

# Responding to Cosmopolitanism.

## Preface

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At the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the humanities are beginning to respond to a reality in which global restructuring and growing inequalities are fuelling religious and ethnic conflicts and national anxieties, as well as movements for social justice, reconciliation, interconnection, and the development of inclusive perspectives.

The last few years have seen a veritable upsurge in interest in the discourses of cosmopolitanism. The work of well-known sociologists and political theorists, such as Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, Arjun Appadurai and Antonio Negri, has had an impact on literary theory and comparative literature; it has confronted these fields with the challenge to rethink their place and tasks in a world marked by increasing complexity and interdependence.

In proposing to focus on the ways in which literary theory has embraced the various discourses of cosmopolitanism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at present, we wish to examine the foundations of the notion of 'world literature' and the disciplinary practices of literary theory in their relation to comparative literature, literary history, 'literature in translation' etc.

Our main goal is to begin to work out responses to an important range of questions, including:

- How has literary theory conceptualised and responded to globalisation and cosmopolitanism? What are the differences between globalisation and cosmopolitanism?
- What are the theoretical and ideological stakes behind the notion of 'world literature'? How has 'otherness' been negotiated in notions and programmes of 'world literature'?
- What are the origins of modern cosmopolitanism as a discourse, from antiquity through the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century?
- How do literary theory and comparative literature participate in the shaping of educational and other cultural processes that set themselves the task of negotiating the effects of globalisation?
- Are the discourses of cosmopolitanism too elitist to play a serious role in modern consumerist societies?
- What is the significance of migration and exile in constructing cosmopolitanism as a body of discourse? How have migration and exile been

inscribed historically in the identity of literary theory and comparative literature as disciplines?

- How does literary theory reflect upon global media and transnational flows of communication? To what extent do these phenomena alter the identity, the role, and the conceptualisations of literary theory at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

By holding its 2008 annual colloquium in Ljubljana, the ICLA Committee on Literary Theory was very pleased to be able to acknowledge its long and fruitful collaboration with colleagues in Slovenia, both at ZRC SAZU and at the University of Ljubljana. We are very grateful to Prof. Marko Juvan and Prof. Darko Dolinar for kindly co-organising and hosting our work. This thematic section features some of the papers written after what was a most stimulating exploratory event that has helped us to set an intellectual agenda which the ICLA Committee on Literary Theory will continue to explore over the next few years.