

Peer Review

Review of: "Towards a Definition of Small Literatures"

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1. General Summary

The manuscript addresses the critical need to establish a clear methodological and terminological foundation for "small literatures". The authors review the state of the art, critiquing the broad generalizations of world-system approaches (specifically Pascale Casanova) for eclipsing earlier systemic models developed within small literatures themselves, such as those by Even-Zohar and Āurišin. The text surveys major conceptualizations—including minor literature, exiguous literatures, contact cultures, ultraminor literatures, and micro-literatures—assessing their value and limitations. It proposes a preliminary definition integrating quantitative criteria (demographic scale, repertoire size) and qualitative ones (territorialization, historical depth). Finally, it distinguishes "small literature" from minority or migrant literatures, emphasizing "capillary worlding" as a strategy for visibility.

2. Content Evaluation

A. Theoretical Framework and State of the Art

The article demonstrates solid scholarship. The authors successfully trace the genealogy of the term, going back to the origins of comparative literature with Hugo von Meltzl and Paul van Tieghem. This provides a necessary historical depth often missing in contemporary studies that focus solely on the post-Casanova era.

The critique of Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* is fair and necessary. The authors rightly point out that her approach replicates geopolitical stereotypes and lacks contextualization of the literatures themselves. The recovery of Even-Zohar's Polysystem Theory and Āurišin's interliterary process is a strategic move to rebalance the centre-periphery discussion.

B. Conceptual Clarity and Proposed Definition

The distinction made between "minor literature" (Deleuze/Guattari) and "small literature" is vital. The authors correctly criticise the continued use of the "minor literature" concept to forcefully homogenise diverse contexts.

The proposed definition is robust:

"Small literatures are defined as territorialised, historically rooted systems whose limited scale and cultural capital place them at the world-literary periphery, yet whose institutionalisation and strategies of capillary worlding shape their visibility".

This definition is operationally useful because it combines territoriality with institutionalisation, effectively separating the object of study from migrant literatures, which are characterised by deterritorialisation and often lack an independent literary system (media, institutions, criticism).

C. Methodology

The proposal to use both quantitative criteria (population, production, translation rates) and qualitative criteria is a balanced methodological approach. However, the authors honestly admit there is "no consensus yet" on the upper and lower limits for system size. While a limitation, the article suggests using "small state" political studies as a heuristic tool, which is a promising avenue for future research.

3. Strengths

Revaluation of Agency: The article moves away from viewing small literatures as mere passive victims of systemic neglect, highlighting strategies of resilience and "capillary worlding" (social networks, small publishers, festivals).

Terminological Precision: The review of adjacent concepts (ultraminor, micro-literature, contact cultures) effectively clears the theoretical ground for their own definition.

Systemic Approach: The emphasis that a small literature possesses a complete "ecosystem" (albeit on a smaller scale)—including writers, editors, and critics—is fundamental to distinguishing it from ethnic minority literature within a larger nation.

4. Weaknesses and Areas for Improvement

Eurocentric Bias: While the article references global theories, the context heavily leans towards Europe (Luxembourg, Latvia, Slovenia), and the authors explicitly mention their coordination of the project "Comparative History of Small Literatures in Europe". It would be beneficial to clarify if this definition is universally applicable (e.g., to small literatures in Africa or Southeast Asia) or if it is designed specifically for the European nation-state context.

The Rigidity of the "Migrant vs. Small" Distinction: The authors define small literature as "sedentary and territorialised" versus migrant literature as "deterritorialised". This dichotomy might be problematic in cases of massive exile or diaspora, where a literary system operates outside its territory temporarily. Nuancing this could enrich the theory.

Lack of Empirical Data: As a theoretical paper ("Towards a Definition"), it lacks a deep case study applying the proposed metrics. The text mentions this as a future step, but a concrete example of applying the quantitative criteria would have strengthened the proposal.

5. Conclusion

This is an excellent and necessary review article. It provides much-needed terminological housekeeping in World Literature and Comparative Studies. The proposed definition of "small literature" is sound and promises to be a useful tool for researchers seeking to move beyond Casanova's generalizations or the linguistic limitations of Deleuze and Guattari.

The manuscript lays the groundwork for the development of future typologies and descriptive models, fully justifying its publication.

Verdict: Accept with minor revisions. (I would suggest the authors briefly address the applicability of their model outside of Europe or specify the geographic scope of their theory in the introduction to manage expectations).

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.