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**WHY COMPARE? WHAT'S TO COMPARE?
THE PRACTICE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN A
POSTCOLONIAL/POSTCOMMUNIST CONTEXT.
A RESPONSE TO DAVID DAMROSCH'**

Keywords: postcolonialism and postcommunism, transnational literature, translation and comparative studies, nationalism, Eastern vs. Western scholarship

Abstract: This article examines the basis of recent comparative studies of literature against the background of global cultural and political markets. It finds that the positioning of Eastern (European) and Western literatures is constantly asymmetric, as is scholarship of the two regions itself. In spite of all efforts to redress this a priori inequality and of the new international dynamics of globalization, there is a huge disparity between the attention given to translations from Western literatures (especially in English) as compared to those from Eastern (European) ones. This can only increase and modulate the hegemonic position of the West in both literature and the academe. As a result, comparisons and evaluations are generally rigged by nationalist agendas just as attempts at neutrality in comparative studies are thwarted by the metaphors of origin and originality or of modernity and progress as a race. Relying on insights from such postcommunist critics as Maria Todorova and Alexander Kiossev, the paper suggests that figurative representations of world literature contaminate the study of transnational cultural phenomena and that a new historical and comparative framework needs to be used to avoid nationalistic and hegemonic images in present-day scholarship.