

Peer Review

Review of: "Towards a Definition of Small Literatures"

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This is an excellent overview, working in the tradition of Casanova and Damrosch, of the way that small literatures operate in the world literary system. It demonstrates that, despite and, in a way, because of their size, small literatures are an important and ineluctable part of the world literary systems. What I would think about, though, is the emphasis on the quantitative. Small literatures are smaller not just because their languages or ascribed national polities are smaller, but because the publishing industries, bookstores, libraries, and so on, the literary networks that comprise a 'literature,' are smaller. But I would stress that this scalar difference is not across the board. Slovenia is a small country, and poets like Aleš Debeljak and Aleš Steger have a lower profile than they might have if they were from France. But Slavoj Žižek became huge not just in spite of being from Slovenia but because of it; it was a quirkiness that added to his profile. Small countries can attract more notice when they are in the news (cf. Greenland/Kalaallit Nunaat). Countries that are small in terms of power may actually have a reasonably large population, such as Ukraine or Bangladesh. A small literature may, for local reasons, become important, in a Casanova-esque way, to a large literature; Anglo-Welsh literature (Roland Mathias, Jeremy Hooker) is to English. In other words, there are times when small literatures can leverage their marginality into higher visibility or, actually more frequently, have that position leveraged for them by external factors. The authors might wish to call some attention to this. So when, though, the quantitative is very important, the qualitative, or that which falls more into the sphere of cultural/social capital, is also important, and the authors might wish to take that into consideration. The authors could put qualitative considerations side-by-side with the quantitative ones, or they could insert a separate section for the qualitative..

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.