P.I.E. Peter Lang

OLD MARGINS AND NEW CENTERS

The European Literary Heritage in an Age of Globalization

ANCIENNES MARGES ET NOUVEAUX CENTRES

L'héritage littéraire européen dans une ère de globalisation

Marc Maufort &
Caroline De Wagter (eds./dir.)

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Acknowledgments

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Marc Maufort and Caroline De Wagter

Old Margins and New Centers: The Legacy of European Literatures in an Age of Globalization

Marc MAUFORT

Université Libre de Bruxelles

This critical anthology seeks to reassess the complex cultural and literary negotiations taking place between Europe and its literary "Others" and/or margins in an increasingly globalized age. In the past few decades, postcolonial literary studies have established a binary cultural model implying a perhaps exaggeratedly neat opposition between the new margins of third world countries and the old centers of Europe and North America. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the new literary voices of previously colonized African, Latin American, Asian and Pacific countries have now acquired artistic independence, thus securing a significant place in the international literary canon. However, this state of affairs became more complex at the turn of the twenty-first century. For instance, the emergence of major transnational writers such as Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, or Caryl Phillips, to cite only a few famous examples, destabilized the balance of the relations between Europe and its "Others," clearly moving beyond the traditionally assigned roles of center and margins.

The somewhat paradoxical title of this volume therefore playfully reverses the views of the relationship between Europe and its "Others" upheld by the first generations of postmodern and postcolonial studies. Reflecting the awareness that the very concept of "Europe" is in itself far from homogeneous, this volume suggests that former European cultural centers could become tomorrow's new literary margins. The theme of this collection indeed complicates received notions of cultural binaries and the values attached to them. It calls for a re-examination both of the margins versus centers dichotomy and of the concept of Eurocentrism at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Granted, the globalization process characterizing our contemporary world could be construed as a subtle reinscription of the economic hegemony of Europe and North America. Nonetheless, the negative connotations that progressively came to be linked to Eurocentrism in the critical discourses of the late twentieth century may now need to be nuanced in

order to accommodate the web of intricacies typifying the cultural traffic linking Europe, America and the third world. In some instances, one could also argue that stable definitions of margins and centers are now collapsing. In this respect, I concur with the statement implicit in the title of Gerald Gillespie's essay, "Peripheral Echoes": as international literary comparatists, we should try to document the "reciprocal literary mirrorings" that indissolubly link old and new Worlds (Gillespie "Peripheral Echoes"). Taking into account the complex specifities of our age of cosmopolitanism, then, this collection reevaluates the enduring impact of European cultural and literary traditions on various postcolonial and contemporary literatures, not only in world regions that used to be called the new margins of Europe but also in the former center, i.e. Europe itself. As the contributions gathered in this book suggest, the current relationship between European culture and its previous "Others" is no longer marked by unilateral opposition.

In the face of the increasingly multi-ethnic, transnational and cosmopolitan nature of our age, a deep sense of self-questioning has characterized the Euro-American-based discipline of comparative literature in the past three decades or so, as an overwhelming number of positional publications indicate.[1] Comparative literature scholars now face the dilemma of deciding whether or not the Euro-American canon should still be privileged. In this preamble, it may be useful to include a brief overview of these debates. In his well-known 1993 "Report," commissioned by the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), Charles Bernheimer and his colleagues advocated for a radical renewing of the discipline so as to accommodate non-European and multicultural masterpieces (Bernheimer *The Bernheimer Report, 1993* 39). This most controversial report tried to respond to the identity anxieties that beset the discipline of comparative literature—and much of American academe—in the 1980s and 90s. Hence Bernheimer's emphasis on cultural contextualization in order to avoid sterile Western appropriations of the literary "Other" (Bernheimer *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* 15). In an essay resulting from a more recent report commissioned by the ACLA, Haun Saussy rightly points out that our information-saturated internet age further complicates the agenda of comparative literature (Saussy 31). Haun Saussy also mentions other factors which should be taken into account: our age is one of inequality, one of institutional transformation, and perhaps first and foremost, one of unipolarity, i.e. Americanization.

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[1] It would of course be impossible to provide an exhaustive review of these methodological publications in these introductory pages, of which the most recent may be the excellent anthology edited by Hubert Roland and Stéphanie Vanasten, *Les nouvelles voies du Comparatisme* (November 2010).

Thus, paradoxically, the beginning of the twenty-first century seems to negate the multicultural premises of the 1990s, when the Bernheimer report was conceived (Saussy 25). Saussy then recommends that the comparatist learn "not so much through coverage as through contact." He concludes: "An eye for the unobvious connection distinguishes makers of metaphors, according to Aristotle (*Poetics* 1459 a 6), and perhaps comparative institution builders as well" (Saussy 35). In many ways, it could be argued that the contributors to this collection possess such an eye for the "unobvious connection."

Of equally paramount importance in redefining the field of comparative literature from a non-European perspective is Walter Damrosch's reinterpretation of the elusive Goethean notion of *Weltliteratur*. Goethe's 1827 concept of a literature transcending national boundaries, Walter Damrosch reminds us, prefigured our global modernity (Damrosch 1). Indeed, contemporary globalization makes it impossible for us to ignore works written outside the confines of Europe. Damrosch regards world literature as a network of circulation of literary works. He views it as a mode of reading taking into account the specific local environment in which the foreign literary work is received (Damrosch 3-5). In this regard, he usefully refers to the notion of refraction:

> This refraction, moreover, is double in nature: works become world literature by being received *into* the space of a foreign culture…. World literature is thus always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture; hence it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone. (Damrosch 283)

Writing from a more distinctly postcolonial perspective, Gayatri Spivak, in her *Death of a Discipline*, talks about the need for comparative literature to adopt the stance of what she terms "planetarity." While she regards globalization as a process of homogenization, "planetarity," she argues, allows us to truly encounter alterity: "If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us" (Spivak *Death of a Discipline* 73). Accordingly, Spivak emphasizes the need for cultural differentiation in the exploration of non-Western literatures. Further, cosmopolitanism, Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo indicate, has been the subject of critical revival since the 1990s as a concept related to postcolonialism. This new cosmopolitanism echoes Spivak's plea for a differentiated "planetarity:" its new advocates seek to unfix "its traditional associations with privilege and impartiality to the demands of

the local." This revitalized cosmopolitan world view attempts to come to terms with the "challenges of cross-cultural and transnational encounters in contemporary life" (Gilbert and Lo 4-5). Both the related concepts of "planetarity" and "new cosmopolitanism" underpin the comparative projects of the contributions collected in this book, which focus on specific case studies.

The theoretical standpoints briefly described above find a felicitous synthesis in Gerald Gillespie's conclusion to his essay, "North/South, East/West, and Other Intersections:" "the task for comparatists today is, as it always was potentially, to discriminate the particular features of cultural expression…one has to be able, in fact, to compare and contrast both within and across the continuities and discontinuities in the flux of systems of varying complexity." That requires an "honest ethos" that Gillespie dubs "postpostcolonial" (Gillespie 201). A massive task indeed, one in which many of the authors of this volume are undoubtedly engaged.

This book's "planetary" journeys are framed by Haun Saussy's introductory and David O'Donnell's concluding essays, purposely situated at thematic extremes to set the tone for this collection's diversity of approaches. While Saussy focuses on Chinese literature, one of the oldest in the non-Western world, O'Donnell concentrates on the neglected genre of drama in contemporary Anglophone Australasia, one of the outposts of the European colonial enterprise. Diametrically opposed, these two essays resonate with each other: while Saussy shows how modern Zhuangzi's engagement with the "Other" will read to contemporary comparatists, O'Donnell illustrates how conventional Western dramatic forms are hybridized and transcended through the "Otherness" of local Pacific material.

Saussy's introductory case study is followed by a cluster of three methodological and theoretical papers. Gerald Gillespie offers an overview of the complex interactions between European and non-European literatures in the twentieth century, using the concept of "internal liminalities." Gillespie insists that cultural boundaries must be defined by the writers themselves. Theo D'Haen and Anders Pettersson subsequently discuss their projected World History of Literature and provide insights into how this typically European genre could be reconceptualized from a non-Eurocentric perspective. On a more pessimistic note, Hans Bertens interestingly points out, in our age of globalization, Euro-American hegemony insidiously reinscribes itself in the practices of academic discourses.

The second cluster of essays reconsiders the European literary legacy from the shores of the old continent itself. Steven Shankman compares a passage from Homer's *Iliad* and a Chinese poem in their similar plea for

openness towards the distrusted stranger. Rapidly moving towards modern times, Vladimir Biti offers an intriguing reconsideration of Herder's cosmopolitanism. Hubert Roland prolongs this emphasis on German culture, linking considerations of German romanticism and supra-national historiography. Tackling Eastern Europe, John Burt Foster explores conflicting visions of the West in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Stéphane Michaud introduces the book's section on twentieth century literature. He deals with the representation of Europe and alterity in the poetry of Bonnefoy, Deguy, and Kirsten. Moving to the Scandinavian margins of Europe, Steven P. Sondrup sheds light on the too little-known poetry of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. Dorota Walzack concludes this European cluster with a consideration of how today's globalized world is reflected in the poetry of Polish writers Hartwig and Różewicz.

The next four essays offer a transition towards the postcolonial section of this volume, as they progressively leave behind the shores of the old continent. Randolph Pope analyzes a literary instance of globalization in the work of Latin American writer Roberto Bolaño. K. Alfons Knauth argues that Latin America stands at the forefront of the conflict between polyglossia and the monoglossia of globalization. Through a perspective calling to mind Damrosch's "world literature" methodology, Laurence Denooz examines Egyptian writer ʿAlī Aḥmad Bākaṯīr's appropriation of Goethe's *Faust* from a Muslim perspective. Finally, Christophe Den Tandt discusses the hybridization of global local color strategies in Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire*, a film taking place in India.

The final cluster of essays prolongs the discussion of postcoloniality initiated in the previous section. In doing so, the authors enlist the aid of specifically postcolonial methodologies and theories. This division is prefaced by Dorothy and Thomas Figueira's contribution about "traveling with Herodotus." While Herodotus, as an opponent of essentialism, was genuinely interested in alterity, the Polish journalist Kapuściński consistently simplifies Herodotus's vision of the "Other" in his own travel writings. In this sense, Dorothy and Thomas Figueira argue, Kapuściński, like many of today's multicultural theorists, misreads the "Other." Thus, through its insistence on the dangers of misapprehending otherness, this essay theoretically predicates the ensuing postcolonial section, in which the contributors resist homogenizing the "Other."[2] Miceala Symington indicates that Ireland, a

[2] In her *Otherwise Occupied. Pedagogies of Alterity and the Brahminization of Theory*, Dorothy Figueira offers a fascinating critique of contemporary theories of postcolonialism and multiculturalism in American academe. She regards these theories as self-serving tools only paying lip-service to an abstract notion of the

former European colony inside the margins of the old continent, finally succeeded in representing its postcolonial identity through a literary discourse of its own, thus belying Spivak's celebrated assertion acccording to which the "subaltern cannot speak." Stéphanie Loriaux deals with the problematic identity of immigrant and postcolonial writers in the Netherlands while Isabelle Meuret analyzes the mutual attraction between the West and India in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*. The next three articles move to the North American continent. Franca Bellarsi explores how Hildebrandt and Susknaski, two contemporary Canadian prairie poets, view realities of place as process. In its emphasis on the imaginary value of the land, Bellarsi's essay stands at the intersection between postcolonial studies and ecocritical thought. Sylvie Vranckx's article forces us to reconsider the boundaries of comparative literature, as she contrasts two Native Canadian novelists writing in English, Highway and Van Camp. Vranckx successfully demonstrates that in spite of their common use of English, these writers differ radically through their First Nations identities, respectively Rock Cree and Dogrib. Caroline De Wagter's essay prolongs the discussion initiated in Vranckx's piece: she focuses on a little-known play by Tomson Highway, *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout*, which she cross-culturally contrasts with *Radio Golf*, the last play by U.S. African American dramatist August Wilson. David O'Donnell's concluding contribution echoes De Wagter's in its discussion of theatre issues. Morever, as indicated at the outset of this overview of the collection, O'Donnell's essay reintroduces the anthology's overall framework. Indeed, it invites us to look back at the cultural journey accomplished throughout the volume since Haun Saussy's key-note article. O'Donnell rounds off his essay with a focus on Australasian plays that no longer foreground typically postcolonial themes, Linda Chanwai-Earle's *Heat* and Andrew Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling*. These works both display ecocritical concerns, a reminiscence of the Canadian Prairie poetry discussed earlier by Franca Bellarsi. Thus, comparatists, O'Donnell suggests as an apt epilogue to this book as a whole, will have to devise new methodologies enabling them to adequately explore this new century's ever-shifting literary landscape.

All in all, the "planetary" itineraries offered in this anthology, however transgressive, certainly will not quench the fiery debates raging on in the field of comparative literature about the status of margins and centers, globalization, and Eurocentrism. However, this volume offers

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"Other," with which they fail to truly engage and whose intellectual history they do not take into account. However, the "third world defies packaging" along these theoretical lines, Figueira suggests (28 ; also see "Marketing the Margin" 24-29).

suggestions about how these concepts could be rethought in our "internet" age. It points out new ways of negotiating more effectively the general and the particular as contiguous entities and successfully engaging with the "Other" as polymorphous. When dealing with the above-mentioned cultural notions, one should avoid strict binaries, bearing in mind Stuart Hall's fluid definition of identities, which he described as "always in process," as positionings rather than essences. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall indeed mentioned: "[…] We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context,' *positioned*" (234). The essays collected here, focusing on a wide range of fictional, poetic, dramatic and filmic material, make abundantly clear that the old margins and new centers of the European literary heritage partake of a similar process of perpetual re-invention.

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