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**Literary History / Cultural History:
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DORIS BACHMANN-MEDICK

Is There a Literary History of World Literature?¹

The question of a history of world literature seems almost threatening, if one's view is restricted by a solidly canonical "mountain range of world literature" – by the impressive summits of Peak Dante and Monte Cervantes, by Mount Shakespeare, Mont Rabelais, and finally Hohen Goethe.² It goes without saying that this imposing range is to be found in the West. In contrast, the new literatures of the world – especially non-Western, non-European texts – require a different cartography and a clear expansion of the horizon. While no colossal summit comes into view here, large formations which undermine the massif of established world literature can be discerned. As a result, the desire for expansion and appropriation which accompanied the centuries-long claim to Western superiority and literary power is also undermined. If one speaks less these days of "world literature" than of "literatures of the world," then this critically illuminates two different things: on the one hand, the unilaterally Western location of the traditional concept of world literature; on the other, the inequalities existing between cultures and literatures. The concept of world literature has to be brought into the present tense and freed from its European shackles if it is to become the basis for the writing of a new intercultural and comparative literary history, which is no longer limited to a national concept of literature and which deals with the worldwide interfacing and conflict of cultures. In this way, other points of emphasis in the history of literature become apparent which have appeared alongside the historical changes in the understanding of world literature. Things could be expressed more precisely in view of a "future literary history under the sign of globalisation," as the Germanist Horst Steinmetz recently indicated.³ Indeed, while working on the question of world literature, Steinmetz's starting point – how the relationship of literature to developments seen in the global world "can be transferred to a conception of literary history"⁴ – could also be dealt with more thorough-

1 Translation from the German by Marc Colavincenzo (MC). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German texts quoted are also by MC.

2 See Durs Grünbein, "Zu Füßen von Peak Dante und Monte Cervantes" 42.

3 Horst Steinmetz, "Globalisierung und Literatur(geschichte)," in *Literatur im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, eds. Schmelting, Schmitz-Emans & Walstra 189: "künftigen Literaturgeschichte im Zeichen der Globalisierung."

4 Steinmetz, "Globalisierung und Literatur(geschichte)" 189: "in ein literaturgeschichtliches Konzept überführt werden kann."

ly. This not only has repercussions for a future literary history in the twenty-first century, but also entails a retrospective rethinking of its practice so far.

The attempt to accentuate intercultural aspects is in any case at odds with the way in which traditional, linear-chronological literary history defines certain canonical works as the high-points within the framework of a classical division into literary periods. In contrast, this attempt is concerned, rather, with widening the horizon of cultural contact through the medium of the literary text. At present, such a new focus for the writing of literary history could certainly make use not only of research into the internationalisation⁵ and globalisation⁶ of literature, but also of certain insights into a “material literary history” of the media and technological conditions of the emergence of literature,⁷ as well as of the critical discussion surrounding the canon⁸ and, above all, research into processes of cultural transfer.⁹ In the first place, however, it is necessary to gain an understanding of world literature which is not dependent on the canonised masterworks of literary history. This entails the exploration of – in Edward Said’s words – a “complex and uneven topography”¹⁰ of literary texts: that is, their position and possible influence in a worldwide network of cultural articulation. But even this sort of topography of texts remains influenced by the same linguistic and cultural tradition of great works that it attempts to overcome. Any understanding of world literature nowadays must increasingly accommodate a world language spoken dominantly in the West with its internationalised discourses. Worldwide understanding clearly presupposes the internationalisation of language and meaning. In this sense, the cultural encounter between an Indian scholar and an Egyptian Imam – as portrayed in the documentary work of fiction *In an Antique Land* by the Indian writer and anthropologist Amitav Ghosh – results in the following insight:

5 See *Internationalität nationaler Literaturen*, ed. Udo Schöning, and *Unerledigte Geschichten*, eds. Gesa von Essen & Horst Turk.

6 See *Literatur im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, eds. Schmeling, Schmitz-Emans & Walstra.

7 See Friedrich A. Kittler, “Literaturgeschichte” 357–61.

8 See *Kanon und Theorie*, ed. Maria Moog-Grünwald, and *Kanon – Macht – Kultur*, ed. Renate von Heydebrand.

9 See, among others, *Philologiques*, eds. Michel Espagne & Michael Werner, esp. vol 3: *Qu’est-ce qu’une littérature nationale?; Mediating Cultures*, ed. Norbert H. Platz; *Nationale Grenzen und internationaler Austausch*, eds. Lothar Jordan & Bernd Kortländer; and *Kulturtransfer im Epochenumbruch*, eds. Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink & Rolf Reinhardt.

10 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 318.

To make ourselves understood, we had both resorted, I, a student of the ‘humane’ sciences, and he, an old-fashioned village Imam, to the very terms that world leaders and statesmen use at great, global conferences, the universal, irresistible metaphysics of modern meaning.¹¹

Already in 1962, Hans Magnus Enzensberger assumed that, as a result of the internationalisation of poetic modernism, not only a general basis of understanding had been created, but also much more: a “poetical world language.” As Enzensberger observes in an essay based on the original introduction to his “Museum of Modernist Poetry,” an astonishing degree of consensus in terms of poetic attitudes and methods developed “at the same time in the most varying places in the West, and soon also in the East,” during the course of twentieth-century modernism.¹² Modernist poetry – and this is a striking criterion for the writing of literary history – ignored boundaries, bringing forth an internationalism of literature; as a result, the old idea of a world literature in his view became reality for the first time. In this case, world literature appears to be synonymous with a universal opening of literary history which clearly crosses national boundaries. Enzensberger was particularly excited by the innovativeness of modernist poetry, which matched the technological developments also taking place at that time around the world. His conclusion, however, is problematical: the modernists had “helped the term ‘world literature’ achieve a radiance [...], which would have been unimaginable at any other time.”¹³

This radiance appears to have clearly diminished to a very large extent in the era of postmodernism and postcolonialism. Instead, literature at present is expected to be critical of the modernist project. World literature and the internationalisation – not to mention the technologisation – of the world have gone their separate ways. Literature is becoming an increasingly important instance of differentiation in contrast to the burgeoning uniformity of the international global communication network. In assuming this role, literature does not advocate a homogeneous world language, but rather cultural differences. Ultimately, literary texts themselves are drawn into the conflict-ridden dynamic of worldwide cultural confrontation insofar as they are classified either as central or as peripheral. As a result, the discussion of world literature becomes more pointed, since it is no longer clear that a multitude of literatures and cultures can find their common denominator in a multifaceted “archive” of literary texts from around the world. In

11 Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* 237.

12 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Weltsprache der modernen Poesie” 262: “gleichzeitig an den verschiedensten Punkten der westlichen, bald auch der östlichen Welt.”

13 Enzensberger, “Weltsprache der modernen Poesie” 262: “dem Begriff der Weltliteratur zu einer Leuchtkraft verholfen [...], an die in anderen Zeiten nicht zu denken war.”

any case, *pace* Enzensberger, the literatures of the world can no longer assume that a poetic world language has become reality. Considering the cultural inequalities and asynchronisms of the postcolonial condition, aspirations to a uniform poetic world language – which would be at the same time the unifying characteristic of an intercultural literary history – would seem to be misplaced.

These days, the self-evident assumption of a global cosmopolitanism, which relied upon the eighteenth-century notion of “the unity of humankind,” has been shaken in its foundations. However, postcolonial literary theory and history, with their focus on alterity and cultural differences, in their turn throw new light on the classics in the history of a conception of world literature. In this sense, Homi Bhabha stresses that Goethe’s own terminology was already clearly characterised by a concern with otherness, which only two hundred years later had become more pointed in the assumptions of alterity and conflict reigning in the contemporary discussion of world literature:

The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’. Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of world literature.¹⁴

Precarious border and frontier conditions, transnational histories, and “contact zones,”¹⁵ especially as documented in travel reports, could open up new horizons for literary history and histories. This widening results not from principles associated with the creation of national identity but from exploring the differences that emerge in moments of cultural encounter.

Goethe had already taken cultural encounter to be a necessary condition for the realisation of world literature. He did not feel that world literature had in his time become a reality – rather, that it was a project for the future which would have to rely on a cooperative process involving writers, artists and intellectuals from different parts of the world. Such a stress upon the active production of world literature through personal contact with “living and aspiring literary authors”¹⁶ does not necessarily have as its aim a literary history of world literature. However, the step from a conception like this to a model for a literary history which crosses cultural boundaries is not that large. This conception is not interested in a canon of periodised literatures

14 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 12.

15 See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

16 Johann Wolfgang Goethe, “Die Zusammenkunft der Naturforscher in Berlin 1828,” *Werke* 363: “lebendigen und strebenden Literatoren.”

of the past, but in the intercultural exchange between contemporaries – between the other and the self – as it took place, for example, in the eighteenth-century context in the concrete instance of periodicals circulating across borders, and especially in the practice and reception of translations.

It is noteworthy that Goethe was the first to formulate a communication- and process-oriented understanding of world literature, rather than one which was canon-oriented (although the nineteenth century was soon to shift this focus). World literature for Goethe was an intercultural space for communication that crossed national borders – a process oriented to the future and only really understood as it comes into being; precisely this is implied in his notion of an “advancing world literature.”¹⁷ This in no way amounts to agreement about modes of thought, as presupposed in Enzensberger’s “poetic world language.” The idea is, rather, that a knowledge of world literature enables the reciprocal adjustment between given national literatures. According to Goethe, the advantage of an outside perspective is that the recognition of cultural differences has a positive result:

For a general world literature can only emerge from each nation’s gaining a knowledge of the conditions obtaining in other nations – thereby inevitably finding something in the others that is pleasing or unpleasant, worthy of imitation or to be avoided.¹⁸

Goethe’s attitude towards world literature is, however, in essence an educational programme, and is therefore subject to the same limitations that apply to his understanding of education, which is humanistic and oriented to the classical ideal. In the end, owing to his understanding of education, Goethe himself played a part in the narrowing of the discourse about world literature which took place in the nineteenth century. The emerging comparative study of literature – what Fritz Strich has called a “*Weltliteraturwissenschaft*” – has been working to develop evaluative criteria of selection for a eurocentric canon of literary masterpieces. The study of non-European literatures still suffers today from this distortion of the humanist tradition through the lens of an aesthetic canon. I need only refer to the “canon wars” of recent years, in which Harold Bloom defended the superiority of the “Western Canon” based on “aesthetic value” and the “autonomy of the aesthetic.”¹⁹

17 Goethe, “Brief an Zelter, 4.3. 1829” 363: “anmarschierenden Weltliteratur.”

18 Goethe, “Entwurf der Einleitung zu Thomas Carlyle, Leben Schillers, 5.4. 1830” 364: “Denn daraus nur kann endlich die allgemeine Weltliteratur entspringen, daß die Nationen die Verhältnisse aller gegen alle kennen lernen, und so wird es nicht fehlen, daß jede in der andern etwas Annehmliches und etwas Widerwärtiges, etwas Nachahmenswertes und etwas zu Meidendes antreffen wird.”

19 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*.

Goethe, however, argued more for a socially anchored understanding of literature, similar to that advanced nowadays by cultural studies. For him, literary interchange was not an isolated aesthetic activity, but a moment in the worldwide expansion of the network of communication and trade. At the same time, Goethe had envisaged the problem of how to channel the rising flood of world literature. The solution for him was certainly not canon-formation; he, rather, placed his faith in the direct network of connections which authors have to one another through their cosmopolitan and social activity, as well as in directed pedagogical efforts to introduce the Other into one's own cultural socialisation.

In 1808, long before he had given full expression to his concept of world literature (1827), Goethe corresponded with Niethammer, the Bavarian official in charge of schools and universities. The topic at issue was a future canon and school curriculum. Goethe was very critical of Niethammer's suggestion that he should compose a national history and anthology of German literature. The Bavarian official imagined a "book for the German people" ("*Volksbuch der Deutschen*") which would further the unity of the German nation. Goethe, however, emphasised that it was essential to incorporate foreign literatures in the form of translations – indeed:

one must explicitly point out the achievements of other nations, because the book is also intended for children, who, particularly in these times, need to be made aware at a very early age of the achievements of other nations.²⁰

(The project was never carried out.)

Goethe assumes here, above all, a reciprocal exchange between the different European literatures, formulating the first steps towards a 'hybridisation' of literary history whereby "foreign goods become our own property."²¹ An even wider horizon of world literature could already be found in 1778–79, in Johann Gottfried Herder's ethnopoetic collection of folk-songs. Herder draws attention here also to the poetic articulations of "savage or half-savage peoples," among whom, interestingly enough, he even includes the ancient Greeks. In doing so, he questions the superiority of the classical norms for literature and literary history. What about the "young Laplander," Herder asks, "who instead of speaking with Venus, speaks with his

20 Goethe, "Plan eines lyrischen Volksbuches" 286: "ja man müsste ausdrücklich auf Verdienste fremder Nationen hinüberweisen, weil man das Buch ja auch für Kinder bestimmt, die man besonders jetzt früh genug auf die Verdienste fremder Nationen aufmerksam zu machen hat." See Armin Paul Frank, "Transatlantic Responses" esp. 226ff.

21 Goethe, "Plan eines lyrischen Volksbuches" 286: "das fremde Gut unser Eigentum geworden [ist]."

reindeer?"²² Does this young Laplander not have as much poetic skill as the educated Greek? For Herder, world literature could only really develop once the classical aesthetic poetic norms had been left behind and by going beyond the limits of European literature. World literature does not refer to the history of the adoption of canonised texts of antique cultures, but to the discovery of poetic competence outside of the great literary traditions. More value is attributed, in particular, to the peripheral, marginal regional literatures, and Herder is determined to put their forms of expression on the map: "I sketch, therefore, a plan of the world, beginning with the small nations which live with and among us."²³

The current discussion of world literature picks up at exactly the point where Herder recognises and revalorises peripheral, marginal and regional literatures. This has led to a radical separation between world literature and canon formation. In such attempts to separate a concept of world literature from canonical questions, the aesthetic criteria of literary judgement are deliberately relegated to the background. Instead, there is a greater concentration on literature's cultural implications within the global context of cultural encounter. Which contribution can the literatures of the world make to a non-centralised, non-eurocentric cultural politics in the context of economic and cultural globalisation? This would be a far-reaching central concern for a still unwritten literary history of cultural contact. It would also involve consideration of historical constellations, as found in Edward Said's "comparative literature of imperialism."²⁴ What is meant by this is the placing of texts within broader discursive contexts such as discovery, colonialism, and postcolonialism, which first assumed concrete shape in the central field of the study of Orientalism.²⁵ In their own way, Goethe and Herder already widened the contextual horizons of literature, in particular with regard to world politics and economics – and at a time (the late-eighteenth century) when the autonomy of literature had been on the increase. A pessimist with regard to progress, Herder clearly recognised the dangers of trade and colonialism. Goethe, on the other hand, who regarded progress with optimism, felt it likely that world trade could be accompanied by a "general intellectual trade." In a "reciprocal exchange," the individual nations would open themselves to one another at the level of a "more or less

22 Johann Gottfried Herder, "Alte Volkslieder. 4. Buch: Ausweg zu Liedern fremder Völker," *Sämtliche Werke* 87.

23 Herder, "Alte Volkslieder" 87: "Ich ziehe also einen Plan der Welt zuerst auf die kleinen Nationen ein, die mit und unter uns wohnen."

24 Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 18.

25 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*.

free intellectual trade"²⁶: the setting for world literature is "the market, where all nations put their goods up for sale."²⁷

This conception of a cosmopolitan economy of world literature was also mentioned by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their Communist Manifesto. Marx and Engels realised that the expansion of the global market would free literature and literary history from their "national one-sidedness and limitedness": "a world literature will result from the many national and local literatures."²⁸ The hegemonic system of colonialism, however, prevented precisely this from happening. If it is no longer possible nowadays to speak uncritically of one world literature, but rather of many different literatures of the world, then European colonialism and imperialism have played no small role in this. They determined the specifically European way of dealing with foreign cultures and literatures, whereby I mean the typical European practice of a dichotomous opposition of the self and the other, based on the European invention of the Orient as an otherworld. Edward Said's criticism of Orientalism has shown how the consequences of the inequality of power between Western and non-Western cultures have even affected questions of epistemology. Until today, the horizon of world literature was also influenced by the fact that Western cultures have developed a narrow perception of self and other as a result of exactly this principle of a static opposite or antitype.

For the understanding of world literature, the conception of an opposition between a (European) centre and (non-European) periphery was constructed on this dichotomous principle. The demand for a European "monopoly on world literature" emerged. Both the dichotomisation and the European monopoly on world literature are being increasingly submitted to scrutiny. In Said's case, this takes place through recourse to a "contrapuntal and often nomadic" form of literary history which does not insist on linearity or synthesis. "Contrapuntal reading" concentrates on the synchronicity between the dominant history of the European centres and their colonial 'counter-history,' with which this master-narrative is connected through the poetics of imperialism. The methods of such an orientation for literary history consist not only in "looking at the different experiences contrapuntally," but also in "making up a set of what I call intertwined and

26 Goethe, "German Romance. Edinburgh 1827" 364: "mehr oder weniger freien geistigen Handelsverkehrs."

27 Goethe, "German Romance. Edinburgh 1827" 362: "Markte, wo alle Nationen ihre Waren anbieten."

28 Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, "Manifest der kommunistischen Partei," *Werke*, vol. 4, 466: "Die nationale Einseitigkeit und Beschränktheit wird mehr und mehr unmöglich, und aus den vielen nationalen und lokalen Literaturen bildet sich eine Weltliteratur."

overlapping histories."²⁹ "Intertwined histories" are also the main focus of the most recent discussion of world literature, which is taking place in the force-field between colonial and postcolonial experience in the USA and in the countries of the so-called "Third World."³⁰ In addition, one finds in postcolonial texts themselves – particular novels – striking "translations" of key topics in the current cultural studies debate. Using one of these novels as an example, I wish to indicate how it is possible to develop a new set of guiding principles for an intercultural history of contact between literatures and cultures by connecting literary texts to reflections involving cultural studies. The novel I have chosen illustrates at the same time the "contrapuntal" method of reading propagated by Said. It shows how in the meeting of different cultures, cultural contrasts – histories and counter-histories – can be negotiated without essentialising them or having them harden into cultural oppositions.

The text I will use is the already mentioned documentary novel by Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*. Ghosh is an Indian anthropologist who received his education in the USA, and who then became a novelist. This text is of particular interest for literary scholars because of the increasingly common experimental modes of representation in the documentary novel. In the form of a twofold travel report, Ghosh narrates the transcontinental business trips of a slave in the entourage of a Judaeo-Arabian merchant in the Middle Ages as well as his own anthropological research in Egypt. One of the surprising results of this is a reverse ethnography, for it is the Egyptians themselves who open up an energetic intercultural discussion about foreign cultures and religious practices.

In this encounter as represented in the novel, the search for a common language fails at the point where key cultural practices are under discussion, such as the Hindu burning of the dead, the cult of the holy cow in India, or circumcision rituals in Egypt. A common language appears really to exist only when technological achievements (weapons, bombs, nuclear power) are discussed and in this way when the aforementioned unified language of the "universal, irresistible metaphysics of modern meaning" is at issue. The staging of the cultural encounter in this documentary novel shows, on the one hand, a "travelling in the West" common to the Indians and Egyptians.³¹ On the other hand, Western forms of modernisation and internationalisation are contrasted with each of the respective cultural self-understandings: whether the burning of the dead, holy cows, or circumcision, it is

29 Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 18.

30 For a more detailed discussion, see Doris Bachmann-Medick, "Multikultur oder kulturelle Differenzen?"

31 Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* 236.

always a question of the introduction of difference, not just among themselves, but especially compared with the West, because “the West meant only this – science and tanks and guns and bombs.”³²

This example shows how the capacity for inter-subjective understanding of a Western-influenced standardised language infiltrates such texts. Despite this, the literatures of the world do not converge seamlessly as a result of internationalisation and globalisation. They do, however, develop a specific connection to the world, which achieves meaning in the context of what Homi Bhabha calls a “‘new’ internationalism.”³³ Such a “‘new’ internationalism” is to be comprehended neither by means of an anthropological humanistic universalism as Goethe understood it, nor through exchange between national literatures. On the contrary, the connection of world literatures to a system of national literatures is being increasingly severed at present. The contemporary experience of post-national forms of globalisation goes well beyond the experience that was formative for the old conception of world literature, just as present global history goes beyond older conceptions of world or universal history – which were still influenced by the idea of the nation-state.³⁴ It has to take into account the multi-layered transnational identities and loyalties of social and ethnic groups. World literature at present is formed in processes of migration between countries and by the cultural displacements resulting from them: that is, through the activities and life situations of subjects in diaspora. This is all taking place in the force-field of increasingly common multicultural identities, such as Afro-American, Asian-American-European, but also Turkish-German, Arabian-German, and so forth. A new type of novel is developing out of this force-field: “a postcolonial novel, a decentered, transnational, interlingual, cross-cultural novel,” as described by Salman Rushdie.³⁵ Under these premisses, Rushdie’s own novels are concerned with syncretic experiences and mixtures of cultures in metropolises. They show how processes of cultural transfer and of translation are closely bound to such tension-filled changes in life situations. The articulation of cultural ‘hybridity’ is of importance here, as is clearly apparent in the alienated position and/or ‘rebirth’ of Indian immigrants in England.³⁶ At present, cosmopolitanism alone no longer appears to be the main criterion for world literature; it is, rather, its interface with social processes of worldwide migration and with categories of cultural studies, such as homelessness, mapping, or translation.

32 Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* 236.

33 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 5.

34 In this context, see *Conceptualizing Global History*, eds. Bruce Mazlish & Ralph Buultjens 1–24.

35 Salman Rushdie, “In Defense of the Novel, Yet Again” 74.

36 See Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*.

In view of global developments the connection of literatures of the world to such real world processes poses important challenges, and not only for a future literary history. It is also opening up, in a more general sense, new possibilities for literary history: the usual consolidated progressive history found in nationally oriented literary histories, in which the identity of a culture is presented,³⁷ is thus dispersed across a spectrum of smaller individual histories – according to the motto of the New Historicism, literary history should tell not just one, but many histories.³⁸ A plea for a literary history of cultural encounter could, however, not only be based on the current problematic of literatures of the world. In accordance with the tenets of the New Historicism, it could rest on more general methodological premisses. These demand a removal of chronological corsets by paying attention to synchronous constellations of texts and to processes of circulation between texts. This perspective enables a contextual and cross-disciplinary literary history based on “moments of cultural history, in which the goal is the construction of cultural and historical connections which do not already exist but which must be created.”³⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, however, has recently intimated, within the context of a discussion of Francis Bacon’s “imagined project” for literature in *The Advancement of Learning*, that a useful literary history must go beyond the cellular formations of a national literature’s “cultural poetics” and become cross-cultural. This is an important signal for a new direction which the New Historicism could take. Greenblatt, however, does not indicate precisely what such a “cross-disciplinary” and “cross-cultural”⁴⁰ history of literature would look like. One thing appears clear to me: a comparative, intercultural literary history will no longer be concerned solely with systematic comparisons of different (mostly European) national literary histories. It could expand Said’s contrapuntal mode of reading beyond the discourse of imperial relations to a “comparison” of literatures, which would trace the intercultural history of interrelations between cultural forms of expressions at further concrete literary points of interchange and connection.⁴¹

To return to my opening question – is there a literary history of world literature? Such a project would be problematic if written from a eurocen-

37 For more on this tradition, see Jürgen Fohrmann, *Das Projekt der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*.

38 See Anton Kaes, “New Historicism: Literaturgeschichte im Zeichen der Postmoderne?” 263.

39 Kaes, “New Historicism” 261: “kulturgeschichtliche Momentaufnahmen, in denen es [...] um die *Konstruktion* von (erst zu erstellenden, nicht schon vorgegebenen) kulturellen und historischen Ereigniszusammenhängen geht.”

40 Stephen Greenblatt, “The History of Literature” 471, 472.

41 In this respect, the differentiation of these two forms of cultural comparison, as Jürgen Osterhammel has done for historiography, would be of use. See Osterhammel, “Zivilisationen im Vergleich.”

tric perspective. The new literatures of the world provide us with other perspectives; not only by their postcolonial writing-back or rewriting of European texts, but also by their sharing a postmodern stance and forms of literary presentation they invalidate the principles of the traditional writing of literary history. They call for an intercultural, 'hybrid' literary history, which, far from adopting a simple comparative approach, would include to a larger extent than before both significant cross-sections of literary interconnections and cultural mixings as well as the representation of foreign cultures and literatures in the form of translations.⁴² In this way, further important fields and constellations of literary history could be included for the first time or would be more clearly marked than usual: the multilingualism of exile literature, cultural crossing of boundaries through travel literature, or the literature created by minorities or by so-called foreigners. However, this will not only open up new literary fields of study. Instances of "inner" translation within these fields of study will become apparent, closely connected to the existential situation of migrants as "translated men," in Rushdie's words.⁴³ The elaboration of these inner translations or stories of intercultural relations at the level of the "existential situation" of individual subjects and their accessibility is clearly a new terrain of literature. It marks force-fields within literary history which not only reveal the overlappings between texts and different cultural experiences in the interrelations existing between the local and the global, but also shed a new light on the relations between references to the subject and to the world within a fictional text. A history of world literatures and their connections to the world – their "worldliness," in Edward Said's term⁴⁴ – could take shape in this way, even before the much more demanding, large-scale project of a global history of literatures can be truly considered. A focus on the question of how world literatures develop, including of course the multi-layered and ambiguous connections of literature to the world, would have two essential features: on the one hand, it would deal with the conceptualisation of an intercultural and comparative literary history, which would position literature in the context of an emerging world society instead of the nation. On the other, it would posit a literary history which is made up of various smaller histories, but which also reveals as yet unnoticed relations and connections between the literatures and their forms of expression, thereby bringing to light the representation and transformation of a multiplicity of culturally plural worlds.⁴⁵

42 See *Übersetzung als Repräsentation fremder Kulturen*, ed. Doris Bachmann-Medick.

43 See Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 17: "Having been borne across the world, we [the British Indian writers and migrants] are translated men"; see also Rushdie, *Shame* 23.

44 See Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*.

45 See Steinmetz, "Globalisierung und Literatur(geschichte)" 198.

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