

On the concept of world literature

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In this article I will reflect on the current concept of world literature. I will make comments on the contemporary critical and scholarly uses of the expression “world literature”, and also on the question of how to conceive of the concept of world literature and come to terms with it. This means that what I have to say will be of a terminological or methodological nature. No literary-historical discoveries will be offered, nor any literary-critical insights in the narrow sense.

I will begin by introducing some definitions of “world literature” from the last 20 years, mostly in order to illustrate the multiplicity of the use of this expression. Then I will draw attention to the fact that such definitions are sometimes formulated as assertions about what world literature is. I will ask whether or not there can be a truth about what world literature is and what further consequences a straight answer to this question is bound to have. As part of this discussion I will look in some detail at how the concept of world literature is employed in the introduction to the recent two-volume *Cambridge History of World Literature* (Ganguly 2021).

SOME CONTEMPORARY DEFINITIONS OF “WORLD LITERATURE”

The idea of world literature may already have originated, in some form, before the 19th century (see D’haen 2012, 5 and the literature cited there, and more recently Hassan 2021). Still, the well-known remarks by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels about the coming into being of a “Welt-Literatur” or “Weltliteratur” represent the first really prominent points of reference for the history of the expression “world literature” (Eckermann 1837, 325; Engels and Marx 1848, 6). In both cases, the idea was that increased international contacts were about to create a new situation in the literary world, one in which literatures were becoming more intertwined than before. Goethe made himself many thoughts about the consequences of this (see Birus 1995). Marx and Engels just stated, in passing, that the bourgeoisie, by exploiting the world markets, was making everything cosmopolitan, including literature.

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This is not, or not typically, how the concept of world literature is understood today. In the *Idea of World Literature* (Pizer 2006) John Pizer assumes, presumably correctly, that many scholars and most people think of “world literature” as standing for all literature, “even when popular and often scholarly imagination reduces its proportions to manageable dimensions through recourse to such signifiers as ‘great books’ and ‘canonic literature’” (3). “World literature” taken in this sense becomes synonymous with “literature”, the adjective “world” merely emphasizing that all literature is being included, without temporal or cultural restrictions.

Zhang Longxi puts forward a definition along these lines, but restricting world literature to canonical literature, in his article “Canon and World Literature” in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of World Literature* in 2016. He writes: “World literature is not just all the works that happen to circulate beyond their culture of origin, but the collective body of the best canonical works from various literary traditions that circulate to constitute what we call world literature” (119). On the other hand, the Warwick Research Collective understand world literature in the actually more original way as something coming into being in modernity. In their book *Combined and Uneven Development* from 2015 they define “world literature”, in a manner reminiscent of Marx and Engels, as “the literature of the capitalist world system” (15).

In expressions like “English literature” or “French literature”, the term “literature” is typically taken to refer to bodies of literary works (see, for example, Howarth et al. 2022). This also applies to “world literature” in the uses mentioned so far. But Pizer, in his book, also introduces two other concepts of world literature. As already indicated, he uses “world literature” to designate the “literature of the world in its entirety”, “all creative writing produced at all times by all people” (2006, 2, 3). Yet he also introduces the term “Weltliteratur”, letting it refer to “self-aware critical discussions” of “a discrete critical concept”. Pizer then employs a third expression, “World Literature” in capitalized form, to stand for world literature as an academic subject (2006, 3). (It is Weltliteratur and World Literature that form the subject of Pizer’s book.)

Pizer’s “World Literature” exemplifies the fact that the concept of world literature can today also be understood to denote a kind, or a branch, of literary study. In his influential *What Is World Literature?* (2003) David Damrosch describes world literature as being, among other things, a mode of reading: “My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike” (2003, 5). (Compare the partly different definitions or definition-like formulations 2003, 4, 283; the definition quoted forms part of an argument about what world literature is when “properly understood”, 2003, 5.) Similarly, what is published in the *Journal of World Literature* is literary research, not literary works. The journal announces that it “welcomes submissions that can concurrently imagine any literary tradition, in any language, moving beyond national frames to simultaneously discuss and develop the cosmopolitan threads of a variety of literary traditions”.¹

The tradition of world literature understood as a kind of study of literature was comprehensively described by Theo D’haen in his *Routledge Concise History of World*

Literature (2012). It is my impression that Damrosch very much succeeded in taking the expression “world literature” and filling it with a new meaning through his own writings, through the *Journal of World Literature*, of which he is one of the editors, and through the Institute for World Literature at Harvard, of which he is the director. At this Institute, world literature is “a far-reaching inquiry into the variety of the world’s literary cultures and their distinctive reflections and refractions of the political, economic, and religious forces sweeping the globe”.²

Yet, other institutions may define world literature partly differently. The A.M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences was behind one of the major modern world histories of literature, *Istorija vsemirnoj literatury v devjati tomach* (The history of world literature in nine volumes), appearing between 1983 and 1994. The research program of the Gorky Institute “includes coordinated studies of Russian and international literary heritage and folklore, and development of the fundamental base for source studies, textology, hermeneutics and comparative studies utilizing interdisciplinary techniques, analytical methods and digital technologies”.³ Without attempting to go deeper, one can say that the general atmosphere of this characterization of world literature studies is no doubt different from the Harvard one, and that the reference to developing a fundamental base signals more attention to theoretical concerns.

In yet another quarter, comparative literature, too, has developed toward comprising a multitude of modern approaches and transcending cultures and eras. According to its current mission statement, the International Comparative Literature Association, or Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée,

promotes literary studies beyond the boundaries of languages and national literary traditions, between cultures and world regions, among disciplines and theoretical orientations, and across genres, historical periods, and media. Its broad view of comparative research extends to the study of sites of difference such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion in both texts and the everyday world.⁴

World literature studies and comparative literature are not very different things. As D’haen points out in his history of world literature, “the relationship between world literature and comparative literature has been an intimate yet tangled one from the start” (2012, 15). (D’haen also devotes his entire Chapter 3, “World literature and comparative literature”, to a closer look at this relationship.) Many researchers have figured prominently within both contexts. This is certainly true of Damrosch, D’haen, and Zhang. All in all, many people work on the literatures of the world for different reasons, under different banners, and using different approaches, and it is not easy to know what new transformations these kinds of research will undergo. “World literature”, like so many big concepts, seems to me to work most of all as a kind of sign-post pointing somewhat vaguely toward a certain domain, in this case that of literature without temporal or geographical borders and corresponding literary studies. The situation around the concept of world literature is a bit unclear because some want to give the concept this or that more specific content, and because there are also sign-posts with a different text – like “comparative literature” – indicating more or less the same area.

This ends my brief review of contemporary definitions of “world literature”. I did not seek to provide any systematic overview of the contemporary use of the expression. What I wanted to make clear, before digging deeper, is the rather obvious fact that it is actually being used in a number of different ways. “World literature” can refer to literature, or some part of what we call literature, and it can refer to a special kind of study of literature. If referring to literature, “world literature” always implies a broad international perspective, but the literature in question may be delimited in more than one way – at least: as all literature, or as literature of canonical status, or as the literature that exists under capitalism. World literature as referring to a study of literature is always a study of literature without cultural borders, whether one wishes to define its aims and methods very liberally or more narrowly.

Having said this I will now switch tracks and raise the question of whether or not there is a truth about what world literature really is.

ABOUT HOW WORLD LITERATURE EXISTS

Pizer’s three definitions of “world literature”, “Weltliteratur”, and “World Literature” are all presented as stipulations, and the Warwick Research Collective also seem to introduce a decision of their own about the use of the expression, since they refer to how they “plan to deploy the concept” (2015, 15). But Damrosch, in the formulation I cited, *claims* that world literature is a mode of circulation and reading, and Zhang asserts that world literature *is* the body of the best canonical works from various literary traditions. Superficially at least, their definitions do not sound like declarations of how they themselves are going to use the expression “world literature”, but like statements about what is actually the case, about what world literature really is.

Can there be a truth about what world literature is? In that case there will have to be an entity of some sort, world literature, of which statements about world literature are true or false. Can there be any such entity and, in that case, where and how is it thought to exist, and how is it supposed to be possible for us to know anything about it? Or should we in fact take pronouncements like those of Damrosch and Zhang not as attempts to *capture the features of an already existing entity*, world literature itself, but, like Pizer’s and the Warwick Collective’s, as reports about how they themselves have decided to *demarcate an imagined entity called “world literature”*. I believe it is better to understand statements like Damrosch’s and Zhang’s in the latter way, as creating and characterizing an imagined entity, and I will explain why. This will require an excursion into philosophical territory in the form of some remarks about the relationship between language and the non-linguistic outer world.

This relationship can be conceived of in a number of ways. I will point, very concisely, to two principally different modes of thought. The first of these, which I will call “objectivism” – short, here, for “objectivism about the relationship between language and the world” – is the view that no doubt predominates, both in everyday thought and in academic philosophy. The objectivist conceives of the world such as it is in itself, in its very being, as structured into such things as objects of different categories and aspects of objects. When the world is viewed from this perspective it is not only true, for example, that there are dogs, and that some of them are white.

For the objectivist this is true in the absolute sense that the two statements correctly capture something in the structure of the objectively existing world: there is a division in reality itself between dogs and non-dogs and between what is white and what is not white.

According to the second, less common view, and the one that I share, this is not so. This second view, which I will call the “conventionalist” view, agrees with the objectivist one on some crucially important points. The conventionalist, too, counts with the objective existence of an outer world. For both the objectivist and the conventionalist the world exists entirely independently of what we think or say about it, so that it will be conceivable, for instance, that humankind might disappear and the rest of the world might continue to exist just like before. Also, the conventionalist, too, will regard it as true that there are dogs and that some of them are white. But for the conventionalist this will be true not because the world as it is in itself is divided into dogs and non-dogs and into white and non-white things. The conventionalist will think that humans have invented the idea of a dog and the idea of the color white. When we apply these human concepts to the world such as it is, there will be every reason to call it true that there are dogs and that some of them are white.

Yet, according to the conventionalist, the world such as it is in its very being just is as it is. It is as who divide up the world around us into things belonging to different categories and aspects of things, and we do this in ways that are fruitful for humans. To get this conventionalist idea into focus, think of such entities as longitudes and latitudes. It seems obvious, at least to me, that longitudes and latitudes are human constructions, projected onto the surface of what we call the Earth for practical reasons – and for very good such reasons, I hasten to add: human constructions can often be excellent things. We would be helpless without the concepts we use to come to grips with the phenomena and processes in the real world around us.

There are certainly more ways than the two just described of thinking about the relationship between language and the world, and there can be varieties of objectivism and conventionalism. Let me just mention that it will lie near at hand for the objectivist not to regard just any valid human concept as corresponding to a pre-existing division in reality itself. Objectivists may regard some sorts of entities, like physical objects, as parts of the structure of the universe, but not some other sorts, such as longitudes and latitudes.

It would be possible to bring up, and discuss at length, arguments for and against varieties of objectivism and conventionalism. A certain tradition in linguistics, from Ferdinand de Saussure onward, has maintained that language does not reflect pre-existing divisions in the world but establishes such divisions; the linguist N.J. Enfield recently wrote that “language is not a means for *reflecting* how things are, but rather a means for *portraying* it in certain ways” (2015, 2). Similar views have been expressed within philosophy, and not only by followers of Jacques Derrida: for example, John Searle has referred to our vocabularies and conceptual schemes as “human creations, and to that extent arbitrary” (1995, 151). On the objectivist side, Robert Kirk has dismissed what I call conventionalism as the “cosmic porridge doctrine” (1999, 53), obviously because he finds that the idea turns reality into a porridge-like blur.

Donald Davidson has maintained that the very idea of a conventional scheme is one that does not make sense. According to him, we have to give up the idea of “an uninterpreted reality, something outside all schemes and science” and consequently also the idea of conceptual schemes applied to such an uninterpreted reality (2001, 197). There is much more to be said on both sides and, as one can imagine, an extensive discussion on these matters is ongoing within philosophy and the natural sciences (see Chakravartty 2017).

This is not really the place to go deeper into this ultimately philosophical debate. My own most important reason to side with the conventionalists is that I find untenably anthropomorphic the idea of a world pre-structured into what seems to me to be human categories, answering to human perceptions and thoughts and needs. For this reason I do not believe that there is a truly independently existing entity, however construed, that is world literature. I find it possible that even an objectivist may be inclined to regard not only latitudes and longitudes but also world literature as a human construction, rather than as part of the fundamental furniture of the universe.

Another reason why I do not believe in the mind-independent existence of world literature is this. If one thinks that world literature has genuine, independent existence, it will be reasonable to try to establish facts about what world literature is actually like. This seems to me to raise a big problem. In order to have a good idea about what world literature is really like, you would have to have access to world literature such as it is in itself – otherwise you will not really be in a position to say something about what it is or is not really like. But how can you have access to reality such as it is in itself, beyond human perceptions and thoughts and categories? This is of course a problem facing not only discussions about world literature but all discourse about the world understood along objectivist lines, also, for example, the discourse of theoretical physics, and this is also why there is a debate about how to understand the statements of the natural sciences.

I have said all this in order to explain my skepticism about the mind-independent existence of world literature, but I do not claim to have proven that world literature only exists as something we have, perhaps for very good reasons, conceived into being. What I *have* done is to point to two different ways of understanding talk about world literature: as talk about something that has an independent existence irrespective of what we happen to say or think about it, or as talk about something that we create ourselves by imagining it and that we can freely reimagine.

If one believes that world literature has an independent existence irrespective of what we happen to say or think about it, the logic of reasoning about world literature is easy enough to understand. Statements about world literature will be statements of fact to be checked up, in one way or another, against independently existing realities. However, if one views world literature as an imagined entity, the logic will be different. For me, as a conventionalist about world literature, there is nothing like world literature such as it is in itself, irrespective of how humans think or talk about it. There is the expression “world literature”. If this expression had been used more or less in the same way by everybody, the expression would have projected onto the world a formation that more or less everybody would understand as being world

literature. We could then, indeed, go on to talk about what world literature is actually like – but we should manage to keep in mind that this will be what world literature is actually like as long as we continue to use the expression in the way we do. If world literature is a formation that we have thought up, we can always rethink it, and everything will be different. As things are, one can certainly not say with justification that the expression “world literature” is being used in more or less the same way by everybody. We have already seen that.

Many terms in literary studies are like “world literature” in that they have multiple meanings, meanings which are not, in their turn, crystal clear. The student of literature will arguably have to negotiate the concept of world literature in the same way as so many other notions. When nothing much hinges on the exact interpretation of the term, one can just leave it unexplained. But if the concept of world literature plays a structural role in one’s study or one’s argument, one will have to define the notion, that is, one will have to explain what one will, oneself, mean by “world literature” in the context in question. One will, in effect, have to design a concept of world literature of one’s own, fit for the occasion. I would say that two requirements need to be met when one is performing such an operation. One will have to design a concept that is productive, one which delimits something about which one has something of interest to say – otherwise the concept will be worthless. It should also be natural to call the concept a concept of world literature – otherwise it would be misleading to use the term “world literature” and one had better find some other expression.

I can foresee two quite opposite criticisms of what I have now said about the existence of world literature. Some may find my position too relativistic, and some may find my remarks banal. I will address the two objections in turn.

Some may want to argue that world literature exists, that it is absurd to deny that world literature exists, and that I am attempting to cast doubt on this obvious fact. To clarify my views further: I do not deny that world literature exists any more than I deny that dogs exist. Once we agree about what to mean by “world literature”, just like we more or less agree on what to mean by “dogs”, world literature can be said to have a clear reference. If we decide, for example, to mean by “world literature” literature under the capitalist system, then we can go on to discuss the characteristics of world literature. What I deny – but have not disproved – is that world literature exists in an absolute sense, independently of any human thought or talk about it. But I think I have made it clear that belief in the existence of world literature in that absolute meaning must, just like my own belief, ultimately presuppose metaphysical convictions. It cannot be just common sense.

Other critics of my reasoning may want to say that I have been belaboring the obvious. We were all taught, as undergraduates, that we will have to define our key terms when doing scholarly work. And who, one may ask, believes in an absolute truth about world literature, as if the concept formed part of a Platonic world of ideas? Such criticism may sound plausible, but if one looks at the actual critical discussion of world literature one will find confusion rather than clarity on the points that I have brought up. I will take the *Cambridge History of World Literature* (Ganguly 2021) as an example.

ON THE CONCEPT OF WORLD LITERATURE IN THE *CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF WORLD LITERATURE*

The two volumes of the *Cambridge History of World Literature* contain 47 essays, plus a comprehensive “Introduction” by the editor, Debjani Ganguly. The essays are of many different kinds. There are contributions focusing on specific countries or cultures, or on specific thinkers, or on poetics, or on translation, or on the idea of globality, and much more. There is, in short, an impressive variety of approaches to literary phenomena, approaches that, taken together, are not restricted by cultural or temporal borders. However, in this context I will only comment on the use of the concept of world literature in this work, and only on the editorial version of the concept – that is, on how the concept of world literature is employed in Ganguly’s “Introduction” and, anonymously, on the back cover and the half-title page.

Ganguly presents world literature as being at one and the same time a body of artistic production and a kind of academic study. These are the three opening sentences in her introduction:

World literature dwells in our time and in times past. As a treasured heritage of artistic expression in oral, visual, and written forms, it is an indelible part of the story of evolution of human civilization. As a scholarly field, however, world literature has had a rather sporadic presence in the disciplinary landscape of modern universities, surging and receding in accordance with political and sociocultural transformations. (2021, 1)

In my view, this is not a good way of introducing world literature. Ganguly lets world literature be two different things at the same time. If one is to make genuine use of the concept one should settle for some specific meaning of the expression “world literature” and hold on to that meaning. If one attempts to let the expression cover various different things that have been referred to as world literature the concept will just disintegrate.

It is worth noting that Ganguly, or at least the *Cambridge History of World Literature*, also makes contradictory remarks both about world literature as artistic production and world literature as a kind of academic study. On the artistic production side Ganguly writes of world literature as a treasured heritage of artistic expression. But the back cover and the half-title page announce that “*The Cambridge History of World Literature* is founded on the assumption that world literature is not all literatures of the world nor a canonical set of globally successful literary works” (14). If the assumption is that world literature is not all literature, nor the canonical literature of the world, one may ask how world literature can at the same time be presented as our treasured heritage of artistic expression.

Regarding world literature as a kind of academic study, Ganguly’s initial formulations suggest that it has a long tradition, with ups and downs. This may well be said – for example, world histories of literature have been published at least since Karl Rosenkranz’s three-volume *Handbuch einer allgemeinen Geschichte der Poesie* (Handbook of a general history of poetry) in the early 1830s (1832–1833) and up to the four-volume *Literature: A World History* with David Damrosch and Gunilla Lindberg-Wada as general editors (2022). But when Ganguly later describes world literature in its capacity of a kind of literary research, she refers to something dis-

tinctly modern, “an emergent field” situated “at the crossroads of five disciplinary areas and theoretical constellations – comparative literature, English literature, area studies, postcolonial studies, and globalization studies” (2021, 14). World literature as a scholarly field becomes, at one and the same time, something with a considerable tradition and something just about to take shape.

What, then is the *Cambridge History of World Literature* a history of? Not a history of literature or some specific body of literature, like the world histories of literature I have mentioned, nor a history of a kind of academic study, like D’haen’s *Routledge Concise History of World Literature*. In fact, somewhat surprisingly, the *Cambridge History of World Literature* is not the history of anything at all, at least not in any conventional sense of “history”. It appears obvious to me that this is rather a collection of articles in world literary studies, and in world literary studies in the sense of a modern, emergent field. Ganguly offers a list in eleven bullet points of the “conceptual and methodological coordinates” (2021, 17) of this kind of study, and a slightly different list recurs in the very last sentence of her introduction, which reads: “With its focus on excavation, retrieval, travel, translation, exchange, preservation, mediation, comparison, intersection, networks, convergences, and cartographic and planetary shifts, the *Cambridge History of World Literature* offers a model of literary history soberly attuned to our times” (42). A more adequate title for her two volumes might have been *Studies in World Literature*.

In her “Introduction” Ganguly does not bring up the question of what the work is a history of. In practice, she tells us that world literature cannot be defined. At the only point at which the question of what the volumes are a history of seems to arise, she writes of “the dizzyingly heterogeneous range of scholarly articulations of it” (9), that is, of world literature. This is to call up the idea that world literature exists in what I referred to as an absolute sense, as something in objective reality itself, but something possessing a dizzyingly heterogeneous range of scholarly articulations. As I attempted to explain earlier, such an assumption is in fact heavy with metaphysics, but there is no attempt in Ganguly’s “Introduction” to give it a metaphysical motivation. It remains a naked assumption, and one not fully acknowledged.

The idea of world literature as enjoying what I have called absolute existence never really reaches the surface in Ganguly’s “Introduction”, but one can sometimes see it presupposed, like in the formulation just quoted. Another example is a passage in which Ganguly refuses to accept the concept of world literature proposed by the Warwick Collective. She seems to take their definition of world literature as literature under the capitalist system not as a stipulation but as a statement about what world literature truly is and to regard it as factually wrong. Her argument is that the history of world literature spans much more than the last few centuries (36). She cannot say that without presupposing that there is a truth about what world literature is. A conventionalist might, rightly or wrongly, criticize the definition proposed by the Warwick Collective as being unproductive, or – as Ganguly also does – as misusing the expression “world literature”, but not as being factually wrong.

One can already find the implicit idea that there is an absolute truth about what world literature is on the back cover of the *Cambridge History of World Literature*.

When it is said there that the work rests on the assumption that world literature is not all literature, nor canonical literature, the talk of an assumption presupposes the idea of a factual state of affairs about which one can make assumptions in the absence of certain knowledge. In talk in a conventionalist vein publisher and editor would not have made any such *assumption*, but simply *stipulated* that in this work “world literature” is not being used to designate all literature or canonical literature.

In literary studies it is rather common to say that concepts like “literature” or “world literature” are difficult to define, or cannot be defined. (Where “world literature” is concerned I have seen, at least, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen’s remark that the concept of world literature “is notoriously difficult to define”; 2008, 2.) There are two ways of understanding such claims, an objectivist one and a conventionalist one.

For the objectivist about world literature, there is a given formation in mind-independent reality that is world literature. This formation is separated out, so to speak, by objective reality itself, before any human intervention. This formation may be too complex or otherwise ungraspable for its decisive characteristics to be captured in a definition.

For the conventionalist, things look differently. It is not too difficult to give a decent *descriptive* definition of terms like “world literature” – that is, an overview of the different things that they are typically used to mean – as I did here, to some extent, earlier in my article. Nor is it a big problem to *stipulate* a definition: to explain how one intends, oneself, to use the term in a given context. It is certainly true that terms like “world literature” cannot be given an *analytical* definition of the classical type, one specifying their distinguishing characteristics, but for the conventionalist this cannot be because world literature is something too subtle and elusive to be defined. It is rather because an expression like “world literature” can refer to different things, and one has to decide what thing to refer to before one can specify the distinguishing characteristics of that thing. As long as one has no specific meaning of “world literature” in mind, the expression cannot be defined – not because it is something too complex, but because there will be nothing to define: one cannot describe the distinguishing characteristics of nothing in particular. However, if one decides to mean by “world literature”, say, a quite specific kind of academic research, nothing will prevent one from making it precise, by means of a definition, what are the features distinguishing that kind, and only that kind, of research. True, one may fail to find such distinguishing characteristics. But for the conventionalist this will signify – in the absence of other convincing *raisons d’être* – that this version of the concept does not do any useful work and had better be abandoned or reshaped.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have commented on the contemporary critical and scholarly uses of the expression “world literature” and on the question of how to conceive of the concept of world literature and come to terms with it. The emphasis has been on how to conceive of the concept and come to terms with it. I hope that one will not, in the end, think that I have been banging down an open door. Still, one may ask whether terminological and methodological considerations like mine really matter in literary studies.

Among the fine qualities one is likely to look for in literary research, conceptual clarity may not be at the very top of the list. But of course, it matters how we reason and how we use our concepts. I would particularly like to emphasize the importance of the distinction between objectivism and conventionalism that has run like a theme through the latter part of my article. Without making a choice between these, in some form, one will not have a clear idea of what one is talking about when one is speaking of world literature. It is wise to try to see our own presuppositions, and reflect on them, and moderate our ways of thinking and arguing in the light of this. This is so not only where discussions of world literature are concerned, but in this article the concept of world literature was my topic.

NOTES

¹ See <https://brill.com/view/journals/jwl/jwl-overview.xml?language=en>; accessed January 28, 2022.

² See <https://iwl.fas.harvard.edu>; accessed February 1, 2022.

³ See en.imli.ru; accessed February 23, 2022.

⁴ See ailc-icla.org/mission-statement/; accessed February 23, 2022.

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On the concept of world literature

World literature. The Cambridge History of World Literature. Ontology. Definition.

The expression “world literature” is currently being used in several ways: about various culturally and temporally inclusive bodies of literature and about various ways of studying such literature. In the article, special attention is devoted to the editorial concept of world literature in *The Cambridge History of World Literature* (2021), edited by Debjani Ganguly. Formulations about world literature sometimes cast it as a mind-independent entity, sometimes as a scholarly construction. It is argued that the choice between these alternatives is important, since it has significant consequences for the logic of thinking and reasoning about world literature.

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