

Peer Review

Review of: "Towards a Definition of Small Literatures"

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The topic of this article is of clear scholarly significance. It brings to light a number of historical trajectories and theoretical perspectives that have long been underexplored, and it engages directly with one of the most pressing questions in contemporary literary studies: how the world literary system can and should be rethought today. This question has become increasingly central to scholarly debate since 2020, and the article makes a timely contribution to this ongoing discussion.

First, if the stated aim of the article is that “these preliminary reflections on definition are part of a larger conversation in the project *Comparative History of Small Literatures in Europe*,” the conceptual framework could be further strengthened through a broader engagement with existing European scholarship. In particular, incorporating perspectives from Eastern and Central Europe—such as those associated with Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera, and Joseph Remenyi—would help situate the argument more firmly within a longer intellectual genealogy. In addition, there is already a substantial body of scholarship addressing issues of translation, interpretation, and conceptual slippage in the reception of Kafka within the theoretical trajectory from Deleuze and Guattari to Casanova. These questions of mistranslation and conceptual displacement have been examined in detail in studies published since 2020, including a 2020 article (He) and a 2024 edited volume (He and Birns), and engagement with this work would further enrich the article’s theoretical grounding.

Second, while the article makes a valuable effort to distinguish *small literature* from *minor literature* and *migrant literature*, the definition of *small literature* itself could benefit from additional conceptual clarification. At present, the discussion occasionally moves between understanding small literature as the literature of a small state and as the literature of minorities, particularly linguistic or peripheral ones. This ambiguity echoes earlier conceptual tensions between Deleuze and Guattari and Casanova, as well as later reinterpretations by scholars such as Damrosch and Burger. Burger’s elaboration of *ultraminor*

literatures, developed more fully in *Mapping Minor/Small and World Literatures: Periphery and Center* (2024, He and Birns), may offer a useful framework for refining this distinction. From this perspective, the article's discussion of territory and periphery is persuasive within Northern, Western, Central, and parts of Eastern Europe, but it becomes more limited when extended to Europe as a whole, particularly when former Soviet literatures are taken into consideration.

Third, the article's reliance on quantitative criteria to define small literature invites further reflection. For example, Soviet literature offers a particularly instructive counterexample: despite the enormous scale of its literary production, only a relatively small portion entered a world literary canon largely shaped by Western Europe and North America during the Cold War. This raises important questions about how Soviet literature should be classified. Can it meaningfully be described in terms of *smallness*, or does ideological exclusion play a more decisive role than demographic or territorial scale? Related debates—addressed in the special issue *Socialist World Literature* (2022, He and Pratt), in Joseph Remenyi's work (2024, He), and in *The Socialist Side of World Literature* (2025, He)—suggest that definitions of *smallness* may need to account more explicitly for disparities in cultural capital, political power, and geopolitical influence, which shape distinctions between small and big, minor and major, periphery and center.

Fourth, in light of these considerations, the authors envision this project as a longer-term and more systematic study; it has the potential to be of considerable value to scholars who are actively rethinking the structure of world literature. In this regard, a world-systems approach may offer a particularly productive analytical framework. Such an approach would allow for a clearer differentiation among colonial, postcolonial, and forms of internal colonialism—categories the article itself already gestures toward—while also clarifying how literature is positioned in relation to regional (e.g., minorities), national, and international literary spaces.

Finally, the article could benefit from a more explicit reflection on internal differences within the European model itself, as well as from considering whether and how this model might be extended beyond Europe.

Overall, the article's effort to systematically examine and recover how minorities and small nations—understood both in terms of population size and limited access to cultural, political, and symbolic capital—have articulated their own understandings of *small literature*, *minor literature*, and *world literature* is highly valuable. This perspective adds an important dimension to existing debates and contributes meaningfully to the ongoing rethinking of the world literary system. I very much look forward to the authors' future work and the further development of this promising line of research.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.