



## ***Book Review: Literature and the Experience of Globalisation: Texts Without Borders by Svend Erik Larsen***

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### **Abstract**

This review focuses on the book *Literature and the Experience of Globalisation: Texts Without Borders* (2017) by Svend Erik Larsen. It brings out the fundamental argument that literature is an important medium in understanding the role of globalisation, shaping culture, emotions and society. Larsen argues that literature does more than merely reflect on cross-border experiences; it also humanises globalisation by posing questions of self-identity, memory, migration, communication, and translation. Moreover, the review describes the book in its two parts, demonstrating how Larsen makes literature a place of confluence of global and local realities, where dominant narratives are problematized, and where readers are encouraged to rethink reality, nuances of belonging, and cultural mobility. Furthermore, a critical perspective is provided in a review. It notes that Larsen pays limited attention to the role of literature in reproducing global inequalities, the work of translators and publishing industries, and that of women's writing and feminist translation studies. It also suggests that the book does not sufficiently discuss the impact of globalisation on family forms and intimate relationships, especially in Eastern cultural contexts.

### **Literature beyond Borders**

In the contemporary world, where identities are in a constant flux and technology is accelerating at a rapid speed, we may often feel as though we have endless freedom in our lives. This sentiment is further strengthened by the advent of globalisation, which has brought us together globally. Yet, in this worldwide trend, we need to pause and reflect—what is happening to our close family relations in the mix of globalisation and technology? Does globalisation leave us as faceless, mere spectators, or can we still enjoy real and sustainable relationships despite all the changes it brings?

Writing in *Literature and the Experience of Globalisation: Text Without Borders*, Svend Erik Larsen (2017) concludes that literature plays a crucial role in coming to terms with the complex influence of globalisation on human life. Not only does it represent cross-border experiences, but it also demonstrates the interconnectedness of culture, identity, memory, and everyday life, beyond its economic and political contexts (p. 1). However, Larsen also poses an important question: is there a possibility of literature being able to illustrate the extreme realities that are so fractured by globalisation? Although he points out the roles of *experience, knowledge, and communication as cornerstones of cultural structures* in determining the production and reception of literary texts (p. 41), his argument leaves room for interrogation. How might literature, in some cases, reinforce the very power structures it critiques? Could it

do more than reflect—perhaps even catalyse resistance against the inequalities globalisation creates? A more robust analysis would include texts that expose literature’s complicity in global hierarchies as well as its potential to inspire transformative action. In the introduction, Larsen employs the metaphorical, animal-toned example of the *duck-billed platypus* to describe the hybrid, unclassifiability of literature as an entity reflecting how the form of literature extends to cross boundaries in the globalized society. Larsen also argues that literature does not merely reflect globalisation; it also interrogates, reframes, and humanizes it. On the one hand, Stephanie M. Hilger (2019) posits Larsen’s persuasive investigation of how the literature can address the challenges of Globalisation, considering the experiences of readers, historical approach, global-local interrogation, and how he presents fundamental questions concerning the significance of literature to culture in a contemporary era (pp. 613-614). On the other hand, Brigitte Le Juez (2021) critiques Larsen’s claim that Globalisation has long been embedded in literature, particularly at the reader’s phenomenological level of how readers engage with texts through specific genres as a way of experiencing globalisation. She notes that Larsen draws on Danish and Australian Literature to demonstrate how literary works reflect the cross-border movement of people and ideas. While Le Juez suggests that literature can foster so-called global thinking by offering diverse views, she also finds some of Larsen’s observations vague and at times frustratingly unclear (pp. 107-110). Whereas Flair Donglai Shi (2018) emphasizes that Larsen’s work is not simply another addition to the debates of world literature, but rather a unique theoretical proposal that shifts the focus of literature as a form of lived global experience. Shi’s critique highlights that Larsen’s arguments would be stronger if he had cited scholars, such as Pheng Cheah and Shu-mei Shih, whose views resonate with his approach (pp. 718-719).

Larsen’s book consists of two parts. In the first part, “*Globalisation in a Literary Perspective*,” specifically in Chapter One, Larsen presents literature as a cultural bridge, amplifying the voices of those often silenced amid globalisation’s complexities (pp. 12–18). By facilitating cross-border exchanges of ideas, literature allows for the reinterpretation of global narratives and urges readers to centre those left behind in dominant discourses (pp. 19–24).

In Chapter Two, Larsen contends that globalisation challenges traditional systems of knowledge and communication, creating layered cultural interactions that demand interdisciplinary responses (pp. 25–30). He argues that literature provides essential instruments to navigate these cultural disjunctures through a wide embrace of views (pp. 31-38). The interaction between globalisation and communication, authority, and identity is illustrated through the experiences of students, who show how these global processes redefine language, education, and identities in relation to one another (pp. 41-50).

Chapter Three builds on the argument by demonstrating how literature is a reflection of multicultural and translocal realities, which engage in issues of citizenship, cosmopolitanism, and historical trauma (pp. 66-78). Larsen compares these to medieval perceptions of divine order, contending that the aesthetic self-consciousness in literature during modern times brings forth mutual understanding and affective connection, as presented in a Swahili text, *Out of Africa* (pp. 82-91). He adds that literature provides a better, more sophisticated understanding of globalisation than any other study (p. 94).

In Chapter Four, Larsen goes even further, claiming that literature, although being a fiction, has a disruptive impact on set truths and the opening of a space where potentially conflicting realities can be critically engaged (pp. 95-96). Drawing on Holberg’s Erasmus Montanus, he

illustrates how literature reveals the tension between deception and belief in a globalised world (pp. 97–100). He emphasises that subjective authenticity and narrative multiplicity compel readers to interact actively with stories, highlighting the link between knowledge, agency, and interpretation (pp. 101–124). Ultimately, literature demands that readers navigate the blurred boundaries between truth and fiction in an increasingly uncertain global context (pp. 125–128).

In the book's second part, "*Literature in a Global Perspective*," Larsen explores how literature reflects the effects of Globalisation. In Chapter Five, Larsen introduces the concept of "*Memory for the Future*," arguing that literature is not just a repository of the past but a dynamic force shaping future identities through cultural memory (p. 131). He distinguishes between inner memory, which forms personal identity, and outer memory, which drives the evolution of traditions (pp. 135–142). Through travel literature and satirical narratives, particularly in diasporic contexts, Larsen demonstrates how memory revitalises tradition and fosters global awareness (pp. 143, 149). Memory, then, is not backwards-looking, but rather is forward-thinking, enabling local traditions to adapt within a global framework (p. 162). Chapter Six shifts the focus to translation, which Larsen views not merely as linguistic conversion but as a transformative act that reshapes literary expression and cultural exchange (p. 163). Drawing from David Damrosch's idea of world literature as "work that gains in translation," Larsen argues that translation injects new life into languages, especially postcolonial ones, thereby breaking down cultural barriers (Ibid.). Mahler's *The Song of the Earth* exemplifies how translation across art forms fosters cross-cultural resonance (p. 166), underscoring literature's role in reimagining global connectivity.

In Chapter Seven, Larsen explores how experiences mediate global narratives. He contends that literature engages the senses, with people becoming vessels for cultural meaning and motion (p. 204). Through depictions of movement and location, readers are invited to experience global interconnectedness in visceral, embodied ways thus reinforcing literature's relevance in today's globalised context (ibid.).

Chapter Eight tackles migration, positioning literature as a key site for understanding its disruptive and generative effects. Examining texts from Denmark and Australia, Larsen shows how migration stories unsettle fixed cultural boundaries and turn local settings into vibrant spaces of hybridity and negotiation (p. 250). These narratives challenge static notions of globalisation and compel readers to rethink identity in a world shaped by constant flux.

In Chapter Nine, Larsen examines how movement physical, social, and cultural has shaped human experience, particularly under globalisation. Through characters in Nadine Gordimer's fiction, he contrasts traditional and modern concepts of mobility (pp. 257–261). Larsen uses Amitav Ghosh's work to explore how physical proximity fosters global interaction but also reveals the limitations of closeness in bridging cultural divides (pp. 262–272). He then analyses *On the Black Hill* by Bruce Chatwin to argue that even isolated rural spaces are touched by global currents, challenging our assumptions about cultural distance (pp. 273–277).

In the final section, "*Perspectives: World Literature or Literature around the World?*" Larsen presents two overarching arguments. First, he asserts that world literature must be understood as a synthesis of the local and the global, where regional traditions evolve through global interactions (pp. 279–287). Second, he advocates for a more expansive literary methodology one that values comparison, translation, oral traditions, and anonymous transmission to rethink how literature circulates and influences the world (pp. 288–292). Through this lens,

Larsen urges readers to see literature not as a static archive, but as a living, evolving response to globalisation's complexities.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Larsen insightfully explores how literature helps us make sense of globalisation. However, while examining literature's positive aspects in relation to globalisation, it's essential to keep in mind that some works can also reinforce prejudices, power disparities, and stereotypes in a globalised setting. Larsen also examines cultural exchange, identity, memory, and migration to illustrate the profound impact of globalisation on our lives. However, initially, the relationship between literature and globalisation in shaping cultural identities amid evolving social norms and technology is missing. So, we need more research to understand these parts better. Second, identifying whether the author's approach is limited to text-based translation is a vital area to explore, as just cultural meanings and linking with globalisation are not enough. Issues such as these, the roles of the translator (Ning, 2024) and publishing industries (Vassallo, 2023) have been widely debated in recent scholarship, and are vital to what has not been given importance in the past, not in the linguistic sense, but rather as a necessary agent of transformation for generating new content. Third, the translation studies of women in writing have not given enough importance in the last decades; the role of women in writing and feminism are important areas to explore. What is the role of women in writing to eliminate gender imbalances and the status quo in translation studies? To hear the marginalised experiences can enrich our cultural exchanges and foster the literature of women in writing by bridging the differences of patriarchal work. As indicated by Catherine Riley (2022), along with feminism and translation studies, in the Publishing industry of the UK in 2016, a small number of books were published by non-white Britishers, whereas Britishers produced the bulk. This biased approach of neglecting non-whites is a serious matter of concern. Another vital area of study is that the author has not talked much about how globalisation affects close relationships and family structures, especially in Eastern cultures.

Despite these encounters, Larsen challenges what we think is true and real, saying that literature helps us think critically about different points of view and the way of looking at things that connect globalisation and literature, saying we should study literature with an open mind and include everyone's ideas in our world today is essential. This book is an excellent source for students because it covers a lot about globalisation in an easy way to understand the complexity of different pieces of literature.

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