

Introduction to World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century

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**Marko Juvan,**

**"Introduction to *World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century*"**

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 15.5 (2013)**

Special Issue ***World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century*. Ed. Marko Juvan**

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## **Introduction to *World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century*** **Marko JUVAN**

The "traveling concept" of world literature (Bal), however global and topical it may seem, proves to be but a locally specific European invention (see, e.g., Damrosch; D'haen; D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir; Āurišin; Koch; Pizer; Strich). After less known coinage of the term *Weltliteratur* by August Ludwig von Schlözer in 1773 (see Schamoni), it was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who launched the notion in an 1827 article on Duval's *Le Tasse*. During the last years of his life in a semi-peripheral Weimar which he strove to refashion into a German and European cultural capital, Goethe kept using the expression *Weltliteratur* to refer to what appeared to him as an emerging, specifically modern phenomenon: the dawning of an international cultural market, the rapid growth of transport technologies which enable the dynamic inter-lingual and cross-cultural circulation of books, literary works, ideas, forms, themes, and representations, and a transnational networking of cosmopolitan writers and intellectuals striving for a common cause of the "generally human" (Goethe qtd. in Strich 349-51, Eckermann 164-67). Such a *respublica litterarum* had been evolving among humanist intellectuals ever since the fifteenth century, whereas intra-European and inter-continental cultural traffic — for example, the circulation, exchange, and collecting of manuscripts, books, or "exotic" objects — had been taking place along trade routes from the antiquity through the middle ages to the early modern age (see, e.g., Buescu; Burke).

Following Johann Gottfried von Herder's and Wilhelm von Humboldt's praise of culturally diversity and equality of different linguistic expressions (Koch 89-143), Goethe's notion of world literature was an attempt to harmonize universal claims with national concerns. On the one hand, the concept was grounded in the post-Enlightenment humanist and cosmopolitan belief that individual experiences articulated through culturally specific life-worlds are mutually translatable and understandable because of the "generally human" as their spiritual invariant or aesthetic common denominator. On the other hand, however, world literature has been locally perspectivized from the beginning. Goethe articulated the notion of *Weltliteratur* in the context of and with regard to a politically and economically fragmented Germany which lacked its own metropolis and figured as one of the European semi-peripheries. He employed his concept as a strategy of infusing the view of seemingly parochial and belated national literature with world-wide resources and universal aesthetic norms and thus aiming to establish German-language letters as a globally important mediator of cross-cultural communication and a nodal point of transnational networks of literati, as well as an active player on the international literary scene and contributor to a literary repertoire which transcends temporal, linguistic, ethnic, and other boundaries. From this it may be concluded that, in essence, Goethe's perspective on world literature resulted from the post-Enlightenment processes of aesthetic autonomization, individualization, and the nationalization of European literary fields. The term itself — a hybrid of cosmopolitan, nationalist, and aesthetic ideologemes — was shaped in a turbulent context characterized by the declining authority of the Greco-Latin classical canon, the restoration of interstate politics after Napoleonic wars, the beginnings of European nationalisms, and the global growth of the capitalist market. The emergence of the concept of world literature remained inscribed in the word's semantic memory that — implicitly or explicitly — continued to influence its subsequent diffusion and manifold global appropriations and local interpretations thus inducing its users to perceive the global literary landscape from their particular perspectives including specific needs of cultural fields to which they felt to belong.

Although Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, influenced by Goethe's idea through Heinrich Heine, in their 1848 *Communist Manifesto* also declared that world literature was marking the advent of a new historical epoch, Goethe's parallel between the economic and cultural globalization with their transnational social networking and circulation of goods remained almost forgotten until the end of World War II. Since the second half of the nineteenth century it has been largely overshadowed either by anti-cosmopolitan and increasingly chauvinist cultural nationalism that advocated the autochthonous character of individual national literatures or by the value-laden notion of world literature as the universal (Western) canon. The canon of world literature was reserved for masterpieces which, once selected from among the best national literary classics and translated into major (Western) languages, figure as the everlasting cultural heritage of humanity. Both

developments — the former dominating in Europe and the latter in the U.S. — were conditioned by particularistic, even parochial Euro- or Occidentocentric perspectives: the canon of world literature overlapped primarily with European or Western traditions on which different national literatures sought to ground their identity. Such a canon included only few exemplary additions of — mostly pre-modern — writings from the global East and South.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century globalization, postcolonialism, and multiculturalism with its "culture wars," as well as the so-called global war on terror and the crisis of the neo-liberal world economic order have rediscovered the original Goethean and Marxian notions of world literature stressing its complex dynamics, fluidity, antagonism of power, and asymmetrical distribution of cultural capital. From the point of view of the current world wide renaissance of Goethean ideas of transcultural traffic, the circulation of literary goods, and the transnational networking of literary producers, mediators, publishers, readership, and scholars and critics it might seem surprising to find the beginnings of pluralist and de-centered notions of world literature in the above mentioned Occidentocentric and value-laden paradigm of world literature as the canon of "great books." Richard G. Moulton, writing in 1911 in his effort to cultivate US-American undergraduates by providing them with the essentials of Hellenic and Hebraic civilizations which he regarded as fundamentals of Anglo-American culture, underscored the "English point of view." As indicated by the subtitle of his 1913 book, Richard Meyer wrote about twentieth-century world literature "from a German perspective" and in 1949 Fritz Strich stressed that Goethe conceived of world literature "from the point of view of German literature ... the little world system, the microcosmos Weimar" (51). And for John Pizer — a contemporary US-American scholar — world literature "presupposes a specific national perspective" and thus "conjures inevitably different visions, and will inspire quite different canons, in China, France, England, and Japan" (89-90). Moreover, one of the assumptions of Mads Rosendahl Thomsen's book on "shifting focal points in the international canons" is that "world literature ... will always be a world literature as seen from a particular place" (1, 33-60). In my view, the literary world system is accessible cognitively and creatively only through the archives of localized cultural memory and singular cognitive or linguistic perspectives. These show world literature as a set of variant corpora, representations, inspirations, and classifications. World literature is constantly being translated and presented in manifold localized inscriptions, which are the subject of reflection and reworking in different semiospheres. Any literature or literary history sees world literature through the lenses of how they perceive their position within the global literary system (see Juvan 86). And Ning Wang also argues in 2011 for a pluralist conception of "world literatures" claiming that "world literature is represented in different languages" so that "there is no such thing as the singular form of world literature" (296-98). However, no systematic comparative research has been carried out so far that focuses on the pluralist notion of world literature as an always already perspectivized and dynamic global system.

The title of this special issue of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture: World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century* signals that up to the present every national literature, region, migration, and multicultural space has developed its own version of world literature. Therefore, world literature exists as a dynamic, glocalized, and complex network, but conditioned by asymmetrical distribution of economic and cultural power. Contributors to the volume explore and compare the history and the present of mappings of world literature in different literary systems and their particular shaping of global canons. The aim of the volume is to ascertain how particular literary systems, which geoculturally incline to either centrality or peripherality, positioned themselves in the world literary system (on this, see, e.g., Casanova; Moretti) and what was the role of a localized world literature in the identity and literary systems' formation across the globe. Contributors address the following issues: perspectivizing world literature; ancient, pre-modern, European, and Asian world literatures; periodization of world literatures; relations between world literature studies, comparative literary and culture studies, literary transnationalism, and postcolonial studies; world literatures and Orientalism, hegemony, "thirdworldism," and imperialism; world literatures, the international book market, and cultural transfer; the interdependence of world and national literatures; otherness and universality in world literatures; and the global role of peripheral literatures.

*World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century* contains the following articles:

In "Greek, Latin, and the Origins of 'World Literature'"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/2>> Alexander Beecroft argues that while it is hardly new that the models of contemporary comparative and world literature(s) are Eurocentric in their origins and structures, the precise nature of Eurocentrism is less discussed. Beecroft argues that far from representing (as Goethe had wished) the end of national literature, the era of comparative and world literatures has, from its beginnings, been structured specifically around the notion of "national literatures." Beecroft explores the national basis for the study of comparative and world literatures in the nineteenth century with particular attention to the anthologies of Noël and La Place and de Staël's *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* and the representation in each of Greek and Latin as "national literatures." Beecroft argues that the failure of the national literary system to recognize the distinctive nature of these classical languages led to particular challenges to speakers of non-European languages such as Chinese whose own literatures failed to match the national model as they sought to enter the system of world literatures.

In "World Literatures in Temporal Perspective" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/3>>

David Damrosch discusses the vexed problem of how to shape a literary history into definable and meaningful periods without simply projecting old Western patterns onto new ages and distant areas of the world. This problem becomes acute when one seeks to create a genuinely global literary history. Damrosch surveys some early periodizations according to patterns of infancy, growth, maturity, and decline, and discusses the often unrealized persistence of biblical and classical models in modern accounts of the literary histories of Egypt, Mesoamerica, and India.

In "On World Literatures, Comparative Literature, and (Comparative) Cultural Studies"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/4>> Ning Wang argues that cultural studies is characterized by being opposed to (elite) literary studies not only because it points to popular or non-elite literature, but also because it challenges the discipline of comparative literature. On the other hand, (comparative) cultural studies complements literary studies in that it contributes a great deal to the reconstruction of a sort of new comparative literature. Wang illustrates how some of the representative Anglo-American comparatists are now doing cultural criticism while still engaging in comparative literature and they paved the way for dialogue between literary and cultural studies. Therefore, deconstructing and subverting the Eurocentric discipline of comparative literature, (comparative) cultural studies has made a positive impact on the reconstruction of a new discipline of comparative literature and the field of world literatures. It has also enabled a remapping of world literatures by enlarging the canon with non-canonical Oriental literary works.

In "Interculturality and World Literary System(s)"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/5>> Jola Škulj proposes a new framework for studying planetary exchanges of literatures, one that subverts the systemic distinction between centers and peripheries. She advocates a model that can yield the analytical conceptualization and hermeneutic understanding of literary phenomena and their historical reality in the complexity of semiotic traces, in actual distinctiveness of formal and textual deposits, and in interconnections of poetological impacts. She argues that literary facts seen in such intricate networks of mutual intertextual phenomenology and reaccentuations attest to their character of permanent mobility, evident instability, and constant inventive reformulation of verbal and literary matrices, which means that literary texts ought to be reinterpreted through ever new disseminations of literature. In Škulj's view, in the intricacy of cultural memory and cultural transfers it is necessary to keep records of traces which reestablish continually the singular manifestation of literature in a certain geocultural space and to ensure the vitality of world literary system(s).

In "Towards a Symbiotic Coexistence of Comparative Literature and World Literature"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/6>> Jüri Talvet postulates that comparative literature has really never enjoyed a pivotal or central status in the broad field of literary studies, yet at the same time specialized studies of separate literary traditions have not been able to fill numerous gaps in the understanding of literary creation as a broader cultural phenomenon influencing (although often invisibly) the world-view and axiological attitudes of entire societies and vast communities of people. Developing some ideas presented in his book *A Call for Cultural Symbiosis* (2005) and in his article "Edaphos and Episteme of Comparative Literature," *Interlitteraria* (2005), as well as the ideas of Juri M. Lotman, Talvet proposes a symbiotic approach aimed at reconciling extreme oppositions and

establishing a dialogue that would strengthen the position of the discipline of comparative literature, as well as the field of world literatures.

In "World Literatures, Comparative Literature, and Glocal Cosmopolitanism"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/8>> Paolo Bartoloni reflects on the topos of the crisis of literature and the humanities. An urge to question the status and the relevance of literature; to investigate the relation between literature and literary studies; and the location of literature within the context of a transforming world has emerged in the last three decades. Assuming that a bond exists between literature and the world, what is its nature? Is it possible to take an interest in literature without knowing its potential relevance or its world? These questions are related to the serious state of disrepair in which literary studies departments find themselves in the Western world. This essay aspires to contribute to the debate on the place of literature by focusing on the ideas of comparative literature and world literature.

In "Major Histories, Minor Literatures, and World Authors"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/9>> Theo D'haen discusses how the idea of world literature has made a remarkable comeback in literary studies. A major feature of this revival has been increased attention from a "world perspective" to literatures until recently little studied beyond disciplinary boundaries, particularly so some "major" literatures such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and various Indian-language literatures. As such, these literatures have come to join what has usually been thought of as "European" world literature. What this move, however to be welcomed in itself, obscures is the even further peripheralization of a number of "smaller" literatures, amongst them many European ones. Thus world literature in its newly emerging guise is merely upping the ante for such minor literatures, or, alternatively, reshaping such literatures in the image and interest of the few "major" literatures which are deemed worthy of inclusion in the "new" world literature.

In "Worlding Literatures between Dialogue and Hegemony"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/10>> Marko Juvan claims that during its late capitalist renaissance, the Goethean idea of *Weltliteratur* is interpreted either in terms of intercultural dialogism or hegemony embodied in the asymmetrical structure of the world literary system. Launching the concept of *Weltliteratur* during the emergence of the early industrial globalization, Goethe initiated a long-lasting transnational meta-discourse that influenced the development of transnational literary practices. In his aristocratic, cosmopolitan humanism, Goethe expected world literature to open up an equal dialogue between civilizations and languages encouraging cross-national networking of the educated elite. However, his notion of dialogue is marked by the hegemony of Western aesthetic and humanistic discourse based on the European classics. Marx and Engels exposed aesthetic and humanist cosmopolitanism as the ideology masking European bourgeoisie's global economic hegemony and the worldwide expansion of Western geoculture. It is within this ambivalence of dialogism and hegemony that the process of "worlding" (Kadir) and nationalizing of European literatures has taken place since the early nineteenth century.

In "National Literature, World Literatures, and Universality in Romanian Cultural Criticism 1867-1947" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/11>> Andrei Terian analyzes the relevance of systematizing international literary relationships in current theories of world literatures. Terian criticizes the "naturalist" reductionism that still dominates many contemporary studies in the field of world literatures and asserts that a particular feature of the interliterary processes is that they occur not only at the level of mere "facts," but also at the level of cultural "representations" thus supporting various strategies through which national literatures attempt to acquire more favorable positions within world literatures. Terian presents a systemic classification of these strategies and tests the efficiency of the proposed concepts through an analysis of the politics of universality undertaken in Romanian cultural criticism of the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

In "World Humanism(s), the *Divine Comedy*, Lao She's '灵的文学与佛教' ('Literature of the Soul and Buddhism'), and Gao's *Soul Mountain*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/12>> Letizia Fusini analyzes Lao She's and Xingjian Gao's conceptions of literature as an activity concerning the realm of the spirit. Fusini utilizes Dante's *Divine Comedy* for comparison between the literary ideals pursued by the two Chinese writers and regards Lao She's and Gao's humanist and non-political approach underlying their respective notions. Considering Lao She's call for the emergence of a "Chinese Dante" (1941), Fusini contends that China might have found its own "Dante" in Gao who

seems to have shared the same destiny of the exiled Florentine poet. Although Lao She ascribed to the Buddhist clergy the task of creating a Chinese literature of the soul modeled on the *Divine Comedy*, Fusini argues that Gao might have fulfilled this task without resorting to any religious frameworks, but to a personal, intense, and profoundly Chinese spirituality.

In "From Cultural Third-Worldism to the Literary World-System"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/13>> Jernej Habjan links the debate on Franco Moretti's distant reading to the debate on Fredric Jameson's "third world culture." In and around this debate, Aijaz Ahmad both critiqued close reading and rejected Jameson's "Third-Worldism." What Jameson's and Ahmad's interventions into literary theory meant at the end of the real-socialist alternative and what Moretti's meant at the end of the US-American alternative to real-socialism, a synoptic reading of all three interventions might help achieve at the end of what seemed the European alternative to the US-American alternative.

In "Western and Oriental Worlds of Literature and Modern Greek Literature"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/14>> Maro Kalantzopoulou explores the extent to which modern Greek literature can be seen as linked to Western and Oriental literary cultures. She discusses examples of literary phenomena featuring Western influences, as well as works which are linked in different ways to Southeastern Europe in general, the Ottoman world, and Oriental literary cultures. Kalantzopoulou's claim is that scholarship tends to associate modern Greek literature with Western literary cultures and dismisses non-Western contributions and influences. Kalantzopoulou suggests that by acknowledging the historical situatedness of such assumptions and by examining modern Greek literature on different time- and space scales, the relation of modern Greek with Western and Oriental literary cultures could be assessed more productively.

In "The Pan-Asian Empire and World Literatures"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/15>> Sowon S. Park argues that world literature studies have been limited to "Europe and its Others." That is to say, while there has been an increasing preoccupation with literary networks beyond the Western canon since the middle of the last century, the investigations have been restricted to the colonial world and the postcolonial states of the Western powers. The non-Western colonial field of the Pan-Asian empire (1894-1945) — Imperial Japan, colonial Korea, semi-colonial China, and Taiwan — has been not so much relegated to the margins as just passed over. Park recalibrates the dynamics of the "West and the rest" and "center/periphery" models of world literature by bringing an East Asian perspective to the discussion and presents an atypical model that expands the radius, as well as challenges certain accepted norms.

In "The Persistence of 'Cathay' in World Literature"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/16>> Eugene Eoyang argues that China has only recently begun to occupy a place in world literatures as evidenced by the absence of Chinese literature from the early editions of the widely adopted *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* and its token representations in subsequent editions. "Orientalized" images of China still persist partly stemming from the continuing currency of stereotyped images of the Chinese promoted by publishers, by Western Sinologists, and even by expatriate Chinese. A cottage industry has developed which privileges the study of images of China (however distorted and oversimplified) over the often more intractable and less exotic complexities of Chinese literature and Chinese reality.

In "Precarious Cosmopolitanism in O'Neill's *Netherland* and Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/17>> Pier Paolo Frassinelli and David Watson propose a comparative reading of two twenty-first century novels in light of recent debates on cosmopolitanism and precarity. They examine cosmopolitan articulations within a novel dealing with immigrant communities in post-9/11 New York and within a text narrating life in the metropolis of Johannesburg. Both *Netherland* and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* are preoccupied with economic and political precarity in cosmopolitan cities and offer a rich inventory of forms of cosmopolitan desire rooted in modes of life. By aligning and moving between these texts and the transnational networks they represent, Frassinelli and Watson explore the ground for theorizing some of the political questions brought up by contemporary world literature.

In "Strangeness and World Literature" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/18>> Mads

Rosendahl Thomsen argues that world literature has emerged as a supplement to the two dominant paradigms for studies of literature beyond the nation: comparative literature and postcolonialism. Key

questions for all three paradigms are first, what kinds of otherness or strangeness are desirable in literature, and second, how literary circulation is dependent on the representation of otherness. Through a variety of literary examples, Thomsen discusses how strangeness is mediated through genres, bicultural references, and (im)migrant experiences, and how making the local enchanted makes the world stranger to everyone.

*World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century* includes the book review article "Limits to Transculturality: A Book Review Article of New Work by Kimmich and Schahadat and Juvan" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/19>> by Hrvoje Tutek.

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*World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century* is co-published with two further special issues of the journal on the theme of world literatures and comparative literature in 2013: *New Work in Comparative Literature in Europe*. Ed. Marina Grishakova, Lucia Boldrini, and Matthew Reynolds. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 15.7 (2013): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss7/>> and *New Work about World Literatures*. Ed. Graciela Boruszko and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 15.6 (2013): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/>>.

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