

Weltliterature und Welttheater: Ästhetischer Humanismus in der kulturellen Globalisierung. By Alexa Alice Joubin. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012. 218 pp. 27,80 €.

The announcement that Mo Yan won the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature has created a demand for more in the American and European academies about this author and the tradition from which she emerges. Within the German academy, as questions surrounding German orientalisms of East Asia are a key topic of discussion, demand for German-language scholarship surrounding Mo Yan and what informs his writing is on the rise. One note-worthy step has been taken to making the study of Chinese literature more accessible and more comparative in *Weltliterature und Welttheater: Ästhetischer Humanismus in der kulturellen Globalisierung* by Alexa Alice Joubin. She defines humanism as “ein Teil der interkulturellen Kunst und Literatur” (“a part of intellectual art and literature” [10]) that “fördert unab-hängiges Denken und den Mut, sich gegen selbst ernannte Autoritäten—ganz gleich ob in Politik oder Kultur—zu stellen” (“promotes independent thought and courage, taking a stand against self-proclaimed authority—both political and cultural alike” [6]). These cultural authorities take on many forms within Huang’s work, including the People’s Republic of China, the United States of America, and even the Anglo-American academy. Huang’s cultural globalization (*kulturelle Globalisierung*) is examined in twentieth-century China through its more politically well-known Chinese authors such as Lu Xun, Lao She, Gao Xingjian, and Mo Yan, as well as adaptations of Shakespeare by Liang Shiqiu and Lin Shu, demonstrating that challenging authority and doing so with a strong sense of self is not limited to Europe and America’s children of the Enlightenment. According to Joubin, Chinese artists “brachten neue, hybride Genres hervor und schufen Werke, die immer wieder bohrende Fragen nach dem Funktionieren der Weltordnung und nach kulturellen Hierarchien stellen. Einige von ihnen wurden Mittler zwischen den Kulturen, andere wiederum unterstützen lokale Kulturen angesichts von Verwestlichung und Globalisierung” (“brought about new, hybrid genres and created works that are repeatedly asking probing questions about the functioning of the world order and cultural hierarchies. Some of them became intermediaries between the cultures, while others emphasize local cultures in the face of westernization and globalization” [9-10]). Of the two kinds of artists, Joubin is preoccupied more with the marginalized group: those looking to demonstrate their humanistic uniqueness in the face of authorial movements that attempt to reduce independent thought

and perspective (local culture) in favor of a homogenized culture, whether “Western” or “global.”

The book is divided into two sections, with the first covering world literature (*Weltliteratur*), focusing on the authors Lu Xun, Lao She, Mo Yan, Lin Shu, and Liang Shiqiu. For Joubin, *Weltliteratur* is one that comes about through “Transformation und Verbreitung” (“transformation and dissemination” [II]), rendering it a process of diffusion. In contrast to definitions that attempt to make world literature either an elitist hyper-canon of world literature or a comprehensive corpus of every literary work written in every language, Joubin offers a dynamically engaging perspective that demonstrates how she sees the underlying understanding of literature, in particular those works of twentieth-century canonical Chinese authors, operating in her book.

A large part of Joubin’s *Weltliteratur* as transformation and dissemination is the discussion of how works are translated into English. Humor is at the center of Huang’s discussion on translation because it is one of the most subversive means by which a humanist can creatively undermine any self-proclaimed authority. In particular with the use of the Chinese word for “humor” in Mo Yan’s *Shifu, You’ll Do Anything for a Laugh*, where, according to Joubin, “Howard Goldblatt, der amerikanische Übersetzer der Erzählung, übersetzt Xiaohus Bemerkung dementsprechend mit ‘Shifu, you’ll do anything for a laugh.’ Und damit umschiffert er das knifflige Problem, das Wort *youmo* ins Englisch zu übersetzen. Xiaohus Verwendung des Wortes ist nicht gleichzusetzen mit dem englischen Wort ‘humor,’ zumindest nicht im Sinne lauten Lachens” (“Howard Goldblatt, the American translator of the narrative, translates Xiaohu’s comment as ‘Shifu, you’ll do anything for a laugh.’ And with that he avoids the tricky problem of translating *youmo* into English. Xiaohu’s use of the word is not used to mean ‘humor,’ at any rate, not in the meaning of laughter” [68–69]). The one-to-one translation for *youmu* is “humor,” but Joubin notes that for the context in which the expression occurs, humor does not work in English translation. For this reason, Goldblatt uses the more common English expression “do anything for a laugh.” By analyzing within a German-language monograph the ways in which Mo Yan is translated into English, Joubin creates multiple levels of discussion that suggest why comparative literature should operate as translation and dissemination. The first level concerns the Chinese language itself: Joubin chooses throughout the book to use romanized forms of the Chinese words rather than relying on Chinese characters, thus making the sound of the language accessible to scholars who may or may not know Chinese already. The second level is the discussion of how the Chinese transmits into

other languages, engages with readers who are not reading the Chinese—in this particular case, the instant where the English translator of Xiaohu needs to find a suitable idiom for a Chinese expression in cases in which a word-for-word translation into other languages would leave much to be desired.

Joubin demonstrates the necessity of assessing translation in scholarship by illustrating a conundrum in the translation process at a moment in the text where humor is being used in the discussion of humanism. On the one hand, the final level of language seems superfluous since many German scholars, inside and outside Chinese and comparative literature, have a strong command of English. On the other hand, the book is a gesture toward a scholarship that extends a more active engagement with German scholars and demands of its Anglo-American scholars at bare minimum a reading knowl-edge of German. Joubin recognizes this and ends her work appropriately by saying, “Akademiker, die sich mit nicht-westlicher Literatur beschäftigen, sind wie Übersetzer, die trotz Globalisierung auch eine frühere Gegenwart und den Humanismus in ihrer Forschung bewahren müssen” (“Academics who work with non-Western literatures are like translators, who have to preserve an earlier present and the humanism in their research in the face of globalization” [198]). Ending on this meta-commentary about the relationship between the study of Asian literature and the Euro-American academy suggests that Joubin wants to make accessible what is not entirely accessible, despite the English-language translations by Howard Goldblatt and the available German translations. Admittedly, one drawback to this discussion of translation is that, although Joubin generously directs her German reader to German translations of Mo Yan (and, by extension, German translations of the other authors), she does not offer any critical commentary on these translations in comparison with the original.

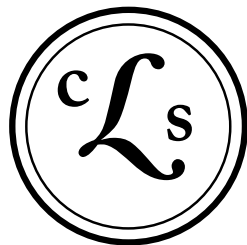
Joubin furthers the issue of translation and accessibility in the second section of her book on *Welttheater*. Like her position on *Weltliteratur*, her approach to *Welttheater* is a process of transformation and diffusion, reading both texts and performances of those texts. Beginning her discussion of Gao Xingjian, Asian performances of Shakespeare, and Shakespeare himself, Joubin notes, “Humanismus bezieht sich nicht allein auf einen weltlichen Rationalismus, sondern auch, wie in diesem Buch deutlich wird, auf das Verstehen und Bewahren des menschlichen Subjektes als solchem” (“Humanism refers not only to worldly rationalism, but also, as will become obvious in this book, to the understanding and preservation of the human subject as such” [103]). The anxiety of losing one’s identity in the face of globalization is one that, from the first chapter on Gao Xingjian, belongs to writers of color, who are being consumed by Euro-American visions of a

global community. However, read alongside *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, the notion that individual human identity is being enveloped by a monocultural monster becomes a white issue, if not continuing, then beginning, a cultural value for individuality on a global scale. Huang's project takes an unpersuasive turn at this point: the two systems of oppression, the one under which the people of color are consumed by the white monoculture and the other under which whites are consumed by a monoculture of a ruling elite, are considered by many ethnic-literature scholars to be separate.

Underlying Huang's comments on preservation and the necessity for translation is a notion that there is an inherent aesthetic to Asian literature that needs to be rendered, yet which is a challenge to render into terms which a Western audience can understand. Because the academy made Asian literature and drama secondary to European and U.S. literature and drama for a long time (because of its supposed incommensurability), Joubin puts forward the necessity to translate her understanding of these texts. In asserting this necessity, Joubin appears to undermine the aesthetic humanism that connects Shakespeare to Chinese authors in Joubin's own conception. Additionally, Joubin also makes the reader wonder what the distinction between "Western" and "global" is in the largely East-West dynamic that grounds this book. Because the aesthetic humanism is one that is shared by Europe and Asia, though on their different, historical terms, the conundrum of globalization is one that the two face together in Alexa Alice Joubin's remarkable work of scholarship.

Adam J. Toth
Pennsylvania State University

Special Issue
Poetry Games



VOL. 51, NO. 1, 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Poetry Games
Jonathan P. Eburne and Andrew Epstein 1

ARTICLES

Poetry Is Theft
Rachel Galvin 18

Comic Poetics of Imaginative Travel in *Your Country Is Great*
Eric Rettberg 55

English Before English: Asian American Poetry's Unruly Tongue
Tara Fickle 78

Pedantry and Play: The Zukofsky *Catullus*
Josef Horáček 106

The ABCs of Conceptual Writing
Jacquelyn Ardam 132

Terrible Engines: A Speculative Turn in Recent Poetry and Fiction
Brian Kim Stefans 159

BOOK REVIEWS

Theodore Ziolkowski. *Gilgamesh Among Us: Modern Encounters
with the Ancient Epic*
(Sydney Aboul-Hosn) 184

David Tucker. *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing "a Literary Fantasia"*
(Lois Gordon) 187

Magdalena Kay. *Knowing One's Place in Contemporary Irish
and Polish Poetry: Zagajewski, Mahon, Heaney, Hartwig*
(Charles S. Kraszewski) 190

ONLINE BOOK REVIEWS

These reviews appear as e-pages on JSTOR and Project Muse

Valerie Henitiuk. *Worlding Sei Shōnagon: The "Pillow Book" in Translation*
(Charlotte Eubanks) e-1

Alexa Alice Joubin. *Weltliterature und Welttheater: Ästhetischer
Humanismus in der kulturellen Globalisierung*
(Adam J. Toth) e-4

CONTRIBUTORS 194

Comparative Literature Studies is published at THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY under the auspices of the Department of Comparative Literature.

Comparative Literature Studies will publish comparative articles in literature and culture, critical theory, and cultural and literary relations within and beyond the Western tradition. *CLS* does not publish notes, and encourages submissions between 6,000 and 13,000 words. Communications concerning editorial matters may be sent to *Comparative Literature Studies*, 442 Burrowes Building, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802. Authors should remove all self-reference from their manuscripts before submitting. Manuscripts must be submitted electronically; documentation should conform to the endnote style of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which does not use a "Works Cited" list. Authors should consult www.editorialmanager.com/cls for further guidelines. Upon acceptance, the author should be prepared to submit a 200-word biography.

Comparative Literature Studies (ISSN 0010-4132; E-ISSN 1528-4212) is published quarterly by The Pennsylvania State University Press, 820 N. University Drive, USB 1, Suite C, University Park, PA 16802.

The editorial office can be reached by e-mail at cl-studies@psu.edu. All

correspondence regarding permissions and advertisements should be addressed to Penn State Press, journals@psu.edu. Our web address is: www.psupress.org.

All subscriptions, claims, and changes of address should be directed to the Johns Hopkins University Press, PO Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211, phone 410-516-6987, jnlcirc@press.jhu.edu. Subscribers are requested to notify the Press and their local postmaster immediately of change of address. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Johns Hopkins University Press, PO Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211.

This journal is registered under its ISSN with the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923 (www.copyright.com). For information about reprints or multiple copying for classroom use, contact the CCC's Academic Permissions Service, or write to Penn State Press, 820 N. University Drive, USB 1, Suite C, University Park, PA 16802-1003.

The Pennsylvania State University Press is a member of the Association of American University Presses.

Copyright © 2014 by The Pennsylvania State University. All rights reserved. No copies may be made without permission of the publisher.