*“Literature as a World”(2005)*

*Pascale Casanova*

* Key Terms
  + *World Literature:* A body of literature expanded to a world scale.
  + *World Literary Space:* A mediating space that exists between literature and the world. A “parallel territory relatively autonomous from the political domain, and dedicated as a result to questions, debates, inventions, of a specifically literary nature.” A “Set of interconnected positions, which must be thought and described in relational terms.”
  + *World Republic of Letters:*
  + *Greenwich Meridian of Literature*: A reference point or “norm” which other “players” in the world literary space will be measured against. It is a literary centre.
* **Literature as a World: What does she mean?**

🡪 A hypothetical world or space (*World Literary Space*) where we can move beyond confines of internal criticism (specifically looking to the texts linguistic form) and external criticism (specifically looking at how the text acts politically) and combine both criticisms.

🡪 “In other words, a criticism that could give a unified account of, say, the evolution of poetic forms, or the aesthetics of the novel, and their connection to the political, economic and social world.” (See how it combines internal and external!)

🡪 A space relatively independent of 1.) linguistic borders (Internal Criticism) and Political borders (External Criticism)

* **Is this mediating space the same thing has World Literature?**

🡪 NO. World Literature refers to a body of literature expanded to a world scale.

🡪 This is a *Space*. A “set of interconnected positions, which must be thought and described in relational terms.”

🡪 Metaphor of the Persian Rug:

- If you look at a Persian Rug too closely, its shapes, designs, colors seem arbitrary and indecipherable. However, from the right distance and angle, we see the larger interconnectedness between each individual pattern on the rug and its relation to other designs/the rug as a whole. But to see this, we need to view the rug from its totality, reciprocal dependence, and mutual interaction.

- *The World Literary Space* is the same as the rug. By understanding how an individual “pattern” exists, we need to see its relational identity to others: “Each text, each individual author, on the basis of their relative position within this immense structure [the world literary space].”

* **How has the World Literary Space developed?**

🡪 France and England (16th Century) mark its oldest regions

🡪 Enlarged into Central and Eastern Europe (18th and 19th century)

- Influence of Herderian national theory

🡪 Expanding even further through decolonization (20th and 21st Century)

🡪 Note: “Although the space of literature has been constituted more or less everywhere in the world, its unification across the whole planet is far from complete” [though working towards that].

* **How does Literary Globalization relate to this space?**

🡪 Common understanding of Literary Globalization: “short-term boost to publishers’ profits in the most market-oriented and powerful centres through the marketing of products intended for rapid ‘de-nationalized’ circulation.” From this perspective, one might see “conflicts” or differences between themes, forms, languages, story-types, etc. dissipating into a standardized forms.

🡪 In the World Literary Space, we see the opposite – “struggles, rivalries and contests over literature itself.”

* **Where is one place we can *see* the World Literary Space?**

🡪 Though this mediative space is invisible, we can *see* its existence in literary boards such as The Nobel Prize for Literature. Casanova sees the award as being autonomous (outside control of linguistic, political, and national criteria) and global

🡪 “The Nobel Prize is today one of the few truly international literary consecrations, a unique laboratory for the designation and definition of what is universal in literature. […] The expectations aroused, the beliefs stirred all reaffirm the existence of a literary world stretching across virtually the entire plant.”

* **Aesthetic Scale of Time?**

🡪 There are norms which each “entrant” must use as a reference point; a point which they will be measured against. This reference point or centre is called the *Greenwich Meridian of Literature*.

🡪 In terms of time, the line helps us understand the literary “present.” The reference point marks what is modern and not modern (what is modern being the present), so other entrants will relate to this “present” based on their “distance” from the centre.

🡪 Note that what is modern is not permanent.

🡪 “To be decreed ‘modern’ is one of the most difficult forms of recognition for writers outside the centre, and the object of violent and bitter competition.”

🡪 “Owing to the inherent precariousness of the principle of ‘modernity,’ a work declared modern is doomed to become obsolete unless elevated to the category of ‘classic.’”

* **World Literary Space and National Borders**

🡪 The Dominate/Dominated model revealed in the world literary space, caused by inequalities between centres and the peripheral, “implies the rejection of established national categories and divisions; indeed, demands a trans- or inter-national mode of thought.”

🡪 “Once we adopt this world perspective, we can immediately see that national boundaries, or linguistic ones, simply screen out the real effects of literary domination and inequality.”

🡪 Germany and Nationalism in 19th century

- “led to an essentialization of literary categories and the belief that the frontiers of literary space necessarily coincided with national borders.”

-This division of literatures leads to a form of distortion – for instance, viewing Germany in the late 18th and early 19th century without examining its competitive relationship to France would “risk completely misunderstanding its structuring engagements.”

🡪 Casanova is trying to say that by looking solely at literature from a national perspective, we miss a large part of the domination and “soft violence” visible in the invisible world literary space.

- Another example is Kafka. By looking only at him and his work from a biographical or national perspective, we miss out on the larger worlds he participates in (such as being one of the dominated in the German linguistic and cultural space).

\*\*\* “The national filter acts as a kind of ‘natural’ frontier which prevents the analyst from considering the violence of transnational political and literary power relations as they impact upon the writer.” \*\*\*

* **Pierre Bourdieu and the “Field”**

🡪 Discusses how this structure of domination is highly influenced by Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘field’

🡪 But does not see this as a world-system; other work on “world-economy” tended to neutralize the violence involved. Prefers to use the terms dominant and dominated rather than centre and periphery

🡪 The world literary space is not a sphere that is set above all others. The world literary space is formed *by* the Republic of Letters, and everyone in this republic is situated in their own national sub-space.

🡪 So: “each writer is situated once according to the position he or she occupies in a national space, and then once again according to the place that this occupies within the world space.” This does not mean that the national and international are two separate spheres – they are two opposed stances struggling within the same domain.

* **Power and the World Literary Space**

🡪 The World Literary Space is hierarchical and inequal.

🡪 Literary resources have historically accumulated within national frontiers (especially since the 19th century nationalist movements) leaving some with easier access to recognition than others

🡪 Thus as writers wish to gain more literary resources, they participate in a “new economy” developed in this space. This economy doesn’t deal in economic goods but “general intellectual trade” – something Goethe recognized.

🡪 Production and reproduction in this economy are based on the belief in “objective” values for literary creations.

🡪 Older regions in the world literary space thus have an advantage. They more “universal” classics, more recognition, etc. giving them more power.

🡪 “Transfer of prestige” is a benefit of old regions. Through review/prefaces by prestigious writers, unrecognized works in these spaces can easily gain international recognition.

* **World Literary Space and Autonomy**

🡪 The world literary space is meant to be autonomous from political domains.

Example: Latin America literatures have recently received global attention (in the form of four Nobel Prizes) despite the countries political and economic weaknesses

🡪 But there is a level of dependence on the political too. There is an initial dependence upon national-politics relations, and an eventual autonomization that follows.

* **Key Forms of Domination**

🡪 Linguistic Domination: Example is Dutch and its “semi-peripheral” position compared to global domination of English

🡪 Literary Domination: Example is Rubin Dario as Spanish writer, writing through a French model (according to Casanova).

- Ex: Gertrude Stein. During the 1910s and 1920s, “the US was subordinate in literary terms.” Stein therefore went to Paris seeking its literary resources and aesthetic models.

🡪 Political Domination: Economic power over another.

\*\*\* “The effects of consecration by the central authorities [that is, those located at the centre of the world literary space] can be so powerful as to give certain writers from the margins who have achieved full recognition the illusion that the structure of domination has simply disappeared; seeing themselves as living proof of the establishment of a new ‘world literary order.’ Universalizing from their particular case, they claim that we are witnessing a total and definitive reversal of the balance of power between centre and peripheries. […] In reality, the effects of this pacific and hybridized fable are to depoliticize literary relations, to perpetuate the legend of the great literary enchantment and to disarm writers from the periphery who are seeking recognition strategies that would be both subversive and effective.” \*\*\*

\*\*\*”The problem at stake in the theorization of literary inequality then is not whether peripheral writers ‘borrow’ from the centre, or whether or not literary traffic flows from centre to periphery; it is the restitution to the subordinated of the literary world, of the forms, specificities and hardships of their struggles.” \*\*\*

**Questions – Pascale Casanova, “Literature as a World”**

1. Casanova distinguishes the history of “world literature” (72) from the history the “world literary space” (72). What’s the difference? What, according to Casanova, are the benefits of conducting a literary history from the point of view of world literary space?

*- “World Literature” refers to a body of literature expanded to a world scale. “World Literary Space” refers to a mediating space that exists between literature and the world, a “set of interconnected positions, which must be thought and described in relational terms.” The latter, according to Casanova, is autonomous from political and linguistic borders, meaning it is not subjected to internal or external criticism.*

1. What is the “Greenwich Meridian of literature”(75)? What role does it play in world literary space? How does it impact writers differently, depending on their distance towards the literary centre?

*- The Greenwich Meridian of Literature” is a reference point in the world literary space. It is a literary centre which acts as a norm for other entrants in the space. The Greenwich Meridian of Literature also serves to mark an aesthetic scale of time. What is “Modern” is what is “present” and it is determined by the centre. Other writers will relate temporally to the “present” depending on how close they are to it.*

1. For Casanova, the generally national orientation in the study of literatures “leads to a form of astigmatism” (78) because “[t]he national and international are not separate spheres; they are two opposed stances struggling within the same domain” (81-82). Explain how, according to Casanova, writers experience the contradictory demands of both the national and international spheres. Compare her critique with Kundera’s critique of “small context-terrorism” and of the study of literature “in its home province”.

*- Casanova sees nationalism as a “filter” which prevents writers and critics from seeing the dominate/dominated model that exists within the total structure of the world literary space. But within this domain, writers must position themselves according to how they fit in their nation and in the more global context.*

1. Casanova draws on the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío’s “expropriation of [French] literary capital” (88) to argue that “[t]he problem at stake in the theorizing of literary inequality… is not whether peripheral writers borrow from the centre…. it is the restitution, to the subordinated of the literary world, of the forms, specificities, and hardships of their struggle” (89). Does this statement resonate with some of the problems highlighted in the essays by Kundera and/or Borges?

- I see similarities mostly with Kundera. Kundera discusses how small nations fight for their survival in ways large nations do not have to worry about. They are more of the “dominated” in Casanova’s mode. Borges too discusses how