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TRANSLATION SPECIAL ISSUE

Translation, Translation Studies, Comparative Literature, World Literature

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Translation has always played an invaluable part in the transmission of texts from one culture to another. Think for instance of St. Jerome's Bible translations from Hebrew yielding the Latin *Vulgate* canonized by the Roman Catholic Church or of the spread of Bhuddism to China via translations of the Han Dynasty. In European literature, translations of Greek and Roman classics provided many authors not only with inspiration but also with a handsome income, as was for instance the case with the early 18th-century English poet Alexander Pope. The translation of *One Thousand and One Nights* into French by Antoine Galland in the very early years of the same century gave rise to a vogue for oriental tales in European literature. Voltaire, among others, used the genre for some of his best-known philosophical *récits*. Goethe was a copious translator, either directly or via intermediaries, from a wide variety of literatures. For his *West-östlicher Divan* he found inspiration in German translations of the Persian 14th-century poet Hafez. His pronunciations on *Weltliteratur* were triggered by his reading a Chinese novel in translation.

With the rise of national literatures and their study in the 19th century, the role of translations in the transmission and spread of genres, styles, and tropes, or in the development of a writer, was systematically underrated. National pride demanded that writers in the national language be claimed as in every respect original instead of tributary to foreign examples. Even much later this often led to the practice of separating, for instance in collected works, a writer's "original" productions from her or his translations. For the longest time this was the case with the works of some early 20th-century Dutch poets. Only recently have their translations been included not as an appendix to their collected works but as an integral part of their work with a discernible influence on the rest of their production. If translations were considered at all, it was usually from the perspective of their faithfulness to the original. Translation theory as such until the 1970s largely concentrated on Bible translation, especially with an eye to missionary activities by the various Christian churches. The reigning terminology discussed source and target texts in terms of the equivalence of the latter to the former. This is also how translation studies were approached in the translator and interpreter schools that after World War II flourished in several European countries. A change occurred in the late 1970s with the introduction of Descriptive Translation Studies, or DTS, by literary scholars. Instead of measuring the equivalence, or faithfulness, between source and target text, DTS looked at why a certain target text arose in the form it did, seeking explanations in social, political, and cultural conditions obtaining at the moment of translation. This led to a veritable blossoming of Translation Studies in the bosom of Comparative Literature. In the early 1990s Susan Bassnett, one of the contributors to this issue of the *Journal of Foreign*

Languages and Cultures, proclaimed Translation Studies no longer a sub-branch of Comparative Literature but rather the other way around.

Since the turn of the 21st century, Translation Studies has grown into what can legitimately be called a separate discipline, with hundreds of scholars avidly studying not only actual translations and the impact they have had on the development of writers, genres, styles, or tropes, but also working on theory or theories of translation. In turn, the success of Translation Studies has decisively influenced the theory and practice of Comparative Literature and World Literature. The essays that follow address these developments.

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