

***The Many Languages of Comparative Literature:* A valuable contribution to discussions of world literature**

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The Many Languages of Comparative Literature: A valuable contribution to discussions of world literature

Congress of the ICLA/AILC. Comparative literature. World literature.

Translation studies. Achim Hölder. Language diversity.

This study examines papers and discussions from the 2016 XXI International Congress of ICLA/AILC in Vienna *The Many Languages of Comparative Literature*, which have recently been published in a five-volume collection (2020–2024) edited by the Austrian comparatist Achim Hölder. The individual contributions explore the many ways in which language shapes the character of national and world literature, and the discipline of comparative literary studies itself. For the comparatist, language shapes the concentrated marketplace of world literature whose globalization provides a limited choice of languages and thus encourages discourse in world languages. It turns out that world literature from the perspective of “language” can be understood in two ways: 1) as a diversified set of plural or parallel “voices” in “big” or “small” languages, and 2) as a canon of literary texts whose multicultural sources are reciprocated exclusively through the filter of translation and the economic market. According to Hölder, this situation can be countered by “two turns”: epistemological reflection and a greater knowledge of disciplinary history. Finally, a “comparative laboratory of concepts” of world literature is needed to take a more intensive account of the large register of languages and local traditions.

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From the 2013 ICLA/AILC World Congress in Paris to the present (Vienna 2016, Macau 2019, Tbilisi 2022, and Soul 2025), discussions among comparativists have focused on the question of world literature as a variable and problematic, yet relevant phenomenon that influences the overall conception of literature in all its intrinsic and extrinsic contexts. This thematic axis anticipated the now-established view that world literature – despite its abstractness and “invisibility” – cannot be dismissed, even if its status and subsequent interpretation does not correlate with a particular discourse (Gáfrík – Zelenka 2022, 2–4). Here, the American concept based on an experiential mode of reading created in our minds by the reception of translated literary texts clashed with the European tradition that approached world literature as an ambiguous category, from a variety of local and temporal perspectives yet also as a theoretically understandable category within an epistemological framework – whether the canon, the inter-literary network, the world literary republic, or a set of regulative ideas and value reflections linked by the aspect of comparing. With a certain degree of simplification, we can state that world literature in the last two decades has been understood as a dynamic system that (through the interaction between different literary domains and through translation) shapes the determinants of an inter-literary process in which circulating texts are permanently established in cultures outside their home environment. A trio of contemporary scholars (Pascalle Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti) have emphasized the materialization of cultural power as a logical consequence not only of intellectual but also of economic and political globalization. This context was later relativized by the idea of viewing world literature from its “periphery”, allowing literary production to attain global aesthetic consumption through “consecration” (Juvan 2019).

In 2024, the Austrian comparatists who organized the XXI International Congress of the ICLA/AILC in Vienna in 2016 under the title *The Many Languages of Comparative Literature* edited a five-volume set under the same title: *The Many Languages of Comparative Literature / La littérature comparée: multiples langues, multiples langages / Die vielen Sprachen der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft* (Hölter 2020–2024).

The editor-in-chief Achim Hölter and the other editors of the volumes have collected and carefully selected some 230 relevant studies that explore the many ways in which language shapes the character not only of national literature, but especially of world literature and the discipline of comparative literary studies itself. Though the congress featured more than 1500 papers, including parallel thematic panels (A. The arts as universal code, B. Language: The essence of world literature, C. Many cultures, many idioms, D. The language of thematics, and E. Comparatists at work: Professional communication), the published proceedings presented less than a fifth of the papers. Nevertheless, this representative sample of texts comments on the nature and contemporary forms of worldliness and world literature. It is therefore logical that these issues, treated in diverse contexts and levels, organically permeate all five volumes, which the editors have made available online in open access format. The first volume, *The Languages of World Literature* (Hölter 2024a), which was completed last, is the most thought-provoking, and comprehensive one.

The second volume is *Literary Translation, Reception, and Transfer* (Bachleitner 2020); the third volume, *Discourses on Nations and Identities* (Srovy 2021a), brings together comparative discourses on nations and their identities, while the fourth volume, *The Rhetoric of Topics and Forms* (Zocco 2021), returns to thematology and narratology, to the rhetoric of symbols, poetic codes, and forms; the final volume, *Dialogues between Media* (Ferstl 2021), concludes the set, focusing on the disciplinary dialogue between media in time and space with an emphasis on transparently acceptable terminology. The connecting idea becomes the multilingualism and internal differentiation of literary texts, which determines both the subject of comparative study and the professional way of expressing it, that is, the metalanguage. A related question is how language used by different ethnic and social groups enters literary texts published in different cultural and methodological discourses, such as postcolonial, gender, or imagological studies, and how language refers metaphorically to literary forms, styles, and genres.

This return to language and to literary texts can be understood as a response to the sometimes thematically boundless interdisciplinary overlaps into physics, biology, psychology, as was the case at the XX ICLA/AILC Congress in Paris 2013 (Zelenka 2013, 241–243). At the same time, it is a matter of emphasizing the current continuity with the tradition of the discipline, which permanently moves between theoretical and literary-historical grasp. It is natural that this Central European approach, highlighted by the venue of Vienna as the former center of the multi-ethnic Habsburg monarchy, evokes a metonymic inter-literary mode of artistic communication in general: a number of ethnicities, confessions, and poetics coexisting side by side in a small territory, articulated in languages that are both similar and typologically different. As the main editor Achim Hölter points out in the “Introduction” (2024b, 3–28), for the comparatist, language (whether oral or written) is shaped above all by the concentrated market of world literature whose globalization brings a small selection of languages and thus tends, despite the efforts of polyglot scholars, towards the standard use of English. This situation can be avoided, however, by consciously making language visible in different contexts and meanings (8–9): 1) language as the “national” idiom in which the initial verbal text is written; 2) language as the target language in the process of literary translation; and 3) language as the “concentrate” of those literary concepts that in their totality mark “world literature”. It must be admitted, however, that the scientific metalanguage with which we write or speak about literary texts of the humanities (including literary studies) strives for exclusivity and more for elegance and playfulness than for precision achieved at the cost of a certain uniformity of expression and also of thought. The ideal of linguistic-ideological neutrality espoused by philosophical-analytical literary scholarship seems to be at odds with the efforts of comparative literary scholars who pride themselves on a heightened sensitivity to linguistic “otherness” or peripherality. According to Hölter, the above typology is undoubtedly reflected in discussions of world literature, which, from the perspective of “language”, can be conceived as 1) an internally diversified set of plural or “parallel” voices realized by various “big” and “small” languages; 2) a canon of literary texts whose sources, though multicultural, are exclusively recip-

roated through the filter of world language (translation) and the economic market constituted by it (9).

Since our article cannot cover all of the texts included, we have selected only those that raise the question of world literature and worldliness.

THE FIRST VOLUME: THE LANGUAGES OF WORLD LITERATURE

As editor of the first volume, Hölter has incorporated the central theme of languages and world literature into all the thematic blocks. The unifying feature of these contributions becomes a comparative analysis of acts of writing and the different functions of speech acts: in general, how literary language can cope with, for example, traumas of the past and the present and how the multitude of voices of multilingual modern society constitutes the phenomenon of world literature. This approach was reflected in the opening paper of the “Communities of Fate: Magical Writing and Contemporary Fabulism” by Marina Warner (2024, 31–50), who explores the functions and transfers of so-called magical writing in contemporary literature, namely the possibility of using archetypal ancient myths, prophecies, and rhetorical formulas. The time arc thus updates a timeless tradition and thereby stamps a stamp of universality. Similarly, Hendrik Birus, in his article “Zur Übersetzbarkeit literarischer Namen” (2024, 51–64), deals with the “translatability” of literary names, especially proper nouns, which help translators to play an expressive game of hidden resonances and allusions. The worldliness of Central European literature is demonstrated by Vladimir Biti in “Past Empire(s), Post-Empire(s), and Narratives of Disaster: Joseph Roth’s *The Radetzky March* and Ivo Andrić’s *The Bridge over the Drina*” (65–84) on a comparison of Roth’s and Andrić’s “catastrophic narratives”, which show individual and collective traumas by depicting historical fractures through the parallel of a disintegrating family and a decaying empire. Peter V. Zima’s article “Ähnlichkeit und Differenz in der Komparatistik. Der Vergleich als Begriffsbestimmung” (173–199) returns to the subject of comparative literature which should treat not only corresponding elements but also bridge differences in time and space with its theoretical apparatus. The traditional paradigm of world literature derived from printed canonized texts is disrupted by Joep Leerssen, who concludes in “Literary History Outside the Gutenberg Comfort Zone” (103–126) that literature, including world literature, does not always have to take the form of printed texts and that to think outside this framework here is to respect the process of writing by hand as a form of open work in semantic flux. E. V. Ramakrishnan, in “From Reception to Resistance: Multiple Languages of Indian Modernism” (127–147), explains how the literary languages of India mediated contact with Western civilization during British colonization, particularly at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, which gradually led to the development of new genres and scholarly terminology. This “symbolic assimilation” was then followed by a phase of critical rejection motivated by political independence. Likewise, Waldemar Zacharasiewicz’s “The Confluence of Ethnic Voices in Urban America” (149–172), using John Dos Passos’s modernist novels as an example, shows not only linguistic but also ethnic polyphony in American literature, drawing on emigration and the coexistence of parallel poetics.

The joint opening of the congress also included a panel discussion, which attracted a great deal of media interest under the title *The Theory of World Literature and the Politics of Translations*, between American comparatists David Damrosch and Emily Apter, moderated by German scholar Christian Moser (Vajdová 2016, 109–110). This discussion documented that world literature has become a global scholarly problem that remains unresolved due to numerous communication misunderstandings. Damrosch understood world literature as a phenomenon “detached” from the country, time, and language of its origin and disseminated through translation, while Apter (referring to Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova) considered the study of world literature as an unsolvable problem in the context of contemporary literary scholarship. Like Apter’s skepticism, Damrosch’s elliptical refraction of national literatures, characterized by an ignorance of Central European and especially Slavic comparative scholarship, indirectly confirms the fact that a discussion conducted from one perspective cannot capture all the nuances of this term, which we should not reject as an object of future research. Róbert Gáfrik’s observation that “theoretical and methodological discourse takes place in different languages and in diverse power relations” (Gáfrik 2016, 112) applies here, and that these studies need to be carried not only from the dominant “centre” but also from the neglected “margins” (Juvan 2023, 70–77). One can agree with Achim Hölder that old concepts are returning to current thinking about world literature as a conscious “prefiguration” that can better illuminate the pluralistic world of comparative literature. He speaks of its advantage, which is precisely the multiplicity of languages and literatures: “One of the real tasks of the new discipline is to explore the epiphenomenes of linguistic diversity, which is one of the features of European identity” (2024, 684). One cannot only regret that a textual transcript of this discussion, significantly illustrating the “American” view of world literature, did not appear in the book set.

The first volume also contains contributions in which the worldliness of literature emerges in connection with the issue of emigration, most often from Central /Eastern Europe, and with questions of translation. They show that this emigrant literature continues to attract attention because of its epochal turn before the collapse of socialism, whose emphasis on a hybrid “displaced” existence led to the destruction of traditional identity. Cristina Săndru’s “Post-Cold War Literature of Migration: East-Central European Consciousness between Exile and Diaspora” (241–252) draws attention to the difference between exile and diasporic writing, while John M. Kopper’s “Alternative Émigré Places: Berberova, Makine, and the Russian Escape from Paris” (341–352) refines the differences and correspondences between past and present Russian emigration. Similarly, Elge Segelcke’s paper “Okzident und Orient: ‘Poetik der Bewegung’ im Werk Zafer Şenocaks” (253–264) cannot be treated in the category of national literature. Eva Miriam Simon’s “Komparatistik als Provokation: August Wilhelm Schlegels *La Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d’Euripide* (*Vergleichung der Phädra des Racine mit der des Euripides*)” (393–403) is devoted to Schlegel’s interpretation of two treatments of the *Phaedra* theme by Euripides and Racine. Miloš Zelenka’s chapter, “Ein tschechoslowakischer Beitrag zur Theorie der Weltliteratur” (611–621), compares the Slovak theorist Dionýz Ďurišin’s approach

with that of the Czech Slavist Frank Wollman, whose morphological conception of world literature as a set of timeless and supra-local forms is based on the aesthetic reception of texts through translation and rereading. Finally, Haun Saussy's paper "My Idiolect, If I Have One': Translation in a Single Language" (591–597) addresses the question of the shifting boundary between linguistic and national identity, in which comparatists should aim at understanding the inherent diversity of cultural contexts.

THE SECOND VOLUME: LITERARY TRANSLATION, RECEPTION, AND TRANSFER

The volume *Literary Translation, Reception, and Transfer* was edited by Norbert Bachleitner (2020), who has divided the contributions into six thematic sections 1. Translation Criticism: Studies on Individual Authors; 2. Modes and Strategies of Translation; 3. Influence and Comparisons Between Authors; 4. Genres of Motifs; 5. Transfer Between Literatures and Digital Globalization; 6. "We are translated men": Hybrid Identities and Regionalism. The three concepts reflected in the title – translation, reception, and transfer – are based on similarities related to the literary form of "circulation" and following or "imitation" of whole works, genres, forms, motifs, etc. Of the three, transfer, which encompasses all types and modes of such circulation, aspires to the widest scope. The process of communication begins with the initial text embedded in a specific cultural circle, then emphasizes its mediation by a series of individual and collective factors (critic, translator, publisher, library network, etc.), and ends with its integration into the target culture. From this point of view, translation is the main tool for the dissemination of literature through linguistic and cultural barriers; it is a key factor for integration into the canon of world literature. Galina Alekseyeva's paper "Constance Garnett's Translation of Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is within You*" (17–30), for example, explores the influence of Russian émigrés in London at the end of the 19th century on Garnett, who translated seminal works of Tolstoy and numerous other writers into English. It is worth noting that the notion of influence was widely discussed by Slovak scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it is unfortunate that Ďurišin's rejection of it as the "domination" of one literature over another is not mentioned here (1979, 331–353).

As Daniel Syrový notes in "The Originals of *Don Quixote*: Translation and Pseudo-translation in the *Spanish Libros de Caballerías*" (97–107), influence in the first half of the 20th century marked the sphere of direct and mediated relations between author and literature from the 1960s onwards. This shift can be demonstrated by comparing the titles of two monographs by Lawrence Marsden Price, *English-German Literary Influences* (1920) and *The Reception of United States Literature in Germany* (1966). In his conference paper, Syrový also reveals the neglected forms of translation, which as a meta-linguistic transfer, includes references and allusions to fictional originals. Using the example of the pseudo-translation of the Spanish *Libros de Caballerías* as the alleged main source of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, he analyzes these complex metafictional and meta-narrative strategies. Krystyna Wierzbicka-Trwoga's "The Birth of the Novel in Renaissance Poland through the Medium of German:

Translations of Medieval Narratives in Sixteenth-Century Poland” (267–279) studies the influence of German and French chivalric prose on the Polish Renaissance of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Polish literature is also revisited by Marta Skwara, who demonstrates the worldliness of the second largest Slavic literature in “How to Cross Cultural Borders While Discussing National Literature Internationally” (329–343), through the multilingual intertextual links between Polish texts and world literature. For example, if Joseph Conrad and Czesław Miłosz wrote in English, Stanisław Przybyszewski in German, and Witold Gombrowicz in Spanish, the boundary between the source language and the language that can become “foreign” due to the environment is relativized here.

A new thematic area of translational studies under the title “ocean studies” is presented in a pair of papers by Jean Marc Moura and Margarita Alfaro, who depict the Atlantic as a space of material and genre migration between Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanic, Russophone, and Dutch literatures, that is, the literatures of nations with a colonial past. We can recall here the obvious analogy with the so-called inter-literary network interpreted in the 1990s by Dionýz Ďurišin and the Italian comparatist Armando Gnisci (2000). Moura’s article “Des voyages au féminin dans l’Atlantique au XXe siècle” (281–289) demonstrates transatlantic literary history on a theoretical level, using feminist discourse (Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous) to reject traditional Western European bipolarity. Alfaro’s essay on Italian-Argentine novels, “Les voyages de l’immigration et de l’exil entre l’Amérique latine et l’Europe: Griselda Gambaro et Laura Alcoba” (291–301), understands the Atlantic as a symbolic and intercultural border that intervenes in family fates and collective memory as a metaphor of death and rebirth. The joint article by Norbert Bachleitner and Julian Werner, “Österreichische Periodika in französischer Sprache als Medien des Literaturtransfers (1750–1850)” (345–356), analyzes Austrian periodicals published in French using the field of sociology of translation.

THE THIRD VOLUME: DISCOURSES ON NATIONS AND IDENTITIES

The third volume *Discourses on Nations and Identities* (Syrový 2021a) reflects on literary languages from a socio-economic perspective, namely from the position of cultural capital (literary conventions, norms, expectations of the reading public, and market demands). The concepts of nation and identity are viewed through the lens of language through such approaches as discourse analysis, cultural memory, narratology, biography, literary sociology, critical reading, and others. Comparative literary scholarship is interested in the authorial motivation in the question of the strategic choice of language in changing national identity, showing that language divides rather than unites. Writers either “abandon” one language in favor of another or create hybrids that transform the receiving literature, yet with the linguistic patronage of the mother tongue. The introduction by the volume editor Daniel Syrový (2021b, 1–14) cites the translation of Jhumpa Lahiri, who around 2014 decided to become an Italian writer after a series of successful English-language novels: “abandoning” the language was not forced by the demands of exile or economic interest,

but by a certain conscious choice – a risk as an opportunity to gain a new creative impulse in the form of an expanded vocabulary or expressive syntax. This strategy, as the English theorist Kate Briggs argues in her monograph *The Little Art* (2013), also applies to translation understood as a commercial aspect of professional writing practice. The change of language in literary communication thus hovers between craft and creativity. However, the motivation can also be patriotic and nationalistic, as shown by the linguistic and literary situation of the 19th-century Apennine Peninsula, divided between the Habsburg monarchy, the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Holy See and other entities (3–4). However, the nation-state must define itself on the basis of a national monolithic language and abandon the hybridity of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). Clearly, these trends are confirmed by the formation of written Italian, which in Alessandro Manzoni’s novels did not derive from Cicero and the usages of humanistic Latin, but from modern Tuscan.

Among the many contributions, we can highlight Eri Ohashi’s article “L’évolution des consciences grâce à la langue, vue au prisme du voyage, de la colonisation, et de l’émigration” (69–82) on the trans-cultural clashes of language and national identity in the works of Pierre Loti written in Japan, Marguerite Duras in French Indochina, and Isaac Bashevis Singer in the US. Similarly, Elisabetta Vinci reflects on linguistic hybridity as an aspect of modern Yugoslav and German identity in “Marica Bodrožić: Hybridity, Language, and Cultural Identity” (197–207), while Esra Canpalat focuses on the multicultural area of Istanbul in “Multikulturalität und Hybridität als identitätsstiftendes Moment in Orhan Pamuks *İstanbul*. Hatıralar ve Şehir und Elif Şafaks *The Bastard of Istanbul*” (209–222). Luísa Alfonso Soares approaches linguistic hybridity and national identity transformations from a similar angle in “Imagining Transcultural Identities in Turkish German Literature and Cinema” (249–258), which discusses the formation of so-called post-migration identities in Turkish-German literature and cinema in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Also returning to the question of so-called unity and internal heterogeneity is Tina Hartmann’s paper “Deutsch als Literaturheimat. Warum Literatur multilingualer Autorinnen und Autoren einfach deutsche Literatur ist” (355–369), which justifies the functionality of the notion of a “literary home” (*Literaturheimat*) by privileging biographical over aesthetic criteria. The topic of literature in exile is dealt with by Alexandra Vranceanu-Pagliardini, whose article “Transnational Writers and Double Literary History in Communist Romania” (399–408) takes into account texts by Romanian authors written in English and French. The same applies to the article by Shuko-Tanaka Rauber, who in her study “Le choix linguistique et l’identité des écrivains transfrontaliers – autour de la tentative de Milan Kundera” (409–422) compares Kundera’s works in the context of the transformations of national identity, which remained “Czech” despite the adoption of the French cultural tradition.

THE FOURTH VOLUME: THE RHETORIC OF TOPICS AND FORMS

The volume *The Rhetoric of Topics and Forms*, edited by Gianna Zocco (2021), focuses on the complementarity or dichotomy of these elements in the internal construction of a literary work. While we traditionally classify the study of motifs, sym-

bols, images, myth, topoi, and discourse as “content” components, we consider the analysis of style, structure, language, and rhetorical devices as internal “formal” and “signifying” matters. Thus, thematology has been labeled by structuralist conceptions as a positivist discipline outside of real literary history. Theodor Wolpers points to the organic inseparability of these two components, arguing that the study of a single motif in literary texts remains a crucial, if complicated task of literary history (1993, 80–91). Here, despite René Wellek’s critique of traditional *Stoffgeschichte* (1959, 149–159), we can include imagology. According to Leerssen, this approach understands literary imagery as articulated discourse constructs whose natural circulation forms the basis of our national identification (2006, 560). In this context, Zocco recalls the founding significance of the German literary scholar Ernst Robert Curtius, who in his book *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948) defined topoi as minimal stylistic and thematic units that allow for a new perception of the inner coherence of European literature and that contribute to emphasizing its threatened humanistic unity (2021, 2–3). In his evaluation of individual contributions, Zocco points to the continuing tendency of so-called “undeclared thematology” (Sollors 2002, 219–220), that is, the reluctance to develop a methodology and to use its terminology.

The papers include studies on the role of emotions as complex affective states in literature. For example, Kathrin Betke’s chapter “Emotion Metaphors and Literary Texts: The Case of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*” (15–27) studies these difficult-to-express emotions “in the relationship between language and love in Shakespeare’s sonnets, while Nina Tolkstdorf’s article “Zu Kafkas Sprachen der Scham” (39–49) observes the elusive expression of shame, sadness, and feelings of worthlessness in Kafka’s vocabulary. The motifs of love and eroticism in the context of autofiction and political ideology are treated in Stefan Kutzenberger’s “Enden der Liebe, Enden des Texts. Der Alltag der Liebe bei Navid Kermani und Karl Ove Knausgård” (87–102) and Gianna Zocco’s “Love and Propaganda in W. E. B. Du Bois’s Novel *Dark Princess*” (115–126). Philip Wagner’s essay “You är ju även du. Englisch als Mittel zur ‚Selbst‘-Reflexion in Aino Trosells *En egen strand* (2013)” (209–220) presents the multilingualism of the contemporary Swedish novel, in which the use of English is intertextually linked to the reflection of colonial privileges and the feminist criticism of society. The imagological methodology is invoked in Tone Smolej’s paper “La thématologie et les actualisations des figures mythiques – le cas d’Antigone” (309–318), which reflects on the transfer of ancient themes such as the story of Antigone in post-textual updates.

THE FIFTH VOLUME: DIALOGUES BETWEEN MEDIA

The last volume *Dialogues between Media*, edited by Paul Ferstl (2021), does not fit at first sight into the discourse of literary languages and national identities that evoke reflections on world literature. Specialized contributions dealing with the relationship between media and inter-arts studies are present, as well as essays oriented towards comics studies, including interdisciplinary analyses of the graphic novel. Yet, here too, issues of worldliness and world literature are contextualized in the adaptation of literary texts in various target media such as film, television series, opera, and

theater. This has been particularly due to Kai Mikkonen from Finland and Stefan Buchenberger from Austria, whose paper “The ICLA Research Committee on Comics Studies and Graphic Narrative: Introduction” (13–18) presents the development of comics in the 20th and 21st centuries in a broad historical-anthropological perspective, and who founded the Research Committee on Comic Studies and Graphic Narrative at the 2004 ICLA/AILC World Congress in Hong Kong. In doing so, they contributed to the incorporation of comics studies into comparative literary scholarship, and even established comparativists have begun to reflect on classical literature in comics adaptations: for example, German researcher Monika Schmitz-Emans in her paper “Dante-Comics zwischen Kanon-und Populärkultur: Spielformen der Hybridisierung und Strategien der Selbstreferenz” (235–250) focuses on comic book adaptations of *Divine Comedy*.

CONCLUSION

Returning to methodological issues (found at the end of the first volume of *The Languages of World Literature*), Achim Hölder’s study “Comparative Literature in Europe” (2024c, 683–687) argues for a greater knowledge of the field’s history by taking two turns: towards epistemological self-reflection and towards praxeological to empirical description, and thus towards understanding what has been positively and beneficially realized in this tradition (686). He recommends systematizing comparative collections of translations into third languages, since no library captures translations other than from the source language into the language of the respective country. This eliminates the broader cultural-historical horizon of contemporary translation through so-called intermediaries, whose importance was pointed out a century ago by Paul van Tieghem. There has been no effort to compile dictionaries of comparative terminology that would contribute to a general awareness of the much-needed “unity in multiplicity”. This includes, according to Hölder, the highly debated concept of world literature. Its semantic potential is allegedly not yet fully exploited because different approaches are territorially bound, as can be seen, for example, by a cursory confrontation of the American version of specific reading with the Slavic or Russian morphologically conceived “mirovoj literary”. Hölder’s call for a kind of “comparative laboratory of theories” comes from a natural respect for the large register of languages, and in our view also reflects the current discourse on world literature, which can be understood typologically either as an internally differentiated set of voices or as a canon of texts, with a multicultural background but only reciprocated by the globalized “filter” of a world language and its economic market power.

The notion of world literature was discussed in a number of sessions, among which were the contribution from the Czech and Slovak Association of Comparative Literature, Old and New Concept of Comparative Literature in the Globalized World. Particularly noteworthy in the published summary of the roundtables (Hölder 2024c, 665–682) is the panel “Language: The Essence of World Literature”, which included the participants Hans Bertens, Ipshita Chanda, Adams Bodomo and Sandra Bermann, moderated by Achim Hölder. This panel, whose subtext embedded

an implicit polemic with Damrosch's emphasis on the power of English-language literature, sought to bring together two major aspects of contemporary comparative studies: the relationship between the greatness and extension of universal language and the aspiration to worldliness. According to Hölter, the fact that some languages had reached the level of world languages was reflected in their global and communicative hegemony in literary circulation, which contributed to the disregard of so-called small languages. Their visibility has been aided by translation, which is, however, market-driven and therefore simultaneously on the rise and contested (669). The imaginary boundary between "big" and "small" language is thus both overcome and constantly made more present. Likewise, Chanda, referring to Ďurišin's conceptualization of dialogical reception of metropolitan models, points out that definitions of world literature are negatively determined by the possibility of translation and its eventual dissemination. We still have as a false model the monolingual, monocultural nation and its literature, which is taken from 19th-century Western European nationalist discourse (669). The example of contemporary India with its with over twenty official languages, whose writing has historically been marked by alterity and plurality as an existential condition, is proof that world literature must reflect "a world formed through contactual relations" rather than the "circulation and translation of national language literatures" (670).

Adams Bodomo symbolically argues with Damrosch that multilingualism must become an important aspect of comparative literature, pointing to the growing importance of African languages. He sees the way out of the existence of multiple languages in the production of so-called parallel texts written by African authors striving for worldliness (670). A parallel text is defined as a set of texts in which literary expressions are mediated through translation at different levels, that is, a text produced in parallel in several languages such as English and African dialects. For Hans Bertens, world literature (which must not be understood as a canon) demands a kind of literary justice, since it implies a moral imperative to perceive all texts regardless of place and language (671). Sandra Bermann relates the "globality" of English not only to era of colonialism, but also to the 20th century when this hegemony was shaped through media, politics, and publishing, and she challenges the perception of American literature as monolingually English, arguing that more than 400 languages are spoken and written in the US, most of which are local creole or hybrid dialects (672).

The terminological and semantic delineation of world literature in relation to the affinities and complementarities between comparative literature and cultural studies was also explored in a panel entitled "Many Cultures, Many Idioms", characteristically subtitled "Has Comparatism Turned into Worldwide Cultural Studies?", which featured Isabel Capeloa Gil, Longxi Zhang, and discussion leader Dorothy Figueira. The latter opened the panel with a historical excursus into the development of comparative literature and cultural studies: prior to the formation of ICLA/AILC in 1955, world literature was a broader term in terms of content, with the ambition of extending literary scholarship to include "non-Western" literatures and thus modifying its scope to the study of cross-cultural reception (673). It was not until the late

20th century that the discipline of General Literature emerged in the US as a discipline focused on the reading of texts in translation, with the aim of incorporating literatures that are not taught in the original language. In practice, however, their teaching was carried out exclusively within English departments. Cultural studies, which has its origins in the UK in the 1960s, merely creates a “simulacrum of the social sciences” (674), deconstructing comparative literature into postcolonial studies of identity theory, gender studies, etc. The parallel between world literature and cultural studies is that both fields lack a strict methodological structure and freely borrow theories, methods, and principles from other fields. In this regard, Figueira argues somewhat starkly that world literature is essentially the latest version of a “theory and pedagogy of otherness” that has adopted cultural studies’ commitment to sociocultural intervention (674). But if Isabel Capella Gil shares the concern about the politicization of cultural studies which has aggressively overstepped its interdisciplinary horizon (675), Longxi Zhang places the perspectives of world literature studies exclusively outside the Anglo-Saxon context. While for cultural studies, literary texts are merely a means to understand culture itself, comparative literature, including reflection on world literature, should be concerned with the circulation of the text and its use towards understanding the workings of the text itself. Although these fields are metonymically related, they are not inherently interchangeable (676).

As Longxi Zhang pointed out in the panel discussion, the study of world literature must not dissolve into cultural studies or the field of General Literature (676). With some optimism, world literature must be understood as a project that promotes the circulation of literatures that are less well-known in the Western world (676–677). Although the search for ideal forms of world literature will be difficult to realize the “partner language of reciprocity”, the study of world literature revived at the XX ICLA/AILC Congress in Paris 2013 and the XXI ICLA/AILC Congress in Vienna 2016 has its justification and a realistic research perspective. At the same time, this search once again raises questions about whether world literature is knowable and whether we want to know primarily the world that we sense and not the secondary world that literature generates through its texts and in which our observing and influencing subject finds itself. Despite this justified skepticism and hesitation between an emphasis on the world or literature itself, we believe that it is in fact possible to have a serious dialogue about world literature in theoretical discourse through concepts that, despite their semantic variability, navigate their local connotations within a particular epistemological framework. As shown by the following ICLA/AILC congresses in Macao 2019 (on world literature as the main subject of a new discipline) and Tbilisi 2022 (on world literature from the perspective of the “margins”), neither world literature nor “the world of literatures” or worldliness can be associated with one universal language or commercially successful translation into a “big” language.

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