



# Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literatures (Continuum Literary Studies)

*By Mads Rosendahl Thomsen*

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Mapping World Literature explores the study of literature and literary history in light of global changes, looking at what defines world literature in the 21st century.

Surveying ideas of literature from Goethe to the present, Thomsen devises a compelling concept of literary constellations. He discusses a wide-range of critical positions, identifies the limits of comparative and post-colonial approaches and examines two specific cases: literature written by migrant writers and the literature of genocide, war and disaster.

Mapping World Literature captures new ways of understanding the patterns and trends that emerge in literature, opening up and inspiring research to map patterns in the field.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"thoroughly thought-provoking in its international perspective on literature ... opens up promising avenues for future research."

--Natasha Grigorian, *Journal of European Studies*

"Mads Rosendahl Thomsen's book is an impressive survey of the growth of a new field of study, known as world literature." --Susan Bassnett, *English Studies*

"this volume ingeniously links national and transnational literatures and global culture .... will lead readers to engage with old and new texts in new constellations and ways. Highly recommended." --K. Tölölyan, *Choice*

"Rosendahl Thomsen's book offers us, for the first time, a both comprehensive and systematic overview of the history, and of the different phenomena and the semantic layers of 'World Literature' today. This would already make his work truly important. But Thomsen goes one decisive step further: he not only points to the traumatic conditions that, in addition to the process of 'globalization', have permeated and founded the experience of 'World Literature'; he also proposes a new concept of literary 'constellations' that has the capacity to trigger and to orient future empirical research. Altogether, this is an amazing début by a young Danish scholar within the English-speaking scene of Literary Criticism and Literary Theory."

**Professor Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Albert Guérard Professor in Literature, Stanford University, USA**

"This wide-ranging, learned, and ambitious study makes an important contribution to current debates on the concept of world literature. Thomsen helps us better understand the formation and circulation of literature in a globalizing world, through his compelling concept of literary constellations that link works at a level between the individual and the national.

Set within a comprehensive and nuanced view of existing scholarship, and illuminated with an impressive variety of literary examples, Thomsen's study is sure to have wide appeal both to students and teachers of comparative and world literature. It will be a necessary addition to every university library and to the personal library of everyone interested in world literature — and in the creation of contemporary literature generally."

**Professor David Damrosch, Department of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University, USA**

Mention —*Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 19, 2008

Mention —*Book News*, February 2009

"One urgent literary debate of the first decade of the 21st century has been that surrounding "world literature": How is it to be defined and constituted? What will be its inevitably changing canon? What modes of interpretation are most appropriate to it? Thomsen (Univ. of Aarhus, Denmark) discusses the "contested paradigms" that structure this debate within various literary disciplines. For example, scholars of comparative literature have been seeking to shed its Eurocentrism and rejuvenate it without turning their

backs the achievements of Western writers; those interested in postcolonial literature have had to confront the dilemma of its status as a transnational migrant literature more dependent on the major languages of Europe than on the national literatures of former colonies. Drawing on the work of David Damrosch (*What Is World Literature?*, 2003), important essays and books by Franco Moretti and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Christopher Prendergast's edited volume *Debating World Literature* (2004) and informed by changes in media and culture, this volume ingeniously links national and transnational literatures and global culture while assembling a useful list of formal and thematic elements that will lead readers to engage with old and new texts in new constellations and ways. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. Lower-division undergraduates through faculty."

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(*CHOICE*)

"Thomsen's value is to inspire thought about how literature is taught in relation to departments which owe an allegiance to a national literature, and to think about the status of 'world literature.'"

**Jeremy Tambling, *MLR* 104.3 2009**

"In this important book, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen innovatively applies the concept of literary constellations to trace revealing patterns within world literature, with special relevance to present-day cultural globalization. ... Overall, the book is thoroughly thought-provoking in its international perspective on literature, also reflected in the impressive range of its bibliography and index, while the author's emphasis on the construction of a methodology opens up promising avenues for future research."

**Natasha Grigorian, *Journal of European Studies***

"Thomsen's book methodically reviews the lineage of World Literature as both a concept and label and

succeeds in being detailed without becoming hindered by the myriad dichotomies which typify the term. The scope of this undertaking is ambitious and the result is an opportunity for scholars of comparative literature to consider new types of literary and cultural constellations encompassing national, translational and global movements."

**Mark Sullivan, *The Comparatist***

"Mads Rosendahl Thomsen's book is an impressive survey of the growth of a new field of study, known as world literature. He takes as his starting point the impossibility of ever comprehending the whole of world literature, and sets out instead to trace paths through the complex web of global writing. The book is divided intelligently into four chapters, each of which surveys the field from a particular perspective."

**Susan Bassnett, *English Studies***

Reviewed in *English Studies*, Vol. 91, no. 5, (Netherlands)

'A contribution to world literature'

"Rosendahl Thomsen's *Mapping World Literature* is an important contribution to our process of remapping...Thomsen's map has room for "major" and "minor" literatures alike and develops new coordinates that other worldly mapmakers will want to employ."

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(Charles Forsdick)

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(Sanford Lakoff)

Reviewed in Routledge ABES

... wide-ranging and readable, and will undoubtedly be of value as a starting point for scholars interested in the field. Thomsen's underlying thinking is progressive and pragmatic, leading to ideas which highlight the substantial potential of a reconfigured field of world literary studies. (Sanford Lakoff)

About the Author

**Mads Rosendahl Thomsen** is Associate Professor in Comparative Literature at Aarhus University, Denmark. He is the author of *Mapping World Literature: International Canonization and Transnational Literature* (2008), *The New Human in Literature: Posthuman Visions of Changes in Body, Mind and Society* (2013), and the editor of several volumes, including *World Literature: A Reader* (2012) and *The Posthuman Condition: Ethics, Aesthetics and Politics of Biotechnological Challenges* (2012). He is a member of the Academia Europaea and an advisory board member of the Institute for World Literature.

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