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DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

A DEFENSE AGAINST THE SAME:
THE HISTORY AND THE PROGRESSION OF THE INTRODUCTORY WORLD
LITERATURE COURSE IN AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Though classes on world literature have been a staple within comparative literature departments throughout North American and European universities since its inception in the early 1800s, it was not until very recently that these courses began to explore more extensively texts outside of the Western tradition. Towards the close of the twentieth century, following a string of ethnic renaissances, globalizing systems, and theoretical advancements, the discipline of world literature returned once again to the forefront of literary discourse. In light of such vast migrations of people and information across national boundaries, it is time for scholars to rethink the ways in which we teach the literary diversity of our planet for students who have only known other cultures through the frame of Western hegemony. Through an examination of the syllabi from Penn State's own introductory world literature survey course, CMLIT 010, one can observe the changes over time to the ways in which the field of comparative literature has integrated recent theoretical studies—such as postcolonialism, cultural studies, women's studies, queer theory, and translation studies—into the world literature curriculum over the past twenty-five years. Over time instructors have merged these theories into the course, emphasizing a cross-cultural, international, and more cosmopolitan reading of foreign texts and situating students within the context of the work in order to teach students to read non-Western cultural traditions in an ethically responsible manner.

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For my mother, Linda Lee Young.

Introduction

Since Goethe formulated the concept of world literature in 1827 we have witnessed time and time again its ability to form bonds between different nations and traditions. Although the discipline lost ground amid the rise of the field of comparative literature, which saw translation as a barrier to international understanding of texts, in recent years world literature has once again become relevant in light of globalizing processes that have the ability to eliminate diverse cultural traditions through standardization. Following the expansion of the world literary canon after a string of social uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s, coupled with the “culture wars” of the early 1990s, world literature has appeared at the center of scholarly debate. The epoch of world literature is at hand once again, and therefore scholars must revisit what it means to study the multiplicity of our planet’s writers when until the turn of the twentieth century, world literature courses spent a majority of students’ time discussing predominantly Western European and North American literature.

Because the migration of diverse peoples and the development of vast global networks is occurring more rapidly than ever before, it is clear that the means pedagogues employ in order to teach students about world literature can have significant implications for the ways they understand foreign cultures and the other. We must reconsider, for students who have only known other cultures through a history of Western domination, the means we use to situate students within the unknown and to employ ethical modes of reading that do not subvert students’ understanding of the diversity that engenders the field. To determine how one can encourage students to recognize and to accept difference

between nations, peoples, and traditions, it will be prudent to discuss the development of world literature first as an independent discipline, and then as a subset of comparative literature within the American university. The goal of this paper is to examine Penn State's survey course on world literature—currently titled CMLIT 010: Introduction to World Literature—in order to establish the ways it has changed and how these changes have coincided with theoretical discussions of world and comparative literature. Through a discussion on the way that the course has expanded from the canon of Western masterpieces to include works that represent the many theories that have shaped comparative literature over recent decades. I will syllabi to show how the professors of this course have designed this class along with the readings and objectives they have included over the past twenty-five years to chart the modifications that such courses have undergone as a direct result of recent theories and historical events.

Chapter 1

Development of the Disciplines: World Literature and Comparative Literature

The roots of the English word for *world* lie in the Latin word for man, *vir*. This becomes *wier* in German, and when combined with an old-German suffix—*eld*, meaning “time”—we end up with an utterance that carries the literal sense of “man in time.” When Johann Wolfgang von Goethe formulated the concept of *Weltliteratur* as a discipline in January of 1827, in the midst of a collection of Germanic nation-states lacking a unified culture and language, he recognized the ability of literature to form links between humans from different nations and traditions. He built his idea on the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder, who saw language as a universal bond and believed that the ability of a nation to establish its unique role in the world lay within a formulation of a “national literature” (Herder, 6). Goethe, too, saw the uniting power of literature, and believed that man should be determined to search about himself and to delve deeply into the works of foreign nations, without regarding one particular nation’s literature as a model (Goethe, 23). Thus we see that the idea of a literature of the world must always be composed of men in time—in other words, by men and women in the midst of historical transit.

But while Goethe boldly declared the “epoch of world literature” to be at hand, he certainly did not address the issues that arise from trying to cover the seemingly infinite territory before its scholars. From Goethe, we are given an ultimate goal to strive towards, but we are not given the heuristic tools to embark upon a task that must overcome national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Half a century later, in 1877, it

was Hugo Metzl who first began the search for a solution with the aid of the comparative fields (43). Though Metzl was conscious of the use of translation as a tool with which the commerce of literature would be made possible, he knew that “true comparison is only possible when we have before us the objects of our comparison in their original form... even the best translation leaves something to be desired and can never replace the original” (44). It is for this reason that his journal of comparative literature accepted works in ten languages, celebrating the principle of polyglottism that would allow the direct flow of ideas—rather than the indirect route provided by works in translation—from one linguistic tradition to another. Through translation and polyglottism, rather than barbarism and violence, Metzl thought that all independent literatures and their respective nations could progress towards an ideal world literature, as once imagined by Goethe (Metzl, 47).

Unfortunately for our early idealists, the world is not without violent imperialism, which places the diversity of the literatures of the world in danger of being standardized. From its inception, the concept of *Weltliteratur* was closely involved with both the “narrative of European development” and the notion of human diversity (Mufti, 79). In 1952, Eric Auerbach argued against the process of “harmonization” that posed a threat to the survival of smaller national literatures. It was the dominating processes that arose in the post-World War II era that not only witnessed the attempted destruction of an entire race and its associated traditions, but that also permitted the concentration of “all human activity... into European-American or into Russian-Bolshevik patterns” (127). This procedure of concentrating the plethora of national literatures into a single category would eventually reduce man to a life in “a standardized world, to a single literary

language,” against which the world’s nations must stand in order to ensure the survival of world literature and its many diverse cultures (Auerbach, 127). In this sense, it is the field of comparative literature, and a study of multiple national literatures in the place of a single “world” literature that previously held the key to a form of transnational study that would not place a limit upon nor destroy the distinctions inherent within it. Indeed, the idea of world literature has always had a close connection to comparative literature: both embrace “transnational aspirations” and encourage their scholars to research works that lie outside of their native cultural traditions through the study of foreign languages (Berman, 169). Within the context of the North-American University, the terms “Comparative Literature” and “World Literature” often refer to the same course of study.

Yet while the field of comparative literature has gained considerable ground in the mid-twentieth century, becoming a staple in universities across the United States, until recent years the study of world literature has maintained a somewhat peripheral position. The difficulties of reading literatures in translation have been exemplified by the study of world literature, for the translation of a written work between two distinct cultures requires a detextualizing process. Capturing the essence of a foreign culture and its context of reception, much less the coded jumble of signifiers that constitute the language in which it was written, is a monumental task that at first hindered the global capabilities of world literature. Thus, the appeal of comparative literature manifested itself in its insistence on proficiency in multiple languages in order to perform close readings of texts in their original languages rather than examinations of the thematic issues present in works in translation. Yet in both fields, ideas of transnational, international, and world literatures tended to concentrate themselves principally in works from major European

languages and literatures, limiting the expanse of comparative literature to the works centered in Western Europe.

It was not until the close of the twentieth century, specifically in 1993, that a report from Charles Bernheimer for the ACLA advocated for learning languages outside of the major European languages and “registered a new openness to reading in translation” (Berman 172). With these disciplinary changes, world literature was able to attain the place of a necessary aspect of comparative study. This proved to be a welcome change, in light of the globalizing and hegemonic forces—such as the growth of all-encompassing financial systems and rampant technological advancement along with the diffusion of these technologies—that doubtlessly have provoked a rethinking of current cultural issues. It is now, at the dawn of a twenty-first century that is already proving to be revolutionary, with religious sects and fundamentalist groups that are creating new “hegemonic totalitarianisms” that masquerade as righteous groups, when scholars must reconsider what it means to study world literature and comparative literature (Kadir 128; 7). In light of the scholars that are already making an effort to engage themselves and their students in more of the world’s texts, we must first consider how to account for processes of human migration, development, and diversification that are occurring more rapidly now than in any other point in human history. However, before we can begin to rethink the ways that we analyze and teach world literature, we must first have a clear idea of what exactly it is and how we have been studying it up to this point.

Chapter 2

Canons and Anthologies: On Approaching “World Masterpieces”

When examining the development of the fields of world and comparative literature since their foundations, it is important to first consider the development and the influence of the canon in general literary studies, along with the considerable ways that it has changed over the past century. For Goethe, the notion of world literature involved a conversation between nations via a conversation between representative writers from each individual nation. The process of “electing” a national writer—whose role it is to convey the feelings of an entire people—is by no means a simple task, but it is an essential one that is central to establishing specific values that determine the most cherished texts. As Peter Carravetta notes, whether these values are aesthetic, ethic or political, the canon and its development within the history of European nationalism “clearly exercises a *legitimizing and censorship* function, even while it constantly generates one or several splintered anti- or extra-canonical minor or marginal textualities” (265). Thus the canon can be thought of as a base from which the literary study of an individual nation or of a particular cultural tradition can begin. But as we will see, the development of the canon of world literature specifically illustrates the issues inherent in attempting to cover the scope of our planet’s literary production.

It was during the age of European nation-building, according to Carravetta, that “the Classics were reintroduced and interpreted in terms of what they said about the nationalistic tenets, such as love of country, language, territory, allegiance to the people—*das Volk, el pueblo, la raza, il popolo*” (268). These openly nationalistic

attributes were the prized characteristics of European literature. Today, these are the same issues that dominate the literature of nations that only gained their independence in the twentieth century. In the field of world literature, these products of Western European nations aided in the creation of a world literature with a predominantly Eurocentric canon that remained unchanged throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century. Until the dawn of the information age and the rise of globalization, the circulation of non-Western texts was uncommon “in spite of constant revisions and often profound revolutions,” and non-European texts did not appear consistently in the canon of world literature until the 1970s (Carravetta, 268).

This profound shift in the canon of world literature from a largely Eurocentric core occurred swiftly as a result of evolution of global ideas and technologies, and the aftermath of the “opening up of the canon” was a newfound emphasis on transnational cultures, languages, and value systems (Damrosch, 31; Carravetta, 268). The issues that stem from this unprecedented shift in the study of literature are very clear for those who would teach world literature, as illustrated by David Damrosch:

“The tremendous widening of our literary horizons, in turn, is nowhere more evident than in the field of world literature, which until recently meant ‘Western European’ literature but which now seems to encompass everything from the earliest Sumerian poetry to the most recent fictional experiments of the Tibetan postmodernists Zhaxi Dawa and Jamyang Norbu. Wholly laudable in principle, rapid expansion poses exceptional difficulties in practice. Just how is this great wealth of material to be made accessible to readers? What classic texts will have to be dropped in order to make room for the new arrivals within the physical and temporal boundaries of courses and anthologies? What cultural context needs to be provided—and what cultural context can feasibly be provided—for nonspecialists to have meaningful encounters?” (31).

Of course, these inherent problems are not really a direct cause of the expansion of the world literary scene in the last few decades. Rather, they have been present since the field's beginnings and its rapid expansion "only brings into sharp relief a number of tensions that have long existed within the idea of 'world literature' as it has been formulated over the course of the last century" (Lawall, 31). With the constant and virtually unhindered flow of information through global networks, there is less of a need today for validation of peripheral world texts from Western nations than ever before in history. What these tensions show us is that there needs to be a center when studying world literature, and so we must consider the different approaches at our disposal in our studies of different cultural and linguistic traditions.

A common tool in world literature pedagogy is the anthology, the most common being *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* (formerly *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*). The word anthology in Greek literally means "flower-gathering"; the word is quite apt to describe the process of a single compiler—or groups of editors, as is most often the case today—picking the finest and most beautiful of all the literary works, in all of the languages and cultural contexts that world literature is produced in, and making them available in a single location to those who would study them. Before the advent of a form of studying literature that possessed a more global scope, the anthologies used by most English Departments were worldly in that they were able to cross national boundaries, though they contained works that were chiefly Western European in origin. Even though the editors of the first Norton anthology of world literature wished to forego literary theory and history in favor of a more thoughtful

examination of the text, the works within the collection retained a pointed emphasis on Western works (Lawall, 63).

This is not to say that the first of many Norton anthologizers were willfully leaving out a majority of the world's literary samples. Historically, the inclusion of more global writings has posed problems for anthologies in the sense that there is a need to select and present material in a way that "proposes structures of understanding [without prescribing] them" (Lawall, 81-2). The task of creating an anthology, like that of assigning individual works to a class, requires one to be incredibly selective. As Sarah Lawall notes, "someone teaching world literature must figure out what materials to choose, how to juxtapose them, [and] how to present them in a way that leads to student inquiry and acceptance" (48). To do this, and yet to also bear in mind the ostensibly immeasurable materials to draw from, is a labor that exposes the extensive gaps in a field that tries to encompass the globe at the same time that it highlights the similarities and differences that represents the relationships between vastly different nations or peoples. This is a daunting endeavor when one considers that each method of approaching world literature will generate comparison and that each will have its advantages and disadvantages for those who wish to give students a representation of the other (Lawall, 48). In this sense, the comparison of one's home culture with a foreign one is quite inevitable, and so instructors face the dual problem of finding an effective way (doubtlessly there is no perfect system or method) to grant their students access to the world's literary works without framing them through a markedly Western lens.

Although the Norton anthologies have responded to modern conceptions of worldly literature, there is an ever-present specter of the European canon. Until the mid to

late twentieth century, priority in many anthologies was given to the “great books” and “masterpieces” of the Europeans without much notice given to African, Latin American, or Asian literature. In spite of all of these problems, there seems to be a need to provide students with a starting point from which they may begin their study of world literature: a starting-point that locates students geographically, linguistically and contextually. And so the question remains, how would we function within the university setting without using a canon or an anthology to teach our students? What would be the center for university students undertaking a course of literary study in the fields of comparative and world literature? The answer, for Peter Carravetta, may rest in comparative literature’s new affiliation for emphasizing the encounter with other texts and cultures:

“A world literature canon could well begin with travel narratives and focus on travel itself, on how notions of origins and authenticity have no more than transactional categories which *homo viator* has used as symbolic currency. Travel—of ideas, texts, values, ultimately people—ought not be considered a mere genre among others, but as an underlying modality of human existence itself. Only recently construed as a critical concept whose application extends beyond its use in economics and sociology, migration lends itself to the study of the transmission of texts and their metamorphoses through time and place, for ‘migration is the engine of history’ (Carravetta, 269).

By utilizing the idea of the encounter and placing potential world literature students in a category that underlies the totality of human existence—two ideas that are extremely relevant to student experiences within the context of the information age—Peter Carravetta presents a notion of migration that allows for comparison without upsetting the balancing act that is presenting foreign works in translation to students of world literature in a more ethical manner. Through these ideas, the study of world literature might find its place within the field of comparative literature.

Chapter 3

Global Literatures: The Twentieth Century Expansion of World Literature Theory

In order to understand the changes that once again brought ideas of world literature to the forefront of study in the humanities today, it might be wise to consider the evolution of American literature in the latter half of the twentieth century. At the very start of the twentieth century, there was little in the way of a consensus as to what exactly constituted “American Literature.” The first full-time professor of American Literature, Fred Lewis Pattee, was not hired by Penn State University until the year 1894. With very few exceptions, the bulk of the United States’ literary exports consisted of popular fiction and Hollywood productions rather than of its more “serious” literature (Cassanova, 149). Before 1930, no American writer had ever won a Nobel Prize for Literature (Buell, 444). Until the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s, most American Literature consisted primarily of “Euro-settler” writings by predominantly white-male authors that showed little concern for either minority literatures or issues lying outside of the influence of European dominance (Buell, 450).

However, after the advent of the American women’s rights movement along with the civil rights movement, following a spring of “ethnic renaissances” in African American, Jewish American, Asian American, and Latin American literatures, the various minority literatures of the United States began to gain serious attention from literary scholars (Buell, 450). These specific developments of the 1960s and 1970s also echo the same issues that shook the foundations of world literary study, and aided writers and critics alike to generate new theories, new ideas, and most importantly new ways of

thinking of different cultures gaining ground within the field of American Literature. The effects of these processes have had a profound impact on American views of world literature, as seen by Lawrence Buell:

“This expanded scene of literary production and critical activity has made it seem almost self-evident to twenty-first-century Americanists that national literature, or literary US-ness, cannot be thought of as contained within national borders, either territorial or cultural. In particular, the past two decades have seen dramatically intensified critical interest in literary cultural mobility and interaction within and among three international zones: the Atlantic world, the American hemisphere, and the transpacific. The first (predictably) is the most fully developed, drawing as it does on long-standing critical interest in the transatlantic percolations of Anglo-European romanticism, the French and Spanish influences on early national literati, and so forth. But today’s Euro-American transatlanticism is less concerned with transmissions from old world to new than with reciprocal exchange or circulation” (450)

Thus, it is because of immigration and the experiences of transcultural and transnational peoples that scholars were forced to reconsider the “pluralities of cultural belonging” that create the identities of diasporic and transnational individuals, as well as postcolonial theory, culture and media studies, and the hybridization of American writers.

World literature was founded on universal humanist values, and so a temptation may arise to apply one universal theory to the consumption and study of world literature. However, one must certainly consider the strong ethical implications of such a course of action in light of theories of globalization and of the circulation of literary products around the globe. Scholars, writers, and critics of world literature must realize that there is a link between periods of literary globalism and eras of imperialism. For example, the emergence of the Information Age during the latter half of the twentieth century coincided with Franco Moretti’s advocacy of distant reading and World Systems Theory

(399). This method of reading combines the field of literature with scientific systems such as economics and sociology and reduces the literature of the world into only three positions: literature from core nations, literature from periphery nations, and literature from semi-periphery nations (401). Moretti acknowledges that there is always unevenness between literatures exported from the core and literatures from periphery nations, and that “this asymmetric diffusion [of world literature] imposed a stunning sameness to the literary system,” since more dominant core nations are constantly interfering with the autonomous development of periphery nations (402).

Emily Apter is a second example of a scholar of world literature who advocates the use of a world systems theory, because “macrocomparative approaches have the capacity to illuminate waves of literary circulation,” or in other words the diffusion of world literatures (44). She too realizes that world systems theory has a taste for these “totalizing rubrics” (she attributes this to a “general post-war trend,” no less) that arise from Marxist theories of sociology (Apter, 47). The typology of literature into works of core and periphery nations highlights the fact that clearly “the nations that create the critical lexicon are the nations that dominate the literary world-system” (Apter, 49). These two critics of world literature show scholars that we must suspect any totalizing system that seeks to place all of world literature into just a few broad categories, and that designate the West as the agent of recognition and diffusion.

Unfortunately, in world systems theory and in other systems that rely on a universal approach, literature is treated as capital; and if we treat literature as capital, then the Western World will continuously dominate. The diffusion that characterizes world systems theory is simply a conservator of Western models of literature, which can

subsequently proliferate in periphery nations. The theory of evolution is supposed to explain the diversity of literatures in the world, but instead we are seeing that when literature is speciated, the result is simply a reduction of variety in literatures and a progression towards Sameness imposed by the core nations of the West. Further issues arise concerning the usage of these systems when one considers that the advent of globalization is seen in vastly different ways depending on whether one is a scholar of literature or a scholar of economics or political science. Hayot's argument is that for political scientists and economists, globalization is about the spread of capitalistic and democratic values throughout the world, while for literary scholars the term "represents the loss or deconstruction of cultural difference, [and] the erasure of lifeways or cultural beliefs incompatible with the maximization of profit" (224).

It is clear from the above examples that the ways that scholars and teachers construe the state of world literature and the changes that it undergoes have consequences on the modern student's interpretation of the other and of cultural difference. In this light, it is pertinent to ask ourselves if there is a way to read in a worldly or cosmopolitan manner. As Coopaan explains, "there is an ethics of reading whose goal cannot be the conversion of otherness to sameness, an ethics of reading that must instead choose to stay blocked from that final assimilative movement, at home in the very moment of nonrecognition" (38). Her students, because of Western imperialism, in many cases are not given an accurate representation of non-Western works. Instead, the rest of the world's literature is converted into something more "domesticated" (Coopaan, 37). As an example, she discusses the various translations of the *1001 Nights* often studied by Western students today, and how each version fails completely in discovering the work's

Arabic center (36). Whether it is Galland, who fitted the work into the style of a French fairy tale, or Burton's "orientalist sexual fantasy replete with Victorian racial stereotypes and anthropological nuggets," her students are presented with an Eastern work that is redesigned until it fits into a preexisting Western frame (Coopman, 36). As a possible solution to these issues, she suggests viewing the world not just through one Western frame, but rather through multiple frames and new perspectives by utilizing the analytic techniques of scholars that are studying comparative literature.

Kadir explains that we must direct our focus on the acts and the writings of the scholar in order to defend our world literature from the imposition of Sameness. But if we must always question the acts of the scholar, without a clear notion of the study's focus and its goals, and without a universal system that we can use to study world literature, how are we supposed to study it, much less teach it to students? Casanova suggests that scholars of world literature and comparatists should look to the opposite of globalization—internationalization—in order to study world literature, since no single model can be successfully and universally applied to the study of world literature. Sarah Lawall, similarly, believes that "in practical terms, it is unlikely that any global perspective can be truly decentered, providing equal representation and a neutral framework" for world literature (29). Since world literature has no professional guidelines, the professionals must create the guidelines in order to "[situate] students in a broader framework" (Lawall, 23).

Therefore, that which is required of us, in this age of Western hegemony, in a time when, according to Kadir, "we have seen world literature taught in monolingual, monocultural, national, ethno-nationalist, [and] nationalist institutional contexts," is to

ensure that comparativity is preserved by preserving what is not alike in our world. We must always be wary of globalism, since “literary globalism in the mode of imperialism becomes a suspect ethics of (dis)engagement in which other literatures and cultures are recognized... in order to globalize the privileged narratives of the West” (Coopaan, 36). We must create new divisions in our great world, breaking down the single, immense quantity into smaller morsels, so that they may be analyzed more effectively. World literature must discover a practice of reading that “seeks difference as much as sameness,” and that preserves the foreignness of the other (Coopaan, 38). We must view the world through not just one Western frame, but rather from multiple frames and new perspectives, utilizing the techniques that we have learned from comparative literature.

There are many more examples today of comparative literature courses branching out from Western European literatures. An especially interesting development lies in the inclusion of stateless minority literatures, immigrant and diasporic literatures, and literatures dealing with hybridization and issues of identity politics (Kenshur, 111). Postcolonial literature also possesses the ability to expand the horizons of world literature past the European context. Thus the ideas of what constitutes “great” and “world” literatures are moving past the older perspectives. However, it should be noted that in spite of the limitations and difficulties of establishing a national literature and comparing and contrasting the literature of different cultures through a foreign lens, it is still valuable to tie world literatures to national, linguistic, or cultural boundaries. Bruce Robbins, in his article *Comparison and Cosmopolitanism*, states that comparison is always distorted by power; what is most important for scholars is to recognize the imperfect nature of cosmopolitanism (or of world literature) and to make use of

comparison's inevitable rootedness in one nation in order to foster the counter-comparisons needed to strengthen a method of reading that seeks to cover the world's literatures without presenting an image of Western domination. It is extremely important in our studies to seek difference as much as we seek sameness through the use of comparative principles, and we may look to comparative literature to amplify the differences—as well as the similarities—between works of literature from different cultures and linguistic traditions of the world.

Comparative literature may well be quixotic in nature, but it gives us the many different frames that are necessary for us to understand as much of world literature as we can. It is for these reasons that scholars of world literature must revisit the comparative principle in order to form a new conception of what the world is today, while fighting against the imposition of sameness caused by the global exchange of capital in core nations. Scholars must recognize that it is not possible to command all of the literature of the world in one place, and similarly it is not possible to locate a position of total neutrality from which we can examine literature of the world, whether in its original form or in translation. What we can do, as scholars, is to acknowledge these facts and move on; we must compare as many different frames as possible, and hope that this is enough to bring us to a new level of understanding.

Chapter 4

Penn State's World Literature Experiment: The History of CMLIT 010

In order to engage students effectively in world literature, scholars, writers, and critics of world literature must realize that there is an ethics to reading the literature of the other, especially with regards to works in translation. As Coopaan tells us, “there is an ethics of reading whose goal cannot be the conversion of otherness to sameness, an ethics of reading that must instead choose to stay blocked from that final assimilative movement, at home in the very moment of nonrecognition” (38). The role of the critic becomes much more actionable when one considers Kadir’s assertion that there is much consistency “with which the invocation of something referred to as ‘world’ repeatedly correlates and becomes coeval ideologically with cultural and political thresholds at traumatic cusps of history” (Kadir, 5). The way that scholars and critics of literature construe the state of world literature and the changes that it undergoes have both political and ethical implications.

The fact that a teacher of an introductory world literature course, often offered as a component of students’ general education curriculum, must try to select a small portion of the world’s great literatures to cover in a single semester is daunting to say the least, especially in light of these social, political, and ethical connections that become entangled in the study of world literature. There is most definitely a need within the field of comparative literature to find effective ways to move beyond the Western world when choosing the works to be covered in a world literature course (Foster, 155). However, the process of organizing literary productions from different cultures and languages becomes

even more difficult when one considers the tug of war that occurs between different regions, time periods, and themes in course design. Should a professor, given one semester to teach a course that covers all of the world's literature, spend more time reading fewer texts more closely? Or should he or she attempt to include a greater variety of texts, while risking the loss of student experience with an important text?

The overall goal of the introductory survey course on world literature, according to John Foster, is the progress towards “a more enlightened global citizenship, involving a recognition of the interdependence of nations and peoples, a respect for the cultural values of peoples and nations in the global collectivity, and a self-conscious awareness of the impact of our words and actions on others” (214). A main objective of actively engaging in such a wide range of texts is to introduce students to the global and historical range that exists within the field (Harrison, 2006). For Penn State's own world literature course, first entitled *CMLIT 010: Forms of World Literature* under our current department head Caroline D. Eckhardt, the instructional objectives as written in December of 1986 are as follows:

“To introduce students to the development of literary forms throughout the world, providing a balance between the more familiar Western forms and the less familiar forms of other areas, so that students may develop a global perspective on the nature of literary forms. A second objective is to help students learn to read critically and to respond thoughtfully to a wide variety of important literary works, from ancient through modern times” (3).

The proposal for Penn State's *CMLIT 010: Forms of World Literature*, later renamed *Introduction to World Literature*, has consistently focused on the organizational structure of literary form, dividing the class into two parts: the emergence of oral literary forms, and the development of written literary forms (Senate Curriculum Report, 3). In

the first part of the course, students would learn about world literature through six literary forms—myth and legend, epic, lyric, drama, fictional prose, and satire—but in the second half of the semester the instructor would revisit these same forms in order to discuss the effects of time on each of them. The readings from the earliest world literature courses were framed around this organizational structure, covering Asia, Africa, India, Latin America, and Western Europe along with a timespan of approximately four-thousand years (Senate Curriculum Report, 3). By charting the evolution of one particular world literature course over the course of over two decades, we may be able to pinpoint the exact ways that such changes will have an impact on current and future students.

Chapter 5

Mode of Analysis and Data

Penn State's own Introduction to World Literature survey course—entitled CMLIT 010 in the office of the university registrar—is offered during both the fall and spring semesters through the Department of Comparative Literature. In the fall of 2010, it ceased to become an elective course and became a requirement for those who wish to major in comparative literature, which shows the growing importance of the field of world literature. Along with CMLIT 010, students may choose to take the introductory survey course among other introductory courses on literature from Asia, Africa, the Americas, and western literature before and after the renaissance in order to complete the major's requirements. CMLIT 010 fits a number of elective requirements within the general education curriculum of the university, including the requirements for students to take courses in the humanities as well as on the United States or on international cultures. Ideally, this single sixteen-week class that meets for less than three hours per week should prepare its students for future writing and reading intensive courses in the humanities through a firm foundation in global literary study.

My objective is to determine the influence of world literature studies and recent theories on the development of the course offered by Penn State, and to see whether there has been a profound shift within the past twenty-five years from a Euro-centric focus to one more dedicated to the inclusion of works that are not necessarily a part of the Western canon. To determine whether such a shift has taken place and to examine the way that things have changed within my own university, it was necessary to delve into

the archives of the Pennsylvania State University Libraries and those within the Department of Comparative Literature to obtain a collection of syllabi of CMLIT 010 courses since it was first approved in the winter of 1987. In spite of some very productive searches, my access to the past twenty-four years of course documents was limited due to the continuous migration of paper copies to digital servers. However, in spite of the absence of some documents and the gaps that it created in this research, I believe that there is still many pieces of valuable data that can be analyzed from the syllabi that I have in my possession.

The information that I consider to be the most important are the changes and deviations from the original world literature “canon” at Penn State. Primarily I plan to ascertain whether more recent versions of the course include predominantly modern or pre-modern works, and the origins of these works to see how many Western and non-Western works are included. In this sense, I consider pre-modern to mean the age of Enlightenment, from approximately the middle of the seventeenth century. Western works, in this particular study, I will consider to be European (including Russian authors) and English-speaking North American in origin. In order to analyze which works are used most often in CMLIT 010, I will mainly focus on the number of class days dedicated to each individual work, region, time period, or language in order to discover the works granted priority within the scope of the class. I will also be mindful of the differences in each semester’s course objectives, required textbooks, and the types of assignments that instructors utilize in order to aid their students in the study of world literature. The outcome, I hope, will reflect the newest theories on the reading and the

instruction of world literature in their organization, assignments, and number of class days that are dedicated to regions outside of the Eurocentric sphere.

The earliest incarnation of world literature at Penn State in the fall of 1988 adhered very closely to the structure indicated in the original course proposal; a majority of class time was spent on pre-modern texts in the first half of the class and more modern forms being discussed in the second. Required texts included an anthology on world mythology, Bedier's *Tristan and Iseult*, and Czech author Milan Kundera's work *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. The class began with readings of myths and epics from around the world, focusing mainly on *Gilgamesh* (an epic from the region that is Iraq today), the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*, the West African *Askia Mohammed* of the Songhai Empire, and the legend of King Arthur. The course was entirely graded through exams. In later classes the myths and epics were revisited in the modern context, with more time allotted to the proliferation of fictional prose in the form of short stories and novels. Emphasis was placed on a global scope and the end goal of student appreciation of world masterpieces within the humanities. A more detailed syllabus from the spring semester of 1989 follows a similar track, but shows the amount of class days that the class spent on each literary work. A full week was given to *Tristan*, *The Book of Laughter*, and to Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. Other works included the pre-modern Yoruba legend of Oba Koso, the autobiographical work of the fourteenth-century Japanese concubine Lady Nijo, and vernacular Chinese author Lu Xun's work *A Madman's Diary*. But a majority of the class's time was spent on works belonging to the Western canon, including Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Anne Frank's diary, Columbus's Journals, and works by Voltaire and Orwell.

Until the late 1990's, CMLIT 010 consistently required the Romance of Tristan, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and *The Little Prince*. Written assignments were included as early as the summer of 1991, but as of that time there was still less class time spent on the study of non-Western works, in spite of increasing global coverage. In the fall of 1992 the instructor maintained the same required textbooks for the class, and while ultimately more classes were dedicated to reading Western works on the whole, there was a marked increase in the number of juxtapositions between Western and non-Western works, presumably to encourage students to draw connections between works that shared a similar form—such as drama, allegory, satire or novel—rather than a language or country of origin. It was the first year to see the introduction of a reading journal designed to directly involve students in the text; prompts were included that asked students to compare the works they were reading to other works or to choose passages that seem to be the most important or interesting for discussion and analysis. Similarly, in the fall of 1992 more time was spent on Western works, but new texts were included: Isabel Allende's 1960's novel *Eva Luna*, that outlines the political turmoil of many South American countries during the decades of imperialism, as well as *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, about the journey of the Native American ancestors of Pulitzer Prize winning author N. Scott Momaday.

The practice of having students use a writing journal continued in the spring semester of 1993. It was at this time that students were also given a major assignment to choose and present a form of oral literature that was not covered in class. However, in spite of the assignment, which was obviously meant to give students experience in non-Western texts, there remained a much greater focus on Western works from the modern

period within the syllabus, which still included the same three canonical textbooks that located students squarely in the midst of a Eurocentric frame. The spring of 1994 saw greater significance placed on the idea of comparison within the course objectives, with a goal of identifying the similarities between works across time and space as well as the differentiating traits of individual works from certain areas of the world. There was also a significant change in the required texts for the course, with Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a landmark novel born of the Harlem Renaissance that describes the politics of race in the United States, as well as *So Long a Letter* by the Senegalese authoress Mariama Bâ on the condition of women in certain West African traditions. The course spent a full week on Rigoberta Menchú's groundbreaking autobiography, which played a major role in the culture wars that at the end of the twentieth century when it was included in Stanford University's class on "great books" (Damrosch, 232). The inclusion of Menchú, Bâ, and Hurston in the syllabus may well reflect the changes that resulted from ongoing debates about the canon of world literature, and represent a digression from Euro-centric works.

The course syllabus of CMLIT 010 from the spring of 1996 and the fall of 1997 indicate a much greater level of inclusion of non-European works than in previous versions of the course. The instructor decided to cover a larger breadth of authors from around the world, organizing them by form rather than through a thematic structure. The selections for each class period were no more than a few pages per author, but the literary focus varied from poetry of twelfth century Muslim Spain, to dramas by the Caribbean author and Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott, to selections from a novel by Ghanaian author B. K. Liang, to modern Irish Satire. Both courses utilize selections that are brief

and do not exactly provide students with a center from which to consider each work, but the course certainly succeed in bringing together diverse forms and authors within one sixteen week segment. The reading of multiple authors from different cultures together appears to symbolize an attempt to inspire students to compare the works, and to make connections between their own lives and the lives of those foreign to them. By choosing breadth over depth, the instructor may have intended to generate classroom discussion and promote understanding through similarities and differences between authors from separate geographic locations and time periods.

An even greater shift occurred during the following year, when there were two central projects for students to complete during the fall 1998 offering of CMLIT 010. Students were assigned a translation project and a film project. For the translation project, students were required to find four different translations of a work writing originally in a non-English language and compare them in terms of language use, intentions, genre changes, and other differences in a four-page paper. Their second drama and film project required students to watch either a live play or watch a film, and then to write an analysis of the visual performance. A separate assignment asked students to perform an examination of the anthology itself: the criteria for selection, the organization, and the kinds of works included based on the table of contents of two anthologies of literary work. The instructor also included very short selections of a vast number of literary works, including poetry, which tends to be omitted in world literature courses because of how difficult it is to translate. In her syllabus she includes Pakistani poems by revolutionary author Faiz Ahmed Faiz, along with the poetry of Aimé Césaire and Pablo Neruda alongside that of American icon Robert Frost. Her course plan truly spans the

globe, including Caribbean literature, Chinese and Japanese poetry by Li Po and Basho respectively, American science fiction, short stories by Rabindranath Tagore and Ernest Hemingway, and essays by Borges and Gandhi. In an effort to branch out, CMLIT 010 suddenly became open to poetry and therefore to close reading of works in translation. The inclusion of such revolutionary authors and authors whose nations bear the scars of Western imperialism, perhaps indicates a new interest in the role of Western hegemony on non-Western nations as understood by the nations' authors.

The years between the new millennium and the fall of 2002 witnessed a marked difference in the forms of literature used in CMLIT 010. Aside from a new focus group work and team building along with individual evaluations, these courses exhibit a new interest in student discussion about television and film as well as other cultural forms more uncommonly studied in literature courses up to this point in time. Beginning with myths from the Mayan account of the creation, the Popol Vuh, and selections from the Koran, the students would branch out into worldly forms that included the African American search for identity in the United States in Paul Beatty's *White Boy Shuffle*, along with films (*Slam!*, directed by Mark Levin and *Ran*, the Japanese epic by Akira Kurosawa) and graphic novels (*The Dark Knight*, from DC Comics and *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman). In the fall of 2002, students in CMLIT 010 began to study literature as an academic and a social phenomenon: for four weeks at the beginning of the semester students studied pre-modern texts, myths, and epics; afterwards they only studied modern literature. Texts included Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*; the Egyptian author Tawfiq Al-Hakim's work, *The Sultan's Dilemma*; the film *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* on apartheid in South Africa in 1972; the Japanese short-story *Bewitched* by Ueda Akinari; the

autobiography of Frederick Douglass; poetry by Martinican poet Aimé Césaire; songs written by Leopold Sedar Senghor, the future president of Senegal; the avant-garde and postcolonial poetry of twentieth century Caribbean author Kamau Brathwaite; and Indian author Premchand's *Road to Salvation*. In this class, the comparative method was used as a tool students could employ to analyze the similarities and differences not only between different works and between their cultures of origin, but also between cultural forms that had never been studied in CMLIT 010 before.

In the spring of 2003, CMLIT 010 ceased to be called *Forms of World Literature*, and gained its current title: *Introduction to World Literature*. The goals of these two courses expanded to focus more heavily on the development of writing and speaking skills, along with collaborative learning. Students were also required to engage in readings that advance intercultural and international understanding. In most of the course students focused on modern works, with equal numbers of Western and non-Western works. The textbook list changed once again, this time to include the 1967 work *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Norton Anthology of World Literature: Expanded Edition*, and Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. A primary objective was the understanding of the field of comparative literature, with relation to cross-cultural and multi-national studies of literature, while paying attention to diversity in the classroom. Students studied Chinese and Egyptian poetry, the Bhagavad-Gita, Aristotle's *Poetics* and Euripides's *Medea*, works of prose from Japan's Golden Age. Some works, like Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart* and Nadine Gordimer's stories detailing apartheid in South Africa, are literary examples of the

imperial and colonial tensions that result in the oppression of minority groups around the world as a result of primarily Western hegemony.

Not until the fall of 2010 did an instructor structure the introduction to world literature in a way that organized the texts around a thematic issue. Charlotte Eubank's course was configured on the idea of cultural networks. As described in the objectives of the syllabus, this particular world literature course was "about the ways in which groups of humans have interacted with one another over time, and about the ways in which literature provides a place to record, contest, and shape those interactions." Within the course of a semester, she divided the world's literature into four main geographic areas: Indic, Sinitic, Mediterranean, and Germanic/Nordic spheres. With this particular conformation, her students' goal was to explore "the bases of those cultural systems and charting their increasing hybridity over time, whether arising through migration, invasion, conversion, pilgrimage, or social dissent from within. In her final unit, she opted to discuss colonialism and its aftermath in Latin America, Africa, and in Southeast Asia. To supplement the texts covered in class, students were required to create a group presentation. Included in the class were daily themes that connected works and encouraged students to connect the works: Islam and Spanish Fusion (The Qur'an, Ibn Ishaq, Iberia, the meeting of Three Worlds), The New World Conquest: North (Shakespeare, Aimé Césaire), Ends of the British Empire (Tagore, Indian Independence and Partition), Writing (on) Africa (Achebe), and Postcolonial Conditions (Cronin, Walcott, Darwish). The themes not only invite comparison between the works but also create a center for the students to discuss and understand literatures from outside of their native culture. From this standpoint, students could begin to read literature as a

meaningful encounter with a different time, place, and language. This method of introducing themes and organizing texts into sections in which students can be expected to make connections between texts and between themselves and the unknown cultures of the literary world.

The most recent version of CMLIT 010 is currently being taught by the Edwin Earle Sparks Professor of Comparative Literature, Djelal Kadir, is a course on the idea of literature in the world” rather than on a course on specific world “masterpieces.” In his course, he seeks to show his students “how stories engender the world and how the world makes literature.” His course is also organized thematically, with varied short readings from sections on Creation Myths (Hymn to the Aten, Enuma Elish Babylonian, Hesiod, Genesis), The Ancient Near East (Gilgamesh, The Descent of Ishtar), Classical Greece (The Iliad and the Odyssey, Aristotle’s Poetics, Ovid’s Metamorphoses), the Medieval Era (Tang Dynasty Poetry, Wang Wei, Li Bo, Du Fu, Dante Alighieri, The Thousand and One Nights), The Early Modern Period (Don Quixote), Perspectives: The Conquest and Its Aftermath (Bernal Diaz del Castillo, the Aztec-Spanish Dialogues of 1524), The Age of Enlightenment (Matsuo Basho, Voltaire), The Nineteenth Century (Blake, Wordsworth, Pushkin, Agha Shahid Ali) The Twentieth Century (Lu Xun Diary of a Madman, Virginia Woolf, Borges, Kafka, Primo Levi, Mahmoud Darwish, Chinua Achebe). Through the discussion and the examination of the texts, along with a thematic element to the course that enables students to place the literary works within a cultural and historical context and to bridge gaps of time and space through knowledge of foreign texts.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Implications for Pedagogy

The latest scholarly research and the course syllabi presented above all indicate that in today's world literature courses there is more attention given to chronology and geography to give a sense of literary history (Palencia-Roth, 148). Instructors are also spending more time going over lesser-known literatures from regions and cultures that are less often explored in the context of the Western university. Many instructors are beginning to organize materials by region of origin, paying special attention to the separations and geo-political divides between continents previously studied as a whole—more often recognizing the differences between Northern and sub-Saharan Africa, or South Asia and East Asia, or Latin America and the Caribbean. They are including new theories ranging from cultural studies and postcolonial studies, to diaspora studies, hybridization, and translation. They are studying different texts through lenses that help students to compare works and recognize their literary significance in the context of world history. These shifts are astonishing considering the incredibly short timespan in which these changes have been implemented into university pedagogy and current introductory world literature courses, and they have truly succeeded in emphasizing a cross-cultural, international, and more cosmopolitan academic experience among students (Palencia-Roth, 146-7).

All of these incredibly new changes clearly exhibit comparative literature's renewed interest in the study of world literature and world literature's novel entanglement with the comparative method. For as vague and as difficult as the study of "world

literature” can be at times, we must make sure as scholars that our students can recognize the value of verbal art and the power that it has to relate people to different times, places, and cultures. Today there is an additional asset in the classroom, with instructors who are able to relate student backgrounds in the increasingly diverse university settings, as well as their experiences, to certain texts in order to find sameness and difference within unfamiliar cultures. (Foster, 160). The study of world literature will help students talk about events in their own lives, in a way that allows them to think critically and respond appropriately. At times, real-life parallels between works studied in the classroom and the outside world can arise unexpectedly, as was the case in early November of 2011, when the allegations of pedophilia against retired linebacker coach Jerry Sandusky rocked the Penn State community and resulted in the firing of two of its most influential leaders to date, President Graham Spanier and philanthropist Joseph Vincent Paterno.

In a course for which I was a teaching assistant during the fall semester of 2011—*Human Rights and World Literature*, taught by Professor Sophia McClennen of the Department of Comparative Literature—students were scheduled to discuss Afghani author Khaled Hosseini’s novel *The Kite Runner*, which details the moral fallout that results when Amir, the novel’s young protagonist, witnesses the brutal rape of his best friend and fails to protect him. During this class, which took place less than twelve hours after thousands took to the streets to protest the media’s handling of the scandal, students took part in an almost two hours of discussion: how can one recover from a massive moral failure, and can such a person ever achieve redemption? In the midst of this group, still dazed by the abrupt termination of a beloved figure and angered by sensationalized media reports that failed to convey the complexities of Paterno’s involvement to the

outside world, was an urge to connect the struggles of Amir to the current situation. They used analytical skills that had been further developed in class along with ethical sensibilities finely tuned to the effects of violations of basic human rights to guide themselves through this difficult time, and to empower themselves to navigate the complexities of the case and respond in an informed manner to questions surrounding the central issues.

Morality, ethics, race relations, gender identities, and political systems: these are issues that are prevalent in world literature courses and that have real-life consequences that necessitate ethical reading systems to guide students through complicated matters that constitute human existence. During the fall semester of 2011 students struggled to accept the lapse of judgment of a man regarded as a father figure to a university, and today, in the spring of 2012, our students are still in the midst of trying to make sense of the murder of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin at the hands of a neighborhood watchman that may have unjustly profiled Martin as a thug because of the color of his skin. In light of these cases and the others that play a significant role in students' daily lives, there obviously is a need for teachers of literature, and world literature especially, to create a curriculum that is not only intellectually stimulating but also pedagogically responsible (Palencia-Roth, 147).

In this age of globalization, world literature has the ability to convey the essence of a nation's culture, as initially conceived by Goethe, but also to raise questions and concerns of cultural and linguistic dominance through its multifaceted methods of reading. World literature is inextricably connected to political systems, and it has the power to enlighten students as to "the internationalization of culture that resulted from

the emergence of capitalism as the dominant mode of production” in the Western world (Hassan, 39). The greatest strength of world literature, I believe lies in the very characteristic that has caused its popularity within the field of comparative literature today: its resistance to a single definition or a set literary canon that showcases the achievements of a specific set of domineering nations. It is through comparison and infinite counter-comparisons that we may one day succeed teaching our students to understand other peoples and their traditions in a way that will precipitate good will and acceptance rather than hatred and violence. Therefore, it is the responsibility of world literature pedagogues and scholars alike to ensure that the diversity of the planet’s peoples remains at the core of a field that seeks simply to understand the other, always in an ethical manner.

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