

twayne

companion to
contemporary
world literature

from the editors of *world literature today*

pamela a. genova
editor

volume 1

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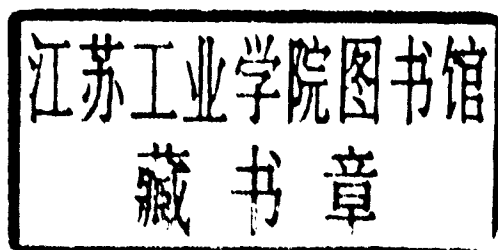
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Twayne Companion to Contemporary World Literature: From the Editors of *World Literature Today*

Pamela A. Genova

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Introduction

These journals, as they reach a wider public, will contribute most effectively to the universal world literature we hope for; we repeat, however, that there can be no question of the nations thinking alike, the aim is simply that they shall grow aware of one another, understand each other, and even when they may not be able to love, may at least tolerate one another.

■ WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, COMMENT ON *WELTLITERATUR*,

INCORPORATED INTO THE *BOOKS ABROAD*/WORLD LITERATURE

TODAY MASTHEAD SINCE 1927.

■ WORLD LITERATURE TODAY: HISTORY AND LEGEND

The history of the oldest international English-language literary quarterly, *World Literature Today*, housed at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma, presents an engaging tale, full of anecdote and adventure, a story of men and women of letters deeply committed to questions of literature, art, culture, and the global scheme of things.¹ The emergence of an internationally acclaimed journal in a small campus town of the American heartland embodies a phenomenon that may appear unlikely, and yet in a sense it seems also quite normal, conceived as a natural extension of the intellectual encounters of scholars, students, and the reading public, within a large academic research institution. Indeed, as the 1980 Nobel Laureate and 1978 Neustadt Prize winner Czesław Miłosz once declared, “If *WLT* were not in existence, we would have to invent it. It fulfills the unique role of bringing information about works little known or inaccessible in English-speaking countries.” For her part, Joyce Carol Oates, the novelist, poet, and playwright, describes the journal by highlighting one of its most original aspects, the inclusion in every issue of an unprecedented number of book reviews: “*World Literature Today* is an extraordinary journal, one very much needed, handsomely produced and edited with skill and discretion. No other journal begins to do what

WLT does routinely—the conscientious reviewing of over 300 books in each issue from approximately 60 languages.” It is true that the reviewing of numerous titles of fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography, and many other literary genres, from writers based all over the world, is a prominent and unusual component of *WLT*. Yet, equally importantly, the journal also publishes articles, interviews, and many other features, while its offices function as a vital site for a variety of cultural activities, as the editorial staff organizes conferences and symposia, bestows important literary prizes, and encourages the work of students, scholars, researchers, and readers of world literature everywhere. Devoted to the presentation and discussion of current literature in all the major and many of the lesser-known languages of the world, *WLT* is the only international review focused on comprehensive and informative coverage of developments in contemporary literatures worldwide. In its pages readers can find timely and stimulating discussions of the work of a vast diversity of authors, from many different languages and cultures; *WLT* frequently represents in fact the sole source available anywhere for information on the less-familiar, often unjustly overlooked, literary traditions of the twentieth century.

The journal was founded in 1927 by Roy Temple House at the University of Oklahoma under the name *Books Abroad*. At that time, House was chair of the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics (MLLL), and his work with the journal launched a long and active relationship between the academic unit of MLLL and the editorial offices of what would later become *WLT* (I myself am a faculty member in the department, as well as a senior contributing editor at *WLT*). House’s driving idea for the publication was fueled by his desire to try to offer non-ideological commentary on a variety of foreign literatures as a means of aiding America to move away from what he saw as a dangerous trend toward isolationism. House hoped thus to promote more extensive and more thoughtful international understanding through the

communication of a variety of opinions on art, literature, and ideas. As he wrote in the first issue of *Books Abroad*, he was very much aware of the difficulties of his new enterprise, of the myriad looming challenges and obstacles, but also, he could clearly sense the satisfaction and rewards the future would bring:

[The editors] are undertaking to distribute four times a year a little magazine of really useful information concerning the more important book publications of Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, the South American republics, and perhaps other countries. They are hard-worked modern language teachers in a modest institution, without the leisure, the equipment, or the experience to do this work as well and thoroughly as they wish it might be done. They will be criticized for their omissions and inclusions, for their lack of a hard and fast plan as to just what types of books shall be treated and what types left to other publications, for the amateurish character of some of their matter, for the opportunism which fully expects to change their policy here and there as circumstances may demand it. They offer their first number with fear and trembling, but with the conviction that they are undertaking a work which very much needed doing.²

In the recounting of the legends and lore surrounding WLT, and of the infamous tales associated with the frequent visits of literary celebrities who traveled to the University of Oklahoma campus under the auspices of the journal's affiliated programs,³ one often encounters the anecdote relating how House and his editors began their work, a genuine labor of love, for no extra compensation or release time from their duties as professors at the university; even production costs were paid for a time out of their own pockets. In 1931, however, these costs were becoming more onerous, and the editors were obliged to impose a subscription rate—an amount charming to nostalgic readers and editors of today—of one dollar per year, though the editorial staff still received no extra salary. As a metaphoric emblem, House devised as the journal's Latin motto "*Lux a Peregre*," which can be translated as "Light from Abroad," or "Light of Discovery." The phrase accompanies the logo, also conceived by House, of a full-rigged ship, a rich image which not only calls to mind adventure, as in venturing out toward unknown horizons, but also evokes harbor and beacon, as the academic community and university institution are perceived as a safe haven for the daily operation of the journal. In 1927, the quarterly (which today is the second-oldest literary periodical in the United States, younger only than *The Sewanee Review*) began as a short publication of thirty-two pages; by the end of its fiftieth year, *Books Abroad* had grown

to more than 250 pages (the average length of an issue of the journal still today).

At its origins, the quarterly was truly democratic in its selection criteria regarding books to review, even excessively so perhaps, and for the first years, every kind of publication—from entomological studies and naval histories to grammar books and reissued classics—was reviewed in its pages. Soon, however, a clearer, more sophisticated focus on literary works per se was formulated, as the editors opened the frontiers of their publication to a broader geographical and cultural scope, expanding the perimeters of the journal significantly to include reviews and articles addressing the work of non-European writers. House also encouraged the inclusion of features of more popular style and wider appeal, as with the surveys of celebrated writers on questions of general cultural interest and a variety of symposium topics, such as the 1932 discussion, the first of many more to come, on the Nobel Prize. Related topics for symposia included "Transplanted Writers," "Women Playwrights," "Foster-Mother Tongue," and "Can't Book Reviewers Be Honest?" By the early 1930s, such celebrated authors as Sinclair Lewis, H. L. Menck-en, Upton Sinclair, and Henry Van Dyke were publishing critical texts in *Books Abroad*.

House served as editor from 1927 until his retirement in 1949, and was succeeded by the German critic and novelist Ernst Erich Noth, who went on to edit the journal for ten highly productive and formative years. As a European-born writer and editor, Noth was the first of a series of cosmopolitan, foreign-born intellectuals who would continue to lead the journal's editorial staff for more than forty more years. One of Noth's major contributions to the ongoing process of establishing a distinctive identity for the quarterly was the move to streamline the inclusion policy, to focus solely on writers of the twentieth century while reviewing only books that had been published no more than two years earlier. He also introduced a new feature, "Periodicals in Review" (sometimes appearing as "Periodicals at Large"), which surveyed the policies and initiatives of a number of literary journals from Europe, the Americas, and throughout the world.

In 1959, Noth was succeeded by Wolfgang Bernard Fleishmann, a Viennese-born scholar who directed the quarterly for two years. His major contribution to the development of *Books Abroad* was the publication of a continuing symposium on twentieth-century poetry from the western world. He was followed in 1961 by the Czech émigré Robert Vlach, who had been appointed as a professor in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Oklahoma. Vlach established a new review section in the journal devoted to Slavic

languages, and he also initiated the *Books Abroad* symposia which took place at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association. After Vlach's untimely death in 1966, Assistant Editor Bernice Duncan carried on his duties with noted success until Ivar Ivask became editor in 1967.

With the arrival of Ivask, a long and significant era of development began for *WLT*, and the journal underwent many major transformations, in its style and presentation format as well as in its subject matter and intellectual perspective. Stylistically, the cover was redesigned, the internal page arrangement was transformed into a layout of double columns, and vignettes were added to diversify the visual and thematic organization of the pages. As for the content of the journal, more emphasis was placed on the development of special issues devoted to a single author or topic, while many new symposium proceedings were published, such as those on "The Writer in Exile," "Nationalism in World Literature," and "The Writer as Critic of His Age." Ivask, of Estonian and Latvian heritage, also established a new section of reviews of books in Finno-Ugric and Baltic languages. The staff of associated reviewers had grown to more than 800 by 1970, and fifty percent more books were being reviewed in the quarterly issues. In 1977, a truly significant initiative was reflected in the change of name from *Books Abroad* to *World Literature Today*, an innovative title that suggests both global and contemporary reflections on a diversity of literary forms of art, and transcends the more limited implications of the former title that could be interpreted as excessively Eurocentric. The journal's coverage and reputation had expanded so impressively since its inception that a new name seemed only appropriate to reflect the increasingly rich nature of the overall enterprise.

In 1991, at the end of the sixty-first year of the publication of *WLT*, a new editor replaced Ivask, the Cyprus native Djelal Kadir. In a unique double essay that appeared in the Autumn 1991 issue, the outgoing and incoming editors shared their views on the past, present, and future of the publication, both invoking the sea-going imagery of the masthead. As Ivask points out, a mere six editors in more than six decades is an unusual record for any publication, and each brought an undeniably original style and personal vision to the journal. Kadir, a scholar in English, Spanish, and Portuguese literatures, led the editorial process at *WLT* until 1996, when William Riggan (who joined *WLT* in 1974, and who subsequently served as assistant editor, associate editor, assistant director, and editor of the journal) took over until 1999.

In that year, the current executive director at the journal, R. C. Davis-Undiano, professor of English at the University of Oklahoma, came to work at the offices of *WLT* and was named the Neustadt Professor of Comparative Literature. Today, Davis-Undiano collaborates with the current editor, David Draper Clark (who has been with *WLT* since 1983), and has worked to enact many modifications, among the most significant in the history of the journal. The new format and the expansion of affiliated programs currently enjoying evident success at *WLT* will be discussed in more detail further in this introduction.

■ NEUSTADT, PUTERBAUGH, NOBEL

One of the most important facets to the *WLT* enterprise is the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, which was launched in 1969 under Ivask's editorial leadership. This biennial award, which brought an original purse of \$10,000 and in 2002 bestowed \$50,000, is supported by an endowment through the University of Oklahoma, from the Oklahoma-based Neustadt family. The Neustadt Prize was the first international prize for literature of this scope to originate in the United States, and it remains one of the few literary prizes on an international scale for which novelists, playwrights, and poets are equally eligible (the only stipulation dictates that at least a representative portion of the author's work must be available in English, Spanish, and/or French, the three languages used in the jury's deliberations). Each Neustadt Prize winner is selected by a different jury of ten to twelve individuals, chosen by the executive director of the journal (who is the only permanent member), in consultation with the journal's editorial board and the president of the University of Oklahoma. Each juror nominates one author, and all nominations are made public six months before the jury convenes on the campus. The group meets for two to three days behind closed doors and the award ceremonies culminate with a banquet in the following fall semester, an event attended by the laureate, while a special issue of the journal is devoted entirely to that author's work. An overview of the sixteen prizes awarded to date offers a telling perspective into the undeniably esteemed group of winners selected over the past thirty years: Giuseppe Ungaretti (1970, Italy), Gabriel García Márquez (1972, Colombia), Francis Ponge (1974, France), Elizabeth Bishop (1976, United States), Czesław Miłosz (1978, Poland), Josef Škvorecký (1980, Czechoslovakia), Octavio Paz (1982, Mexico), Paavo Haavikko (1984, Finland), Max Frisch (1986, Switzerland), Tomas Tranströmer (1990, Sweden), João Cabral de Melo Neto (1992, Brazil), Kamau Brathwaite (1994, Barbados), Assia Djebar (1996, Algeria), Nuruddin

Farah (1998, Somalia), David Malouf (2000, Australia), and Alvaro Mutis (2002, Colombia).

The second major event associated with *WLT*, a particularly important occasion with regard to outreach and visibility, is the Puterbaugh Conference on World Literature, sponsored by the journal in collaboration with the University of Oklahoma Departments of English and Modern Languages. The Puterbaugh series of conferences began in 1968 and was originally named the Oklahoma Conference on Writers of the Hispanic World; it was endowed in perpetuity in 1978 by the Puterbaugh Foundation of McAlester, Oklahoma. In that year, the scope of the conference was expanded to include writers of the French-speaking world, as well as from Spain and Spanish America. In 1993, all restrictions were removed, and since that date, all living writers have been potentially eligible for the honor. Now an annual event (previously it was biennial), the Puterbaugh Conference brings a prominent author to the Norman campus for approximately one week, during which he or she offers classes and seminars, as well as free public lectures and readings, followed by a symposium featuring scholars and specialists who have concentrated in their research on the author's work. Again, the list of those who have been featured in the Puterbaugh Conference is striking in the highly visible nature and exceptional quality of the writers honored (some of whom have also won the Neustadt Prize): Jorge Guillén (1968, Spain), Jorge Luis Borges (1969, Argentina), Octavio Paz (1971, Mexico), Dámaso Alonso (1973, Spain), Julio Cortázar (1975, Argentina), Mario Vargas Llosa (1977, Peru), Yves Bonnefoy (1979, France), Michel Butor (1981, France), Carlos Fuentes (1983, Mexico), Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1987, Cuba), Edouard Glissant (1989, Martinique), Manuel Puig (1991, Argentina), Maryse Condé (1993, Guadeloupe), Luisa Valenzuela (1995, Argentina), J. M. G. Le Clézio (1997, France), Czesław Miłosz (1999, Poland), and Kenzaburō Ōe (2001, Japan). In April 2002, the nineteenth Puterbaugh Conference on World Literature featured the Cuban poet and essayist Roberto Fernández Retamar.

Another particularly interesting element in the identity of *WLT*, as well as of the Neustadt Prize and the Puterbaugh Conference, is the relationship between these entities and the cultural institution of the Nobel Prize for literature. Since the inception of *Books Abroad*, the editors associated with the journal have encouraged lively debate about the annual announcement of the Nobel Prize, as with the 1939 "Super-Nobel" election sponsored in *Books Abroad*, in which contributors and other specialists were invited to each choose the writer whom they felt had offered the most significant contri-

bution to world literature in the first third of the twentieth century, whether or not that writer had won the Nobel Prize.⁴ At the top of the "Super-Nobel" list were several non-Nobel winners, such as Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, and Theodore Dreiser, but the award went to Thomas Mann, who had in fact won the Nobel in 1929, and who became a frequent contributor to *WLT*. Over the years, *Books Abroad* often featured the topic of the Nobel Prize, as with the series of symposia published periodically in the journal: "Prodding the Nobel Prize Committee" (1932), "Nominations for the Nobel Prize for Literature" (1935), "*Books Abroad's* Super-Nobel Election" (1940), "What's Wrong with the Nobel Prize?" (1951), and "Nobel Prize Symposium" (1967). In these remarkable symposia, critics, scholars, and authors discussed the policies and procedures of the Swedish academy, as well as the secretive selection process and the sometimes curious choices of winners for an inherently literary prize (such as Winston Churchill, the 1953 laureate, and Bertrand Russell, the 1951 laureate). The Spring 1981 issue of *WLT* was devoted entirely to the presentation of the members of the Swedish academy, many of whom were successful creative writers in their own right. Interestingly, in 1951, the Nobel Foundation chose the University of Oklahoma Press to issue the first English-language edition of its own authoritative volume, entitled *Nobel: The Man and His Prizes*. Also, the often-synchronistic relationship between the Neustadt Prize, once infamously described by *The New York Times* as the "Oklahoma Nobel," and the Nobel Prize itself is in fact quite amazing. Between 1970 and 1980, for example, no fewer than six writers associated in one way or another with the Oklahoma prize (usually as jurors, candidates, or winners of the Neustadt Prize) also received the Nobel.⁵

■ A NEW ERA OF WORLD LITERATURE

Since 1999, *WLT* has undergone many changes, as the current executive director, R. C. Davis-Undiano, has worked with contributors, readers, and editorial staff to rethink the identity of the journal and the functions it fulfills. At issue are several important goals, especially that of expanding the readership and widening the horizons of the journal, as well as working toward the establishment of an active and diverse humanities center, to be housed at the *WLT* offices. Not surprisingly, throughout the history of the journal, the majority of its reading public has been made up primarily of librarians, research scholars, and literary specialists. These groups remain important subscribers to *WLT*, but a critical recent priority has been to work toward opening the ideological and stylistic parameters of the journal and to present material that is interesting, useful, and acces-

sible to a more general public, one made up of discerning and curious readers who are not specialists in literary criticism, cultural theory, or the history of letters. With this goal in mind, the editors of *WLT* aim to reach the kind of reader who may feel that the realm of purely scholarly and academic writing and research represents a closed, even elitist enterprise, as they seek out a well-rounded reader attracted instead by lively discussions of topics of general cultural and artistic import.⁶

To begin, Davis-Undiano decided to expand the scope of the original periodical extensively, by launching two new related publications. The first, entitled *WLT Magazine*, is, like the journal, quarterly (with the primary difference that the magazine format presents far fewer book reviews). Available at newsstands at half the cost of the original *WLT*, the magazine offers a variety of often-provocative styles of writing and topics for discussion. Of course, in the past *WLT* has offered a few recurring features, such as the "Notes on Contributors," the "Literary Necrology," and the "Last Page" (a kind of bulletin board posting announcements and information regarding international literary events), but the guiding idea now is to develop and augment these supplemental columns substantially. Among the new features, "Currents" presents brief and thoughtful commentaries on new works, literary prizes, and colloquia, as well as subjects of artistic and literary controversy; many of these pieces center on the social and contextual issues affecting literary culture today, such as Ilán Stavan's exploration of the hybrid linguistic forms of "Spanglish," Sudeep Sen's study of recent Indian poetry in English, and Warren Motte's "Ten Fables of the Novel in French of the 1990s." "Travel Writing" is a feature that showcases notes, musings, and essays discussing a diversity of cultural sites around the world (as with Evelyn Accad's reminiscences of the city of Beirut and Marcel Cohen's thoughts on travel after World War II). "Essential Books" presents texts by scholars, specialists, and creative writers who consider the impact of a single book or of a series on the formation of the contemporary canon (see Rainer Schulte on Marcel Proust and Moacyr Scliar on Isaac Babel, for example). Under the rubric of "Children's Literature," readers discover a guide to the leading authors, publishers, and prizes awarded in the field of literature for younger readers. The "WLT Interview" furnishes original interviews with internationally recognized writers (such as Mario Vargas Llosa, Aleksandr Kushner, and Amitav Ghosh), and in the "Poetry" columns appears original work in verse composed by a variety of global figures (Ha Jin, Cyril Dabydeen, Claudio Rodríguez, and Czesław Miłosz, for example).

By including features such as these, Davis-Undiano and his colleagues are striving to bring a renewed sense of diversity to the global enterprise of the journal, and new ideas for expansion and experiment are always under review. In late 2000, for example, the editors worked with almost forty scholars to establish a list of the "Most Important Works in World Literature, 1927–2001," a project organized and timed to help celebrate the seventy-five years of uninterrupted publication enjoyed by *WLT*.⁷ The top forty list was chosen by specialists, but with the non-specialist in mind, with the intention of inviting response and debate among readers and writers everywhere. A forum for readers' correspondence was also initiated, and since 2000 it has helped spark dialogue among the editors of *WLT* and the reading public, contributors, and reviewers, as they discuss such issues as possible thematic frameworks for new symposia and potential ideological directions for the journal to explore.

In addition, the editorial staff at *WLT* has acted on the resolution to communicate directly with a specific population, at the University of Oklahoma and beyond, the student body. With outreach in mind, a student publication, entitled *WLT 2*, was inaugurated in the fall of 1999. Produced, edited, and designed by undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Oklahoma, the enterprise enables younger scholars to gain valuable insight and practical experience in the editorial world; recent issues have focused on "Latina Literature" and "Literature of the Cuban Diaspora." The new publication is distributed free of charge in creative writing classes and elsewhere, and is also available in an online version. The renewed interest of *WLT* in the student population is also highlighted through the Neustadt Student Fellowship, which allows students to earn three hours of university-level credit free of charge, while the fellows are invited to participate in all events associated with the Neustadt Prize. With the aim of reaching a cross-section of students from various fields of study, *WLT* has also sponsored classes that highlight interdisciplinary topics and methodologies, as with the course on Chicano and Latino Studies offered by Davis-Undiano. Further, a projected endeavor to continue to engage more students into the journal's development will be the *WLT* Virtual Book Club, which will be interactive, while keeping students informed about the various activities planned for visiting authors. A conventionally styled book club, sponsored in conjunction with the University of Oklahoma Hispanic-American Student Association, has already begun. And, *WLT* has now put into place a series of student internships, for both undergraduate and graduate students, to introduce students to the editorial process, marketing prac-

tices, and overall dynamics of the world of literary publishing.

Closely related to the goal of reaching a wider reading public, including students and younger readers, is the plan to work toward the establishment of a humanities center, sponsored by the editorial offices of *WLT*. The staff at the journal is currently seeking funding opportunities and examining renovation plans with the aim of constructing a new media center connected to its offices and expanding the space available to accommodate the activities of more classes, visitors, writers, speakers, and guests. The diversification of the content of *WLT*, as well as the exploration of various publication formats directed toward different sectors of the reading public, will be reflected in the wide array of daily projects and special events organized through the humanities center. Welcoming students and faculty, the local community, and visiting writers into an interactive and productive space for cultural, artistic, and literary expression will represent the driving force of the center.

Along with these more pragmatic developments, Davis-Undiano has endeavored to reinvigorate the stylistic form, as well as the subject matter, of the primary critical texts published in each issue. In "Back to the Essay: *World Literature Today* in the Twenty-First Century," a piece by Davis-Undiano that appeared in the Winter 2000 issue, he argues for a move away from the increasingly more stilted academic style of the scholarly article, favoring instead the more creative, experimental, and unrestrained form of the essay. As Davis-Undiano explains:

The essay tradition is not a prescriptive one of writing in a certain mold, but a capacious one defined mainly by a strategy for maintaining effective ties among writing form, the material being discussed, and the intended audience. Essays in the main tradition tend to have a definable perspective, even on occasion a personal one, and they speak in an idiom that reaches a broad audience. They tend to emphasize the occasion for foregrounding a question or issue as important, and they tend to demonstrate the argument in the form of the essay itself.⁸

In such a way, Davis-Undiano links the contemporary editorial project embodied in *WLT* with a time-honored literary tradition, illustrated by the works of such renowned essayists as Michel de Montaigne and Francis Bacon. Specifically, Davis-Undiano emphasizes the etymology of the word "essay," which evokes experimentation, trial and error, and the exploration of a curious mind faced with the adventures of world culture. Grounded in innovation, interpretation, and hypothesis, essay writing presents a necessarily personal and

subjective perspective, as an author explores myriad possibilities surrounding a chosen topic. The key is to encourage lively, provocative writing in essays that address literary issues, while political, economic, and other cultural factors are heartily welcomed into the discussion. Indeed, the influence of social and contextual forces on the formulation of both centuries-old and newly emerging national literatures rises to the forefront in these essays; as Davis-Undiano suggests: "Essays, perhaps unique among literary genres, helpfully mirror the culture back to itself in an immediate or powerful way" (7), and it is this concept of the text, perceived both as a window from which to view the world and as a glass that reflects back to us our own identity, that most succinctly and creatively describes the writing featured in today's *WLT*.

In the end, the contemporary era of *WLT* is characterized especially by heightened visibility; in the editorial offices of the journal, a concerted effort at expansion continues, as new ideas and experimental methods are discussed with editors, contributors, students, faculty, and the increasingly diverse reading public. Many initiatives are underway. Beginning in 2003, *WLT* will award a new juried prize to an author of children's literature; the *NSK/Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature*, which carries a monetary award of \$25,000, will be presented every other fall at the University of Oklahoma.⁹ Also, there are now among the staff of *WLT* six contributing editors (whose specializations span literatures in French, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and general traditions of poetry); these individuals work with the core editorial staff to review proposals, establish translations, and recruit new reviewers, essayists, and interviewees; they also represent *WLT* at a variety of national and international conferences and symposia.

The newest initiatives in outreach and development were recently acknowledged in Spring 2002 when *WLT* was awarded the 2002 Arrell Gibson Award for Lifetime Achievement by the Oklahoma Center of the Book (dating from 1986, the Oklahoma center represents the fourth to be established among the forty-four that exist nationwide). This marks the first time that this Lifetime Achievement Award has been bestowed upon an institution rather than an individual writer. (Previous winners include mystery writer Tony Hillerman, an alumnus of the University of Oklahoma, and poet N. Scott Momaday, Pulitzer-Prize winning novelist and Oklahoma native). With an acclaimed and diverse history that reaches back more than three-quarters of a century, today's *WLT* strives to combine the excellence of its past tradition with exciting future plans, as the editors build upon the solid groundwork of many years of literary

work and pleasure. Through a renewed perspective and a diversification of methodology, format, and vision, the revitalization of *WLT* is definitely underway.

■ THE PRESENT ESSAY COLLECTION: METHODS AND MODALITIES OF SELECTION AND ORGANIZATION

The current enterprise—the project to choose, categorize, and present approximately 300 essays and 150 book reviews—has been a challenging, thought-provoking, and ultimately rewarding process. Yet despite the undeniable editorial pleasures that surfaced along the way, when faced with such a task, one cannot help but be reminded of the sentiment shared by Roy Temple House, quoted earlier in this introduction, that any such undertaking is bound to be ambiguous and many-sided, and that those who attempt it “will be criticized for their omissions and inclusions, for their lack of a hard and fast plan. . . .” Indeed, many hours of consideration and discussion, thinking and rethinking have gone into the establishment of the current table of contents, which has seen many versions, and was truly a work in process for some time, flexible and kaleidoscopic.¹⁰ The question of which essays to include, as well as which appendices to provide, involves a series of factors, including fundamental organizational considerations such as chronology, geography, language, political and ethnic identity, gender issues, and regional culture.

On a primary level, we concentrated in our choice on those literatures that have been the most influential during the relative time period in question (the contemporary era as conceived as approximately the past twenty-five years); those writers and languages usually the most underrepresented in other collections of literary essay selections and thus calling for attention here; and those essays that distinguish themselves as the most indicative of the unique nature and function of the journal, *WLT*. Further, working from a foundation of some of the most stylistically sophisticated essays to appear in the pages of the journal over the years, one goal has been to supplement the highly influential pieces composed by celebrated authors (such as Elie Wiesel’s 1984 “A Vision of the Apocalypse,” Mario Vargas Llosa’s 1978 “Social Commitment and the Latin American Writer,” and Max Frisch’s 1986 “We Hope”) with more oblique and specialized essays treating “minority” literatures and languages with which the general reading public may well be much less familiar. By concentrating then on offering a diverse spectrum of literary voices from a perspective firmly grounded in the contemporary era, and originating in a multitude of cultural and linguistic contexts, the aim is to address the interests of a more

diverse readership, one particularly curious about recent developments in worldwide literary history. It is in this spirit that the current two-volume collection of essays has been conceived, as both a narrative of and a guide to the dynamic systems of contemporary literature from across the globe. Further, through the endeavor to choose the best and most representative essays to appear in recent decades in the pages of *WLT* (texts notable both for the quality of the writing and for the significance of the subject matter), we hope to impart to the reader the sense of an era and to communicate the distinctive character of the collaborative editorial project that *WLT* has become.

One of the most important elements in determining which essays should be included in this collection is that of chronology. The reader will note that the time span of critical essays and articles presented begins in 1977, which, were one unfamiliar with the history of *WLT*, might appear as a rather random date. Yet 1977 embodies in fact the pivotal year of transition and revision that accompanies the shift from the former name of *Books Abroad* to the current title of *World Literature Today*, and marks an important moment of self-reflection on the part of the editorial staff at that time. Given that one of the primary aims of the present collection is to offer the reader an overview of the most significant voices in modern literature as seen through the unique perspective of *WLT*, the original idea from which the project sprang was to focus on approximately twenty-five years, a substantial period presenting much radical variation in the history of modern literatures worldwide. Since it is true that within the more concentrated history of the journal itself, 1977 indeed represents such a formative year, the decision was made to limit this collection to works appearing from that date up to 2001, when this introduction was written. If one of the most consequential factors guiding the organizational approach of this collection is the question of time, another is certainly space, as the element of geographical location arises in our project as perhaps even more sophisticated and complex than that of time. For some of the literatures discussed in these essays, the notion of a strong, even oppressive nation state is undeniable, as political and topographical lines of distinction are revealed to be formidable; for others, national boundaries come across as blurred, even transparent, vacillating as they follow the forces of culture and will, as certain artworks aim to transcend the contingencies of daily life; others still consider the context and situation of artistic identity and meaning as well defined but unfettered by the limitations of concrete space, as like-minded writers bond together across borders, mountains, and seas.

Another possible methodology of categorizing the essays is that of language group: presenting together all the texts that address works of literature written in French, for example. However, in this system one quickly confronts a significant problem, most glaring perhaps in the case of English-language writers, given that they span the entire globe, but also discernible of course with other language cases. The Francophone question is a good example of the formidable problem of the categorization of essays, suddenly more complicated from this point of view, for the cultural elements involved are immense; the obviously consequential differences among literatures written in France and those written in North Africa or the Caribbean clearly cannot be ignored if the reader wishes to gain a meaningful sense of the most central issues affecting the formulation of these literatures. Spanish, too, obviously represents a language that has come to be used in cultures, nations, and regions that are distinct from one another to such an extent that to lump together the literatures originating in Colombia, say, with those coming out of Spain could only prove futile in the current enterprise. Language, considered alone, reveals itself to be a decidedly unsatisfactory methodological principle on which to ground this enterprise.

Moreover, to return to the ambition of remaining faithful to the general ideology of the journal itself, when considered from one perspective, little guidance is offered in this sphere, since a substantial number of issues of *WLT* are devoted to a single author or national literature, or, less frequently, an issue presents collections of texts described as “*varia*,” that is, a selection of essays in no way necessarily connected by topic. Thus, the question of organization within a single issue is not normally at play for the editors of *WLT*. In the book review section, however, the editors do categorize the reviews, to facilitate the location of a given literature for the readers, but this choice—the primary categorization is by language family, but geographical factors also affect the decision—is in large part determined by the nature of the selection of books to be reviewed that happen to be received during a specific quarterly period.¹¹ Thus one issue of *WLT* may arbitrarily contain many more entries in “Asia and the Pacific,” for example, than in “Africa and the West Indies,” a numerical difference due entirely to coincidental factors. Given the representative design of the current collection of essays, it quickly became clear that this particular system would not prove useful or appropriate as a basis for a coherent and systematic approach.

Therefore, what the reader will discover as a guiding organizational scheme in the present collection is a notion one might describe as that of cultural geography,

a methodology in which the foremost intention is to take into account not only questions of language, but also issues of nation states and geographical borders, regional and personal identities, and ideological identifications. In the combination of elements such as these, our hope is that the reader will find grouped together essays that complement one another, leading toward a thought-provoking and multifaceted overview of a given cultural question and its relationship to literary history, such as the status of women in the Middle East, the impact of poverty in African nations, the obstacles of spiritual isolation in Scandinavia, or the intricacies of post-colonial transition in the Philippines.

Perhaps as important as the question of inclusion is that, inevitably, of exclusion and absence. The decision was made to follow the general model and guidelines of *WLT* itself, in the sense that we have included no section to treat North American authors; throughout the long history of the journal, only twice were authors from the United States showcased specifically (Elizabeth Bishop was featured in the first issue of *WLT* in 1977, and in 1992 a special issue was devoted to Native American literatures). We decided to extend this limitation to Canada, as well, guided by the central logical principle that what we hope to accent in the thinking of *WLT* is its presentation and consideration of literatures originating in countries outside the North American arena. Further, throughout the volumes, the choice of countries or authors featured may seem sometimes arbitrary, even patently non-representative, but again, a basic working principle of this collection is to remain true to *WLT*; the choice of countries and literatures is not so much imposed by an external source, such as the weight of economic influence, political heft, or cultural celebrity in the contemporary global sphere, as it is dictated by that which the journal has truly come to be. Since the literature of Iraq, for instance, has not yet been featured in *WLT*, it does not appear in our collection. Similarly, since no contributor to the journal has written on the work of Iris Murdoch, her name is necessarily absent from the section reserved for Irish literature. Finally, although acceptance speeches of Nobel Prize winners, many of which were reprinted in the journal over the years, certainly present great interest and undeniable creative originality, they have been reprinted so often in other venues and are thus so widely available today that we rejected the option of including them here.

Finally, as the reader peruses the twenty-five years of essays, interviews, and reviews included in this collection, certain inconsistencies and irregularities in format and style will become apparent. Given the vast diversity of languages, regional dialects, and alphabetical

systems involved in these discussions, and the frequency with which writers treat literatures of non-Western scripts and systems (such as Cyrillic, Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese, Japanese, and Hindi), it is not surprising that the most obvious of these inconsistencies is to be found in the use of diacritical marks and in transliteration. An example such as the name of the Egyptian Nobel Prize winner—rendered sometimes as “Najib Mahfus,” sometimes as “Naguib Mahfouz,” and sometimes finally as either one of these forms with the addition of various diacritical marks—illustrates the changing guidelines of standardization in place at *WLT* over the years, while it also underscores the desire of some essay writers to remain as true as possible to the original linguistic form, with the final product often embodying a complex, diacritic-filled transliteration. Other writers prefer to use a version of a name that appears, to the average North American reader, to correspond more closely to how the name sounds when spoken orally. Over the twenty-five years detailed in our collection, reviewers and contributors have clearly been divided in their final decisions on linguistic and stylistic issues such as these, and have often fashioned their own unique solutions to these challenges. Therefore, although the editors at the journal have aimed to standardize usage and style within a given text or issue of the quarterly, when twenty-five years of writing are grouped together, undeniable divergences in orthographic, diacritical, transliterary, and stylistic forms appear. In the end, instead of imposing retrospectively one overarching system of format and style, we decided to keep—as we have kept the unique discursive tones, singular writing styles, and original thematic motifs—the peculiarities of transliteration and linguistic style as they appear originally in our many pieces.

■ THE TABLE OF CONTENTS

The first section of the table of contents, “Perspectives on World Literature,” offers a variety of essays in which authors treat questions of literary culture on a global scale, in discussions that bring thoughtful commentary to issues that necessarily cross ideological boundaries and linguistic divisions. Thus well-established critics such as Anna Balakian, Mary Ann Caws, Jonathan Culler, Linda Hutcheon, and Marjorie Perloff discuss in their texts the fluctuating dynamics of the field of Comparative Literature, as they reflect upon its past and contemplate its future as a form of academic inquiry that has undergone much transformation in recent years. Other essays in this section focus on political and ideological factors, especially as they relate to the formulation of new modes of literary art; Alfred Kazin, J. Hillis Miller, Henri Peyre, and Paul Nizon, for example, exam-

ine such questions as the consideration of world topics that resurface throughout various cultures and the problematics of writing literary works in a world in which the technical and scientific advances have become so fast paced that the individual author may find himself or herself isolated, considered as an anachronistic artifact from a quickly receding past. Still other essays in the first section address questions of form, structure, genre, and the fluctuations of the literary canon. Thus Yves Bonnefoy considers the systems of linguistic and semantic activity and the mutations they undergo in the process of translation, Michel Butor discusses the notion of inspiration and the dynamics of writerly production, Michael Hamburger explores poetry as an international and timeless literary form, and Leslie Schenk questions the nature of the world classics as they have been defined in Western culture. In a way, then, the first section was the least difficult category to visualize, given that the articles grouped therein all share a certain universality of perspective, no matter the specific literatures chosen to illustrate the guiding ideas of the essay writers. Much more complicated was formulating a universal, systematic methodology of organization for the rest of the essays included in this collection, the vast majority of texts by far. It is in this arena that the modalities of what we have described as “cultural geography” come into play.

The second section of essays, “The Arab World and the Middle East,” presents first a general selection of texts that address issues spanning many countries, such as Roger Allen’s examination of Arabic literature and the Nobel Prize or Muhammad Siddiq’s study of the contemporary Arabic novel. We then present selections categorized as to geography and nation, listed alphabetically: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. In some of these writings, authors explore the confluence of the cultures of ancient lands with the trends of modern society, such as Yair Mazor’s 1984 examination of feminism and the work of the Israeli poet Daliah Rabikovit; other articles concentrate on the utilization of classical rhetorical figures and universal generic forms as reconstructed from contemporary viewpoints (see Admer Goury’s 1986 “Recent Trends in Syrian Drama”). Also, as the reader may expect, the conflicts and struggles that have besieged these regions in recent decades play a major role in the analysis of many of these national literatures, as with Eisig Silberschlag’s 1980 “Redemptive Vision in Hebrew Literature” and Mohja Kahf’s 2001 “The Silences of Contemporary Syrian Literature.”

Section III, “Africa and the Caribbean,” features first several texts addressing issues prevalent throughout African literatures, such as Charles R. Larson’s

thoughtful 1986 essay, "The Precarious State of the African Writer," or Isidore Okpewho's study, published in 1981 yet still meaningful for today's Africa, "Comparatism and Separatism in African Literature." This subsection is followed by several others centering on specific countries: Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, and South Africa. As for the Caribbean authors treated, such as Derek Walcott, Caryl Phillips, Kamau Brathwaite, Edouard Glissant, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Cristina García, we follow in these subsections a secondary level of categorization—linguistic—with Anglophone and Francophone authors followed by those from Cuba, which happens to be the sole Spanish-speaking Caribbean literature that has been showcased in *WLT*. As might be expected, questions of the hybrid nature of language and cultural identity appear in much of the writing associated with the Caribbean literary scene: exile, territorialism, Negritude, neocolonial social systems, and the changing landscapes of culture animate essays written by well-known literary figures from this part of the world, such as Maryse Condé, Cyril Dabydeen, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante.

Our fourth section, "Asia," has been divided into five subsections, again closely following geographically defined regions: "East Asia" offers writings on China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan; "Central Asia" presents texts about the literary art of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; "South Asia" includes essays focusing on India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; "Southeast Asia" features studies of the literatures of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. A final section, "Australia and New Zealand," may appear incongruous in this category, when considered from a purely cultural point of view, but again, our central logic within these smaller sections remains primarily geographical. Throughout the essays in which authors consider various aspects of the literatures originating in Asia, it is interesting to note certain basic trends, progressively more discernible, such as the strong impact of political issues in texts treating Chinese literature (as with John Marney's 1991 "PRC Politics and Literature in the Nineties" and K. C. Leung's 1981 "Literature in the Service of Politics: The Chinese Literary Scene since 1949"), while the essayists treating Japanese literature tend to focus on aspects in the work of an individual author, analyzed from a primarily aesthetic point of view (see Bettina L. Knapp's 1980 "Mishima's Cosmic Noh Drama: *The Damask Drum*" and Celeste Loughman's 1999 "The Seamless Universe of Ōe Kenzaburō"). Not surprisingly, issues of cultural turmoil and social unrest permeate much of the discussion of literary art from Central Asia, as with Ahmad Karimi-

Hakkak's 1986 "Poetry against Piety: The Literary Response to the Iranian Revolution" and Bektash Shamshiev's 1996 "Post-Socialist Kyrgyz Literature: Crisis or Renaissance?" As for "Australia and New Zealand," we have endeavored to bring together texts that address general literary traditions in the region (such as Peter Pierce's 1993 "Australian Literature since Patrick White") and those that highlight less familiar modes (see Norman Simms's 1978 "Maori Literature in English: An Introduction").

The fifth major division of essays, "Latin America," opens with a series of discussions of the more ubiquitous issues of the region, such as the 1988 piece by Manuel Durán, "The Nobel Prize and Writers in the Hispanic World: A Continuing Story," while the subsections divided according to national literatures include explorations of the writing of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay. In these sections, one is struck by certain commonalities of style and approach, as with the notable number of essays focusing on celebrated literary figures associated with the art of a specific country: Manuel Puig in Argentina, Octavio Paz in Mexico, Mario Vargas Llosa in Peru, or Gabriel García Márquez in Colombia, for example. Here, timely social issues often receive marked attention (see for example Roberto Reis's 1988 "Who's Afraid of [Luso-] Brazilian Literature?"), while a preoccupation with questions of literary form and style is also evident (Wilson Martins's 1979 "Carlos Drummond de Andrade and the Heritage of *Modernismo*" and Gregory Rabassa's 1982 "García Márquez's New Book: Literature or Journalism?" serve as examples).

"Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Balkans," the sixth section, reflects in its organizational logic the radically transformed cultural landscapes of the region. Included in this section are writings on the literatures of Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. The size of this category, one of the largest in the collection, not only illustrates the importance of the geographical proportions of the region in question, but also indicates the impressive number of essays published in *WLT* on literatures from this fast-changing cultural sphere. Over the years, *WLT* has presented a variety of texts focusing on these regions, by such illustrious writers as Milan Kundera, Joseph Brodsky, and Chingiz Aitmatov, as well as a variety of essays that treat the work of these and other celebrated authors from the area (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Bitov, and Karol Wojtyła—better known as Pope John Paul II—for example). While some of the earlier entries, such as Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz's 1981 piece on Václav Havel, reflect the intellectual pre-

occupations of a more traditional eastern Europe, the most recent texts, such as Regina Grol's 2001 article, "Eroticism and Exile: Anna Frajlich's Poetry," demonstrate the extent to which the literary climate of the area has changed dramatically over recent decades.

"Northern Europe," the seventh section, includes a selection of general essays on Scandinavian literatures, followed by subsections on the Baltic States, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Many of these pieces treat the artful combination of centuries-old sagas and mythic leitmotiv with truly contemporary issues of society and culture, as with Robert Bly's 1990 study of Tomas Tranströmer or Helena Forsås-Scott's 1984 examination of Sara Lidman. Other essayists focus on the impact of topics that affect a number of different nations in the area, such as George C. Schoolfield's 1988 study of the history of the Nobel Prize in relation to Scandinavian letters.

Section eight, "Western Europe," includes the literatures that may well represent those most familiar to contemporary North American readers, such as works from France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Here, readers not only will find essays devoted to some of the most widely recognized names in twentieth-century literature, such as Albert Camus, Günter Grass, Seamus Heaney, Italo Calvino, and Tom Stoppard, but also will discover analyses and appreciations of writers about whom they may know much less, as with Séamus Mac Annaidh, Dario Fo, Albert Verwey, and Jorge de Sena. Provocative cultural issues are also addressed as becomes clear in essays such as H. M. Waidson's 1990 "Silvio Blatter: Realism and Society in Modern Switzerland" and Giose Rimanelli's 1997 "The Poetry of 'Limited' Exile and Its Revealing Trek among Italy's Small Presses."

In the end, we hope that the eight classifications of texts that we include in these volumes will provide the contemporary reader with a manageable and pragmatic reference tool, particularly in light of questions of access and retrievability, while we also hope that the final selection will offer a sense of the logical distinctions, as well as the unexpected correspondences, that can materialize among these many literary perspectives. Regarding the thematic motifs and formal considerations that circulate throughout the collection, a more substantial overview will be presented later in this introduction.

To clarify the motivation of including two substantial appendices, again, a series of factors is involved, most pressingly perhaps, to remain true to the nature of the journal, and to present those elements that are

important and interesting but that do not happen to fall within the necessarily limited framework of the present volumes. Appendix A supplies therefore the articles that were reprinted in a special issue of *WLT* (Spring 1989), entitled "The Best of *Books Abroad*." Given that the current collection of essays begins only in 1977, when *Books Abroad* becomes *WLT*, and since *Books Abroad* actually began publication in 1927, there are fifty years of engaging and original texts that appeared in the pages of the journal that fall outside the historical scope of the current collection. Appendix A allows readers to explore some of the most significant of these articles (designated as such by the editors of *WLT* in 1989), some of which are particularly celebrated, such as Czesław Miłosz's 1970 "On Pasternak Soberly," Jorge Guillén's 1971 "Remembering Valéry," Northrop Frye's 1955 "English Canadian Literature 1929–1954," and Mario Vargas Llosa's 1970 "The Latin American Novel Today." Other essays from this retrospective issue address pertinent moments in literary history, especially in relation to fundamental cultural and political paradigm shifts, as with A. A. Roback's 1934 "Yiddish Writing in America," Seán O'Fáolain's 1952 "Ireland after Yeats," and Taha Hussein's 1955 "The Modern Renaissance of Arabic Literature."

In Appendix B, entitled "World Literature in Review" (a title borrowed from the pages of *WLT* itself to designate the substantial book review section included in each issue), the reader will find an assortment of book reviews published in the period featured in the collection, 1977–2001. Given that the number of book reviews that have consistently appeared in *WLT* is startlingly high—approximately 300 per quarterly issue, which, for our twenty-five-year collection, amounts to a total nearing 30,000—this selection is hardly meant to be inclusive. Rather, because of the fundamental role bestowed upon book reviews by the editors of *WLT* throughout its history, Appendix B offers contemporary readers an overview of the diverse variety of reviews that illustrate the far-reaching nature of the material presented in *WLT*. Perhaps more interestingly, our purpose is also to give an idea of the evolving nature of the genre of the book review itself, as it moves, in the late 1970s, from a more informative, descriptive summary to, in the late 1990s, an original and creative form in itself, explored by review writers as an independent generic space to be sounded and expanded, in which to offer new ideas and to provoke thought and reaction.

For each year included within the time span, the reader will find six reviews, chosen for a variety of logistical and methodological reasons. Many of the reviews concentrate on important and influential books, a majority of which are prize winners. Some are written by

authors whose own creative work has become particularly successful. Others stand out as especially provocative, either in form or in content, particularly controversial in viewpoint or suggestive in framework. Although many excellent reviews of extremely influential North American books appeared in the pages of *WLT*, the decision was made to include only reviews on literatures originating in cultures outside North America, to be consistent with the systemic foundation of the main body of the table of contents. Finally, as with the selection of essays, criteria for selection of book reviews involve such factors as language, culture, and the inclusion of both “minority” literatures and the work of internationally recognized authors, as the fundamental purpose remains to offer a diverse and far-reaching selection to contemporary readers, introducing evaluations both of well-known books and of much more specialized creative publications.

■ TOPICAL MOTIFS AND FORMAL CROSSCURRENTS

One of the most striking impressions likely to occur to the reader of this collection is the increasingly more significant presence, as one advances in time toward the most recent texts, of the elements of history and culture, of the consideration (often reconsideration) of the art of literary expression as a phenomenon always deeply ensconced in a situation. Indeed, the notion of the contextualization of literature becomes a crucial leitmotif in these pieces, as the authors of the articles examine and discuss novels, poems, and plays by writers from vastly different geographical, ideological, and artistic settings. Given the astonishing number of substantial transformations in society, government, technology, and the role of the individual that surface between 1977 and 2001, both on a global level and in specific regional zones, this accent on questions of politics, history, and cultural identification hardly seems surprising. The ambivalent connections among such factors as history and memory, truth and fiction, emerge as well in the rethinking of recent world politics and art. A text such as Leon I. Yudkin’s “Memorialization in New Fiction” (1998), for example, explores the genres of the novel, diary, and memoir as potentially powerful modes of expression in the mediation of the past in the work of contemporary writers. Similarly, in Tomas Venclova’s 1978 study of Czesław Miłosz, the figure of the writer as conceived as the conscience of the world and the keeper of tradition emphasizes the ethical dimensions of literature and the committed nature of poetry and art. André Brink, in a particularly lucid and eloquent 1996 essay on history and writing in South Africa, suggests that, in the relationship of historiography to the genre of the

novel, narrative is revealed to embody a touchstone, both for the community and for the individual. Other essays describe the work of authors who, conversely, do not wish to participate actively in politics and society through their writing, and in texts such as D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke’s 1992 piece on Sri Lankan literature in English, we find a rejection of recent trends in some literatures to take advantage of the crises of politics, such as war and ethnic conflict, to meld art into a tool of propaganda.

One particularly significant example of a cultural and historical phenomenon that resurfaces insistently throughout these essays as a primary thematic framework is that of colonialization. Since so many different countries and peoples fought for and won their independence over the past twenty or thirty years, the dramatic new cultural landscapes fashioned through radical social, economic, and artistic renewal give rise to innovative literary artworks in which the notions of oppression, slavery, racism, and domination impact pervasively the tone of the writing. An essay such as Murray S. Martin’s 1994 “Who Is the Colonist? Writing in New Zealand and the South Pacific” portrays the inherent ambiguities implied in questions of territory and possession, nation state and tradition, while Rocío G. Davis’s 1999 text on the Philippines presents the imagistic notion of the nation as protagonist in a drama of power and propaganda, within a particular social and conceptual space. The move from a colonialist system to one grounded in a postcolonial reality is frequently underscored in works originating in the diverse countries of Africa, in which concerns of the overlapping of cultures merge with issues of linguistic and literary tradition and the encounters among different, often opposing priorities of various cultural hierarchies. See Charles P. Sarvan’s piece on French colonialism in Africa, especially Cameroon, and Gerise Herndon’s 1993 study of gender construction and neocolonialism in the Francophone Caribbean. Each highlights distinct facets of this complex and multiform cultural issue, as various literatures revisit the notions of history, power, and nation.

Along with the undeniably prevalent existence of heightened cultural consciousness comes quite naturally the reevaluation of the notions of ethnicity and race, of gender and age, of regional and national senses of self. The problem of the other, viewed as either hostile invader or sympathetic compatriot, stimulates frequent discussion regarding the dynamics of encounter, including the exciting possibilities of communication, or the unfortunate lack thereof. As the authors of the creative works under discussion—as well as the writers of the critical articles that address these works—take into

account the refashioning of the self, along with the reformulation of the other, we discover authorial perspectives that take nothing for granted, even those elements that may have seemed the most stable and comforting, such as the belief in a coherent, logical, integrated ego. Sylvia Li-Chun Lin examines the problematic relationship of individual and collective values in her 2001 study of Gao Xingjian, for example, while Luiza Lobo, in her 1987 essay, explores the ambivalent condition of Brazilian women writers. Many of these texts illustrate thus the aim to universalize the individual, to impart to the readers a sense of shared community through their very subjectivity.

In part, of course, this revival of debate focusing on the most central issues of the human condition grows out of a more globally progressive trend of intellectual and ideological development throughout the twentieth century, as seemingly every realm of human knowledge and activity—from philosophy and literature to communication and transportation to science and sociology—undergoes a crucial transfiguration from the outmoded nineteenth-century model of rationalist, positivist systems of thought and method. In the West alone, the remarkably rapid development of such twentieth-century aesthetic perspectives as Modernism, Dada, Surrealism, Existentialism, Postmodernism, and Cultural Studies has brought an almost familiar sense of change as natural, of refusal and response directed toward the past as an integral and necessary element in the move toward the future. A selection of essays from throughout Europe, for example—such as A. Leslie Willson, “Entering the Eighties: The Mosaic of German Literatures: Introduction” (1981); Glauco Cambon, “Modern Poetry and Its Prospects in Italy” (1985); and Manuel Durán, “Vicente Aleixandre, Last of the Romantics: The 1977 Nobel Prize for Literature” (1978)—offers a panoramic view of the dynamic variations of aesthetic form and function born from a particularly energetic artistic era. The spirit of experimentation, of the search for innovation and difference, is certainly still present—if not even more powerful and compelling—in the years at issue in this collection.

On one side of what might be conceived as a kind of theoretical and thematic dichotomy between negative and positive impulses that arises in the reading of these essays, we sense an indisputably dark, anxious, even fearful voice of the modern writer that seems, sadly, increasingly universal. Thus the motifs of violence, poverty, oppression, ennui, and exile appear as primary in texts that treat countries as far removed from one another as Sri Lanka and Ireland, and it becomes evident to today’s reader that the years in question represent in many ways an era of destabilization and deception, illu-

sion and deceit. As an example, the theme of alienation represents a powerfully evocative motif, widespread throughout these global literatures. The fictional subject of the novels and other creative works seems often irrevocably alone, cut off from family and friends, unable to formulate or to communicate to another his or her deeply felt loneliness and desperation. As examples, Ruth Hottell, in a 1997 piece, examines effects of the entangled relations among sexuality, nationality, and war in the work of Evelyne Accad, while Frederick Hale, in his 1983 “Tor Edvin Dahl and the Poverty of Norwegian Prosperity,” underscores the ambivalent fortune of modern economic progress and its effect on the individual. Frequently this sensation of inexplicable, even unutterable, frustration and angst is expressed in these narratives through the figure of exile, sometimes in the most literal sense, as authors and protagonists find themselves, often through the intervention of forces over which they feel completely powerless, cut off from hearth and home, suffering a profound rupture from their own pasts.

Revolutions, invasions, colonization, and turbulent political change frequently precipitate these drastic transformations that can simultaneously affect large percentages of a given population, and are often carried out along ethnic or racial lines. Gila Ramras-Rauch, in a 1998 essay, “Aharon Appelfeld: A Hundred Years of Jewish Solitude,” explores the archetypes of catastrophe and atonement in relation to the literature of the Shoah/Holocaust, while David Gillespie, in his 1993 text on the bonds between the Russian writer and the past, comments on the effects of such emblematic phenomena as the gulag and glasnost in the formulation of a new kind of literature, based in large part on the reinterpretation of history. Yet sometimes the implacably pervasive sense of exile emerges in the hearts and minds of authors and characters who remain in their native lands, often surrounded by those with whom they have carried on relations of the most intimate kind, friends and lovers, colleagues and family members. This more abstract and possibly more unsettling sense of difference often forces individuals to the margins of their respective societies, for they are considered (or they perceive they are considered) as pariahs, ostracized at the borders of the ideological and geographical homelands, where they had always found comfort and support. In Fernando Ainsa’s 1994 study of Juan Carlos Onetti, for example, the essayist explores the presence in Onetti’s work of the dark forces of passivity and fatalism, solitude and futility, in the figuration of the universal metaphysical sadness of the human condition. The sense of belonging—to a family, a nation, the human race—thus is undermined by the gnawing forces of doubt often

perceptible in the ambiguities of modern times. Such characters, seeped in estrangement, embody dramatic figures of troubling otherness, from the criminal to the homeless, from the genius to the insane.

Yet it seems both inappropriate and untrue in the end to judge the literatures of the world during these particularly formative years as irrevocably helpless or hopeless, ultimately desperate or victimized. There is a remarkably vibrant presence in these literatures of an emerging sense of self, of a right to entitlement and authority, a drive for self-affirmation and the freedom of choice. As the individual, whether Chinese, French, Iranian, or Greek, comes to assert a sense of independent autonomy, necessarily more subtle and sophisticated than the conventions and clichés shared among larger, more anonymous groups, he or she is presented as having discovered a new path, in the forward-looking process toward the actualization of happiness, authenticity, and freedom. Thus John Scheckter, in his 2000 essay on the recent writings of David Malouf, shows how the Australian author explores the notion of individualism in process, as his fictional characters undergo a fundamental metamorphosis toward self-awareness and a sense of unity and cohesiveness on both temporal and spatial planes. As the disquieting figures of alienation and misgiving move toward the promise of genuine communication and cooperation, the reader is left with the sense of a concerted, energetic effort to perceive and understand the world around us, and to translate those impressions and connect to an increasingly knowing readership.

From these concerns with identity and struggle, purpose and freedom springs the popular central motif of movement. The world, as viewed through these literatures, is in constant flux, with nothing fixed rigidly in time and space, and the animated nature of the cosmos is reflected in the makeup of the individual, whose innate character is one of process and transition. In a piece such as the 1997 essay co-authored by Mohammed Saad Al-Jumly and J. Barton Rollins, "Emigration and the Rise of the Novel in Yemen," the figure of mobility, from one world to another, from one imaginary space to another, is revealed to be closely related to the development of the generic form of novelistic writing in the region. Thus the theme of travel permeates these studies, as do the topics of distance, deterritorialization, and a kind of new nomadism of modern urban peoples. In Rufus Cook's 1994 "Place and Displacement in Salman Rushdie's Work," the critic examines the conflicts that can arise between the impulse toward mobility and innovation and the instinctive desire to remain meaningfully connected to a time-honored cultural heritage, as the effects of immigration and emigration continually

influence the creation of art. The figure of progress, of making one's way from point A to point B, repeatedly embodies the metaphoric pivot in these works, as readers witness the evolution of a central character, on the road to success or artistry or, simply, happiness. Space itself has become somehow fluid in these works of art, as boundaries and borders are often revealed to be imaginary, perceived as metaphoric spaces for transition and progress. Frequently in these texts, what happens on the periphery of the storyline can become as evocative to a reader as that which is presented as taking place on center stage; narratives open outward, embracing limitless possibility and infinite interpretation.

Another important thematic framework that recurs throughout the cultural and geographical categories we have chosen is the portrayal of the career of a single author, often a writer who has won celebrated prizes and gained worldwide recognition, as with the pieces on Seamus Heaney, Czesław Miłosz, Marguerite Yourcenar, Manuel Puig, Nadine Gordimer, Edouard Glissant, and Gao Xingjian. Some essays describe the history of the relationship of a writer to his or her public, as illustrated in Sophie Jollin's 1997 examination of the reception of the work of J. M. G. Le Clézio. Yet also we find studies of the works of single literary figures much less well known, especially from a Western viewpoint, yet grounded in solid literary traditions. Eric Sellin's examination of the work of the Algerian author Moloud Mammeri (1989), Chinyere G. Okafor's study of the Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi (1990), and John Zubizarreta's essay on the Iranian poet Forugh Farrokhzad (1992) all illustrate the influence and originality of authors who remain largely unfamiliar to today's Western audience. Some studies widen the scope beyond the work of a single author, and introduce an underrepresented group of authors belonging to literary traditions usually quite unfamiliar to the general Anglophone reading public: See for instance the articles by Valérie Orlando on Francophone women writers of Africa and the Caribbean, Nada Elia on Beur fiction, Kathleen Osgood Dana on Sámi literature, Iman O. Khalil on Arab-German writers, and Gerald M. Moser on the writers of Lusophone Africa.

In these essays we also discover examples of celebrated writers who are also the authors of the texts, as they take retrospective looks back at their own work; thus Peter Schneider meditates in a 1995 piece on the presence of the foreigner in his writing, while Maryse Condé considers the role of the family and cultural traditions on the individual literary artist (1993), and Carlos Fuentes ponders, in one of the most beautifully constructed essays in this collection, the development of one of his celebrated works, *Aura*, as an artistic product