

## The 'New' World Literature: A Review Essay

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Theo D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (Routledge, 2011)

Theo D'haen, David Damrosch & Djelal Kadir, eds. *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (Routledge, 2011)

Theo D'haen, César Domínguez & Mads Rosendahl Thomsen eds., *World Literature: A Reader* (Routledge, 2012)

Elke Sturm-Trigonakis, *Comparative Cultural Studies and the New Weltliteratur* (Purdue University Press, 2013)

Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (Verso, 2013)

Robert Dixon and Bridget Rooney, eds, *Scenes of Reading: Is Australian Literature a World Literature?* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013)

David Damrosch ed., *World Literature in Theory* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014)

Try to imagine just a few of the many varied scenes of reading that the Reading Room of the British Library has hosted and witnessed over the years. Now, which space are you visualising? Is it the one where exiled and poverty-stricken Karl Marx found safe harbour to sit and read and write of an end to capitalism, reputedly at Desk 07? Alas, that magnificently domed Bloomsbury scene is no more. You can still visit the space it once occupied, as home to the National Library 1857 to 1997, at the centre of the Great Court in the British Museum. But it is now an exhibition site for objects mostly other than books. The history of that 'reading room' reminds me of Marc Johns's drawings of 'objects reading books' – a hand of bananas reading *Othello*; a world globe reading *Walden*; a salt-shaker reading *The Catcher in the Rye*. If you do visit the 'old' reading room in the Museum it is unlikely you will find any of these texts or artefacts; but the graphic staging of these absurd encounters, imagining things together that don't seem to belong, serves as a neat reminder of the how reading scenes can change shape, shifting boundaries in and out of context, depending on what knowledge and experience the reader brings to the text. The walls between reading rooms are nothing if not porous. (The British Library's Reading Room models the Library of Congress Reading Room in Washington.)

Perhaps you were imagining reading scenes in a different Reading Room, the one in the 'new' British Library, now located at St Pancras. But those scenes belong to a very different culture of letters – in a different time and a different place – from the one in which Virginia Woolf imagined herself (in *A Room of One's Own*) as a passing thought in the huge bald forehead of the encircling dome, or where Hitchcock, that same year, the year of *Blackmail*, the first British sound film, shows the blackmailer falling to his death through the glass ceiling of the dome.

Historically most readers entering the old Reading Room for the first time did so with a sense of drama, producing – perhaps with an imperial flourish – their new reader's ticket, an entry permit that also certified their membership of a literary culture that allegedly transcended national borders, a kind of floating world, which many regarded as the land of the Holy Grail,

but which many more now see sinking and, sadly, disappearing. Of course, the idea of *res publica litteraria* was never fixed; the consensus of its members about the constitutive values and ideals of their community throughout the Early Modern period was always a process of negotiation. Yet there is no gainsaying the fact of a dominant discourse that equated the Republic of Letters with the Commonwealth of England, as is clearly evidenced by ‘The Trial of the Letter ψ, alias Y’ appended to the seventh edition (1765) of Thomas Edwards’s *The Canons of Criticism*.

Once on a time the English Commonwealth of Letters, generally called the Alphabet, was very much disturbed; that a certain Greek letter whose real name was ‘ψιλον’ had, contrary to the libertys and privileges of the English letters, insinuated himself into the English language; and invaded the province of an English letter: utterly excluding the said letter from several syllables, wherein he ought of right to exercise his office.

According to this history of the Commonwealth, it was of course the letter ‘I’ who was the most put out, for he found himself not only ‘wholly excluded from all jurisdiction in the end of words’ but also ‘frequently banished from the middle’ – ‘insomuch that in Chaucer’s time this fugitive Greek has usurped his power in Wyfe, Lyfe, Knyght, and innumerable other instances; and almost thrust him out of the English language.’<sup>1</sup>

He called for a Commonwealth convention to deal with the foreigner, scaremongering amongst all of the letters of the Alphabet that they too would lose their privileges if the Greek were permitted to remain, since this would soon encourage a full-scale invasion. The Commonwealth, fearing the worst, closed ranks. But at the trial that followed they fell to petty squabbling amongst themselves, each defending his interests and territories in the most transparently self-serving manner. The immigrant accused the Alphabet of ingratitude, reminding them that without Greek assistance they would have neither their name nor even their very existence; but this the Letters simply ignored, oblivious even to the Greek ancestry of their anglicised Supreme Justice. Apollo found the claim of ‘I’ in the end groundless. Yet by his judgement he allowed the Greek only limited representation in the language of the Commonwealth, reserving all primary power to the Englishman.

In 1827, when Goethe formulated his idea of *weltanschauung* (world vision) and proposed it as a frame through which to see ‘world literature’, what he saw was in fact explicitly European (*europäische, d.h., Weltliteratur*). It was not a series of discrete national literatures; and so it did require a commitment to comparative critical method, although that also placed a practical restriction on the scope of the enterprise, in terms of foreign language capability and multicultural literacy. It is not possible to be an expert in World Literature, in the way that has been assumed that one might become an expert in the literature of a nation. But then the concept was never to be taken literally. The erasure of national borders was more of a metaphysical conceit; and the scenes of reading that it figured forth extended from Europe only so far as America. It was hardly possible to imagine a military reading scene in Bengal, contemporaneous with the Weimar Republic, where a British soldier might enjoy the liberty of borrowing a book

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Edwards, *The Canons of Criticism* (London: C. Bathurst, 1758).

from the East Indian Company station lending library and reading it in barracks. After all, reading in the early nineteenth century, as Gary Kelly says, was perceived in Europe as an activity required a certain ideological placement if it were to be beneficial, and a military barracks was a site not easily compatible with dominant ideas of appropriate reading spaces.<sup>2</sup> How much harder, then, to imagine a future where a multi-lingual Argentinian author and self-proclaimed ‘citizen of the world’ such as Jorge Luis Borges might be reading the works of a German-speaking Jewish Czech writer such as Franz Kafka – let alone the many and varied reading situations of Australian literature explored in Robert Dixon’s and Brigid Rooney’s book, *Scenes of Reading*. The purpose of that book, as its subtitle makes explicitly clear, is to beg the question: ‘Is Australian Literature a World Literature?’ The answer of course depends on how we define the field and frame the question.

*Scenes of Reading* follows on from a symposium convened by Dixon and Rooney at the University of Sydney in 2011 on the same theme, obviously related to Dixon’s ARC DORA project, ‘Scenes of Reading: Australian Literature and the World Republic of Letters.’ (So too is the book he edited with Peter Kirkpatrick, *Republic of Letters: Literary Communities in Australia* [2012], but that book is not within the scope of this review.) The challenge in seeking to locate Australian Literature in relation to world literary space is that the overarching concepts of World Literature have continued for the most part to repeat the binaries of previous paradigms. Australian Literature, like most settler literatures, has until recently been situated primarily as a ‘national’ literature. In the 1980s and 1990s the Association for Australian Literature (ASAL) was not overly accommodating of the new comparative postcolonial perspectives that threatened to widen the frame of Australian literary studies. Dixon, a past president of the association, has done more than most to change that situation. But he must also know the collective labour that has gone into achieving the national literature’s profile, and what is at stake if that profile should now be diminished, with student numbers in Australian Literature courses already in decline and the book sector in crisis. If Australian Literature is now to be situated as World Literature, somehow that overarching concept has to be renegotiated as part of the process, a complex synthesis of global and local realities that will historically and geographically enrich the fundamental idea.

Vilashini Cooppan’s work is useful here, conceiving of World Literature as at once ‘locally inflected and translocally mobile.’ This implies that ‘world literature’ requires a rethinking not only of the ontology of the ‘world’ but also of the ‘nation.’ Cooppan’s concept of nations is relational: they are ‘fantasmatic objects knotted together by ambivalent forces of desire, identification, memory, and forgetting, even as they simultaneously move within, across, and beyond a series of spatial and temporal borders (us/them, territory/flow, present/past, life/death).’ It is this idea of ‘nation’ that provides the theme of the ASAL’s conference scheduled for later this year: nation as ‘the mark of a certain locality, rootedness, and even

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790–1827* (Oxford, 1993) 184. See also Sharon Murphy, ‘Libraries, Schoolrooms, and Mud Gadowns: Formal Scenes of Reading at East India Company Stations in India, c. 1819-1835’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 21, 4 (October 2011) 459-467.

oppositonality, in contrast to the mobility, routedness, and expansive cosmopolitanism that defines the ‘world’ in world literature.’<sup>3</sup>

In fact, however, there is still much disagreement about the constitution of World Literature. Is it a canon of masterpieces from the world over or a mode of circulation and of reading, as David Damrosch contends in *What is World Literature?*<sup>4</sup> Is it all national literatures as one – the aggregate of all literary production? This is how Damrosch apparently understands Goethe, which is why he suggests re-naming the subject ‘global literature’, to distance it from *Weltliteratur*. But how does this help, when as Zoltan Milutinovic rightly points out, what we call globalisation today is not unlike like cultural standardisation envisaged by Erich Auerbach in the early 1950s, ‘which makes the planet smaller day by day, diminishing differences’, and which, allowed its full extent, would eventually bring about ‘a single literary culture’, perhaps even ‘a single literary language’ – thereby both realising at the same time destroying the ‘the idea of world literature’.<sup>5</sup> Should we then for preference take Fritz Strich’s reading of Goethe, whereby World Literature refers only to those texts that have travelled beyond the borders of nations and found themselves at home in other literary traditions as well?<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, if only transnational texts can apply for ‘world literature’ status, the question of *Scenes of Reading* – ‘Is Australian Literature a World Literature’ – would be almost pointless. But this is where the geographical frameworks begin to blur. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen’s book, *Mapping World Literature. International Canonization and Transnational Literatures* (2008), works hard to bring world and transnational literatures into a single frame, introducing the idea of literary constellations to assist the process. The literary descriptors ‘transnational’ and ‘world’ have since become virtually synonymous in many contexts. But then, if the one makes the other redundant, why are they so often compounded – as ‘transnational world literature’? Is it possible that transnational literature is something other than World Literature? In Australia, Michael Jacklin has questioned the timing of the surge of interest in the ‘transnational dimensions of the national literature’, for its coinciding with the disappearance of ‘multiculturalism’ from public discourse.<sup>7</sup> In France, on the other hand, it was after five of the seven major French literary prizes were awarded to ‘foreign-born’ writers, in 2006, that the idea of ‘world literature’ (*littérature-monde*) began to gain traction.

For Pascale Casanova the ‘conceptual tool is not “world literature” itself – that is, the body of literature expanded to a world scale.’ It is ‘a space: a set of interconnected positions, which must be thought of and described in relational terms.’ Thus, what is at stake are ‘not the modalities of analysing literature on a world scale, but the conceptual means for thinking of literature as a world.’<sup>8</sup> Inspired by the writings of Fernand Braudel and Pierre Bourdieu, Casanova gave us our

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<sup>3</sup> Vilashini Cooppan, ‘World Literature and Global Theory: Comparative Literature for the New Millennium’, *Symploke* 9, 1–2 (2001) 33; *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing* (Redwood City, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2009) xvii.

<sup>4</sup> David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Zoran Milutinović, ‘One Clearly Defined Phenomenon and a Unified Perspective: Is a History of World Literature Possible?’ *Prim Knjizev*, 31, 1 (2008) 27.

<sup>6</sup> Fritz Strich, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur*. Bern: Francke, 1957 [1946] 5.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Jacklin, ‘The Transnational Turn in Australian Literary Studies,’ *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, (2009) 1.

<sup>8</sup> Casanova Pascale, ‘Literature as a World’, *New Left Review*, 31 (2005) 110.

first systematic model for understanding the production, circulation, and valuing of literature worldwide. What emerges is a 'world' of struggle for survival, where minor languages and literatures are subject to the invisible but implacable violence of their dominant counterparts. It's a spatial elaboration of a psycho-drama not unlike the one Harold Bloom gave us in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Outsiders – like Kafka for instance – crash into world literary space at their peril, like Hitchcock's blackmailer evading the police only by falling to his death through the glass dome of the old Reading Room of the British Library. Borges, like Kafka an outsider, imagines just such an impossible space in 'The Library of Babel': '*The Library is unlimited and cyclical*. If an eternal traveller were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: the Order).'<sup>9</sup>

Underpinning Cassanova's conceptualisation of the World Literature space, as well as Franco Moretti's proposals for World Literature, is Wallerstein's 'world-systems' theory. The system, as he describes it, is 'not the system of the world'; rather, it is 'a system that is a world,' and which therefore can be – and indeed most often has been – 'located in an area less than the entire globe.'<sup>10</sup> It is 'a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence. Its life is made up of the conflicting forces which hold it together by tension and tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remould it to its advantage.'<sup>11</sup> It is not a space for empowering marginal identities. World Literature as a 'system' retains this sense of space, of metropolitan core and provincial or colonial periphery; it also retains much of the economic discourse of world-systems theory. This is why the Centre for Cultural, Literary and Postcolonial Studies at SOAS (University of London) insisted on foregrounding the question of non-European agency at its 2011 Interdisciplinary research workshop, 'Approaches to World Literature'. It provides a partial explanation also for Emily Apter's polemical stance in *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*.

The ghost of Auerbach haunts Apter's vision of World Literature, the fear of standardisation – or to put this in another way, the nightmare of one universally accessible global idiom. The world of this 'world literature' is one where nothing lies beyond the reach of translation. In economic terms, we might consider the driving principle as that of free trade. In fact, the problematic of World Literature is most stark in debates about translation. World Literature, as Apter sees it, is a commodifying force – it is certainly true that the anthologies of world literature in translation are multiplying – a force for making 'the world's cultural resources' easily accessible, convertible, palatable, consumable. Apter would insist that the reader be alert to the subtle differences between those words, not compounding them into one. She might even insist that, as a series, they are not translatable, their whole meaning being larger than the sum meaning of the individual words themselves. For her it is the idea of the untranslatable that drives the desire for translation and preserves its necessity; and World Literature, fetishizing mobility and cultural exchange, she sees as a corruption of translation, whereby everything is

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<sup>9</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Library of Babel' in *Labrynth*s, trans. James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1962) 58.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, 'World-systems Analysis', in *World System History*, ed. George Modelski, in *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS)* (Oxford: Eolss Publishers, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

made translatable, in the service of global capitalism. It is precisely for the political purpose of deflating the grandiose pretense of this 'worlding' enterprise that she invokes and insists upon the idea of the untranslatable. There is a deconstructive understanding and operation at work here: an acknowledgement (and indeed demonstration) of the value of knowledge formation and a simultaneous recognition of their coercive and oppressive potential – that is, their colonising force. The idea of untranslatability, as Apter conceives of it, offers an important check on the power of that process, on the ironically parochial tendencies of World Literature.

The old ideas of World Literature, vacillating between the canonical (Best of the West) and the all-encompassing (the sum of all the literature of all the world), began to fall out of favour as the former colonies of Europe gained their independence and commenced to articulate their own national traditions and values. At universities, the subject was fragmented by traditional disciplinary and administrative divisions (English, Spanish, French, etc). In Europe and the US larger subject of a worlded literature became the sole province of Comparative Literature departments. Over time these developed strict rules of comparison, keeping their potentially unruly subject tightly bound and controlled. But the comparative literature departments never gained much of a foothold in the nation-building tertiary institutions of the former colonies. In these reading spaces, the challenge to the organisation of literary studies came from the rise of postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism offered new ways of thinking about alterity – which is one answer to Michael Jacklin's question about the disappearance of 'multiculturalism' from public discourse at the same time as the 'transnational dimensions of the national literature' came to the fore – for postcolonialism was also instrumental in questioning the politics of reading strategies developed in service to the nationalising of 'new' or 'other' literatures. It's important to realise that postcolonial thought and theory originated first outside of Europe and the US. But as it moved into the academies of those centres of learning and culture it also began to have a significant impact on the discipline of Comparative Literature. Postcolonial scholars in the end aligned themselves more with newly invigorated Area Studies (Caribbean, for example), inadvertently preparing the way for the transnational shift, than with Comparative Commonwealth Literature. So, for example, postcolonial scholars in Europe, since the founding of the European Union, have turned their attention to a postcolonial Europe. To some degree too the renewed interest in World Literature can be seen as an unintended consequence of the successful postcolonial championing of writers from 'other' parts of the world. But the new World Literature now is hardly an object of study (whether a small canon or a vast ocean of texts), but a paradigm for establishing context and connectivity, with the potential, for better or worse, to transmogrify completely not only Australian and other 'national' literatures but also many other objects of literary study, including regional configurations and periodisations like those of American and Victorian literature.

With its new History, Reader and Companion – plus a volume devoted to the theory of World Literature - Routledge clearly aims to capitalise on these developments. The ambition is huge. Ongoing debates about World Literature (Weltliteratur, littérature universelle, vishwa sahita etc.), the Editors note in their Preface to the Companion, might lead to a rethinking and reframing of translation studies, postcolonial and area studies, comparative literary studies. For readers interested in all of the ambiguities and uncertainties that have attended the conceptualisation of World Literature, from its early formation in the heyday of European

nationalism to its current global reformulations, it is hard to imagine a better entry to the field - or a better set of secondary course materials for its university teachers.

The *Reader* contains thirty essays/extracts, beginning with the nomadic Spanish Jesuit, Juan Andres's 'On the Origin, Present State and Progress of All Literature' (1782-99/1784-1806), and ending with Mariano Siskind's 'The Globalization of the Novel and the Novelization of the Global: A Critique of World Literature' (2010). These are arranged chronologically, but the editors have also signposted six other possible reading paths (or clusters of texts) that address key topics in the field – the relationship between comparative and World Literature, the role of markets and literary systems, etc. *World Literature in Theory* provides a complementary exploration of the significant questions facing students of World Literature today. It contains more than 30 important essays, with authors ranging from Goethe to Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak – each essay with a substantive introduction as well as an annotated bibliography for further reading. This time there are four sections: the first, origins; the second, World Literature in the age of globalisation; the third, contemporary debates; and the fourth, and in some ways the most interesting, focusing on localised versions of World Literature. In this end section, for example, we find substantial essays by Paul Giles on the deterritorialisation of American Literature, Ronit Ricci on Islamic literary networks in South and Southeast Asia, Karen Laura Thornber on the rethinking of World Literature through East Asian Literature and its 'contact nebulae', as well as essays on World Cinema and digital modernism. The volume ends with a useful epilogue by Zhang Longxi considering the changing concepts of World Literature.

The *Companion* is perhaps the most generous of the Routledge volumes, providing no less than fifty critical essays, grouped so as to provide four different dimensions of the subject: historical, disciplinary, theoretical and geographical. Only the *History* is a single-authored monograph, and it is understandably the shortest, in some ways providing a summary of and guide to the other three. In effect, it adds to the number of pathways suggested in the *Reader*, allowing students to cross-reference and track – to give but one example - debates about World Literature as a system (Marx/Engels, Lukacs, Adorno, Jameson, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Habermas, Auerbach, Durisin, Casanova, Moretti and so on). Of course some writers/theorists need to be considered under several headings – Auerbach for example (in relation to Goethe and the Humanist Ideal of World Literature), or Benjamin (World Literature and Translation). Trying to cover so many bases, the *History* might seem too short and swift to succeed on its own, but as a rough guide to the debates anthologised in the *Reader* and focused through the more specific analyses of the *Companion* it is excellent, especially when supplemented by the essays in *World Literature in Theory*. I like particularly the list of 'conclusions' in the *History* at the end of each chapter, which for a teaching text are sufficiently 'neutral' and 'open-ended' to encourage further debate.

For the English edition of Elke Sturm-Trigonakis's much cited *Global playing in der Literatur. Ein Versuch über die Neue Weltliteratur* (2007) we have waited six years. The translators, Athanasia Margoni and Maria Kaiser, enjoyed the collaboration of the author, who took the opportunity to revise and update the original text substantially. *Comparative Cultural Studies and the New Weltliteratur* seeks to expand on Goethe's original concept of 'world literature' while maintaining the theoretical framework of comparative cultural studies – 'with its emphasis on interdisciplinarity, the contextual approach, and evidence-based methodology.' Her focus is on genres that cannot properly be classified under the rubric of 'national literature'

either by their language, their content or their readership – texts that collate diverse cultural, literary, and linguistic traditions to create new modes of expression she designates as ‘hybrid texts’. Hybridity as postcolonial scholars have theorised it is the enabling third space of a stalled identity politics derived from the historical conflict between the coloniser and the colonised, the space of entanglement, where an authentic but new subjectivity becomes possible. For Sturm-Trigonakis, however, this is space of the ‘new world literature’ – an umbrella term for ‘migrant literature’, ‘minority literature’, ‘intercultural literature’, and so on – the literature of those marginalised by the national literatures that contain them. The texts she chooses are of Spanish, German, French and English origin, but her comparative method shows that they have more in common with each other, as a distinct formation (‘new world literature’) than they have with their individual national monolingual literatures that otherwise contain them (in the process repressing their anarchic potential).

This is a persuasive enough alternative to Apter’s rejection of the World Literature category. Apter’s critique reminds me to some degree of the postcolonial stand against postmodernism in the early 1990s, when it was postmodern rather than World Literature that seemed to signal the First World’s strategy for organising and consuming Second, Third and Fourth World alterities. At the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century the whole point of the ‘post’ in postcolonial literary studies, Kwame Appiah argued, was to clear a space apart from the neo-traditional artifacts of the emerging globalised capitalist economy.<sup>12</sup> As Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge saw it, the postmodern conceptualisation of literature pandered to the global market place in much the same way that Apter sees World Literature doing today, by producing ever more reified versions of marginalised ‘other’ worlds.<sup>13</sup> The outcome, they predicted, would be the creation of what Bishnupriya Ghosh called, a few years later, the ‘postcolonial bazaar’ – a global market for texts *sampled* from those worlds but ‘honed to the fashionable emphases on postmodern hybrids (on the left) and on globalized cultures or villages (on the right).’<sup>14</sup>

To be fair, once the postcolonial entered the mainstream it was quickly painted into the same corner, notably by Arif Dirlik, who saw the entry of ‘Third World’ intellectuals like Gayatri Spivak into the US academy as inevitably serving the conceptual needs of the First World generated by the new world capitalist order. Without necessarily disagreeing, Ghosh worried that the power of this discourse threatened to undermine the sense of necessity in the US academy for students to learn about the postcolonies: they might still encounter the same texts but in a different space, one their engagement would not need to reflect on the conditions that make those texts possible, or on the institutional conditions forming their own as well as their professors’ reading practices. This, according to many of its detractors, is the space of the ‘new’ world literature.

Collectively the editors/authors of the four encyclopaedic Routledge volumes – the Reader, the History, the Companion and, inevitably, the Theory volume – pack serious firepower. It may

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<sup>12</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, ‘Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?’ *Critical Inquiry*, 17, 2 (Winter, 1991) 356-7.

<sup>13</sup> Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, ‘What is Post(-) Colonialism?’ *Textual Practice*, 5, 3 (1991) 399-414.

<sup>14</sup> Bishnupriya Ghosh, ‘The Postcolonial Bazaar: Thoughts on Teaching the Market in Postcolonial Objects’, *Postmodern Culture*, 9, 1 (September 1998). <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.998/9.1ghosh.txt>. (Accessed: 8 April 2014).

be worth considering their own constitutive roles in the global networks that are driving the reformulation of World Literature. Theo D'haen is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at K.U. Leuven University, Belgium, is Editor of the *European Review* (published by the *Academia Europaea*) and a former President of the *Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Modernes* (formerly the *Commission Internationale d'Histoire Littéraire Moderne*, founded in Oslo in 1928). FILLM comprises twenty member-associations – representing 40,000 scholars around the world – and is itself one of the member-organisations of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (ICPSH), a non-governmental organisation within UNESCO, which federates hundreds of different learned societies in the field of philosophy, human sciences and related subjects. Cesar Dominguez is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain and connects to D'haen in a number of ways: through membership of the *Academia Europea*, through *La Sociedad Española de Literatura General y Comparada* (of which he is currently Deputy Chair) – which gives joint membership to the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA), itself a member organisation of FILLM. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Associate Professor in Comparative Literature at Aarhus University in Denmark, again is a member of *Academia Europaea*, and serves on the Advisory Board of the Institute for World Literature at Harvard University, of which David Damrosch is Director. (Thomsen's university is an institutional affiliate of the Institute. So are six Australian universities, though only one outside the Group of Eight – the University of Western Sydney.) Damrosch is Professor and Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature at Harvard, and Honorary Adjunct Professor, Beijing Language and Culture University. Djelal Kadir is the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Comparative Literature at Penn State University and Founding President of the International American Studies Association. Kadir and Damrosch have both served on the Research Committees for the ICLA, and both serve currently on the Executive Board of the Stockholm Collegium of World Literary History. (Damrosch, Domínguez, D'Haen and Kadir all are Fellows of the Stockholm Collegium.) I could go on ...

The network begins to look like a reincarnation of the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters, not as a trans-Atlantic metaphysical metaphor but as a global reality.

I have had to abandon the Australian Literature unit I have taught for quite some years focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander texts alongside more canonical settler texts such as Prichard's *Coonardoo* and Herbert's *Capricornia*. The market will not sustain it. I am revising the one remaining Australian Literature unit to provide multiple pathways through literary history; and I am introducing a unit devoted to World Literature, in which there is one Australian novel. Of course, there is no way that I or any other university teacher in Australia could expect students to purchase the four Routledge volumes. They are simply too expensive for the Australian student market – which goes to the heart of Apter's misgivings about the whole enterprise of World Literature's anthologising and commodifying of cultural resources. Even if students could afford the money to buy into the encyclopaedic commentary on and sampling of the field it's hard to imagine them having any real engagement with literary texts in a World Literature unit of study confined by semesterisation to perhaps ten to twelve weeks. In this sense the Routledge enterprise is, sadly, almost self-defeating – like that of Borges's reader in the Library of Babel – which is cold comfort to Comparative Literature traditionalists who

might wish to maintain their rage against the perceived inevitable dilettante character of World Literature as an ascendant field of study.

It is certainly true that Australian literature now has a considerable international reach. In this context, how are we to consider its legacy as a national literature? This is the key question in *Scenes of Reading*. With Australian literature courses waning in popularity in Australian universities there is some urgency to the question, and some considerably cultural capital invested in the idea that transnational reading practices might renew not only the practice of Australian literary criticism but also the deteriorating interest in Australian Literature. Other literatures have had to try to reposition themselves in world literary space, for other reasons, with varying degrees of success. Time will tell whether Australian Literature can make the difference, either to World Literature, or to itself.

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