



# Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability

By Emily Apter

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**Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability** By Emily Apter

*Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* argues for a rethinking of comparative literature focusing on the problems that emerge when large-scale paradigms of literary studies ignore the politics of the “Untranslatable”—the realm of those words that are continually retranslated, mistranslated, transferred from language to language, or especially resistant to substitution.

In the place of “World Literature”—a dominant paradigm in the humanities, one grounded in market-driven notions of readability and universal appeal—Apter proposes a plurality of “world literatures” oriented around philosophical concepts and geopolitical pressure points. The history and theory of the language that constructs World Literature is critically examined with a special focus on *Weltliteratur*, literary world systems, narrative ecosystems, language borders and checkpoints, theologies of translation, and planetary devolution in a book set to revolutionize the discipline of comparative literature.

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#### Review

“Just following Emily Apter’s dizzying array of texts from diverse traditions and times (including a tightly argued discussion of the philosophicality of Simone de Beauvoir, lost in translation to the best of US feminists), embracing much experimental material, all read with meticulous care, is an education. No one has thought the question of world literature in greater depth, at once re-thinking Comparative Literature as translatability studies.”—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

“Rarely does one read a book with the title *Against* that is so much *for* important causes and ideas: writing, translation, worldliness, diversity, cosmopolitanism, while fully aware of their promises and threats. In this moment of dispossession of the Humanities, we needed just that book to clarify matters and move beyond the contradictions.”

#### About the Author

**Emily Apter** is Professor of Comparative Literature and French at New York University. Her published works include *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* and *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Subjects*.

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