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Series introduction

The cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic: Conjunctions of world literature

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‘World literature is not an object, it’s a *problem*.’ This was Franco Moretti (2000: 55), famously, in 2000. But what is the problem of world literature today, two decades later? In broad strokes, the disciplinary challenge would seem to be the same: to devise methods and reading practices that offer alternatives to entrenched national and civilizational frameworks. Scholarship within world literature shares a fundamentally *comparative* urge, whereby different instantiations of literature are considered in conjunction. But ‘conjunction’ is in fact the nub of the problem, as this is supposedly not just an older version of comparative literature under a new name. Instead, conjunction can be conceptualized through a wide number of temporalities, scales, geographies, generic constellations, languages and ideological perspectives – all of them susceptible to historical change.

Moretti proposed a world-systemic model, inspired by Immanuel Wallerstein, which has since developed into a strong but by no means exclusive or uncontested methodological premise of world literature. Deep-time approaches focusing on imperial formations, translation-based approaches, Alexander Beecroft’s (2015) ecologies of literature – all offer distinct ways of investigating conjunction and connection. What they do not always offer is mutual compatibility. Instead, the most productive way to delineate world literature today might be to consider it as a set of procedures and methods rather than a coherent body of theory. As a scholarly field, it provides in the first instance a space of conversation and intellectual exchange *across* specializations that may also enable reconfigured empirical and critical investigations within those specializations.

This give-and-take among different disciplinary locations has shaped the work leading up to the four volumes presented here. Emerging from a long-running project based in Sweden, and involving researchers from comparative literature, anthropology, intellectual history and a range of language departments, the basic

methodological wager of our work differs from much else that has been published in the field of world literature. Avoiding hard-wired systemic, deterministic or 'global' claims, what we call the *cosmopolitan-vernacular dynamic* (which can also be read as *vernacular-cosmopolitan*) offers itself not as a distinct theory, but as a methodological starting point – akin to an *Ansatzpunkt* in Erich Auerbach's (1952) sense – from which to explore the resonances and connections between widely diverse literary texts and cultures.

To explain the motivations behind such a methodology, we need to make a detour into the current state of world literature studies. Undergirding this sprawling field is the political and ethical intuition that literary knowledge in our crisis-ridden, globalized and racialized world – even in its (anticipated) post-Covid-19 shape – requires new modes of scholarly attention. To speak from our own contemporary vantage point in Scandinavia, it is clear that the joint impact of the cultural Anglosphere, migration from Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia, the cultural policies of the EU and the ubiquitous presence of digital media not only weaken the explanatory value of the nation state and the national language as the privileged loci of the production and reading of literature in Sweden today, but also invite reconsiderations of an earlier literary history in the region. Similar shifts in the production of literature and in the literary imagination can be registered elsewhere across the world, shifts that prompt us to rethink how we read and contextualize literature. The road to such a revised conception of literary studies leads, however, to a garden of forking paths. This is one important lesson to be learned from the twenty-odd years since Moretti's lively provocation in the year 2000.

Common to the turn-of-the-millennium interventions by Moretti and David Damrosch (2003) (less so Pascale Casanova, whose concern was consecration) was an emphasis on circulation – quite literally on how texts move and are received in diverse contexts. This deceptively simple perspective counters what Jerome McGann (1991: 7) once called 'textual idealism', which treats texts as if they were just magically 'there'. Instead, the circulatory perspective allows us to engage the material, spatial and historical unconscious of literature as texts in movement. This approach has been developed by Beecroft (2015), Venkat Mani (2017), Sandra Richter (2017) and Yvonne Leffler (2020), among others. Increasingly, as in contributions to Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen's (2016) *Institutions of World Literature* or in Ignacio Sánchez Prado's (2018) study of Mexican literature, this tends towards studies of market dynamics and, not least, the sociology of translation (Heilbron 1999, 2020, de Swaan 2001, Sapiró

2008, Buzelin and Baraldi 2016). However, the most rigorous large-scale studies of circulation are to be found within computational literary studies (CLS) which involves an even more fundamental shift towards quantitative methods than the sociology of translation. Not surprisingly, given his coinage of ‘distant reading’, CLS has become Moretti’s (2000: 56–8) main field of activity at the Stanford Literary Lab. Even as the merits and drawbacks of CLS are being debated (Da 2019), the achievements in all these interlinked areas of investigation attest firmly to the *complexity* of studying world-literary circulation. This knowledge is not just readily available, nor does it amount merely to an external study of literature, but it is rather of crucial relevance both to the empirical and theoretical understanding of how literary cultures evolve.

Having said that, a striking alternative development over the last ten years has been the proliferation of interpretive, qualitative methods in world literature studies. Often on the basis of strong theorizations of the world-concept, and sometimes pitched polemically against the circulation approach, researchers have attempted to read ‘the world’ through specific literary works, rather than through Morettian ‘distant reading’ (which is ideally suited for digital methods). The epistemic assumption in these interpretive models follows the synechdochal logic of *pars pro toto*, or the part standing in for the whole. Eric Hayot (2012) was early to embark on this path in *On Literary Worlds*, an ambitious but all too brief attempt to bring world literature studies – understood as a global extension of literary studies – to bear on, in principle, *any* given work of literature, regardless of origin or period. Emily Apter’s (2013) much publicized *Against World Literature* instead championed linguistic specificity – coded as the ‘Untranslatable’ – as the normative locus of a worldly reading. A related tendency has been the regionally or linguistically restricted conception of literature X *as* world literature, with the francophone *littérature-monde* as a high-profile example, but also evident in many (not all) titles in Bloomsbury’s ‘Literatures as World Literature’ series. Building on Moretti’s world-systemic inclination, the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) has elaborated a significantly different conception of world-literature (with a hyphen) as the aesthetic registration of combined and uneven development in the capitalist world-system – but this, too, has issued in a mode of close interpretive attention to literary texts, rather than distant reading. Other, more or less distinct examples of this interpretive turn in world literature studies can be cited, such as Francesca Orsini’s (2015) concept of the multilingual local, pitched in opposition to systemic approaches, Debjani Ganguly’s (2016) work on the global novel, Ottmar Ette’s (2016) ‘transarea’ approach (2016), Pheng Cheah’s

(2016, 2017) phenomenology of ‘worlding literature’ and Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl’s (2017) notes on world-making. A point of relevance to our work is that while the most rigorous systemic approaches, represented here by WReC, speak of world-literature in the singular, the implication of, for example, Hayot’s, Apter’s or Orsini’s perspectives is to consider *literatures* as an inevitably plural phenomenon – even in contexts of exchange and translation. At stake here, ultimately, is the relative theoretical weighting of determinacy and contingency in interpretive practices. Our work does not collectively pursue one or the other of these angles, but most contributions tend to side with contingency and hence the plural conception of literature.

Having said so, it must be stressed that each volume in this series has a distinct methodological profile of its own. As its title indicates, *Northern Crossings* deals with aspects of circulation to and from Sweden – understood in structural terms as a semi-periphery rather than a reified national space. It is in that sense the most systemically oriented volume in this series. *Claiming Space*, by contrast, approaches the narrative inscription of places around the world mainly through interpretive methods. *Literature and the Making of the World* configures its object of inquiry as ‘literary practice’ (both intra- and extratextual) and combines for that reason text-focused readings with book-historical and anthropological methods of inquiry. *Vernaculars in an Age of World Literatures*, finally, with its focus on the concept of the vernacular, combines interpretive readings with large-scale historical analyses.

As mentioned, it is the working hypothesis of the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic that brings these studies together. In the simplest and most general terms, this assumes that literature in different times is shaped through a combination of cosmopolitan and vernacular orientations. Indeed, the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic, we claim, *is precisely what is at stake in the world literature field*: not just the outward success or failure of certain texts, genres or literary languages, nor just the ‘refraction’ of *national* literatures (Damrosch 2003: 281), but rather the always situated negotiation of cosmopolitan and vernacular orientations in the temporal unfolding of literary practice. The further implication – which extends beyond our contributions – is that such a methodology might allow for the articulation of ‘universality’ after the collapse of ‘universalism’ (Messling 2019).

Just as importantly, however, the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic should be understood as a falsifiable postulation: in the hypothetical case of Beecroft’s (2015: 33) ‘epichoric’, or strictly local, literary ecology it would hardly be

meaningful to talk of a cosmopolitan orientation. The opposite point, that there might be texts, genres and modes of writing without any vernacular connection at all, is harder to make – but it is the case, for example, that standard Arabic or *fusha* can function as a cosmopolitan written standard that runs parallel to local (spoken) Arabic dialects (Tageldin 2018). We are not claiming, in other words, that the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic *must* apply in all literary contexts. Even more importantly, it does not operate in just one mode, nor is it necessarily always successful. To speak of the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic is an open proposition, in the sense that it does not prescribe in advance any particular weighting of cosmopolitan or vernacular tendencies. Although the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic is fundamentally a question of how literary values are shaped, just *how* these values should be understood and assessed can only be discovered by examining the particular case.

In adopting the cosmopolitan–vernacular perspective, we acknowledge our debt to Sheldon Pollock (2006), whose magisterial macro-historical analysis of pre-modern literary cultures in South Asia and Europe in *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* offered a path-breaking comparison not just of the cosmopolitan literatures of Sanskrit and Latin, but more importantly of the historical constructedness of vernacular literatures. *Contra* the Romanticist assumption of vernacular authenticity and immediacy, Pollock (and Beecroft after him) argued that a historical approach to vernacular literatures will show how they tend to be elite projects shaped in reaction against a dominant cosmopolitan Other (such as the literate cultures of Latin and Sanskrit). To *literate* (standardize through writing) and *literate* languages coded as vernaculars are to be understood as deliberate, politically motivated actions (Pollock 2006: 4–5).

Illuminating though such an explanatory model is, it should not be taken at face value as a transhistorical constant, nor need it be restricted to macro-historical analyses, but can be applied equally to closer textual study. Contrary to Pollock's pre-modern focus, our four volumes engage with literature from the last 200 years (about half of the primary sources are contemporary), an epoch which marks a radical new departure in literary history. This is when *Weltliteratur* was conceptualized in the wake of the accelerating commodification of print literature, the emergence of comparative philology and the entrenchment of (and resistance to) European nationalism and imperialism. It is, hence, an era when cosmopolitan and vernacular orientations in literature have been reconfigured drastically in relation not least, if not only, to the cultural authority of 'the West'. An important aspect of this process has been the accelerating *vernacularization*

of languages and literatures in all parts of the world. This needs to be understood in two ways. First, vernacularization entails the positioning of named languages, registers of language or local knowledges as inferior in the field of power, as for instance Aamir Mufti (2016) discusses in the context of India and Pakistan. But, secondly, vernacularization also involves the deliberate elevation of vernaculars, including what we more broadly call the ‘domain of vernacularity’, as a resource for the construction of national or socially distinct literatures. Given the constitutively relational nature of vernacularization, this process needs to be thought of as unstable: it can change over time (an obvious example being how European vernaculars such as English and French became cosmopolitan, imperial languages), as well as shift momentarily across space (Spanish being transformed into an immigrant vernacular in the United States). Or, as has often been the case in Africa, a *literary* vernacularity has had to be crafted through adopted, formerly imperial languages.

With its connections to comparative philology and the German romantic aesthetics of Herder, Goethe, Schlegel and Schleiermacher, among others (for more on this see Noyes 2015, Bhattacharya 2016, Mufti 2016, Ahmed 2018), post-eighteenth-century vernacularization is a deeply ambivalent affair: its value-coding can be programmatically positive yet grounded in untenable essentializations of race and ethnicity. A particularly effective challenge to this legacy has been the interrogation of language boundaries and ‘artefactualized’ languages (Blommaert 2010: 4), along with the critique of the ‘monolingual paradigm’ (Yildiz 2012; see also Bauman and Briggs 2003, Heller-Roazen 2005, Sakai 2009, Minaard and Dembeck 2014, Stockhammer 2015, Gramling 2016, Tidigs and Huss 2017, Helgesson and Kullberg 2018). These debates are relevant to our work, not least since discourses of the vernacular have often been a tool for establishing a monolingual paradigm that effaces translingual conceptions of language (Adejunmobi 2004). Our heuristic employment of the term allows, however, for an alternative take on mono- and multilingualism. If the vernacular indicates a *relation*, it may entail a heteroglossic or translingual register ‘within’ a named language (vernacular varieties of English, say), as much as an identity as a separate language vis-à-vis a dominant other (which, for example, was the position of Wolof in relation to imperial French). The social dimension of the vernacular also draws our attention to the relativity of communities of comprehension – the intimacy of a vernacular to one group will be perceived as opacity by others. Such fluidity in the definition and nature of the vernacular chimes well with the critique of linguistic ‘bordering’ (Sakai 2009),

but – and this is important – it also factors the wholly contextual dimension of social hierarchies into the analysis. This has two consequences. One is that it acknowledges the de facto importance of artefactualized language, particularly within literature, despite its *theoretical* untenability. In the world of publishing, the authority of standard varieties of English, French or Arabic – including their publishing infrastructures – cannot be wished away. Hence, when terms such as ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ are used in *Northern Crossings* in the context of translational exchanges, this is not a normative judgement, but rather an attempt at descriptively conceptualizing a given state of affairs.

The other consequence is that a social conception of language opens up towards a wider frame of analysis. As argued in *Vernaculars in an Age of World Literatures* and elsewhere in our volumes, the vernacular is not ‘just’ a linguistic matter, but implies rather an entire domain of vernacularity. This can be understood in metonymic terms as that which relates to proximate, intimate, domestic or local experiences and sensibilities, particularly in their linguistic registration. It has tremendous aesthetic as well as persuasive potential, but is also ideologically ambiguous. As Moradewun Adejunmobi’s important work on West Africa shows, it is naive to assume that promotions of the vernacular are always ‘intrinsic and unproblematic exemplars of minority politics’ (2005: 179). On the contrary, what she calls ‘discourses of the vernacular’ have, intermittently, justified asymmetries of power under colonialism, as well as supported the political aspirations of subordinated groups, notably by those ‘at the forefront of interaction with the dominant foreign culture’ (ibid.: 191). The dynamics of the vernacular will, in brief, always be strictly context-sensitive. From this it follows that an assessment of its political tenor can only be issued a posteriori.

If, when we embarked on this project, we found that the vernacular was an ignored or undertheorized term in world literature studies, this has changed to some extent in recent years. An important line of questioning in this regard concerns the extent to which the very term ‘vernacular’ is possible to use outside of its particular European-latin genealogy. Tageldin (2018: 115), for one, has observantly noted the instability of the term’s field of reference – it is ‘terminological quicksand’ – but her account of Arabic supports rather than refutes the heuristic value of using the term ‘vernacular’ comparatively: it is often the case, we find, that when the vernacular transforms into a deliberate literary project, ‘middle registers’ of writing which fixate the flux of spoken language abound. In literary practice, that is to say, the vernacular oscillates between being a medium and being a citation within the medium. Interestingly,

this need not work very differently in oral or performative modes of verbal art, which also exhibit the qualities of craftedness and quotability (see Barber 2007). Against this backdrop, the value of a 'comparativist assessment of vernacular styles and political practices across the globe', as Sieglinde Lemke (2009: 9) puts it, should be evident.

We should note here that much of the critique *against* world literature as a field of study has argued that the vernacular is what world literature leaves behind. If the basic motivation for world literature as a disciplinary commitment could be described in terms of a cosmopolitan ethics, this has, in turn, often been accused of being an elitist, Eurocentric or politically aloof concern. There is by now an entire subfield of debates in this vein whose most common articulation has been that of postcolonialism 'versus' world literature (Rosendahl Thomsen 2008, Hitchcock 2010, Huggan 2011, Shankar 2012, Spivak 2012, Young 2011, Boehmer 2014, Helgesson 2014, Slaughter 2014, Mufti 2016, Tiwari and Damrosch 2019 and 2020, Sturm-Trigonakis 2020). The more recent contributions to this discussion tend, however, also to identify points of convergence between these positions. Our take on this is that if postcolonialism is ideologically primed to speak on behalf of the vernacular (whose proximity to concepts such as the subaltern or indigeneity should not pass unnoticed), an actual attention to vernacular orientations also shows their relevance far beyond strictly postcolonial concerns. We are, in other words, claiming that the cosmopolitan-vernacular optic engages the postcolonial perspective, without effacing or supplanting it.

At this point, however, it is of some urgency also to address the cosmopolitan dimension of our methodology. As mentioned, world literature and cosmopolitanism were revived as concerns in academia more or less in tandem in the post-1989 phase: if world literature is underwritten by a fundamentally cosmopolitan ethos of openness towards the other, it also offers the more philosophical concerns of cosmopolitanism an empirical field of study. Even more importantly, the gradual turn from such philosophically normative approaches to a descriptive conception of cosmopolitanism as 'a characteristic and possession of substantial social collectivities, often nonelite collectivities that had cosmopolitanism thrust upon them' (Robbins and Horta 2017: 3) offers yet further scope for its coupling with world literature. Not unlike Pollock (2000: 593), who considers cosmopolitanism as something people 'do rather than something they declare, as practice rather than proposition', our own work in these volumes is informed not by any *a priori* definition of what a

cosmopolitan space or stance is, but, again, by a relational premise: terms such as ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘cosmopolitanization’ have meaning only insofar as they set themselves off against other modes of belonging, or, better, other orientations. But to complicate things further, cosmopolitan orientations, insofar as they are verbalized, must have a *specific* linguistic signature; this signature, in turn, might more often than not be positioned as vernacular. Conversely, vernacular orientations may, under the right conditions (such as an attachment to a global language) have a cosmopolitan appeal. An example of the latter could be the Antillean French of Patrick Chamoiseau’s Goncourt-winning novel *Texaco* (1992). An example of the former is Rabindranath Tagore’s ([1907] 2015) famous lecture on world literature, held in the late colonial period when Tagore’s Bengali – a formidable language of literature and erudition – was still regarded by the British as a vernacular. It is, in other words, crucial to think of the cosmopolitan and the vernacular orientations as *different* but not as mutually exclusive *opposites*, in a schematic sense. Homi Bhabha (1996), not least, has inspired such a view by speaking of vernacular cosmopolitanism (Werbner 2006). To grasp how these orientations might interact, it is therefore imperative to emphasize that the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic is also, and fundamentally, a matter of translation – which could be illustrated by how Tagore’s lecture is only accessible to us who are writing this introduction in its English version. As with the vernacular, however, the cosmopolitan tendencies are also ambiguous when translation enters the picture. If cosmopolitan orientations are at work whenever transnational structures or agents – be it anglophone, French, Chinese or any other cross-cultural exportation of literature – exercise their power over less well-endowed literary spaces, it may equally be the case that the cosmopolitan orientation of translational practice creates intercultural channels and mindsets that challenge isolationist tendencies. As Robbins and Horta (2017) explain, cosmopolitanism has always both a positive and a negative definition. In positive terms, it embraces a wider humanity; in negative terms, it fosters detachment. This duality also applies to literary modes of cosmopolitanism, which indicates how *location* must always be factored into the cosmopolitan–vernacular analysis, even if it is a negatively conceived locality (as a consequence of detachment). There is, strictly speaking, no ‘world space’, no vaguely conceived orbit ‘out there’ where world literature exists in its separate realm. Instead, any postulation or imaginary of a wider world necessarily implies a particular ‘here.’ This premise is made explicit in *Claiming Space*, whose readings are organized by way of the two terms ‘location’ and ‘orientation’, and in *Literature and the*

Making of the World, where the focus on literary practice links the textual and fictive aspects of literature to the emplaced and linguistically inflected work of writers, editors or, in one case, a maker of scrapbooks. The word ‘world’ emerges here as double-coded, as both the life-world once theorized by Hannah Arendt ([1958] 1998) and others, and as an imagined world with a wider scope – and this imagined world, it turns out, is typically nurtured by modes of writing, much as Don Quixote once mistook his romances for the world.

The world, then, can be made and sustained through literary practice, a perspective which also offers a particularly strong motivation for our incorporation of anthropological approaches to literature in our volumes. Not only is the immediate relevance of anthropology evident when engaging terms such as ‘vernacular’, ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘world’, but we also claim that the defamiliarizing gaze of anthropology on the literary domain helps literary scholarship to move beyond excessive textualism. The work of Karin Barber (2007) serves as a rich source of inspiration, but there is also a long-running debate on the relation of literature to ethnography (Coundouriotis 1999, Desai 2001, Debaene 2010, Kullberg 2013, Izzo 2019) as well as a subfield of literary anthropology which has grown rapidly in recent years (Rapport 1994, Cohen 2013, Wulff 2017, Hemer 2020, Uimonen 2020). In the latter instance in particular, there has been a consistent development of methods for cultural, temporal and biographical contextualization of literary texts relating to vernacular–cosmopolitan dynamics. A central idea here is that the anthropologist and the author are fellow intellectuals and thus the author’s commentary is key to understanding issues such as choice of topic, the writing process, the literary career, the publishing industry and the literary market, as well as the circulation of books. This, juxtaposed with the anthropologist’s ethnographic observations, can reveal analytical aspects of world literature that are not obvious from the texts alone. It is for this reason that our volumes integrate contributions that build on anthropological methods, such as ethnographic observations during literary festivals, readings and book launches, combined with extensive in-depth interviews of authors.

Our four volumes will appear in staggered fashion in 2021 and 2022, so depending on when exactly you as reader are encountering this general introduction, not all of them may yet be available. Regardless, we will end by briefly describing their profiles.

As already indicated, *Claiming Space*’s contribution to our larger project is its specification of the cosmopolitan and vernacular vectors in terms of

'location' and 'orientation'. This enables a refined analysis of spatial imaginaries in literature. This volume pays attention to language, forms of aesthetic worlding and processes of translation and distribution, while its edge is turned towards the spatial and territorial politics involved in literary practices and works in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Locations, we argue, are inhabited or claimed by means of vernacular or cosmopolitan strategies, choices that are also visible in the orientations bound up with these sites. In dialogue with the critical geopolitics of culture, with sociology and anthropology, our attention to literary locations and orientations brings spatial particularity into the reckoning of vernacular and cosmopolitan relationality. Explicitly expressed or implied, manifesting itself sometimes as *dislocation* and *disorientation*, the claiming of space by any symbolic means necessarily is revealed as a constant effect of literary practice.

Vernaculars in an Age of World Literatures attempts to theorize the vernacular. As indicated in the discussion above, our point of departure is that the vernacular is always plural: not limited to language alone but comprising various types of expressions, material objects, people and environments. Moreover, its significance and value change with time and context. From a European point of view, it has been identified with the consolidation of national literatures, but in other contexts it has been associated with diaspora and movements of the marginalized or else, like in early twentieth-century China, it needs to be adapted to a specific literary and linguistic tradition to be useful as a concept. Sometimes, but not always, it works as an expression of resistance to the hegemony of cultural centres. Yet this seemingly inherent heterogeneity and variability is precisely what makes the vernacular a productive concept for rethinking world literature today. In nine case studies approaching a select number of narratives from the long twentieth century, from more or less marginal contexts, the volume explores how the concept may be put into practice and demonstrates how vernaculars operate within different literary, critical, cultural and political circumstances.

In the collectively authored *Northern Crossings* we analyse cosmopolitanizing and vernacularizing translational processes from the point of view of the literary semi-periphery. Literary traffic to and from Swedish displays a nuanced palette of diverse intercultural relations. The world literary system has hitherto been predominantly described from a binary centre-periphery perspective. A focus on the semi-periphery makes visible other important phenomena in the formation of interlingual literary flows. Our studies show that the logic of integration into new literary cultures does not follow one set of principles or

a single pattern. The strategies employed by publishers, translators and other intermediaries in adapting the foreign text to a new literary culture always put the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic into play, but exactly what processes are implemented depends on a wide range of variables, such as genre, narrative technique, literary style, textual and authorial position in source and target cultures, publishing agendas, translator profiles and overall relations between specific literary cultures.

Literature and the Making of the World, finally, engages the cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic by focusing on a range of literary practices and materialities. In its first section, ‘Worlds in texts’, the world-making potential of place, genre and language is explored in readings of, among other things, French nineteenth-century novels, Lu Xun’s ‘A Madman’s Diary’ and Siberian exile writing. The second section, ‘Texts in worlds’, looks at literary journals, the profession of travel writers, the social world of a scrapbook keeper in Harlem and the trajectory of a contemporary novel in the Indian language Kannada with a view to fleshing out, in an anthropological spirit, the ‘world’ of world literature as an experiential and embodied category. In contrast to macro-scale varieties of world literature studies, the empirically fine-grained contributions to this volume bring close reading, book history, ethnography and historical contextualization to bear on its selected instances of literary practice.

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