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Anglophone World Literatures: Introduction

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1 Rethinking World Literature

World literature has become a buzzword in contemporary literary theory and practice and like any buzzword it has spurred a myriad of controversies, discussions and critical debates. While some scholars have emphatically embraced the term as a conceptual means of opening up the Eurocentric canon and investing literary studies with more, namely worldly, urgency, others have refuted the term for its conceptual vagueness and its consumerist thrust, which would turn literature into yet another global commodity. Accordingly, a number of scholars have emphasised the extent to which ‘world literature’ subordinates literary texts and authors to the logic of an international market that demands the production of easily digestible and evermore standardised literary products (During 2009: 57–58; Casanova 2004: 169–171; Apter 2013: 2–3; Damrosch 2009: 107). Perhaps the most serious criticism has been voiced by various representatives of postcolonial studies. They have repeatedly criticised the term for its tendency to affirm rather than displace the Eurocentrism of both literary practice and theory, arguing that it posits Western literary values as universal ones and thus veils, once again, Western hegemony. Susan Stanford Friedman convincingly notes that “[t]he problem with ‘world literature’ is that it has not been sufficiently global, but has instead replicated the imperial power of the West for the past three hundred or so years by asserting Western culture as the measure of all cultures” (2013: 2). In a similar vein, Aamir R. Mufti in *Forget English!* laments the asymmetries that underlie the very concept of ‘the world’ and emphasises the unequally distributed abilities to engage in configurations of the world. Hence, he states that “[t]he ability to think ‘the world’ itself, whether in a literary-critical thinking or other discourses and practices, is hardly distributed equally across the world” (2016: 10). And Emily Apter, to give one last example, even goes so far as to claim that world literature ultimately propels an aesthetically flattening and politically

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precarious “oneworldedness” and creates “a relatively intractable literary monoculture that travels through the world absorbing difference” (2013: 83). Though Apter is not, as the title of her seminal work suggests, *Against World Literature* (2013), she makes a strong case for emphasising the untranslatable that, according to her, structures literary world-systems. Maintaining that many recent approaches to world literature “rely on a translatability assumption” (2013: 3) that celebrates differences only to market them as “commercialized ‘identities’” (2013: 2), her invocation of the untranslatable seeks to counter the centrifugal and market-driven pressures of the dominant literary world-system.

This is serious criticism indeed, and the question as to why one might bother revitalising ‘world literature’ at all certainly seems warranted. And yet, we believe that, at a time in which the theory and practice of world literature more than ever organises reading lists, scholarly projects, curricula of schools and universities, conference programmes and international markets, the critical engagement with world literature is a worthwhile and timely endeavour. Firstly, such an engagement promises to shed light on the frequently conflicting ways in which literature intersects with the complex dynamics of literary theory, literary markets, educational politics and other agents (such as translators, prize committees and critics) regulating the literary field. Precisely because world literature is bound up with various institutional formations (cf. Thomsen 2008; Mufti 2010; Müller 2014a, 2014b; Helgesson and Vermeulen 2016a, 2016b), can a critical examination of how world literature is brought into being attune us to the political and socio-economic asymmetries that affect not only the circulation and reception, but increasingly also the very production of literature (cf. Brouillette 2007). ‘World literature’, after all, cannot, or at least not exclusively, be coupled to any intrinsic literary structure and value. Rather, it designates a multifaceted and culturally fraught process of ascribing literary, cultural, pedagogical and economic value to specific literary texts (cf. Herrnstein Smith 1988; Rippl and Winko 2013). We believe that a critical engagement with the various institutional, economic and literary factors that come into play in the ascription of world-literary value can reveal some of the socio-political and economic mechanisms structuring academia and the publishing industries alike. Ideally, it might also point a way out of the continuing Eurocentrism of ‘world literature’ that many scholars have rightly criticised.

Secondly, the critical consideration of world literature as a “*concept*”, “*field of study*” and “*institutional framework*” (Mufti 2016: 10) promises to open up new ways of understanding the network of interconnections that shape the multilingual landscapes of literatures at large and of Anglophone literatures in particular. Traditional national models of literary analysis and literary history can hardly account for the entanglements and processes of exchange that both thrive on and transcend locally diversified literary traditions (cf. Jay 2001; Walkowitz

2006; Friedman 2013). In order to advance such an understanding, however, we suggest a rethinking of the concept of world literature, which, broadly speaking, builds on two central premises. Premise 1: we propose acknowledging the plurality of worlds that world literature brings into being, worlds that are made rather than given and that may clash and grapple with each other. Rather than simply understanding ‘the world’ in terms of the global circulation across various national and territorial boundaries, our aim is to put greater emphasis on literary processes of creating worlds, i.e. on the world-making capacities of literature (cf. Cheah 2016; Neumann 2017). The literary worlds of world literature are shaped by the contradictory pull between topographical singularity and transcultural entanglement and might therefore best be understood in terms of Jean-Luc Nancy’s “singular plural” (1996/2000) or Gayatri Spivak’s concept of the planet (2003). The critical endorsement of the world-making potentialities of literature allows us to enact a systematic and not merely terminological shift from world literature (*Weltliteratur*) to *world literatures*. Therefore, and that is our second premise, we argue for a plurality of world literatures that cultivate “a planetary imagination” (Spivak 2003: 96) but are still responsive to local concerns and global asymmetries (cf. Neumann 2017). This means that we do not understand world literatures as a canon of globally circulating works but as open, inherently pluralised texts that are both shaped by and modelled on processes of circulation, translation and exchange (cf. Friedman 2013: 503).

With an eye to these aims and premises, this introduction sets out to provide a brief and certainly selective overview of salient research done in the ever-growing field of world literary studies, rehearsing different definitions and conflicting usages of the term (part 2). Drawing on both this genealogy of scholarship and its criticism, we will, in a next step, suggest a rethinking of world literature that takes as its point of departure the plurality of poietic worlds and their conflicting relations to the worlds construed through institutional frameworks (part 3). In part 4 we will discuss what the concept of world literatures can add to our understanding of Anglophone literatures, which, due to centuries-long histories of exchange, entanglement and transfer are shaped by a contradictory pull between the local and the transcultural. Here we will also discuss how “the rise of English as global literary vernacular” (Mufti 2016: 11) affects literary world systems, possibly fostering what many scholars decry as the Anglocentrism of contemporary world literature. And finally, part 5 traces the routes through the various essays assembled in this special issue, providing an overview of some of the central arguments put forward in the contributions.

2 World Literary Studies – Approaching the World

The multifaceted genealogy of the concept of world literature, from its inception by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to its various travels through the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Erich Auerbach and Edward Said, is well-established and need not be rehearsed once again.¹ Suffice it here to say that the term, from its beginning, has been inseparable from processes of globalisation and concomitant forms of transcultural transfer, which picked up pace ever since the 18th century (cf. Neumann 2017). It was famously Goethe who, conversing with Peter Eckermann on January 31, 1827, programmatically proclaimed an imminent “epoch of World-Literature” (Goethe et al. 1850/1975: 213). Possibly inspired by his recent reading of a Chinese novel, Goethe notes that at a time in which literature more than ever circulates across borders, the term ‘national literature’ has lost its epistemological validity: “National literature is now an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is now at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach” (Goethe et al. 1850/1975: 213). In a number of other writings, Goethe (Goethe, Birus and Bohnenkamp-Renken 1830/1999; Goethe and Fleig 1825/1993: 277) puts forward several arguments for this sweeping claim, amongst others economic changes, novel technologies as well as new modes of communication and transportation. According to Goethe (Goethe, Birus and Bohnenkamp-Renken 1830/1999: 870, 866), these rapid transformations accelerate global traffic and establish new trading routes, which bind people, commodities, finance and literature into complex networks of exchange (cf. Stockhammer 2009: 259; Borsò 2014: 21).

Almost two centuries later Goethe’s ideas still touch a nerve and seem to have lost little of their socio-political urgency. For one, they remind us of the extent to which the possibility of world literature is linked with various forms of circulation and mobility, enabled and enhanced by a global economic market. *Weltliteratur*, for Goethe, does not so much designate a fixed canon of literary classics but a “universal possession of mankind” (Goethe et al. 1850/1975: 212). This possession, however, is intimately tied to technologies of communication and modes of transportation, which jointly turn the world into a seemingly undivided, traversable and quantifiable space (cf. Spivak 2003: 72; Mufti 2016: 5) and thus make it available for trade. Ultimately, Goethe, by emphasising the links between ‘intellectual’ and ‘economic commerce’ (Goethe, Birus and Bohnenkamp-Renken 1830/

¹ For an overview of the term’s history see, for instance, Apter (2013), Hitchcock (2010), D’haen (2012), Helgesson and Vermeulen (2016b).

1999: 870), also points to the extent to which world literature is susceptible to processes of commodification.

Moreover, the founding scene reveals a paradox at the heart of world literature: Though gesturing towards “a cosmopolitan or ‘one-world’ reality” (Mufti 2016: 3), world literature is firmly entrenched in the particular. That is to say that it builds on the Romantic notion of separate cultures, each of which possesses distinct literary traditions (cf. Birus 2004; Müller 2014b; Mufti 2016: 3). For as much as Goethe invokes the universality of world literature, he identifies distinct cultural and/or national literatures and even posits hierarchical relations between them. At no point does Goethe transcend the typical national categorisation of literature; as a matter of fact, he even celebrates the works of “the ancient Greeks” as normative pattern of “beauty” (Goethe et al. 1850/1975: 213). The concept of world literature, it seems, is fraught with power structures and inequities, which assert the universality of particular norms, values and patterns of reception. Given the term’s European genealogy and its firm entrenchment in various forms of European nationalism, colonialism and Orientalism (cf. Hitchcock 2010: 5; Siskind 2010; Müller 2014b; Mufti 2016), it is hardly surprising that the right to define ‘universality’ has primarily been claimed by Western scholars and critics.

At least to some extent, this Western bias still marks much current scholarship done in the field of world literature, a field that has risen to new prominence ever since the mid-1990s.² In particular those approaches that are based on the world-system analysis and its assumption of a unitary, though unequal world, divided into centre, semi-periphery and periphery, are prone to replicating existing power structures (cf. Apter 2013: 8).³ Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* (published in French in 1999 and in English in 2004) and Franco

² Though the term has enjoyed a remarkable presence in academic and public discourse ever since its inception, it has seen a virtual boost since the 1990s. There seem to be various reasons for this renewed interest, amongst others “the promise of worldly criticism [and] politicized cosmopolitanism” (Apter 2013: 7), which could respond to both geopolitical changes and neoliberal pressures on the humanities. According to Hitchcock, the popularity of world literature has much to do with its “assumed neutrality” that “allows one to consume postcolonialism without that nasty taste of social struggle in which a reader’s own cosmopolitanism may be at stake” (Hitchcock 2010: 5).

³ Broadly speaking, world-system theory, most explicitly spelled out by Immanuel Wallerstein and Ferdinand Braudel, explains the hegemony of the West since 1500 with its dominance of a capitalist world system, dividing the world into centre, semi-periphery and periphery. Accordingly, so-called core states, characterised by a strong economy and a marked sense of national identity, control the development of the global economic system and concomitant exchange of commodities and information (cf. Jay 2001: 34).

Moretti's "Conjunctures on World Literature" (2000), both of which understand global exchange primarily along patterns introduced by Western capitalism, may illustrate what is at stake here (cf. Spivak 2003; Prendergast 2004; Berman 2009; Friedman 2013). Broadly speaking, Casanova's model assumes that world literature is "based on a 'market' [...], which is to say a space in which the sole value recognized by all participants – literary value – circulates and is traded" (Casanova 1999/2004: 13). The allocation of value, she argues, takes place in the mediating area of the world literary space, which she defines as a relational space shaped by "rivalry, struggle, and inequality" (Casanova 1999/2004: 4) between nations and their respective national literatures. Accordingly, as she puts it in her at times violent rhetoric, "in the long and merciless war of literature" (Casanova 1999/2004: 90) powerful world literatures have vied for visibility and dominance over "deprived" (Casanova 1999/2004: 181) literary texts, largely emanating from the non-Western periphery. Up to the 1960s, the "Greenwich meridian of literature" (Casanova 1999/2004: 88) has been Paris, which, making full use of its literary capital, defined a standard of modernity against which other, peripheral literatures could be measured. According to this "Gallocentric" (Casanova 1999/2004: 46) model, so-called peripheral writers derive their aesthetic innovation, creativity and expressivity from the centre. Thus their work can only be understood as either an attempt to conform to dominant literary styles or to assert difference from them (cf. Casanova 1999/2004: 178–179). Innovation introduced by 'ex-centric' writers necessarily appears as a mere secondary, imitative and derivative activity, which invariably confirms the primacy of the centre.

The problem with Casanova's centre/periphery model and its sharp emphasis upon global hierarchies is that it is neither able to reflect the complexity of literary history, nor demonstrate its entanglement with heterogeneous, planetary topographies. It therefore necessarily erases the histories of literary creativity emanating from non-Western cultures (cf. Schulze-Engler 2007: 29; Friedman 2013: 503).⁴ Though sociological analyses of "the unequal distribution of literary resources" (Casanova 1999/2004: 175) are indeed key to understanding world literature – and Brouillette is right in reminding us that the very "participation in the literary economy is a mark of privilege" (2016: 98) – Casanova's many economic analogies reduce the specificities of literature to a minimum. The world of world literatures is equated with the quantifiable and totalizing world of capitalist globalisation (cf. Spivak 2003: 103), which, in the words of Spivak, seeks to

⁴ Prendergast (2004: 11) is also right in criticising that Casanova's exclusive focus on rivalry and competition ignores the long histories of exchange between writers and therefore fails to do justice to the variety of possible relations between different literary cultures, fluctuating in processes of confluence and transformation.

establish “the same system of exchange everywhere” (2003: 72), but still endorses strict oppositions between ‘here’ and ‘there’. This worldly space is a form of abstract space in the sense of Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991: 49), i.e., the space of capitalism that imposes an illusionary homogeneity and reciprocity to conceal underlying hierarchies, discontinuities and histories of exploitation.

Proceeding from the premise that “world literature is not an object, it’s a problem” (Moretti 2000: 55), Moretti’s approach to an “unequal” (Moretti 2000: 57) planetary literary system is somewhat more nuanced. First and foremost, it acknowledges that Western dominance “of the world literary system (of interrelated literatures)” (Moretti 2000: 56) does not result in the mere imposition of dominant forms on peripheral literary systems. Rather, Moretti maintains that circulation entails processes of creative adaptation and change, i.e., what he calls “a compromise between a Western form of influence (usually French and English) and local materials” (2000: 58). Accordingly, he does not comprehend world literature as a force of global homogenisation but as a “system of variation” (2000: 64), thriving on the transformative force of locality. Moretti proposes a method of “distant reading” (Moretti 2000: 57) to register these local inflections and to advance an understanding of the ‘laws’ governing the global evolution of the novel. Still, like Casanova, Moretti conceives the world literary system as one that is unified, though – mirroring the patterns of international capitalism – unequally structured, “with a core, and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality” (Moretti 2000: 57). Again, the centre/periphery division that Moretti presupposes bears heavily on his understanding of world literature: since it only acknowledges the economically dominant west as a site of literary innovation. What is more, for Moretti, dominant, Western literary cultures remain largely untouched by the creative adaptations and transformative “compromises” undertaken by peripheral writers. Ultimately, Moretti’s approach to world literature therefore fails to account for the histories of transcultural entanglement and literary exchange that have shaped not only ‘peripheral’ but also ‘Western’ textual practices.⁵

The danger of grounding the definition of world literature on the centre/periphery model and the related paradigm of global circulation is evident. It not only describes but also inevitably confirms the logic that enables processes of circulation in an unequally structured world. It is clear that the capacity of literary texts to cut across boundaries fundamentally hinges on the power of institutions

⁵ Abu-Lughod rightly criticises “the high level of abstraction of much of the discourse” about globalisation (Abu-Lughod 1998: 131), maintaining that more emphasis should be put on the ways in which commodities from core cultures are appropriated under specific local conditions. She rightly notes that the global flow is a “two-way process”, ultimately also changing core cultures.

and agents to *make* specific texts circulate out in the world. To avoid a simple replication of existing power structures, sociological and material studies should pay greater attention to the historically variable conditions of both textual mobility *and* immobility and examine the various economic and socio-political factors that enhance or prevent texts from travelling to specific places at specific times. In this vein, Mufti is right in noting that “the cultural sphere now generally identified as world literature [...] has in fact been from the beginning a regime of *enforced* mobility and therefore of *immobility* as well” (2016: 9). Importantly, the overemphasising of textual mobility also means that these approaches ultimately reduce the world of world literature to movement and circulation (cf. Cheah 2016: 3), i.e., to global pathways that are largely circumscribed by Western hegemony. In this way, these approaches also gloss over the fundamental question of how the right to, and the ability to, construe worlds is distributed in an asymmetrically structured world (cf. Mufti 2016: 10). And though circulation establishes links between heterogeneous places and implicates them in new relationships, the world thus produced is shaped by a clear demarcation between a fixed, stable origin and other, peripheral and foreign cultures.

The reduction of the world to material circulation through the world is also evident in David Damrosch’s widelydiscussed take on the term. According to Damrosch, a literary work “enters the realm of world literature by a double process: first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin” (Damrosch 2003: 6). True, Damrosch’s frequently ignored first condition, namely that texts must be recognised *as* literature, alerts us to the genuine literariness of literature and potentially points a way out of the equation of the world with mobility and exchange. And yet, Damrosch time and again notes that there are no text-immanent criteria that could qualify literary texts as instances of world literature. As a matter of fact, he maintains that world literature does not bring in the “ontology of the work of art” but its “phenomenology” (Damrosch 2003: 6), i.e., the ways in which a travelling text manifests in new contexts. Rather than referring to a set of works defined by distinctively literary characteristics, ‘world literature’ describes a mode of “circulating out into a broader world” (Damrosch 2003: 4). According to Damrosch, the global circulation of literary texts is enabled by linguistic and cultural processes of translation, which set off a dynamics of transformation: “[A] literary work”, according to Damrosch, “manifests differently abroad than it does at home” (Damrosch 2003: 6). That is to say that circulation and translation invest the literary work with alternative, locally inflected meanings and a new lease of life. Crucially, Damrosch does not consider the transformative agency of translation as a disfiguring act of contamination, turning the translation into an inferior version of the original. Rather, proceeding from the assumption that literary texts

are marked by varying degrees of “translatability” (Damrosch 2003: 289) – a criterion that, unfortunately, remains undertheorised and vague –, he claims that “*world literature is writing that gains in translation*” (Damrosch 2003: 282).⁶ The study of world literature therefore first and foremost entails an engagement with the changes, ruptures and shifts that literary texts undergo once they are translated into new linguistic and cultural contexts.

What is unsatisfactory about Damrosch’s approach is its fairly strict demarcation between “our own culture” and “foreign traditions” (see, e.g., Damrosch 2009: 46, 86) that ignores the fact that histories of transcultural literary exchange produce difference within – and not just between – seemingly homogenous creative traditions. Moreover, the exclusive concern with circulation and manifestation, i.e. the “phenomenology” of literature (Damrosch 2003: 6), glosses over the specificities, the singularities and creative agencies of literature and makes it almost impossible to assess the value of world literature other than in terms of numbers and impact (cf. Cheah 2016: 5).⁷ However, literature not only circulates out in the world; rather it is also a practice of world-making (Goodman 1978; Nünning, Nünning and Neumann 2010) with a unique socio-formative impact and the power to affect readers: Literature itself construes imaginative worlds and configures new worldly spaces, alternative geographies, contact zones and transitory spaces that, thriving on both transcultural entanglements and local difference, may offer readers new visions of the world (cf. Neumann 2017). As such, world literature can also disrupt, challenge and trouble the homogenising and quantifying logic of the market, of which it is inevitably part.

3 World Literatures and the Creation of Imaginative Worlds-in-the-Becoming

To move beyond the quantifying understanding of world literature and make visible the many forms of literary creativity within and outside Western frameworks, a number of critics have suggested shifting the focus from the global

⁶ According to Damrosch, “[l]iterary language is thus language that either gains or loses in translation [...]. The balance of credit and loss remains a distinguishing mark of national versus world literature: literature stays within its national or regional tradition when it loses in translation, whereas works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation” (2003: 289).

⁷ For a more multifaceted discussion of the value of literature see, for instance, Herrnstein Smith (1988) as well as the essays assembled in Rippl and Winko (2013).

circulation of literature to literary processes of world-making (Löffler 2014; Cheah 2016; Neumann 2017). At least implicitly, many of these works embrace Homi Bhabha's call for a "new internationalism" that could work towards "the 'worlding' of literature" (1994: 12) and thus promote an alternative, non-Eurocentric canon. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha claims that in our contemporary postcolonial world, the "transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions may be the terrains of world literature" (1994: 12). World literature, for Bhabha, is literature that models the discontinuous travels of migratory subjects and imaginatively construes nomadic epistemologies, emerging from processes of conflictual exchange and entanglement between the Global North and Global South. In her recent book *Die neue Welt-Literatur und ihre großen Erzähler* (2014), German literary scholar and critic Sigrid Löffler explicitly follows Bhabha's call, claiming that in the contemporary age of globalisation, the lived experiences of translocation and diaspora, hybrid and mobile identities, spaces of in-between-ness, migratory subjectivities and polycentric geographies are at the heart of a 'new world literature'. According to Löffler, new world literature revolves around the discontinuous histories of hybrid subjects who struggle to establish a sense of belonging under frequently hostile conditions confronting the West with other, marginalised forms of knowledge (cf. Löffler 2014: 10).

Pheng Cheah's recent book *What Is a World?* also aims at an opening of the world-literary canon by reassessing "postcolonial literature as world literature" (Cheah 2016: 15). According to Cheah, the equation of world literature with global circulation is unsatisfactory because it fails to pay tribute to the intrinsic normative force of literary works. Literature, according to Cheah, not only travels and maps the world. Rather, by means of its formal qualities it has the capacity to "world", i.e. to make a world of its own and, in so doing, to open other, alternative worlds that can shed critical light upon the existing world. Texts become world literature "by virtue of [their] participation in worlding processes" (Cheah 2016: 213). For Cheah, these worlds are clearly different from the market-driven and totalising world construed through processes of globalisation. Indeed, he claims that literature, by virtue of a "heterotemporality" (2016: 13) that disrupts Western modernity's teleological time of progress, has "immanent resources for resisting capitalist globalization" (2016: 11). While Cheah is right in highlighting the unique world-making potential of literature, he preemptively hypostasises the normative capacities of literature. The ascription of an inherent, quasi-given disruptive value to literature cannot do justice to the creative variety of world-making in literature. The uniqueness of poietic worlds only comes to the fore by acknowledging the specificity and singularity of the individual literary text, including its varied affective effects on readers. Moreover, while temporality is surely one important

dimension of worlding, i.e., of making a world and investing it with a sense of unity (cf. Cheah 2016: 8), the world cannot and should not be reduced to it.

World-making, we argue, entails an array of imaginative manoeuvres, such as the creation of new, non-Euro-centric geographies and the tentative entanglement of heterogeneous places into networks of reciprocal exchange; the disjunctive translation between diversified local epistemes and situated practices across the world; the negotiation between the singular and the plural as well as between the particular and universal (cf. Nancy 1996/2000; Benhabib et al. 2006; Butler 2015; Mufti 2016: 11); the exploration of transitory spaces, contact zones and global trajectories, including their role in the creation of new, nomadic epistemologies (cf. Mignolo 2000; Ette 2004, 2012, 2014: 303; Müller 2014b; Borsò 2014, 2015); the articulation of a “planetary imagination” (Spivak 2003: 96; Pratt 1992: 15) and other, minor forms of cosmopolitanism (cf. Benhabib et al. 2006) that can alert readers to new modes of transcultural conviviality (cf. Gilroy 2004; Borsò 2014: 41–42). And of course, literary world-making also resides in a number of poetic practices and transcultural aesthetics that bring together different literary traditions that crisscross the world and that cultivate relationality, exchange and interdependency, while emphasising the transformative force of locality (cf. Glissant 1997; Müller and Neumann 2017).

Hence, to avoid replicating the old Eurocentric centre/periphery model and to capture the distinctiveness of literature, it is crucial to decouple world literature from global circulation and market exchange and take seriously the agency of literature in creating other, imaginative and plural worlds. Of course, this means neither that we ascribe an immanently disruptive force to literature nor that we dismiss the role played by various agents and institutions in the making of world literature.⁸ It is important to acknowledge that in our globalised and capitalist modernity, the formative power of these institutions increasingly inscribes itself *into* the literary text and shapes literature not only *after* but also *before* and *during* its production. In this vein, Pieter Vermeulen’s suggestion that we should read contemporary literature not “against” but “alongside the market” (2015: 273–274) needs to be taken seriously. Still, the inseparable links between the market and world literature do not cancel out literature’s unique affective potentiality and socio-political impact. In her recent book *Born Translated* (2015), Rebecca Walkowitz even argues that literature’s very subordination to a globalised market can be turned into a creative and innovative force. She convincingly illustrates that,

⁸ Indeed, as Graham Huggan (2001), Sarah Brouillette (2007) and John Marx (2009) have illustrated, literature’s mobilisation of cultural otherness and the untranslatable – for Apter (2013: 3) a resource that disrupts the market-driven pressures of the dominant literary world-system – might even make it particularly susceptible to processes of commodification.

as writers become more and more aware of the conditions of literary globalisation, they often write with an eye to translation and global circulation. In born-translated novels, the process of translation is therefore not only a secondary activity but operates as “a thematic, structural, conceptual and sometimes even typographical device” (Walkowitz 2015: 4), giving rise to new poetic ontologies. These ontologies, one might argue, make creative use of literature’s inevitable subsumption under the logic of capitalist globalisation; they confirm the logic of the market only to claim literature’s difference from it. Hence, hovering between the translatable and the untranslatable, between the subordination to a market and an unruly difference from it, the worlds of world literature generate a complexity and openness that transgresses the world construed through capitalist globalisation (cf. Walkowitz 2006: 16). The frequently disruptive polyvalency and affective intensity of mediating processes, we argue, defy containment in systems of economic exchange and circulatory movement.

To advance a more nuanced, multi-dimensional approach we suggest rethinking world literatures in terms of their capacity to create open, polycentric and plural worlds, in which conflicting epistemes, practices and norms coexist in mutually transformative patterns, i.e. in an “ongoing flux of cultural transformations, amalgamations and confluences” (Dagnino 2015: 19).⁹ The systematic shift from world literature to world literatures captures this openness of poetic worlds. At the same time, it pays tribute to the plurality of aesthetic expressivity beyond Eurocentric frames and thus opens up the canon to include forgotten, marginalised and latent literary texts engaged in the imaginative refiguring of the world (cf. Borsò 2014: 41). The imaginative worlds of world literatures bring into being new, non-Eurocentric visions of a world that binds together specific locales in processes of mutual entanglement without glossing over topographical singularities and global inequalities. These worlds do not confirm the homogenising “‘one-world’ reality” (Mufti 2016: 3) of the globe. Rather, as suggested above, they are best captured by Spivak’s notion of the planet (2003: 72), a term that she introduced to develop a non-globalised area studies, or Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of the “singular plural” (1996/2000) and related processes of *mondialisation* (2002/2007). Broadly speaking, these concepts configure the world in terms of its immanent alterity, openness and multiplicity. The irreducible uniqueness of specific locales, of grounded practices and situated epistemologies constitutes shared and interrelated, though differentiated worldly spaces that exceed the

⁹ See also Helgesson, who convincingly argues that the study of world literature should aim towards recognising “the full range of the literary [...] ranging from local generic conventions and the singular encounter between a reader and a text [...] all the way to the global flows of genres, books and translations across dozens of languages” (2014: 489).

“totality” (Nancy 2002/2007: 27) of the globe.¹⁰ Significantly, Nancy (2002/2007: 28) defines the world and *mondialisation* – in contradistinction to the globe and globalisation – in terms of an underlying, latent untranslatability that points beyond the centrifugal pressures of totalising orders: “[M]ondialisation”, he claims, “preserves something untranslatable, while globalization has already translated everything in a global idiom” (Nancy 2002/2007: 28).¹¹ The world of *mondialisation* is not a given, ontological entity but constantly in the becoming, thus calling for our cognitive, ethical and affective engagement with it. World literatures, we maintain, cultivate traces of the untranslatable, unruly and singular, while they are also committed to figuring the world as a shared space, i.e. as a space of new, possible forms of conviviality.

4 English as a Global Language and Anglophone World Literatures

Due to century-long histories of exchange, entanglement and transfer, literatures written in English have increasingly become globalised, postnational, diasporic and transcultural (cf. Jay 2001: 33; Eckstein 2007: 13–19). At the same time, these literatures are shaped by a contradictory pull, namely by an endorsement of local expressive traditions and regionally grounded experiences. This paradoxical and mutually transformative interplay frequently manifests itself in a poetics that is transcultural and de-centred, but still responsive to local concerns (cf. Neumann 2016: 61). Traditional national models of analysis can hardly account for this complex network of interconnections and interrelations that characterises Anglophone literatures. It is these processes of exchange and entanglement that have gone into the making of Anglophone literatures that call for their reassessment as instances of world literatures in the sense elaborated above: for one, they are interlinked and exist in a dense network of exchange, and, second, they have world-making capacities and frequently develop a transcultural poetics. While we are clearly aware of the links and overlaps between the terms, we use the notion of ‘Anglophone literatures’ instead of ‘postcolonial literature’. Very broadly speaking, notions of postcolonial literature build on colonialism’s hierarchical dichot-

¹⁰ “The planet”, according to Spivak, “is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan” (2003: 72).

¹¹ This sense of untranslatability is also to be taken literally since, as Nancy (2002/2007: 27) notes in his “Prefatory Note to the English Language Edition”, the French *mondialisation* is “quite difficult to translate” and might even prove “untranslatable”.

omy between centre/periphery and highlight literature's capacities for subversion, i.e., for 'writing back' to a centre that is posited as the norm. The appropriation, rejection and transformation of colonial expressive traditions, that is, the capacity to use them creatively as vehicles of subaltern resistance, were indeed vital to processes of cultural decolonisation and self-representation. The term 'Anglophone literatures', by contrast, tries to move beyond the dichotomy of imperial centre and periphery/former colony so as to emphasise entanglement and mutual connectedness between multiple localised literary traditions and diverse socio-cultural practices. In times of rapidly accelerating globalisation processes, the concept of Anglophone world literatures relates these "English-language texts to a wider comparative perspective that acknowledges the manifold 'transnational connections' shaping English-language literatures everywhere in the world" (Schulze-Engler 2007: 28–29). Without ignoring literature's potential to question the primacy of Eurocentric aesthetic norms, the term also seeks to account for the mixing and revision of cultural forms "in a myriad of locations" (Jay 2001: 37). It emphasises the range of local contexts and imaginative creations of other worlds that are "by no means restricted to transcultural interactions with Europe or the West" (Schulze-Engler 2007: 23), but extend to capture multidirectional flows. In fact, they are "specifically suited to exploring the dynamics of transculturality in the contemporary world" (Schulze-Engler 2007: 28). Not least as a result of histories of colonialism, English has become a global language and Anglophone literatures increasingly "postnational", i.e., literatures "produced outside Britain and the United States" (Jay 2001: 33). They constitute "a multipolar, decentered network" of literary communication within which they interact (Schulze-Engler 2007: 29), which is precisely why they seem to be particularly prone to becoming world literatures. As Paul Jay notes, "the global production of English" creates a "culture of English [...] so thoroughly hybridized, so inexorably based on complex exchanges among [...] various cultural traditions, that it is getting ever more difficult to identify a dominant Western discourse that is not being subordinated to, and shaped by, this accelerating mix of sources and discourses from outside Britain and the United States" (2001: 40). Like Jay, we consider (Anglophone) literary texts not just as "aesthetic objects but also as cultural objects caught up in complex systems of transnational and intercultural exchange, appropriation, and transformation" (2001: 44). The concept of Anglophone world literatures underscores transnational and transcultural polycentric networks and relations among texts, their world-making capacities and their contemplation of the singular as well as the universal, the local and the global that comes with them. In addition to sociological and institutional aspects, it is precisely these poietic, world-making aspects of literature, its potentially disruptive force that need to be focused on in future studies of Anglophone world literatures. The global circulation of Anglophone texts in the

age of late capitalism cannot be foregone, but there are ways of disturbing and subverting the socioeconomics that rule the world.

5 Institutional Frameworks and Overview of Contributions

Important research has been done over the last decades on institutional frameworks of world literature, the marketing of the exotic margins (Huggan 2001), the commodification of literature, the global literary marketplace and the postcolonial culture industry (cf. English 2005; Brouillette 2007; Ponzanesi 2014; Helgesson and Vermeulen 2016a). There are many institutional agents of world literature such as universities and schools with their curricula, as well as individuals such as academics, teachers, translators and prize committee members. There are also book reviewers and critics in the print media, on the Internet and on television, and one should of course cite bookshops and platforms such as Amazon, as well as anthologies, magazines and other book formats and media prone to igniting and accelerating canon formation processes (Schoene 2013; Rippl and Winko 2013). Among the most powerful of these agents are of course the big publishing houses and the international markets they cater for. As discussed in-depth in various contributions to this special issue, in order to reach a global readership many young Anglophone novelists today decide to write in English and publish with publishing houses of the English-speaking world such as Penguin, Vintage, HarperCollins and Faber and Faber. While on the one hand writing in the former coloniser's imperial language for a global market accelerates the commodification processes of literature that come with heightened circulation; on the other hand, novelists counteract processes of commodification and English monolingualism by, for instance, including local languages and vernacular in their English texts. Multilingualism is just one example out of a whole range of epistemic and poietic interventions and has at least three functions: first, it serves to highlight the local within the global framework; second, it deciphers socio-economic asymmetries and, third, it helps to create alternative worlds that go beyond the Eurocentric, (neo-)colonial paradigm of late capitalist globalisation. This example demonstrates that Anglophone world literatures are entangled in the global – and only allegedly frictionless – circulation of Anglophone literature. While the “uneven distribution of the agency and ability to author” and the “uneven access to reading material and to the means of production” (Brouillette 2016: 104) are commonly seen as deplorable facts, the entanglement in the global might also function as “a spur to creativity and change” (Helgesson and Vermeulen 2016b: 9).

The nine articles assembled in this special issue of *Anglia* are authored by contributors whose names figure large in the research field of world literature. They deal with different aspects and topical questions that we have touched upon in our introduction while at the same time putting stress on the concept of Anglophone world literatures and its defining characteristics. Susan Bassnett's article "Postcolonial Worlds and Translation" looks at the pivotal role translation and multilingualism play in the global circulation of texts, while she detects a continuing marginalisation of translation in English Literary Studies. To understand this marginalisation she discusses literary histories of the past that shaped the notion of English literature and thus helps to map translations in literary history. Seeing translations as creative rewritings allows her to recognise them as an enabling force in world literature. In his contribution "For 'Global Literature', Anglo-Phone" Theo D'haen deals with Anglo-phone literature(s) from the perspective of global literature studies. He understands 'global literature' as a term and approach that builds on comparative literature, postcolonial studies and world literature, but is more appropriate to the age of globalisation. Referring to changes in geo-political circumstances, however, he claims that a 'global-literature' reading of postcolonial novels such as Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (1992) and Jamal Mahjoub's *The Carrier* (1998), and of American novels such as T. Coraghessan Boyle's *World's End* (1987) and Richard Russo's *Nobody's Fool* (1993), allows for a meta-perspective which transcends the paradigms of those contexts. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen's article "Changing Spaces: Canonization of Anglophone World Literature" discusses the complexity of the canonisation processes of world literatures and demonstrates how digital data resources that have been made available on the circulation and readership of authors can be used to refine and qualify said canonisation. This allows him to investigate the relationship between the locally and globally oriented Anglophone writers and the growing importance of migrant writers. "New York, Capital of World Literature? On Holocaust Memory and World Literary Value" is the title of Pieter Vermeulen's contribution which engages critically with Pascale Casanova's conception of world literature and tries to go beyond simply using economic metaphors to describe the process of creating literary value. By positioning New York as the capital of world literature, the intersection between New York institutions and the creation of world literary values are highlighted. Furthermore, his discussion of Roberto Bolaño, Karl-Ove Knausgård and Elena Ferrante demonstrates that Holocaust memory is conceived of as a moral universal and seen as a vital reference point for creating world literary value. In his contribution "Contemporary American Literature as World Literature: Cruel Cosmopolitanism, Cosmopoetics, and the Search for a Worldlier American Novel" Berthold Schoene discusses American literature's world-literary potential and argues that American post-9/11 literature should not simply assert

the multicultural plurality of America itself (as do the works of Jennifer Egan and Amy Waldman) but critically engage with the concept of cosmopolitanism and neoliberal globalisation (as Teju Cole does). Against the backdrop of Lauren Berlant and Mitchum Huels's critiques of the neoliberal condition as lived in American society today (characterised by atomisation, impasse and precarity), Schoene locates a worldlier, more cosmopoetic approach in George Saunder's short story "The Semplica Girl Diaries". Stefan Helgesson's article "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Conceptual Worlding of Literature" discusses the Kenyan writer's avowing for African-language writing, who renders a conceptual worlding of literature to diversify its semantic content in order to facilitate recognition and expanded production of marginalised literature. Looking at world literature from the concept of literature as being multitemporal and multilingual, allows for an understanding of literature as being always in the making. By stating that viable African literature can only arise from African languages, Ngugi presents an anticolonial (non-eurochron) reading of world literature. "Indian Writing in English and the Discrepant Zones of World Literature" is the title of Dirk Wiemann's contribution, which negotiates the special status of the English language in contemporary Indian writing by closely looking at the dichotomy between universally acclaimed texts and local writing based on popular (western) genres. This analysis of world literature highlights that Indian writing has transcended its former semi-periphery status and has become partly independent of the West, but hierarchies and asymmetries shaping the geographical landscape of world literature still need to be taken into account. As Wiemann demonstrates, more contemporary works such as Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* can be seen as examples of emergent Indian writing in English that re-politicises world literature and connects the acclaimed writings with the popular genres as well as the global with the local. The starting point of Jan Rupp's article "Caribbean Spaces and Anglophone World Literatures" is the call for a pluralisation of world literature(s). Discussing texts by V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, Grace Nichols and Olive Senior, it explores the trajectory of multiple domestic and diasporic Caribbean spaces and Anglophone world literatures as a matter of migration and circulation, as well as in terms of the symbolic translation by which experiences of movement and space are aesthetically mediated. Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl's article "Celebrating Afropolitan Identities? Contemporary African World Literatures in English" discusses three contemporary African novels as world literatures: Teju Cole's *Open City*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*. Against the backdrop of today's debate on Afropolitanism, the novels' creative modellings of worlds in motion is employed to gauge world literatures' power to create new, open, polycentric and plural worlds.

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