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How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Larsen, S. E. (2018), An Ecology of World Literature. From Antiquity to the Present Day Alexander Beecroft London: Verso, 2015, 312 pp. Orbis Litter, 73: 546-547. doi:[10.1111/oli.12213](https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12213)

Publication metadata

Title:	An Ecology of World Literature. From Antiquity to the Present Day, Alexander Beecroft, London: Verso, 2015, 312 pp.
Author(s):	Svend Erik Larsen
Journal:	Orbis Litterarum
DOI/Link:	10.1111/oli.12213
Document version:	Accepted manuscript (post-print)

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: [Larsen, S. E. (2018), An Ecology of World Literature. From Antiquity to the Present Day Alexander Beecroft London: Verso, 2015, 312 pp. Orbis Litter, 73: 546-547. doi:[10.1111/oli.12213](https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12213)], which has been published in final form at [[10.1111/oli.12213](https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12213)]. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions.

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Review: Alexander Beecroft: *An Ecology of World Literature. From Antiquity to the Present Day*.
London: Verso, 2015, 312 pages

It is a major task to revitalize the late eighteenth-century idea of world literature. This has been an ongoing endeavor of increasing importance over the last decades on a theoretical, historical and analytical level. On the other hand, it is a task of no lesser magnitude to turn this approach into concrete literary histories of local, regional and even global dimensions, most often requiring the creation of new scholarly networks, many of which are at work in this very moment. However, it is not beside the point to claim that Alexander Beecroft's book, as a one-man show, could be seen as representing an even more audacious attempt to open a particular space between those two types of research. His project is to create categories in a world literature perspective with the potential to guide a literary historiography across cultures.

The bread and butter of the book is the idea that six historizising categories with an intended global validity. They are deflected into different historically specific regional manifestations, which, then, are open both for circulation of literature and for comparative readings and interpretations beyond the classical notions of influence. Through analogies and parallels, often but not always, based on mutual interdependence or unilateral dependence, literature unfolds instead in more open networks, a complex totality of which Beecroft calls an ecology.

The six larger historical periods, or ecologies, with a variety of regional shapes and dynamics are: 1) Epichoric literature, comprising a network of regional literatures, oral or written, mainly with a smaller or larger local circulation (e.g. early China, Athens). 2) Panchoric literature, emphasizing circulation in and between regions with a cultural self-understanding, delimiting themselves from others (e.g. Panhellenic literature). 3) Cosmopolitan literature, concerning literatures in a single language, yet with an outreach to other regions and maybe continents (e.g. later Chinese, Indian, Arabic, Latin). 4) Vernacular literature, pointing to the rise of strong local languages behind or within a cosmopolitan context (e.g. European Middle Ages). 5) National literature, emerging in Europe and then spreading as a literary standard in the larger colonial networks and, also, marking the origin of modern literary studies. 6) Global literature, building on literature dominated by global languages and traveling freely across cultures in a global perspective.

The periods have loose historical boundaries because they show different regional developments. Hence, they do not follow each other in a simple chronology, but in a set of complex transformations from one ecology into another with overlaps between them.

With a host of texts in languages across the world, showing the author's impressive language skills, the book is not only a challenging attempt to rethink categories of literary historiography. It is also a book with many and interesting examples. However, it is still a sketch the potential of which will need to be explored in the years to come.

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