

Networking the Missing Linkage in Goethe's *Weltliteratur*: Orientalism and Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat's Sinology

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to examine how the study of world literature has decisively moved into a new postcolonial direction with the latest investigation of the unnamed Chinese novel on which Goethe formulates his much-quoted world literary imagination. He conceptualizes world literature as a subversive and aspirational imaginary in opposition to the increasingly dominant Hegelian world vision, on the one hand posing itself as an aesthetic cosmopolitanism opposed to French national politics, on the other hand destabilizing the calcifying Eurocentric hierarchy of cultures, languages, literatures, nations, and religions in the 1820s. This world literary imagination is inseparable from the long history of Orientalism, but its newness comes with a pioneering philological representation of China by French Orientalist Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat. I illustrate how a hybrid digital methodology in the intersection of German, translation, and postcolonial studies reveals the missing link between Orientalism, Goethe's notion of world literature, and the Chinese novel.

Keywords

world literature, Goethe, Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, sinology, Orientalism