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## Letter from the Editors

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### The Production of the World on the Head of a Pin: Disrupting Totality in World Literature Studies

What it means to “world,” to live in “*the world*,” and what “world” literature constitutes has proven highly contestable in World Literature Studies. Nirvana Tanoukhi, Pheng Cheah and Djelal Kadir locate a new wave of rethinking “world” in the era of globalization due to the correlative rise of “economic globalization, transnational migration, and global communications” (Cheah 26) that brought to surface “a flattened world... and an array of countermovements of heightened inequality, cultural, and religious conflict, and expansionist realpolitik emanating from multiple locales around the globe” (Kadir 268). The production of the world and the experience of the inhabitation of the world has fundamentally been altered by the external forces of globalization, amplifying the historically recurring challenge of making the world “knowable”—naming it, its positionality, its circumference, its pieces. The totality of “world” and the totalities that governed it can no longer hold.

As Cheah notes: “since one cannot *see* the universe, the world, or humanity, the cosmopolitan optic is not one of perceptual experience but of the imagination” (26). The resurgence of rethinking the world expresses an altered optic, an expanded imagination, what Adam Kirsch calls a “global consciousness” (12), one that is acutely aware of the rapidly

changing world and one's relation to it. A chain of production is produced: the external world influences the internal world of consciousness, which in turn alters the experience and thus production of the world in language. The problem of attempting to articulate a discourse to circumscribe the imaginative and the internal experience of "world" as it correlates to the external forces of "world" further accentuates the lacuna between language and experience, posing whether or not a globalized optic, one to suit a global consciousness, in World Literature Studies is plausible.

Hayot sees a "renewed emphasis on 'world' (and *the* world)" as an attempt to "understand and respond to global processes of economic, cultural, and social transformation" (31), noting that the present (2012) definition of "world" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* runs 40 printed pages. Hayot furthermore recognizes a pattern emerging as a study of world as system, resurfacing the work of Immanuel Wallerstein. Wallerstein's world-systems theory privileges the world as a force in itself, a totality which Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova see as requiring "distant reading" in order to see its patterns at play and form an understanding of what the patterns represent.

It appears then that the "world" in "world literature" is more than a system, a totality, space and a verb. It is breaking through the circumference of totalitarian discourse that perpetuates the sphere of the world by presenting multiple "worlds" in perspective. If to "world" is to re-envision the world, the categories of what constitutes "literature" as a totality in itself must be dismantled simultaneously. To "world" is to widen the scope, adjust the aperture for a larger depth of field in our literary lenses. To widen aperture, however, is to limit the scope through which light penetrates. As such, it is through the perspective of distance that literature permits that the patterns of totality can be perceived. Through David Damrosch's use of

refraction, there appears to be two points of foci: the external “world” as it is experienced, and its refraction in a literary world. The concept of refraction emphasizes that the two points of foci, while constituting one image, are not mirrored.

Wai Chee Dimock claims literature as “one of the most robust inhabitants of the planet...an artificial form of ‘life’” (116). The continuum that exists between two wielders of words is extracted from the physical, “dead” work of literature, creating an imagined world sustained by the text’s participants, but does not have a life force of its own. Dimock describes literature as a “collective life of the planet” mocking “the form of any finite entity...the borders of the nation...the life span of the individual” (178). While literature itself is boundless, it is not the boundary-defying force itself. Reading, as Dimock notes, is the “global process of extension, elaboration, and randomization” (178), the chronotopic continuum that gives literature its “life.”

Bakhtin theorizes the chronotope as an intersection of space and time in which the reader comes in contact with the “humanness” of the text, resurrecting it from a “dead thing” and perpetuating its livelihood (253). The imaginative interaction between text, self and world through reading creates the “dialectically motivated” chronotope mediated between the separated temporal and spatial contexts of the present world of reader and the world that produced the world in the text. Thus, it is time, space, and its participants that create the chronotopes of the world and the created chronotopes of the world represented in the text (Bakhtin 253). By this definition, chronotopes are malleable; they “owe their shapes to the irregular compass of words,” as Dimock would say (174). The “world” cannot exist without words, and thus, humanity is held accountable for the worlds we create and the worlds we destroy.

World literature thus represents a third dimension. For Kadir, this dimension is the continuity between “imperial ventures” that elicits the “nagging questions of critical correlation

between worldliness and globality” (267)—when the world is confronted by itself as world, as planet. For Moretti, the “third dimension” is “local narrative voice,” making the novel an unstable entity as “the narrator is the pole of comment, of explanation, of evaluation” (65), and thus where the reader comes into the livelihood of the text and of another world, one whose particularities require the type of “worlding” Kadir describes—understanding its place in a world system to perceive its full depth of field. It is in these third spaces where “worlding” is practiced, where in World Literature the “body of literature is expanded to a world scale, a *space* (Casanova 72). The totality of “world” is unraveled by perceiving the patterns of totalitarian discourse that upholds it, thus exceeding the term “world” and existing rather as “space.”

For this issue, *Pivot* has sought papers that explore that the third space or “world literary space” as an insurrection of subjugated worlds that ruptures totalities.

**J Lundquist:** This essay analyzes Yōko Ogawa’s *The Diving Pool*, in which the woman characters’ ‘improper femininities’ are expressed through the rupturing of commensality. Ogawa’s protagonists cause direct harm to those around them as a direct response to patriarchal norms of motherhood and child-rearing, as the novel explores how patriarchal capitalism and alienation destroy possibilities for female solidarity.

**Carolina De Souza:** In *Kafka on the Shore* (2002/tr.2005), Haruki Murakami explores the ambiguities surrounding Japan’s traumatic history and its lingering impact on contemporary generations. In the form of two parallel narratives, *Kafka on the Shore* juxtaposes the story of Kafka Tamura, a fifteen year-old runaway searching for his mother, with that of sixty year-old Satoru Nakata, a man who lost his memory in a strange episode during WWII. Initially isolated,

both characters leave Tokyo for Shikoku (the smallest of Japan's main islands), only arriving at their destination after accepting the support of others. Reaching across generational shores, friendships are used in the text to bridge the gap between past and present, personal trauma and collective amnesia. As affective gestures established outside traditional communities of belonging, these friendships teach characters new ways of interpreting their painful past, while allowing readers to reflect on their own sense of shared responsibility.

**Ayse Irem Karabag:** Latife Tekin's *Swords of Ice* (1989/tr.2007) depicts the lives of Halilhan and his best friend Gogi, "ragged men" from Istanbul's "outer most belt" (18). Smart, spiritual, and naïve, Gogi tries to help Halilhan, although Halilhan tricks his brothers and misuses company funds to buy a second-hand red Volvo. While the Volvo is the techne for upward mobility, power and status, Halilhan recognizes that his well-tuned friendship with Gogi is vital to escape the poverty that their neighborhood imposes. This paper analyzes the friendship between Gogi and Halilhan, as they mark a fragile transgression of territorial boundaries, class norms, and socio-political values.

**Zaynab Ali:** Destruction is transnational: homes, places of worship, healing and community are annihilated and the landscapes of counties are altered. Meanwhile, civilians are left to grapple with their new realities. However, the attention afforded to these disasters varies depending on factors of race, ethnicity, creed, and nationality—the ties that are held dear are the very bonds that determine friends from foes. In most cases, however, news of violence is met by indifference. Individuals are unable to empathize with strangers whose lives are being shattered. This paper analyzes Atiq Rahimi's *Earth and Ashes* (1999/tr.2002) in order to argue that the

vehicle transporting one away from apathy is a re-visioning of friendship. Questions of focus include, how is empathy formed for those who are long-gone, or for those whose faces one cannot see? And how can friendship help bridge this gap? An ethical turn to analyzing friendships that can forge connections around the world requires a “re-visioning” of what it means to be a witness to another’s distress as outlined by Oliver Kelly in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* and Michel Foucault’s “Friendship as a way of Life.” In *Earth and Ashes* transit and re-visioning operate on two levels: physically across an unforgiving landscape to the coal mines, and emotionally through death and destruction to the eventual acceptance of infinite loss. This paper argues that progress down the road and past the checkpoint is enabled by fleeting relations working as vehicles: Dastaguir befriends a shopkeeper, a fellow bus passenger, and a servant who help facilitate his passage through the hazardous landscapes of war and trauma. As witnesses to Dastaguir’s transit, these friends help catalyse, and cauterise, exile from family, community, safety—from life itself until an ethical re-visioning of friendships beyond borders can occur.

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