

## **THE WELTVERKEHR OR WORLD TRAFFIC OF BOOKS: MODERN ANTHOLOGIES OF WORLD POETRY**

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**Keywords:** *Weltverkehr*, anthology, museum, atlas, postcolonial mapping, paratext, poetry, Lied, translation, mediation, *Weltverkehr* / world traffic

### **Contents**

1. "*Weltliteratur*" ("World literature"). Goethe and a programmatic concept of literature
  2. *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern (Voices of the Peoples in Songs)*. Herder's collection of poetry and folk songs
  3. Constructing 'world poetry' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century I - Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Museum* (1960, 1979/80)
  4. Constructing 'world poetry' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century II - Harald Hartung's *Luftfracht (Air Freight)* (1991)
  5. Inventing 'world poetry' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century III: Joachim Sartorius' *Atlas* (1996)
  6. Constructing 'world poetry' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century IV: Raoul Schrott's *Die Erfindung der Poesie (The Invention of Poetry)* (1997)
- Glossary  
Bibliography  
Biographical Sketch

### **Summary**

How can and how should "*Weltliteratur*" be presented and mediated? And how - this is a question as it was raised only recently in the context of post-colonial thinking - can the mediator avoid to interpret and to comment on the texts he presents from the perspective of one specific and restricted cultural system, one set order of symbols and thinking, that may actually be incompatible with the original? The different answers that have been given to these questions are related to quite different concepts of poetry and literature - even to remarkably differing ideas about the production and reception of those works that are claimed to be a part of 'world literature'. Anthologies of 'world poetry' can be regarded as programmatic manifestations of such ideas. Their respective structure and the way in which the texts are presented reflect the anthologists' poetics and sometimes suggest very complex ideas of 'poetry' to the reader.

As one might say, *trans-national anthologies of poems are not just descriptions, but constructions of a 'world poetry'*. Editorial decisions that, for instance, concern the use of translations and para-textual arrangements are of formative significance for such constructions.

The following anthologies will be compared from a topographical perspective: Johann Gottfried Herder: *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern. Volkslieder* (1778/79) - Ivan Goll: *Les cinq continents. Anthologie mondiale de poésie contemporaine* (1922) - Hans Magnus Enzensberger: *Museum der modernen Poesie* (1960, 1979/80) - Harald Hartung:

*Luftfracht* (1991) - Joachim Sartorius: *Atlas der Neuen Poesie* (1996) - Raoul Schrott: *Die Erfindung der Poesie* (1997).

### **1. "Weltliteratur" ("World literature"). Goethe and a Programmatic Concept of Literature**

The term "world literature" is ambiguous. It may be used as an expression designating the totality of all national literatures added together but not without entailing a notion of quality: as an indication of outstanding aesthetic value. As an equivocal term with regard to literary theory, "world literature" can imply the idea that literary works of art should not be interpreted within the limited context of one single national literature, but as messages concerning 'the whole world'. And it can also signalize that the authors of such works are constantly participating in a 'global' dialogue with each other, that literary processes are 'universal' with regard to literary production as well as to processes of reception.

The German 18<sup>th</sup> century novelist and critic Christoph Martin Wieland already had occasionally used the expression "Weltliteratur" (cf. Weitz 1987: 296-308). But it was not until Johann Wolfgang Goethe reflected about the potential of meanings inherent to this word and by that popularized it on the long term. Here, and in the works of those authors who followed Goethe in his interpretation of the term, "Weltliteratur" (or "world literature") has mainly an 'extensive' sense: It is used in order to suggest a panoramic view of the literatures of all times and nations. By actually studying the literatures not only of Europe but also of the Near and Far East (cf. Birus 1995: 5) Goethe himself represented this view exemplarily. But in spite of its extensive meaning, 'world literature' as Goethe conceives it, is more than just a summary of all the works belonging to different national literatures; it implies that there are aesthetic qualities that make a literary work of art significant from a global point of view. According to Goethe's conviction, the single products arising from human genius belonged to all mankind: to the well educated as well as to the less educated, to the artists' contemporaries as well as to posterity, to those who speak and read a poet's own language as well to the speakers and readers of different idioms. Moreover, Goethe stressed the importance of a global and panoramic view at literature, especially in times of war and separation, of political dissent and tendencies towards isolation. Regarded from this perspective, the idea of "world literature" is not just a description of something that already exists, but a programmatic concept modeling a future literature as well as a future attitude of readers forming a transnational cultural community. In a famous remark to Eckermann, Goethe stressed the cultural and political significance of 'world literature':

*(...) Ich sehe mich gern bei fremden Nationen um und rate jedem, es auch seinerseits zu tun. Nationalliteratur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Weltliteratur ist an der Zeit, und jeder muß jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen.* (Eckermann 1987: 186)

*[...] I therefore gladly make excursions to other nations and advise every one to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand, and each one must strive to hasten its approach.]* (Eckermann 1852: 204)

World literature, seen from a Goethean perspective, is closely related to the idea of writers and readers as ‘citizens of one world’, and as a programmatic concept of cultural policy this idea remains attractive, although the concept of national literatures that it was originally opposed to in the meantime has been questioned and criticized as insufficient and anachronistic. In more than just one respect, the Goethean reflection about "*Weltliteratur*" may be regarded as a prelude to recent globalization discourse.

If we regard ‘world literature’ as a treasure of works of literary art that should be presented to readers ‘all around the world’, to other nations as well as to posterity, evidently there must be somebody to collect and to conserve these works in order to make communities of readers from different and sometimes even remote countries and times familiar with them. Finally, the era of ‘world literature’ is the era of anthologists. (In 1956 Gottfried Benn already characterized his own time as an age of anthologies, regarding this tendency most critically and using polemic metaphors from medical and pathological discourse.) And it is, of course, the age of other kinds of mediators, such as commentators, interpreters and translators. The ways of publishing, distributing and mediating literature always adapt to complex cultural and economical conditions of framing therefore depend on historical and sociological change. In a globalized world, publishers, book traders and all those who are mediators of literature in an intellectual sense (including literary critics, teachers, and scholars), are historically confronted with new challenges, especially with the request to operate a.s.a.p. in order to cope with the process of literature production. As a single look into an ordinary bookshop may prove, the world of books, has been transformed into a global, universalized world; literary writers as well as publishers and book-sellers operate on transnational grounds.

How can and how should "*Weltliteratur*" then be presented and mediated? What strategies, for instance, can provide an ‘authentic’ impression of the texts on the one hand, and on the other hand disclose them to readers who do not read them in their original language? How can the editor and commentator outline the cultural contexts to which the texts belong without distracting the reader from his aesthetic experience? And how - this is a question as it was raised only recently in the context of post-colonial thinking - can the mediator avoid to interpret and to comment on the texts he presents from the perspective of one specific and restricted cultural system, one set order of symbols and thinking, that may actually be incompatible with the original? The different answers that have been given to these and to similar questions are related to quite different concepts of poetry and literature - even to remarkably differing ideas about the production and reception of those works that are claimed to be a part of ‘world literature’. Anthologies of ‘world poetry’ can be regarded as programmatic manifestations of such ideas. Their respective structure and the way in which the texts are presented reflect the anthologists’ poetics and sometimes suggest very complex ideas of ‘poetry’ to the reader. As one might say, *transnational anthologies of poems are not just descriptions, but constructions of a ‘world poetry’*. Editorial decisions that, for instance, concern the use of translations and paratextual arrangements are of formative significance for such constructions.

So, for the reader of an anthology that is dedicated to ‘world literature’ there are several aspects to take into account: a) the criteria according to which the selections of texts take place, b) the way in which the texts are presented (in their original language, in

translation, or both), c) the structure of the collection (i.e. the principles according to which the texts are arranged), d) the paratextual arrangement (What kinds of explications and con-textualizations are given? What does the reader learn about the poets, about the cultural conditions framing the poems' genesis, about the poetics and aesthetic principles that shaped the texts etc.?) e) The implicit - or even explicit - poetics of the anthology (In how far are paratexts and arrangements answers to the question, what poetry is, from which sources and foundations it originates and how the history of texts and their reception can be modeled? Can the paratexts and arrangements provide for a specific concept of 'world literature' or 'world poetry'?)

With respect to the era of electronic hyper-text, which confront readers with, and taking advantage of, large text corpora that are present(ed) in the world wide web, this may also be an appropriate moment to ask in what way the specific form of a book may be significant with regard to the project of presenting 'world literature' these days. Nowadays, there already are important virtual libraries, for instance the "Library Electronic Text Resource Service" (LETRS) of Indiana University (<http://www.let.rs.indiana.edu>), the "Projekt Gutenberg", the "Electronic Text Center" at the University of Virginia, and the "Project Bartleby" at Columbia University. Not to mention the recent attempts carried out by the provider "Google" to compile an "online book search" that is supposed to contain 15 million books. Do those collections of texts modify our reading habits of world literature - and the expectations we have when we return to the older medium of the book?

## **2. *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (Voices of the Peoples in Songs). Herder's Collection of Poetry and Folk Songs**

In the second part of his autobiographical book *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe acknowledged Johann Gottfried Herder as an important precursor of a modern concept of 'world literature'. Already in 1773, Herder completed a collection of songs and poems from different languages, entitled *Alte Volkslieder* (*Old folk songs*) that was published under the title *Volkslieder* in 1778 and 1779. It mainly consisted of the so-called 'Nordic songs' (*nordische Lieder*) and English poems in their original language as well as in translation. Several years later, Herder worked on a revised and enlarged edition even though it was published posthumously by Johannes von Müller as *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (*Voices of the Peoples in Songs*) in 1807. In its latest version Herder's collection offers a great variety of texts: real folk songs as well as lyrical poems and passages from dramatic and epic texts; verses from Homer, songs from Shakespeare plays, poems from Matthias Claudius, Goethe and other German poets from Baroque up to Herder's time, poems of Ossian (a fictitious bard who was supposed to have created early Scottish poetry; actually, most of these poems can be attributed to James McPherson), Spanish Romances, a Greenlandic "*Totenlied*" (*Song for the Dead or Nenia*), and other texts of different European provenience. Originally, Herder's collection provided a bi-lingual presentation of foreign texts; later he only used German translations. The third edition, which remained to be an ambitious project, was supposed to present the poems arranged according to countries, time, languages and nations ("*nach Ländern, Zeiten, Sprachen und Nationen*"). Herder's intentions were mainly didactical: Reacting to a contemporary interest of his German public in foreign literatures, he wanted to contribute substantially to the improvement of German poetry

and literature. According to his diagnosis, the impact of French literature and of the classicistic paradigm was too dominant. In order to provide for a balanced exchange of impulses between the different nations, new examples of foreign poetry had to be popularized in Germany: even, if not mainly, anti-classicistic forms of writing that had formerly not been estimated from a 'high-cultural' point of view.

The German term "*Lied*" has a complex meaning. Equivocally it refers to songs as well as to poems - and taken in both senses it usually suggests the idea of a popular piece of art, whether it can be attributed to one particular poet or if it has been passed to posterity only anonymously. It is especially linked to the idea of oral performance and perception, to the recital of songs as well as to the recitation of texts. According to a leading idea of 18<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics, ingenious poetry was supposed to be directly derived from musical songs. Therefore, when poems are presented as "*Lieder*", is especially stressed on the close affinity between poetry and music. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century songs were regarded as the earliest form of poetry by several aesthetic theorists (and their precursors), belonging to a time when music and poetry were still united and, in their original unity, expressed man's emotion and the affection for life. In the context of 18<sup>th</sup> century discourse, "originality" in the sense of 'being close to the origins' was homonymous with "authenticity", and so the "*Lied*" as an apparently "original" form of musical-poetical art was usually regarded as an authentic expression of human nature. So, already the anthology's title is of suggestive quality. It can be understood as the typical product of a century that was shaped by anthropological discourse, by theories about man's origin - and by the interest taken in the interpreting of art as well as any other form of human culture as the result of 'natural' preconditions. With his book *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* Herder, as one might say, models his leading idea of man as a creature who from the very beginning of his history, the roots of all cultural practice expresses his natural emotions by singing and thus makes art itself emerge from practical everyday life, and the conditions and rituals surrounding it. Furthermore, according to Herder's (and not only Herder's) ideas, songs were pre-destined to be sung in communities; they unite the individual singers to choirs, and they unite the people of different centuries by tradition.

In a text that was used as introduction to the second part of *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, Herder delineated his ideas about popular and authentic poetry, and he stresses the uniting effect of oral recital, thus drawing a line between musical and visual art. According to his conviction, acoustic art is the more 'original' and more 'natural' form than visual art and written literature, and songs from Oriental cultures give proof of what art was like in its original form. As Herder puts it in his commentary on Matthias Claudius' *Abendlied*, a song book is the humble man's 'bible', as a mean of consolation as well as recreation.

Gathering 'songs' (*Lieder*) from different nations implies the idea of art and culture being related to a transnational community whose unity is - in spite of all the characteristic differences between the nations - still based on human nature as such. In modern as well as in ancient times, "humanity" is supposed to express itself in the art of singing and recital. Regarded from this point of view, the term "*Lied*" is a concept referring to complex anthropological and culture theoretical discourses, and it appears to bear a higher programmatic implication, when it is used as a label for texts that

according to our conventional understanding, are not songs at all - as for instance passages from Homer's epic work or from Shakespearian plays. (Titled "*Opheliens verwirrter Gesang um ihren erschlagenen Vater*", I, 23, p. 154., Herder presents a complete scene from "Hamlet" in which Ophelia sings a song; another example is the *Waldgesang*, a song quoted from *As you like it*, I 3, p. 121.)

As Herder emphasizes, translations may give an equivalent impression of an original "*Lied*" composition, but only as long as they succeed in imitating the original's sound or its tune ("Gesangston"). If they fail, however, to sound similar to the original, it may be more appropriate to confront the reader with the original itself, even if he cannot understand the words in their quality as verbal signs. This in mind, a bi-lingual anthology should be preferred to a collection of translations, as translations will never give an authentic impression of the original's sound. An anthology of translations is a rather poor compromise, similar to the reduction of 'songs' to written texts. Herder had to compromise in this respect as well: He almost exclusively presented verses without melodies. Among his unpublished materials there is, next to other documents, the score of a Sicilian song (*Sizilianisches Schifferlied / Sicilian Sailor's Song*); Herder characterizes it as exemplary.

*Als schönste Probe italiänischer Volkslieder, stehe hier statt vieler, das sicilianische Schifferlied mit seiner einfachen sanften Melodie im Original und in einer hierzu sangbaren Uebersetzung.* (Appendix, p. 373)

[As a most beautiful example of the Italian folk-song, quoted here as one sample out of many, the Sicilian mariner's song with its original simple and tender melody and a singable translation.]

Printed notes, however, are not the same as real melodies. Herder does not explicitly refer to the fact, that his collection only contains representations of oral poetry. But his suggestions that songs 'live' in the people's ears, on the lips of the singers and by way of their instruments may be regarded as an appeal to the reader to re-vitalize the written compositions by performance.

By compiling his anthology Herder consciously invented 'poetry'. Complementary to his collection of poetical texts he collected statements of several authors from different nations (England, France, Germany), mainly, but not exclusively, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whose opinions support Herder's own ideas about poetry. Moreover, he provided paratexts introducing the poems of his anthology, explaining their provenience, commenting on their contents, on national and cultural habits that are reflected by them, on the emotions and sentiments expressed. Indirectly, sometimes even explicitly, the entire paratextual setting confirms the anthologist's leading ideas about 'original', 'popular' and 'authentic' poetry as a heritage of mankind.

As the presentation of poetic texts in anthological form offers an important opportunity to 'invent' poetry, to shape and to contextualize it, the history of conceptions of (national and transnational) literature is closely linked with the history of anthologies. Herder's "*Volkslieder*" collection carries the signature of his age. But his project as such has been continued and modified continuously; even in recent anthologies and series his

idea of making the different nations' and people's 'voices' audible by presenting examples of poetry is echoed by titles such as *Stimmen indianischer Völker (Voices of Indian Peoples)* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann) and similarly programmatic expressions. In order to illustrate the aftermath of Herder's concept, several German examples from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be presented here.

They were published under other conditions than Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*. First, there are new printing techniques that allow the editors of anthologies to embed them in complex layouts, to utilize different typographic means and to insert graphic elements, secondly in the era of globalization, of world wide communication systems and trans-continental tourism, foreign languages appear less 'foreign' to many readers than 200 years earlier. Thirdly, as a consequence of this, the public's expectations concerning the concept of "world literature" have been modified, gradually and continuously.

The numerous anthologies of world literature that were compiled and published in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century represent a broad field of research that has partially been cartographed in the past decades. In many respects, the ways of electing, compiling, and commenting texts, the selection principles, the volumes' structures, and the paratextual arrangements correspond with different concepts of "world literature" (and of "literature" as such). One aspect of crucial interest here is the impact of metaphors and metaphoric concepts upon titles, structures, and paratexts - and thus on the construction of 'world literature'. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century anthologists have used quite different and sometimes quite suggestive metaphors in order to model their subjects of representation. For instance, as the first and largest 19<sup>th</sup> century anthology of world literature in Germany, Johannes Scherr published his *Bildersaal der Weltliteratur* (1848, second edition 1869), on the one hand referring to the concept of poetical "images", on the other hand claiming to offer "portraits" of poets. Heinrich Solger, in 1888, published a poem collection entitled *Im Tempel der Weltliteratur. Eine Sammlung von wertvollen Geisteserzeugnissen aller hervorragenden Völker und Zeiten (In Weltliterature's Temple. A collection of precious works of the mind of all extraordinary Peoples and Times)*. Ludwig Bernhard Wolff, in 1848, presented his poem collection as a treasure: *Poetischer Hausschatz des Auslandes (Poetic (house)treasures from abroad)*. Even if the anthologies' titles do not express the anthologie's self-interpretation (for instance, as "*Bildersaal*" or "*Tempel*"), but refer to their contents (such as *Stimmen der Völker [Voices of the Peoples]*, or *Lieder aus der Fremde [Foreign Songs]*, Harrys, 1857; "*Orient und Occident*", Hart, 1885 etc.), they are full of implications and of suggestive impact on the reader's concept of poetry or literature.

In the new millennium, the process of constructing "world literature" is continued. Published in 2001, a volume edited by Thomas Böhm and Martin Hielscher titled *WELTLITERATUR* is composed of several scholarly contributions about literature and art in the present globalized world as well as of literary and artistic examples. The editors explicitly refer to Goethe's concept of world literature. And they point out, that - according to Leslie A. Fiedler's request to 'cross the borders and to fill the gaps' - a contemporary concept of "*Weltliteratur*" should be conceived of as transgressive: There is neither a borderline between high and popular art nor between literature and the other arts.

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### Biographical Sketch

**Monika Schmitz-Emans** received her PhD in German Literature from Bonn University. She is currently Professor of Comparative Literature at the Ruhr University of Bochum. She is the author of several books about modern and contemporary literature, such as *Die Literatur, die Bilder und das Unsichtbare* (1999), *Seetiefen und Seelentiefen. Literarische Spiegelungen innerer und äußerer Fremde* (2003), *Einführung in die Literatur der Romantik* (2004). From 1999 to 2005 she was the president of the German Association of General and Comparative Literature (DGVAL).