature.

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