

GOETHE AND HIS FOLLOWERS: *WELTLITERATUR* AND ITS AFTERLIVES

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ABSTRACT. *Goethe and his Followers: Weltliteratur and its Afterlives.* Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, which recalls cosmopolitan ideas of the 18th century, drew attention to literature's multicultural role in the international exchange and networks. His ideas were developed by subsequent scholars who reflected upon the importance of translations, literatures belonging to small nations, and putting in contact local and global aspects in their discussions about literary studies. Hugo Meltzl emphasized multilingualism for development of literary studies; Georg Brandes drew attention to the importance of small literatures; and Fritz Strich proclaimed that world literature should challenge the Eurocentric notion of literary studies.

Keywords: *Weltliteratur, World Literature, Glocalism, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Hugo Meltzl, Georg Brandes, Fritz Strich.*

REZUMAT. *Goethe și urmașii săi: Weltliteratur și metamorfozele sale.* Conceptul de *Weltliteratur* al lui Goethe, ce reactualizează ideile cosmopolite ale secolului al XVIII-lea, a atras atenția asupra rolului multicultural al literaturii în schimburile și legăturile internaționale. Ideile sale au fost dezvoltate de foști elevi care au reflectat la importanța traducerilor, a literaturilor minore, punând în contact aspecte locale și globale în discuțiile lor despre studiile literare. Hugo Meltzl a subliniat importanța multilingvismului în dezvoltarea studiilor literare; Georg Brandes a atras atenția asupra importanței literaturilor minore; Fritz Strich a proclamat faptul că literatura mondială ar trebui să concureze noțiunea eurocentrică de studii literare.

Cuvinte cheie: *Weltliteratur, Literatură mondială, Glocalism, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Hugo Meltzl, Georg Brandes, Fritz Strich.*

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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) discussed the idea of *Weltliteratur* and its relation with the changing social circumstances of his time in the notes he wrote mainly around the 1820s. He mentioned *Weltliteratur* in more than twenty references which are spread among his letters, essays, diary and particularly in the discussions registered by his disciple Eckermann². Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* which he never really systematized and which thus remained rather fragmentary, provided a fruitful background for discussion which started to take place already in the latter part of 19th century in the writings of European scholars who were agonized about the state of literary studies. Although it was not Goethe who used the term *Weltliteratur* for the first time³, his elaboration of the term introduced a new understanding of world literature which by then had been discussed primarily in terms of the ancient classics. As Hendrik Birus has pointed out, Goethe's *Weltliteratur* had a wider and different scope of literature than before⁴. He undermined the border between 'high' and 'low' literatures and included into the discussion about world literature also less known European and world literatures. Ritchie Robertson has demonstrated that Goethe's interest in *Weltliteratur* took place at the time when the Classical models of literature were challenged, by questions about Homer's person as the writer of works attributed to him and even doubts about the status of Classical era as the source of civilization circulated⁵. These doubts were accompanied by a growing awareness of less known literary genres, such as the ballad, or of literatures from the margins of Europe such as Celtic Europe and ancient Germania, or of literary traditions outside Western countries such as India, China and the Arab world. Although Goethe still emphasized the example of classical era for this development ("if we really want a pattern we must always return to the ancient Greeks") his remarks about world literature indicate that he wanted to expand the notion of German literature to be enriched by a multitude of foreign influences which he himself enjoyed in Weimar. He read foreign literatures in original and in translations, followed on regular basis literary journals, particularly *Le Globe* and corresponded with literary people from abroad like Alessandro Manzoni, Lord Byron, Thomas Carlyle and Germaine de Stael, whom he even met⁶.

² These discussions have been published in Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*. About the plausibility of these notes see, for instance, Ritchie Robertson, "Weltliteratur from Voltaire to Goethe", in *Comparative Critical Studies*, 12.2, 2015, pp. 163-164.

³ See, for instance Theo D'Haen, "World Literature and World History", in *Comparative Literature and World Literature* 1, 2016, pp. 4-5, and Dieter Lamping, *Die Idee der Weltliteratur: Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*, Stuttgart, Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2010, p. 10.

⁴ Hendrik Birus, "The Goethean Concept of World Literature and Comparative Literature", in *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 2.4, 2000, p. 2.

⁵ See Ritchie Robertson, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 166-178.

⁶ See Dieter Lamping, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 26-56.

Goethe's earliest remark about *Weltliteratur* is found in his journal *Propyläen* in 1801 in which he argues that it is time to take distance from national literatures and cultures and to accept that arts and sciences have no national basis:

It is to be hoped that people will soon be convinced that there is no such thing as patriotic art or patriotic scene. Both belong, like all good things, to the whole world, and can be fostered only by untrammelled intercourse among all contemporaries, continually bearing in mind what we have inherited from the past⁷.

Goethe wrote these words around the time when the Romantics in Germany had launched their literary and philosophical programs under the leadership of Friedrich Schlegel. Although early Romantics, too, were interested in a wider scope of literature in the form of *Universalpoesie*, their goals about literature were very different from Goethe's *Weltliteratur*. By putting emphasis on literature's role within international market Goethe's idea combines humanistic and sociological understanding of the term which benefits (metaphorically) even from economic vocabulary⁸. The development of German Romantics' movement towards nationalism, which was accompanied by the moving of their center from Jena to Heidelberg, agonized Goethe and made him too seek for new possibilities for future of post war Germany which was undergoing processes of incipient urbanization and industrialization, later than the neighboring Britain and France. As John Pizer has pointed out, Germany's situation as compared to that of France or England motivated Goethe's elaboration of *Weltliteratur*⁹. Lacking the strength of national identity and being without a classical national literature of its own, "may have made the formulation of a "world literature" the only possible alternative to cultural fragmentation." Moreover, during the 1820s when Goethe's discussion of *Weltliteratur* mainly took place, provided an "intermediate lull" in which international ideas could briefly flourish between phases of intensive nationalism not only in Germany but also elsewhere in Europe. Goethe himself pointed to the decisive role of wars which had forced the nations to get acquainted with each other in the following note:

There has for some time been talk of a universal world literature; and rightly so, for the nations, flung together by dreadful warfare, then

⁷ Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, translated by C.A.M. Sym, London, Routledge, 1949, p. 35.

⁸ See Dieter Lamping, *Op. Cit.*, p. 134.

⁹ John Pizer, "Goethe's "World Literature" Paradigm and Contemporary Cultural Globalization", in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 3, 2000, pp. 213-227.

thrown apart again, have all realized that they had absorbed many foreign elements, and become conscious of new intellectual needs¹⁰.

While taking distance from more conservative heritage of late Romantics, Goethe criticized the quality of contemporary literature which, he argued, was full of “exclamations, sighs and interjections produced by well-meaning individuals¹¹”, and he regretted its lack of involvement with¹² (...) more universal or loftier matters. (...)”. Although Goethe himself had certainly contributed to the emergence of German national literature, his ironic words show that the literature of future should develop into a completely other direction than the late Romantics in Germany had been envisioning¹³. Instead of focusing on nostalgic emotions, local *Heimat* and idealization of the past, he thought that literature could play a significant role in the future developments and in the traffic between the people and nations¹⁴. As he pointed out, they are the overall development of communication nets that will change the notion of one’s own country so that “The world at large, no matter how vast it may be, is only an expanded homeland¹⁵”. His volume of poetry the *West-östlicher Divan* (*West-Eastern Divan*; 1819) is, as Robertson has pointed out, Goethe’s critical response to this growing nationalism in Germany¹⁶. By envisioning the future world in which people, regardless of their nationality would co-operate with each other, Goethe’s ideas bear similarities with Enlightenment ideals of cosmopolitanism. As Gonthier-Luis Fink has emphasized, Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* should be understood in the context of *Weltbürgertum* which gained popularity within intellectuals in the 18th century¹⁷. Goethe was from the very beginning interested in literature beyond his native language; this was something self-evident for him. As Fink points out, he “was looking for ideas, themes and motives without being ‘disturbed’ by a difference between the past and the

¹⁰ Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Op. Cit.*, p. 32.

¹¹ J. W. von Goethe, *Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. John Gearey, Goethe's Collected Works, vol. 3, New York, Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 226.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ See about Goethe’s relationship with German Romanticism, Gonthier-Luis Fink, “Weltbürgertum und Weltliteratur: Goethes Antwort auf den revolutionären Messianismus und die nationalen Eigrenzungstendenzen seiner Zeit”, in *Goethe und die Weltkultur*, edited by Klaus Manger, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003, pp. 195-196.

¹⁴ As Birus has pointed out, Goethe’s historic-sociological ideas concerning the literature were made productive even in the writings of Karl Marx ja Friedrich Engel who in their *Communist Manifesto* (1848) adapted the idea of Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* to global traffic of commerce. Birus, “The Goethean Concept of World Literature and Comparative Literature”, p. 3.

¹⁵ J.W. von Goethe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 227.

¹⁶ Ritchie Robertson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 168.

¹⁷ Gonthier-Luis Fink, *Op. Cit.*, p. 194.

present or between familiar and unfamiliar, (...) ¹⁸". For Goethe the most important cosmopolitan way of co-operation was not politics but took place within arts and sciences. He notes about the necessity of such co-operation at the congress of natural scientists which took place in Berlin in 1828:

In venturing to announce a European, in fact a universal, world literature, we did not mean merely to say that the different nations should get to know each other and each other's productions; (...) The matter is rather this – that the living, striving men of letters should learn to know each other, and through their own inclination and similarity of tastes, find the motive for corporate action¹⁹.

For Goethe's cosmopolitan growth in his youth G. Herder's influence was important²⁰. Herder emphasized that the roles of patriot (*Bürger*) and cosmopolite (*Weltbürger*) were not opposites but could be ideally connected. But even more importantly, Herder made Goethe aware of another literary horizon which, in contrast to French and Italian Classical models, turned his interest towards Greece and the North, particularly towards England and Scotland²¹. This alienated him from universal Classicism of Sturm and Drang generation and turned his view towards the North and the South of Europe.

But Goethe also saw the dangers of such world literature which would spread all over the world. The most successful would be literature which would please big crowds whereas more demanding literature would be on the margins. Again, Goethe calls for his fellow men to form hidden societies in the manner of Enlightenment to defend all that is valuable in literature:

What appeals to the multitude will spread endlessly and, as we can already see now, will be well received in all parts of the world, while what is serious and truly substantial will be less successful. (...) The serious minded must therefore form a silent, almost secret congregation, since it would be futile to oppose the powerful currents of the day²².

Goethe's ideas about world literature lived further in the writings of subsequent scholars from the end of 19th century onwards although they were certainly working in the circumstances different from that of Goethe. As Pizer

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 160.

¹⁹ Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Op. Cit.*, p. 350.

²⁰ Gonthier-Luis Fink, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 177-178.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 180.

²² J.W. von Goethe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 227.

has pointed out, the nationalism which swept over Germany and many other parts of Europe in the middle of 19th century meant a “break with any idealist, transnational, or cross-cultural concept of world literature²³”. Although world literature started to get associations with later uses of the term as a collection of all texts or with canonical works of (mainly Western) tradition²⁴, the subsequent participants to this discussion often referred to Goethe and made productive use of his ideas in the situation in which literary production had grown much beyond Goethe’s time.

Hugo Meltzl (1846-1908) who worked as a professor of German language and literature in Cluj Napoca, founded, together with his colleague Samuel Brassai, the first comparative journal *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*. The journal was published from 1877 until 1888 when it was replaced by Max Koch’s rival journal *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft* which existed until 1931. As David Damrosch has pointed out, these journals were very different in their approach²⁵. Whereas Meltzl’s and Brassai’s journal with its multilingualism was based upon “idealistic globalism”, Koch’s journal had a national emphasis. The journal *Acta* which, as Meltzl stresses, “must be devoted at the same time to the art of translation and to the Goethean *Weltliteratur*”, was already global, its board consisted of specialists from eighteen different countries, many of them outside Europe, and the journal had altogether eleven official languages. In the articles of 1877 published as “Present Tasks of Comparative Literature, Parts I and II” Meltzl points out to an agonizing change between Goethe’s and his own time, particularly as far as writing literary history is concerned. The cosmopolitan ideas of Goethe had been dismissed by his contemporaries at the time when every nation was making its own version of literary history which had been based upon events in their political past:

Literary historians have gone so far as to base their divisions into literary epochs on political events, sometimes on the death-years of – kings! For these and similar reasons, even the best and best-known presentations of the literary history of all languages are thoroughly unacceptable to the mature taste and are quite unprofitable for serious literary (not political and philological) purposes²⁶.

²³ John Pizer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 220.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 220.

²⁵ David Damrosch, “The World in a *Zeitschrift*”, „Komparatistik: Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft”, Bielefeld, Aisthesis Verlag, 2015, p. 21.

²⁶ Hugo Melzl, “Present Tasks of Comparative Literature”, in *World Literature: A Reader*, edited by Theo D’haen, César Dominguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, London and New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 19.

During the time when nationalism was spreading in European nations Meltzl knew that his vision of literary studies based upon multilingualism was, however, not realistically available but only “an unattainable ideal in the direction of which, nevertheless, all independent literatures, i.e., all nations, should strive²⁷”.

Georg Brandes (1842-1927), too, paid attention to the agonizing change towards nationalism that had taken place in Europe since Goethe’s time. In his essay “World Literature” (1899) he exposes the difference between his own era dominated by nationalistic ideas and that of Goethe which had introduced the cosmopolitan ideas of Enlightenment:

When Goethe coined the term world literature, humanism and the spirit of world citizenship were still ideas universally entertained. In the last decades of the 19th Century, an ever stronger and more bellicose nationalism has pushed these ideas backward. The literatures of our day become ever more national²⁸.

Goethe’s cosmopolitan concept of *Weltliteratur* comes up in Fritz Strich (1883-1963) influential *Goethe und die Weltliteratur* (1946) at the time when Europe was trying to recover from devastation of WWII and find new ways of co-operation between nations. Already after WWI Strich, who was a professor of German studies in Bern, held a lecture in London with the title “Goethe und die Weltliteratur” with which he wanted to contribute to the reconciliation between the nations²⁹. In his essay published 1930 “World Literature and Literary History” he introduces the idea of world literature in terms of ‘World Literature History’ or ‘World Literature Studies’ which wanted to expand the Eurocentric perspective of literary studies. Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* functions as his example for development of literary studies which should replace the concept of comparative literature studies which he criticized for being “at the same time particularly glamorous and indefinite³⁰”.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

²⁸ Georg Brandes, “World Literature”, in *World Literature: A Reader*, edited by Theo D’haen, César Dominguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, London and New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 27.

²⁹ See Gonthier-Luis Fink, *Op. Cit.*, p. 173.

³⁰ Fritz Strich, “World Literature and Comparative Literature History”, in *World Literature: A Reader*, edited by Theo D’haen, César Dominguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, London and New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 38.

The translations

Apart from discussing the scope of literary studies in general, Goethe addressed in his remarks more specific questions concerning *Weltliteratur*. The translations of literature, which were growing in numbers in Europe of his time, continued to be discussed, also critically, in the writings of subsequent scholars. As Fink has pointed out, while translating French texts for German public Goethe became aware of intercultural difference (“Interkulturelle Differenz”) between literatures³¹. This awareness made him to improve his translations in a manner which would better please the taste of German public of his time. Later, Goethe addressed the question of cultural difference by problematizing the gap which exists in the translations between national familiarity and “foreign themes, motives and forms”. He differentiated between three types of translations, which for him are not merely a typology, but belong to a historical process. In this process he emphasized the value of such translation which gains the closest possible identity to the original, even to its form, and becomes an expression of “higher culture”.

In his remarks about translations Goethe pointed out that translation could contribute to world literature in different ways. The value that Goethe put on translation comes up in the letter written in January 1828 to his British colleague Thomas Carlyle, who had written a biography of the Sturm und Drang writer Friedrich Schiller:

(...) for it is just this connection between original and the translation that expresses most clearly the relationship of a nation to nation and that one must above all know (understand) if one wishes to encourage a common world literature transcending national boundaries³².

Not only is the translation important for the translator’s own culture, but also for the culture from which the book was translated. In their lands of origins, the reception of the work might have stuck in certain models among the readers and critics; a predicament which a new, good translation could change. This view comes up in Goethe’s later letter to Carlyle: “Here we note something new, perhaps scarcely felt, and never expressed before: that the translator is working not for his own nation alone but also for the nation from whose language he takes the work³³”.

The question of literary translations remained relevant in the discussion about literary studies in the decades to come, but the academics became more

³¹ Gonthier-Luis Fink, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 189-190.

³² Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 349-350.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

critical about translation's power to express the original works. For Hugo Meltzl the translation was not able to approach foreign literature but his ideal of comparative literary studies was based on original texts:

True comparison is possible only when we have before us the objects of our comparison in their original form. Although translations facilitate the international traffic or distribution of literary products immensely (...) even the best translation leaves something to be desired and can never replace the original³⁴.

As Meltzl argued, in literary studies the "*principle of translation*", which he defined as something inferior, as "*indirect commerce of literature*" should be connected to the "*principle of polyglottism*" which is something superior, "*direct commerce itself*"³⁵. Georg Brandes had even more serious doubts about the potential of literary translations to ever express the original work. He stressed that translations are not even "replicas" of original literary texts - regardless of their genre. Accordingly, one should not make an effort to translate the poetry of such writers as Goethe, Victor Hugo or Leconte de Lisle, but he also cast doubt on the translatability of prose which may bring along an "immeasurable" loss³⁶. Similarly, Fritz Strich paid attention to the quality of translations which are, as he points out, only "insufficient second best"³⁷ compared to the original works.

Brandes also pointed out that the translations put the writers of European countries into an unfair competition with each other. The translations of best writers from minor languages are not compatible with the text whose writers are able to write in their original language. Despite their excellence the writers of minor languages may never become well-known since their work is not accessible or comprehensible to a large crowd of people: "But these translations! (...) They eliminate the literary artistry precisely by which the author should validate himself, and the greater he is in his language, the more he loses"³⁸.

Literatures of small nations

With his criticism of translations, Brandes drew attention to the situation of small nations, as far as the distribution of literature beyond their frontiers is concerned. His critique exposed a more general problem of world

³⁴ Hugo Meltzl, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 20-21.

³⁶ Georg Brandes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

³⁷ Fritz Strich, "World Literature and Comparative Literature History", p. 46.

³⁸ Georg Brandes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

literature and its market between nations of different sizes and power. In his remarks about *Weltliteratur*, Goethe already drew attention to the differences between the nations: "One must learn to note the special characteristics of every nation and take them for granted, in order to meet each nation on its own ground³⁹". His appreciation of different nations also came up in the remark in which he highlighted the responsibilities of the press and the publishers to spread literature which would have a more universal quality. As he pointed out, literary journals such as *Edinburg Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine* "will contribute most effectively to the universal world literature we hope for" but he stressed that "there can be no question of the nations thinking alike, the aim is simply that they shall grow aware of one another, understand each other⁴⁰". Meltzl appears to have followed Goethe's advice by including into literary studies all literatures of the world, of the little nations of the globe, as well as those that are more powerful: "Therefore, a people, be it ever so insignificant politically, is and will remain, from the standpoint of Comparative Literature, as important as the largest nation⁴¹". Even the nations with oral literatures are significant for Meltzl's scope of literary studies which should no longer be shadowed by colonial attitude of the critics: "The same is true for the spiritual life of "literatureless peoples" as we might call them, whose ethnic individuality should not be impinged upon the wrong kind of missionary zeal⁴²".

Accompanied by his critique of translations, Brandes stressed that it is important to include into world literature the literatures originating from small countries which, as he pointed out, are disadvantaged in the circulation of literature. In order to demonstrate the predicament of such literatures, he set up a hierarchy of the literary market in Europe. In this hierarchy, France's position is so superior that "when an author is acknowledged in France, he is known across the entire earth", leaving England and Germany to the position of "first in the second rank⁴³". After these three countries, there come the writers from Italy and Spain, who are "much less advantageously positioned" but "nonetheless read by a certain public outside their homelands", similarly to those writing in French in Belgium and Switzerland⁴⁴. Although Russian writers have hardly any reading public outside their nation, they have plenty of readers in their native country. In contrast to these major countries of Europe whose literatures may be appreciated by large numbers of readers, Brandes pointed

³⁹ Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 350.

⁴¹ Hugo Meltzl, *Op. Cit.*, p. 21.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ Georg Brandes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

out to a disadvantageous situation of writers belonging to minor European languages who never find their way to a larger public:

Those who write in Finnish, Hungarian, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, Dutch, Greek, and so on are in the universal struggle for world renown clearly positioned most disadvantageously. In the context for world renown these authors lack their weapon, their language, and for writers that about says it all⁴⁵.

The Mirror and the World

Goethe, and after him particularly Fritz Strich, reflected upon ways of how national literatures could develop into world literature which would be read elsewhere and even invade the world. Goethe emphasized that the character of nation is not something self-evident, but it remains hidden and needed thus a reflection of others to open itself: "The true character of a nation, on the other hand, is seldom recognized or understood, not by outsiders or even by the nation itself. Nations, like human beings are unaware of the workings of their inner nature, (...) ⁴⁶" In his discussion of *Weltliteratur*, Goethe paid attention to a significant effect that a foreign input may have for literatures to go beyond their national level and gain a status of world literature. According to Goethe, the translations and comments of foreign writers enrich national literatures in the way a mirror does, giving a reflection which allows to understand one's own image. The image, including weaknesses and strengths of character, may contribute to the inner growth of a person - but also to that of literature: "Left to itself every literature will exhaust its vitality, if it is not refreshed by the interest and contributions of a foreign one. What naturalist does not take pleasure in the wonderful things that he sees produced by reflection in a mirror? Now what a mirror in the field of ideas and morals means, everyone has experienced in himself, (...) ⁴⁷". Goethe's commentary, for instance, on Romantic literature in different European countries functions as such a mirror. His remarks expose the typical characteristics of Romantic literature in each country including England, France and Italy, which he appreciated the most⁴⁸. He also pointed out that the foreign writer's reflections

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ J. W. von Goethe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 225.

⁴⁷ Quoted in David Damrosch, *What is World Literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Gonthier-Luis Fink, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 202-215.

upon the inner problems of another country were important for the development of national literatures towards world literature which: (...) “develops in the first place when the differences that prevail within one nation are resolved through the understanding and judgment of the rest⁴⁹”. In Goethe’s opinion, the most developed country in this respect was France, which from early on had been able to elaborate foreign influences into its own literature and culture. In contrary, Germany’s role in such developments was the “weakest in the aesthetic department”, and he prophesized that Germans “may wait long before we meet such a man as Carlyle⁵⁰”. On the other hand, he hoped that in the future “universal world literature (...) an honorable role is reserved for us Germans⁵¹”. Also, in the letter to his friend Adolph Friedrich Carl Streckfuss from January 1827 he writes about Germany’s role in the formation of world literature: “The German can and should be most active in this respect; he has a fine part to play in this great mutual approach⁵²”. Here his ambition resembles that of Herder who, as Robertson has pointed out, “urges his fellow-Germans to give up the cultural cringe that they adopt towards the French and to appreciate the distinctive value of their own culture, which has its own right, but certainly not a unique right, to take its place among the nations of the earth – nations understood as cultural, not political entities⁵³”.

About a hundred years later, Fritz Strich evokes the question of Germany’s place on the literary scene of world, but sees obstacles in the very nature of its literature which, in Strich’s words, “speaks in monologues, and strongly feels that no exterior form can adequately express the inner spirit. (...)”⁵⁴. According to Strich, there appears to be an unavoidable gap between German literary tradition which “seeks to save and conserve precisely those values that threatened to be swallowed by civilization” and the world culture which Strich defines in terms of “the sharing, exchange and mutual tolerance among nations on the basis of a common set of morals, reason and contractual arrangements⁵⁵”. World literature contributes to the world culture, which Strich would like to expand beyond the Eurocentric understanding of world literature. He argued that literary studies of his time remained insufficient in their inclusion of mainly European or Western literatures and exclusion of those beyond Europe:

⁴⁹ Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Goethe and World Literature*, p. 349.

⁵⁰ J. W. von Goethe, *Op. Cit.*, 227.

⁵¹ Quoted in Fritz Strich, *Op. Cit.*, p. 349.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ Ritchie Robertson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 173.

⁵⁴ Fritz Strich, “World Literature and Comparative Literature History”, p. 43.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

But Europe is not the world, and the question should precisely be asked whether world literature does not really begin where the borders of Europe are being transcended.(...) A literary work perhaps only then belongs to world literature when it does not belong to European literature only⁵⁶.

Strich wanted to find a wider horizon, for instance, for the periodization of literature, which has been an important factor in classifying literatures. As he recalled, many European literatures have in the past gone through same stylistic periods such as Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Classicism and Romanticism. In order to gain knowledge about the periodization for world literature, he stressed the importance of expanding such study to include the literatures of Orient, and to find the factors which had caused supranational developments:

(are they) common foundations (...), or is it the expression of a more general humanity, (...) or is it only because these people belong to the same moments in history (...)? Is it the noble motive of competition that spurs people on to similar creations, or does it all rest on influence, imitation, and invention⁵⁷?

Strich emphasized the criteria of selection for literary works which are able to enter world literature. Not every book gains a status of world literature but, as he points out in words similar to Goethe, only “what participates in the exchange of ideas and in the world literary traffic between nations⁵⁸”. As he recalled, they are often novels with “topical interest” and tending towards “a period picture” which enjoy the easiest reception and greatest dissemination in the world. On the other hand, such literature may be easily forgotten afterwards in contrast to other type of literature, which comprises not merely “spatial,” but also a longer “temporal” dimension.

While discussing how a work of national literature may become a part of world literature Strich’s approach resembles that of Hegel’s *Weltseele* which may fulfill itself in the course of historical development. Similar to *Weltseele*, a nation’s literary soul may develop from a more passive, receiving role to a leader in the supra national literary scene at the moment “when a nation by dint of its own most individual character and its own specific gifts succeeds in answering the demands the world historical moment imposes⁵⁹”. He emphasized

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

that different nations possess their unique literary identities which allows them to participate into the system of world literature once their writers can create "symbolic-mythical figures" which makes their literary heritage accessible to the rest of the mankind:

A work becomes world literature when it has to offer something to the world without which the overall spirit of humanity would not be complete, when its roots are firmly embedded in the soil of the nation, yet its crown reaches high into the space of eternal humanity, when it is fed by the blood of the nation, yet is infused with the spirit of general humanity⁶⁰.

Here Strich stressed that the importance of world literature should be based upon national founding; an argument which comes up already in Goethe's remarks about world literature. He wrote about this aspect in the letter to Count Stoltenberg in June 11, 1827: "Poetry is cosmopolitan, and the more interesting the more it shows its nationality⁶¹". Later on, also Georg Brandes wrote about the unavoidable link between world and national literatures. In his words, national and universal are not opposites, but remain both necessary items for world literature:

The world literature of the future will become all the more captivating the more the mark of the national appears in it and the more heterogenous it becomes, as long as it retains a universally human aspect as art and science⁶².

Relating two notions which are often understood as opposites – Goethe's concepts of cosmopolitan and national on the one side, and Strich's ideas of national and more general humanity and Brandes's concepts of national and universal on the other hand – remain something very essential for formation of world literature. In more recent discussions about world literature, David Damrosch has introduced the term "glocalism" to depict both local and global items which are again not opposites but contribute to the emergence of world literature. "Glocalism" points to transfers which cross national and cultural borders in literature and which may have two directions:

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

⁶¹ J. W. von Goethe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 227.

⁶² Georg Brandes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

In literature, glocalism takes two primary forms: writers can treat local matters for a global audience – working outward from their particular location – or they can emphasize a movement from the outside world in, presenting their locality as a microcosm of global exchange⁶³.

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This article has shown that Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur* remained in many significant aspects relevant for discussion about world literature during the decades and even centuries after him. Particularly questions concerning translations, role of small nations in the literary circulation and the relationship between national and world literatures have preoccupied scholars ever since Goethe's era. These questions about world literature remain important up until our age when the scholars such as David Damrosch, Pascale Casanova, Emily Apter and Franco Moretti, among others, are discussing the theory and methods of World Literature. Whereas Goethe's idea of world literature was informed by European rather than global tendencies, the works of these scholars relates to a present situation which is truly global allowing new possibilities and making new demands on every aspect of literary production.

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⁶³ David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 109.

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