
Lu Xun contra Georg Brandes: Resisting the Temptation of World Literature

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Abstract

Two architects of the modern breakthrough. Two transreaders of historical context and intellectual legacy. Both reimagine “world literature” while wrestling with conformity and fame. Each travels an idiosyncratic, though profoundly intertwined, path. Georg Brandes (1842-1927) captivates Europe and Asia with a work designed for Denmark; the moment he fashions it for the universe however, he loses ground. Lu Xun (1881-1936) devotes his translator’s life to unrecognized works in the construction of an alternative frame for Weltliteratur; these tune his writer’s voice that bestows upon him unrequested stardom in modern classics of the whole world. Brandes’s ironic paradox and Lu Xun’s iconoclastic prejudice allude to mirrored discoveries. Exploring their individual cases enables us to discern decisive moments in the evolution of comparative literature. Placing them in juxtaposition reveals a contrast between kindred spirits— an intricate distinction that informs our actions as comparatists.

Keywords

Lu Xun, Georg Brandes, Weltliteratur, Comparative literature.

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