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## Longman and Norton: The Anthologies of World Literature and the Effects on the Literary Landscapes

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**Abstract:** By establishing a critical dialogue with the observations of David Damrosch in *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age* concerning the challenges posed to Comparatism by the current state of the discipline, the question that we will address in the present work is, above all, a position on what it means to make a comparative study in a scenario marked by the reemergence of the phenomenon of world literature in literary studies. After directing our attention to *The Longman Anthology of World Literature* and *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, we were able to see how both still describe an unequal system of legitimation and aesthetic configuration based on a Eurocentric division between the “inside” and the “outside.” And it is precisely in the ethical and political implications of this process of “opening” to the world that lies our proposal for approaching world literature.

**Keywords:** world literature, comparative literature, transnational literary experience, transnationalization of culture and literature

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When we observe the tradition of literary studies, we realize that criticism has always oscillated between two distinct poles: sometimes, the conception of poetics as a “scientific” study was interested in literature in its generality in order to deduce rules or even laws; sometimes, literary history was attached to the works in what they had of the irreducible, explaining them by their national context. However, if we take into consideration that no text, whether literary or historical, is a universe closed in on itself, nor is it presented only as a representative mechanism of the space in which it is inserted, we will verify that adopting one of these perspectives would be the same as establishing a reductionist study of what we know as “literature.” With the advent of globalization and the intensification of cultural exchanges, it becomes fundamental to

recontextualize the semiotic potential of literature in producing meanings in different historical contexts. After all, if the object of comparative literature is essentially the study of diverse literatures in their interrelationships, as Van Tieghem would say, what questions are (or are not) at the center of comparative concerns today? In other words, what does it mean to do a comparative study in a scenario marked by the reemergence of world literature within the processes of transnationalization of culture and literature?

Considering, therefore, the present-day context of comparative literature studies, such issues are illustrated, among diverse forms, in the two major world literature anthologies available, namely *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* and *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. Published in 2018 by W.W. Norton, the fourth edition of *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* was edited by the following researchers: Martin Puchner (Harvard University), Suzanne Conklin Akbari (Toronto University), Wiebke Denecke (Boston University), Barbara Fuchs (University of California), Caroline Levine (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Pericles Lewis (Yale), and Emily Wilson (University of Pennsylvania). Structured in six volumes arranged in alphabetical order, each book is organized as follows (for the purposes of description, we will maintain English, the language of both anthologies). Volume A, with 1472 pages, is focused on texts considered most representative of ancient Mediterranean and near Eastern literature, ancient Egyptian literature, ancient Athenian drama, India's ancient epics and tales, and early Chinese literature and thought. Volume B has about 1536 pages devoted to Europe and the Islamic world, medieval lyrics and India's Classical Age. Volume C has 928 pages on texts that would illustrate encounters with Islam, Europe, and the New World. Volume D, with 752 pages, turns to what represents the literary production of East Asian drama, the Enlightenment in Europe and the Americas, and is also concerned with some literary works of early modern East Asia. Volume E, with 976 pages, presents what is called the Age of Revolutions in Europe and the Americas and the crossroads of Empire and Realism across the world. The last book, volume F, with 1280 pages, is dedicated to the literary production of modernity, modernity, and modernism, postwar and postcolonial literature, and contemporary world literature.

On the other hand, *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*, whose second edition was published in 2016 by Pearson, has as its editors and main contributors David Damrosch (Harvard University), David L. Pike (American University), and Djelal Kadir (Pennsylvania State University). Like the Norton, Longman also has six volumes organized alphabetically. The first, with 1346 pages, deals with the ancient world (Classical Greece, archaic lyric poetry, early South Asia) and some poetry from China, Rome, and the Roman empire. The second volume, structured in 1224 pages, is dedicated to what would be the most representative products of the medieval era (medieval China, Japan, classical Arabic, and Islamic literatures, medieval Europe). With about 936 pages, in book C we see the early modern period, vernacular writing in South Asia, early Europe, and Mesoamerica: before Columbus and after Cortes). The fourth book, with 622 pages focuses on the 17th and 18th centuries. Volume E, with 968 pages, is dedicated to the 19th century (the romantic nature, the romantic fantastic, and other American literature). Finally, the last book, F,

with 1056 pages, addresses the 20th century and post-colonial conditions.

It is in this sense that the question posed by David Damrosch, in his *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*, brings to the North American Academy a very pertinent reflection, although already well known and studied by theorists occupying the margins of the globe: “How can we best address the many disparate literatures now at play in literary studies, and what do we really mean by ‘comparing’ them?” (1). Recovering the classic dilemma faced by literary scholars around the world, Damrosch outlines a possible path for a walk through the woods of comparatism, to paraphrase Umberto Eco, to be rediscovered by those who have not yet managed to observe the different literary landscapes beyond their geographical borders. A walk that, for the more attentive readers interested in the challenges imposed by the concept of world literature, can be considered as a possibility of deconstruction of the dull and static landscapes created by the Norton and Longman anthologies. If the existence of circulation control policies, what Emily Apter defined as “sovereign borders,” in *Against World Literature* imposes challenges not only on the circulation of the literary text, but also on the reception of theories coming from the most varied parts of the globe, perhaps we can say that the ideas put forward by Damrosch in *Comparing the Literatures* enable the opening for the break with the imperialism of the North American academic logos by Americans themselves. If the gaze of the comparatists is undeniably marked by the historical and social forces of the space in which they inhabit, just as it is (or should be) constantly reshaped in light of the sociological and political reflections raised by their own object of study, the North American Academy, in the wake of Damrosch, might realize that they “can be [...] oddly myopic in their scholarly attention, largely ignoring the wider world of comparative work beyond our borders” (*Comparing* 6). After all, in terms, therefore, of a World Literature truly committed to ways of talking about worlds, that is, ways of accessing the culturally other, the adoption of a truly responsible comparatism that is able to put in check what Gayatri Spivak defined as the “US nationalism disguised as globalization” is an imperative in the current scenario of transculturation, of cultural exchanges and transfers (1686).

In this sense, Damrosch’s speech, delivered within the locus of enunciation of the traditional model of comparatism, deserves to be read as a kind of critical review of this ethnocentrist approach by the very space from which it was installed and expanded (Bernheimer 41-42). A revision that, by the way, needs to be read with emphasis on the question of the ethics of *différance* (Derrida, *Margens*) and the disarticulation of critical discourse in order to, finally, as in a gesture of hospitality, as we will talk about later, rearticulate it on new bases. In other words, beyond a gesture of authority in which wanting to hear and making the culturally “other” heard is still characterized as a decision that does not give way to a speaking of the subaltern/marginalized beyond their locus of enunciation, it is crucial to the current state of the discipline of Comparative Literature that, although it seeks to offer “border solidarity,” little is yet known about the discipline’s studies in peripheral spaces. In response to Spivak’s provocation in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* we would argue that pointing out the incongruities of trying to explain the world from a European/North American point of view is not enough to create spaces in which the subaltern can

effectively speak and be heard. Although in the attempt to grasp new integrative perspectives of *différance* every effort is valid, the capacity of the subaltern to speak of itself cannot be relegated. It is worth emphasizing that our observation should not be taken as a political war for the appropriate expression of “our.” It is, above all, about thinking about the conditions of possibility of knowledge as an epistemic performativity that reveals asymmetrical cultural exchanges in global times marked by the return of the concept of *Weltliteratur*. As in Damrosch’s own words, in thinking about the worldly presence of literary works, we need to consider how they relate to the world around them through the worlds they create, who also argues what we need to know is what choices we are making, and why we make them, when we adopt a given definition of “the world” in World Literature, and we should be able to use different definitions for different purposes. (*Comparing* 253-268)

It is within this perspective that we corroborate the renewed reading brought up by Damrosch about the literary landscapes illustrated/constructed by the great anthologies of world literature, which we mentioned above. As the author would say,

the large World Literature anthologies produced for the Norton American market during the past two decades have attracted a good deal of attention from scholars interested in exploring, or critiquing, the ongoing development of world literary studies. (273)

However, unlike Damrosch, we do not believe that anthologies have often been taken as a kind of “metonymy” (274) of the World Literature field in general. If Damrosch departs from the considerations of Apter, for whom anthologies are considered a kind of “entrepreneurial, bulimic drive to anthologize and curricularize the world’s cultural resources,” we totally agree with Apter’s approach. After all, what is at stake is not the fact that anthologies, as Damrosch justifies, present “a good deal of information on the work’s cultural and historical context, through introductions, footnotes, and clusters of related reading” (*Comparing* 276), but what is understood as representative of a literary world. It is interesting that Damrosch, paradoxically comes close to what he himself seems to criticize, when he observes that “European literatures retain a disproportionate presence in all the current anthologies; the major canonical Western writers are given substantially more space than all but a few non-Western writers” (278).

By directing our attention back to the Longman’s and the Norton’s anthologies of world literature, we can see again how both describe an unequal system of legitimation and aesthetic configuration based on a Eurocentric division between the “inside” and the “outside.” Speaking about the Latin American context, the permanence of a structure of symbolic representation of theoretical, epistemological, and hermeneutic violence is undeniable. After all, the already known difficulty in defining what Latin American literature could be shows us that, outside the academic environment, this label is used most of the time to refer to Spanish-American literature, leaving the Brazilian production practically absent from this picture, as well as “Chicano” literature, the French-language productions from the Caribbean and Canada, and “indigenous” literature, to

mention only a few examples.

By listing the writers of the “Latin American literature” that make up the volumes of *The Norton Anthology* and *The Longman Anthology*, we obtained the following data: in Longman, only fifteen names made it onto the select list of world literature, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, Alejo Carpentier, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, Domingo Sarmiento, Esteban Echeverría, Rubén Darío, Julio Cortázar, César Vallejo, Oswald de Andrade, Machado de Assis, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Clarice Lispector, and Derek Walcott; at Norton, we had Machado de Assis, Clarice Lispector, Aimé Césaire, and Derek Walcott. Going a little further, it is interesting to recover the preface of the Instructor’s manual to accompany *The Longman Anthology*, written by Damrosch and available online:<sup>1</sup>

A distinctive feature of our Anthology is the grouping of works in Perspectives section, and as Resonances between texts. Together, these groupings are intended both to set works in cultural context and to link them across time and space. These groupings have a strategic pedagogical function as well. We have observed that in other anthologies, brief author listings rarely seem to get taught. Added with the laudable goal of increasing an anthology’s range and inclusiveness, the new materials too often get lost in the shuffle. Our groupings of works cluster shorter selections in ways that make them more likely to be taught, creating a critical mass of readings around a compelling literary or social issue and economically providing cultural context for the major works around them. (General Editor’s Preface xi-xii)

In this classic hierarchical logic of “Resonances between texts” or of sources and influences, which is well known to serious scholars who inhabit what is traditionally referred to as the fringe of the globe, what we saw was basically Aimé Césaire as part of a Shakespeare resonance. At Norton, on the other hand, most of the material related to Hispanic America is grouped in subsections like “The encounter of Europe and the New World” or “Church, and Self.” Thus, diving into the contemporary scenario marked by intense debates around multiculturalism and globalization we must think about how we can interpret these choices and approaches, starting from the assumption that the recognition of literary space is relatively dependent on political space. As stated by Damrosch,

The opening of theory to the world beyond the West has now been underway for several decades, but it is still an incomplete project, not least because “theory” remains a discourse of largely European and North American provenance. A canon—or hypercanon—of works by theorists based in western Europe and the United States circulates widely around the world, even among critics who reject the canonicity of “Great Books” in literature itself. (*Comparing* 145)

Through this data survey, we are able to see that within the scope of the world literature,

attempts are made to theorize about the various productions that occupy the margins of the globe, but that, ironically, end up denouncing the semantic scope of the place from which such theorizations are enunciated. Far from broadening the scope of the notion of world literature, such anthologies reinforce the logic of a modernity not only understood as a historical period, but as a rhetoric, as a discourse “that consists in celebrating the logos of subjects, institutions, languages, and places that self-define and position themselves in the present and at the center of a planetary evolution of modernity” (Mignolo, *Desobediencia* 9).

And it will be in this imbrication between the colonality of power (and, we would add, of knowledge) and the global colonality that we articulate our look around world literature through the reading of *Comparing the Literatures*. Instead of bringing up a set of texts to try to explain how they should be approached, it is fundamental that the current debates around this disciplinary field be updated in order to understand it as a condition for the possibility of building new loci of enunciation. As Damrosch says, “it is no longer necessary to oppose the national to the cross-cultural or the comparative to the global” (*Comparing* 314). In other words, we argue that such loci of enunciation configure themselves as a new perspective for a geopolitical order of knowledge production. What we have seen has been, in fact, a sophisticated version of the study of sources and influences, so dear to the French School of Comparative Literature. If world literature in its literal sense is characterized as an impossibility (not so much because of its broad scope, but because the very notion of literature is still the subject of innumerable debates), neither is it a “juxtaposition of all the critical concepts and ideas from the world’s different literary traditions, but a set of fundamental questions [...] that poetics or critical theories are dealing with in different cultures and traditions” (Zhang).

After questioning the universalizing stance that has become a tonic of comparative literature since the 1970s, the return of world literature takes us—in a runaway train—to what is now elementary in comparative studies: the relations between a local (and “local” here does not mean a watertight characteristic, by the way) and an imported tradition, as well as the political implications of the exchanges established in this contact. If Wellek, in 1959, pointed out that the world was in a state of crisis because we were unable to “establish a distinct object of study and a specific methodology” (120), we could update his observation in the form of a paraphrase: the world remains in crisis because the cultural asymmetries that have constituted the discipline since its founding moments are still, deliberately, institutionalized, as we have seen illustrated by the Anthologies cited above. In this sense, Damrosch is right to say that

the challenge for comparatists today is to develop what Sheldon Pollock has called “Comparison without Hegemony” [...] a prerequisite for such comparison will an opening out of “Theory” beyond its Euro-translation-zone. If we work against the great-power dynamics still prevalent in much theoretical discussion, we can mitigate the hegemonic tendencies long baked into comparative studies. Both in theory and in practice, we have a long way to go if we want to have a world literary theory worth the name. (*Comparing* 164)

By following this perspective, we must bear in mind the tensions between the hegemonic and the counter-hegemonic to reinforce, therefore, the urgent need to resize the space addressed by the comparative literature studies and its still universalizing posture. If theories also travel, as Edward Said would say, we also agree with Damrosch when we claim that “a much wider range of theoretical perspectives needs to be brought into the conversation today, well beyond the Euro-American theories that continue to dominate much critical discourse, both in the West and often elsewhere too” (*Comparing* 130). As José Luis Jobim reminds us, there is always a certain “geopolitics of the gaze” in comparatism that cannot be neglected. Once the formulation of the term “geopolitics” places us before the intimate relationship between the production of knowledge and the geopolitical location of the social practices of such production, the mistaken idea of “lack” or “universal” description of a given community placed us—and still does—before the notion of “representation,” historically conditioned and, therefore, variable. If geopolitics “is not an arbitrary factor, but a determining one in the production and circulation of works,” Jobim is quite right in stating that it is appropriate to say that the place where works circulate cannot be considered only as a starting point for certain inquiries, but as a space in which “human experience gains materiality, verbally structuring a way of being and giving meaning to the world” (60).

Bound to a traditional mode of defense of the nation and nationalities, world literature—the way it is presented nowadays—inevitably fails to move towards the opening of a truly cosmopolitan base in the sphere of recognition that is geopolitically sensitive enough to avoid reproducing neoimperialist cartographies. In a wider perspective, we might say, corroborating the perspective of critic and researcher João Cezar de Castro Rocha, that at the margins of this single point of reference, in non-hegemonic circumstances “everything happens as if art had been deauratized” by a supposed “absence of stabilizing origin” (21). Local stories are erased by global projects. Or rather, local histories are erased by other local histories that were transformed into global projects. As well noted by Jobim, what is at stake under the designation of influences is the most naive version of the concept of appropriation, which “besides being used to judge the relationship between authors, has also been used to judge the relationship between national literatures, with all the problems this entails” (147). Thus, aware of the interrelationships of multiple consciousnesses that combine among themselves without mechanizing their horizons, we believe that we must ask ourselves whether what we have been repeating over and over again is not a false alarm of an equally superficial understanding of the structures of society. Structures that constitute themselves as modes of representation closely linked to the power of a predominant theoretical system that, by suppressing the enunciating subject and various actors of undeniably heterogeneous processes through the selection and organization of the constitutive elements of social “reality,” relies on closed and restricted knowledge, on a categorical, theological, and institutional truth, ignoring the intentionality and historicity of every cultural order. And in this regard, perhaps we can say that the theoretical basis of world literature is closer to the political than to the literary (considered a discourse of desacralization, in which the subversion of the gears

of a previously established mechanism is what differentiates it from other existing discourses). As thought by Wail Hassan, it is clear that there is an undeniable relationship between the way knowledge is produced and the geopolitical location of the institutions where that knowledge emerged.

Therefore, if for Jacques Rancière there is at the base of politics a first aesthetics, we could invert his presupposition and say that at the base of every aesthetics there is a first politics that cannot be neglected. This means that in the world of world literature it is not only the social body that speaks, but the critical discourse itself that has not yet (re)constructed itself, nor retraced its past in an uninterrupted dynamic that erects present and future. Perhaps this comparative event has been stuck in customs control, in the rigidity of established epistemological boundaries. Of course, this is not about denying the transnational possibilities of cultural exchanges and exchanges that, in one way or another, are constructed by world literature, more specifically in its current context. Rather, it is a question of looking with suspicion at the world that is represented by this discipline, questioning the way in which such a re-presentation is constructed and disseminated by the Longman Anthology and the Norton Anthology.

These sociological and political features also lead us to what Damrosch has stressed as the problem of translation and reception when a theory travels into different cultures: “the [...] serious imbalance between accessible materials from the West versus other regions is redoubled by a lingering linguistic imperialism: English, French and (to a diminishing degree) German are the privileged languages of international theory” (146). Identifying that the basic element through which literature is read and thought is language, and this is a crucial arena in which comparatists have to work against old patterns that have marginalized most of the world’s critical perspectives, Damrosch shows us that the problem is particularly acute when transnational literary exchanges become the expression of symbolic domination relations founded on the unequal distribution of linguistic-literary capital. Unlike a supposed transnationalism marked by the dissemination of codes circulating freely across territorial borders of sovereignty, it means that the space of circulation of texts is increasingly structured around the opposition between a pole of large production and a pole of restricted production. Going further, what is at stake in the current globalized scenario of intensified cultural exchanges and transfers does not concern, we would say, only what is known, but the production of knowledge itself and the urgent relocation and questioning of what Walter Mignolo has tried to show as a kind of Western canon of knowledge, a place of speech authorized to define certain objects and subjects, a place where the Occidentalism is geopolitical dominant system (*Histórias* 89).

And it will be in this imbrication between the colonality of power (and, we would add, of knowledge) and the global colonality that we will also articulate our look around world literature. Instead of bringing up a set of texts to try to explain how they should be approached, we will reinforce our proposal for a change of perspective. And in this regard, more than simply inverting a dominant logic of reading, it is fundamental that we operate a decolonization of the academic culture and its reception. And it is precisely in this displacement of the traditional

opposition between Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism we would situate the concept of world literature. It interests us, therefore, to emphasize the complicity that for us must exist between attempts to reread world literature today and the critical awareness of a cosmopolitanism as “formulation and conveyance of discourses [...] that actually escapes the opposition between Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism, between imperialism and anti-imperialism, as well as identity essentialism” (Araújo 36). And, we would add, between what is designated as canonical and traditional. As a process of ceaseless discovery and self-criticism, not of withdrawal and exclusion, world literature texts need to be constructed according to a comparative approach characterized by the possibility of an ethics of reading that challenges supposed textual properties. If every theorization is intimately linked to the space in which it emerges, the intense cultural and literary exchanges in the perversity of a modern world call, finally, for an attitude of critical revision about non-exclusive modes of belonging, for constant dialogues between different historical and cultural spaces. Eliminating the idea of “origin” and historically establishing itself in terms of a shared planetarity, as defined by Spivak and Mignolo, we believe that the gaze of comparatism opens up the possibility of an ethics of reading that challenges the conditionings that surround the reader’s relationship with the idea of textual/cultural ownership. If every theorization is intimately linked to the space in which it emerges, it is precisely this inventory that, for the organization of an interpretative theory of concepts such as identity, culture, subject, and colonialism, needs to be made by the comparative Anglophone literature that rescued the concept of World Literature. And in a gesture of theoretical cooperation and horizon broadening, we Latin Americans share our hypothesis: the perspective of a world literature must be aligned with a cosmopolitanism as an openness favorable to difference. If the true cosmopolitan is the one who maintains a look of denaturalization in its broadest sense, the broadening of the horizon contained in anthropophagy as criticism reminds us that Latin America is the locus of a relevant theoretical and critical production in the field of cultural and literary studies.

After all, in a transnational context of critical reading and reception, would this same condition of denaturalization of dominant knowledges be the possibility of (re)birth of world literature today? A (re)birth, we might say, no longer from within the insufficiency of certain “Western logocentricities,” but from the margins of the modern/colonial world. A change of perspective that allows us to rearticulate subaltern and hegemonic knowledges from the perspective of those who have always been placed on the margins of the world. Obviously, it is not about sustaining the old propositions of the existence of an “inside” and an “outside,” but about putting in check the referential values existing in dichotomies that justify a will of power that still permeates the concept of world literature, as we could see. The important step is to cross the divide between European centers and non-European peripheries, reading in the tension between the local and the global in the concept of world literature the (re)emergence of fundamental conceptual issues of comparative discourse as a possibility of cross-cultural communication. This will allow us to inquire, like Zhang, “is World Literature to expand

not only its coverage or reading materials to a global dimension, but also its critical and theoretical horizon to embrace the entire world, beyond the great East-West divide?” Since our comprehension of what is the “world” to be represented in the domain of world literature lies in the transgression of any Eurocentrism (or ethnocentrism) and of any attempt to homogenize differences, we believe that to think about such a concept is, above all, to think about the theories that permeate the comprehension of the performativity of cultures.

Instead of being just a collection of texts coming from distinct literary systems—or that circulate beyond their national borders—we believe that world literature should correspond to an ethos of welcoming of alterity, a negotiation between the familiar and the foreign, in the sense that Derrida uses the idea of “hospitality” to talk about the recognition of the Other within an interactive and transversal relationship. Within this relationship that will point to the recognition of the limits of referentiality and that will lead us to the necessary questioning of logocentric systems of representation, the understanding of the world literature system as a space of hospitality will evidence that plurilingualism can and must be accepted as an act of resistance to the idea of a universality that only disguises the belonging of certain groups to distinct spaces in a homogenizing global network.

### Note

1. See [wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/7082/7252683/LAWL\\_V1\\_IM.pdf](https://www.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/7082/7252683/LAWL_V1_IM.pdf).

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