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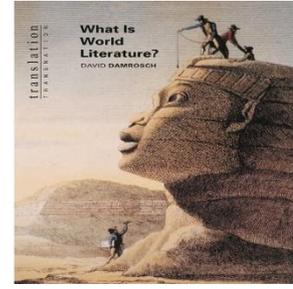
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FROM THE OLD WORLD TO THE WHOLE WORLD

ESKİ DÜNYADAN TÜM DÜNYAYA

Damrosch, D. (2003). *What is World Literature?* Oxford: Princeton University Press.



Expanding the scope of literature has brought out the question of what world literature is not nowadays rather than what world literature is. However, the term world literature has undergone many changes regarding its framework and geographical range, as well as its relation to the issue of translation. Until recently, world literature had generally been defined as Western European literature. Even in the European zone, some lesser spoken languages such as Dutch or Yiddish were ignored, and the main focus was on a few national traditions. As a comparatist, Horst Rüdiger criticizes this narrowness and the confinement of world literature to the UN countries (Damrosch,2003:110). In his book, Damrosch also gives voice to Werner Friederich who also mentions the narrowness of the geographical range of material most often included in world literature. For Friederich, such a programme should not be called world literature at all, but rather NATO literature or, even more specifically, the literature of fifteen NATO nations (Damrosch,2003:111).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, publishers began to put together sets of books which were thought to be the greatest masterpieces of all time. However, they had different approaches which reflected the editors' perspective on the material and the audience. *The Best of the World's Classics* (1909) by Funk and Wagnalls is a ten-volume anthology compiled under the editorship of Henry Cabot Lodge. *The Harvard Classics* (1910) by P.F. Collier and Son is a fifty-volume anthology compiled under the editorship of Charles W. Eliot. Each of these anthologies had the aim of forming a better American citizen who was "refined, thoughtful, self-aware, and self-controlled" (Damrosch,2003:120). However, Lodge and Eliot varied according to their views on world literature: while Eliot supported a more cosmopolitan and Arnoldian view that asked for a broader term of world literature which enriches the reader with the encounter of cultural difference, Lodge was the opposite. Eliot is cited in Damrosch: "From these volumes, the thorough reader may learn valuable lessons in comparative literature. He can see how various the contributions of the different languages and epochs have been; and he will inevitably come to the conclusion that striking national differences in this respect ought in the interest of mankind to be perpetuated and developed, and not obliterated, averaged or harrowed down" (Damrosch, 2003:121).

In contrast, Lodge had a nationalistic view of literature; for him, the works should be written in the author's native language and they should write to the people who share the same language, race, and country. Eliot did not follow as jingoistic an approach as Lodge; in order to broaden his scope, he added Greco-Roman texts to the anthology rather than filling it exclusively with American texts. Another scholar, John Macy, also included a few non-Western texts in his five-hundred-page book survey *The Story of the World Literature* (1925). Appearing under the name "The Mysterious East," Macy used stereotypes for this section and did not bother to evaluate it deeply.

In mid-century America, the shape of world literature began to change with some works. Frank Magill's *Masterpieces of World Literature in Digest Form* (1949) is composed of four volumes that were published in successive years; it gives summaries and brief analysis of the texts. In the first two volumes, there are 1,010 works in total, but just three of them are non-Western. The third volume includes a few Oriental titles and the last volume includes 1008 authors, with just twenty-three who are non-Western, constituting a very low percentage in total. Most world literature courses continued to have the same limited scope, presenting a European or Euro-American focus through the 1980s. Even one of the world's most widely used anthologies, *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, had the tradition of great powers in its content. The world meant Western Europe and the United States for them, but as the years passed, they began to change the content of the anthology by including non-Western authors in their new editions. In the early nineties, world literature anthologies changed even more by including a wider geographical and literary range and presenting extensive selections from non-Western pieces of literature. *The Harper Collins World Reader* (1994) shortened the classical Western texts' section and included texts from China, Japan, India, Vietnam, etc. With this new approach, and due to its comparatist editor Sarah Lawall's contributions, *Norton* decided to change its scope by adding more non-Western works and changing its title to *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* in the second edition of the 2002 version.

While world literature was broadening its scope, other problems emerged, namely those of the framework and translation. It was really hard to define a certain category for those works. In the beginning, it was restricted to basic literary genres such as the novel, poetry, and drama, but as the term world literature broadened, new genres began to appear in the important anthologies. The first two volumes of Frank Magill's anthology includes only novels, drama, narrative, and poetry, but in the third volume, there is a wide range of pieces, including non-fiction, memoirs, and autobiographies. *The Harper Collins Anthology* added journals, African oral epic, orature, and some texts that are not even literature in the sense of the written text.

The translation was another obstacle for world literature. Like Lodge, many people thought that the works should be in their original language and they should not be translated so as not to lose their original sense. Roland Barthes had little interest in translation and did not want his works to be translated, but how would many people have known about his ideas if his works had not been translated into other languages? However, in translating a text, translators should be aware of the cultural differences between the two nations. Moreover, they should not adopt the work into the culture into which the work is translated. Lawrence Venuti is cited in Damrosch and states that many translations "spread American culture abroad than to bring the world home to America" (Damrosch,2003:113).

In chapter six of *What Is World Literature*, David Damrosch marks the importance of translated, retranslated, and interpreted classics of World literature. This chapter, like other parts of the book, is about translation problems—not in *Arabian Nights*, Ngal's works, and others—but in the works of a major modernist German author of the twentieth century, Franz Kafka. Damrosch provides examples from some literary works such as Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf* and Robert Fagle's *Iliad* which have been released on tape format with the voices of Hollywood actors, as books conforming with new standards of translation. Then Damrosch criticizes Kafka and his works. Only a few of Kafka's works were published during his lifetime; other, unfinished works were published by his friend Max Brod who refused Kafka's wish to have the manuscripts destroyed. As he prepared the unpublished novels and stories for publications, he systematically normalized vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation (Damrosch, 2003:189). The earliest English translations of Kafka's work were by Edwin and Willa Muir. These translations began to receive wide attention at a time when Kafka's work was banned in Nazi Germany,

so Kafka became famous in English. As a result, the term “Kafkaesque” has entered the English language to describe this surreal mode of writing.

Kafka did not write in standard High German, but rather in Pragen German influenced by the Yiddish and Czech languages, making it even more difficult to translate his works. Another insurmountable problem of translators of his work is how to deal with Kafka’s extensive use of characteristics particular to the German language which allow for long sentences. His sentences deliver an unexpected impact just before the full stop—that being the finalizing of meaning and focus. This is due to the constructions of certain sentences in German which require that the verb be positioned at the end of the sentence. Such constructions are difficult to duplicate in English, so it is up to the translator to provide the reader with the same effect found in the original text.

Lastly, with the shift from the old world to the whole world, the order and the presentation of these literary texts have been a problem. The questions of what makes a text part of world literature and what defines its quality over other texts are generally asked in this context. Also, the value of a text can change over time; because such shifts can occur, a masterpiece of our time may not be valued for fifty years after its publication. What scholars look for their aesthetic value and universality. So, although texts belong to the early ages of the world, they should have an aesthetic value and address universal issues as in Damrosch’s example, *Gilgamesh*. The texts may have national differences, but they should “be harmonized under the banner of universal principles of aesthetic order and cross-cultural tradition” (Damrosch,2003:136). Actually, it is clear that the thing that gives texts a universal value and makes them comparative is their intertextuality. The term world literature has undergone many phases to broaden its European-based content. With the broadening of the term, some other difficulties such as framework, translation, and assessment occurred. Although these problems still exist, the world is at least different from what it was a half-decade ago.

Works-Cited

Damrosch, D. (2003). *What is World Literature?* Oxford: Princeton University Press.