

Ex-position Feature Topic Call for Papers

Non-Worldly Literature

With a special section on Wu Ming-Yi (吳明益)

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Over the years, “world literature” has established itself as a theorizing practice, a discipline-demarkation move, an institutional exercise, and eventually a field of study in its own right—engaging and game-changing. At its more controversial end, world literature for some seems to have turned into an enterprise promoting particular approaches to literature for the sake of the English-speaking university, emphasizing among other things a literary work’s circulatability and a pedagogical strategy of anecdotal narrativity and immediate comprehensibility. At the same time, the publishing industry, academic and popular, is keen to capitalize on the new category. We also hear renowned writers admit to hoping their writing to be readily “translatable.”

If the circulatability-oriented trajectory of world literature, as critics have pointed out, risks reiterating the logic of the neoliberal market and reinforcing a singularizing notion of globalization, there have been incisive critiques and revisions of the prevailing formulation, committed to complicating and pluralizing the *world*—and *literature*, for that matter.

The diversifying versions of world literature take pains to challenge the limiting, if not outright Eurocentric, configuration. These critiques are focused for the most part on geographically remapping the category, and their aim can be said to be twofold: on the one hand, they seek to expand the scope of world literature, integrating what is ignored by the Eurocentric criterion; on the other hand, they often turn to the local or any smaller and less standardized unit, valorizing it as a more legitimate site of critical engagement. Whichever direction these critiques take (whether to render the world bigger or concentrate on a smaller-sized world), their counter-gestures often pose similar questions as the mainstream version—that is, they are also looking at how a writer imagines his or her place “in the world.” In some cases, these critical interventions in effect reproduce the interchangeability of *world* and *globe*, a problematic presupposition informing the mainstream model.

In this feature topic, we propose to examine literature produced anywhere that either does *not* eye the world (or the globe) for its self-formation or has *not* spread outside of its supposed community.

This topic, to begin with, is premised as a response to the current conceptions of world literature, to inquiries prompted by prominent practitioners in the field such as this one: “What isn’t world literature?” We are interested in discussion of literary productions that indeed *cannot* be considered as world literature as laid out in the dominant discourses of the field.

Nevertheless, this feature topic should not be taken as a project of negativity shaping itself as a lack or absence vis-à-vis the prevailing constructs. Rather, we invite research articles that engage with specific writers based anywhere, in any language, whose distinctively non-worldly stance (inward look, indifference, inability to imagine an outside world, etc.) constitutes its very identity. This stance may be affirming, or life-threatening; it may be liberatory, or destructive. It may cast ideas of community derived from its specific conditions, far removed from the globalizing world.

Along a related but slightly different vein, we also invite submissions on writers writing in a non-English language who have not yet been translated or widely known outside of their linguistic or geographical community. In a productive spirit, we would like this project to serve as a forum where previously unfamiliar writers and works are brought to the spotlight for scholars of comparative studies—not to help enlarge the repertoire of world literature according to the prevalent terms, but to put forth refreshing propositions that redefine the stakes involved in “inter-worldly” exchange. If there is merit in facilitating access to literary and artistic statements based in a different life-world, what is that pivotal point of contact? If comparative scholarship is often predicated upon a shared thematic rubric, how is that commonality hypostatized? Is it not usually the hegemonic side that suggests the import of a theme? In this project we are interested in discussion of works that posit noteworthy thematics and problematics on their own terms. The paper must demonstrate in its methodology why a particular work demands attention from a world that does not seem to have a place for it due to its apparent inapproachability.

Sub-Feature on Wu Ming-Yi

Under this feature topic, we are creating a special section on Taiwanese writer Wu Ming-Yi and welcome research articles that discuss Wu's work in relation to questions raised in this call for papers. How does Wu's imaging of "the world" come into play in his fictional works? Given the writer's versatility and ability to write across genres (novels, nature writing, commentary on photography, etc.), is there a perceivable parallel among these framings ("framing" in the sense of how each genre's conventions make for particular perspectives into the world)? And what is behind the attention he is currently gaining in the world literary scene? What is involved in the translation of his writing into another language? What is at stake in casting his body of work as "world literature" – and what is at stake in *not* doing so?

For people familiar with contemporary Taiwan literature, Wu is easily the last person to be considered within the context of something called non-worldly literature. We have designed this sub-feature specially to open up the conversations. On the other hand, we also invite readings that readily embrace world literature to show how their approach does justice to a writer like Wu more effectively than others.

***For submission guidelines, visit the journal's website:*

<http://ex-position.org>